

PRESS RELEASE – 24TH JUNE 2008

INVERCARGILL'S international draughts queen is set to challenge for the world title - right here in her own home city.

Jan Mortimer is confident an ILT-supported bid to stage an historic world championship match against Amangul Durdyev, from Turkmenistan, will get the green light from the international body in the next few weeks.

It would be the first time any New Zealander has had a home challenge for a world title in draughts, which is known as checkers in the United States, and is played by thousands on the internet and in numerous professional tournaments around the globe.

Mortimer has been playing top-level draughts for only eight years but she is already the number two ranked women's player in the world and last year she won a major international qualifying event in Las Vegas to earn the right to challenge for the world title.

She said being awarded an Invercargill Licensing Trust scholarship worth \$4500 to help prepare for the week-long match in August was a big bonus.

"I'm so grateful for the support from the ILT to make this happen. They've been behind me every year and having a world championship match here would really put Invercargill on the map," she said.

"It would also be so good for me because I wouldn't have jetlag when I play. Every other time I've gone overseas to play it hasn't been the same."

ILT president Alan Dennis said Mortimer deserved scholarship support because she had proven herself as one of the best draughts players in the world.

"And it would be amazing if she won the world title right here in Invercargill," Mr Dennis said.

Mortimer has to raise \$5000 prize-money as part of the bid conditions for an event she hoped would be staged somewhere in Invercargill's city centre and be open to the public.

"But you have to be very quiet when you're watching," she said.

"It's a bit like watching top chess. You can't make a noise."

The match would be the best of 20 games played over one week, with four games a day, and each game likely to take up to four hours.

It will be Mortimer's second crack at the world title after an unsuccessful challenge against an Irish opponent in 2003.

Mortimer has been one of the best internationally since she upstaged all predictions to win the United States national draughts title in 2002.

And if you think her preparation for a world title match involves a few games with friends, then think again.

Draughts is much more complex than you imagine, with 500 billion theoretically possible board Positions, making it one of the most complex games.

So the 58-year-old Mortimer will be studying and playing on the internet for up to four hours every night building up to the world title challenge.

"I've got a whole bookcase full of books on the way to play it," she said.

"So I will be studying hard but I know it will be worth it."