

Dr Robert Keenan Forney Wins 2026 Louisiana State Chess Championship

Candidate Master scores six and a half points in seven rounds and wins by a full point

SULPHUR, La. - Dr. Robert Keenan Forney, widely known as "Coach Robert" in the chess community, won the 2026 Louisiana State Chess Championship on Sept. 7 after going undefeated over seven rounds. Forney scored 6.5 points to finish a full point ahead of the rest of a 51-player field that included five former state champions and several titled players.

Forney entered the tournament as an underdog. He holds the Candidate Master title, also held by French Quarter chess icon and former state champion Jude Acers, but began the event with a published US Chess rating of 2009, more than 300 points below the highest seed. His outright first-place finish meant the championship did not have to be decided by numerical tiebreaks, which rank tied players using performance statistics.

The Louisiana Chess Association organized the tournament, which ran Sept. 4-7 over Labor Day weekend at the Henning Cultural Center in Sulphur. Casa de Ajedrez founder Andy Rivera served as host. The schedule continued the association's tradition of holding the state championship on Labor Day weekend and matched long-running state championship events held that weekend in New York and New Jersey.

A Spontaneous Family Decision

On Friday morning, Forney had not settled on plans to play. His wife, Zoë, suggested that the family, including their son, enter the championship together.

"My family knew the event was happening in Sulphur, but we did not think too seriously about it until the day of," Forney said. "My wife Zoë asked me, 'Hey, what if we all played the championship?' By the time work finished in the afternoon, we had decided to road-trip out there and give it a shot. It was a spontaneous decision, and I'm glad she motivated me to play."

"Without preparation, I decided to play in a way that is fun and energetic, and it worked out," he said. "We had a great time." He also praised Rivera's hospitality and called the tournament an excellent event.

A Century of Louisiana Chess

The Louisiana Chess Association's published roll of standard-time-control champions began in 1915 with James McConnell Jr., whose family had close ties to Paul Morphy. A New Orleans native widely regarded as an unofficial world champion, Morphy remains one of the game's best-known historical figures.

The current championship trophy dates to 1983, beginning with Alfred Carlin's victory that year. Each champion's name is engraved on a plaque on the trophy's base. Forney described adding his name to Louisiana's chess history as an honor. That history also includes Carlos Torre Repetto, the Mexican-born master who lived in New Orleans and won the state championship in 1923.

Meet Coach Robert and See the Trophy

Chess players can meet Forney and see the championship trophy at New Orleans Chess House, 1514 Poland Avenue in New Orleans. The organization opened its doors in June 2026 and offers members group and private classes, camps, tournaments and social events. Memberships begin at \$5 per year.

The monthly Second Fridays Blitz Social is free to attend and gives players a chance to meet or play the state champion. Visit neworleanschesshouse.com, email coachrobert@neworleanschesshouse.com, or follow New Orleans Chess House on Facebook and Instagram for weekly updates.