THE 1994-95 NOVAG AWARD

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For many years the ICCA's premier annual Award has been for the best contribution to computer chess. Originally entitled the Mephisto Best Publication Award, after the generous sponsorship by a leading German manufacturer of chess machines, the name was changed to the Novag Award last year in recognition of new sponsor, Novag Computer, manufacturer of WChess.

In December 1988 the group Anantharaman, Campbell and Hsu won the founding prize for their paper "Singular Extensions: Adding selectivity to Brute-Force Searching". Each year thereafter the ICCA executive or its designates have selected the best published contribution during the previous year. Past winners are:

Period	Winner(s)	Publication
1987-1988	Thomas Anantharaman, Murray Campbell and Feng-hsiung Hsu	Singular Extensions: Adding Selectivity to Brute-Force Searching. *Proceedings of the AAAI Spring Symposium, Computer Game Playing*, March 1988.
1988-1989	Don Beal (for his Editorship)	*Advances in Computer Chess 5.* North-Holland, Amsterdam.
1989-1990	Feng-hsiung Hsu	*Large Scale Parallelization of Alpha-Beta Search: An Algorithmic and Architectural Study with Computer Chess.* Ph.D. thesis. Carnegie-Mellon University.
1990-1991	Tony Scherzer, Linda Scherzer and Dean Tjaden	Learning in Bebe. *Computers, Chess, and Cognition* (eds. T.A. Marsland and J. Schaeffer), pp. 197-216. Springer Verlag, New York.
1991-1992	Thomas Anantharaman jointly with Jos Uiterwijk	Extension Heuristics. *ICCA Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 47-63. The Countermove Heuristic. *ICCA Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 8-15.
1992-1993	Ken Thompson	*Chess Endgames Vol. 3*, CD-ROM. AT&T Bell Laboratories, New Jersey.
1993-1994	Rainer Feldmann	*Game Tree Search with Massively Parallel Systems.* Ph.D. thesis. University of Paderbom.

For the period April 1994 through March 1995 the selection committee chose the work by Aske Plaat, Jonathan Schaeffer, Wim Pijls and Arie de Bruin, entitled "A new paradigm for minimax search", Technical report TR-CS-94-18, University of Alberta, December 1994. This was seen to be an excellent paper that reports on a small, but fundamental advance in search algorithms. It is quite likely to be incorporated into all chess programs. The group present an easy-to-implement algorithm that has application to Chess, Othello and Checkers. According to the report, the method is better than the best alpha-beta variants both in terms of time and node count. The importance of this paper is that the method has been tested on working programs, not through a simulation or theoretical model. As such it is more likely to attract the attention of chess programmers.

Thus the work is seen to be of practical utility to chess programmers. It is relevant and will impact the chess community; yet not all of its cognitive and practical difficulties have been solved. Thus it was adjudicated as best meeting the criteria the selection committee applied.

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