

My Best Games of Chess

1908-1937



by **Alexander Alekhine**

Foreword by Igor Zaitsev

21st Century Edition

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2013
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

Alekhine's Best Games 1908-1937
by Alexander Alekhine

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Computer-assisted Supplement

(free PDF download):

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Editor's Preface

“In playing through an Alekhine game, one suddenly meets a move which simply takes one's breath away” – C.H.O'D. Alexander

When I first became seriously interested in chess, as a teenager in the mid-1960s, Alexander Alekhine quickly became one of my heroes. The record of his accomplishments – wresting the World Championship from the seemingly invincible Capablanca in 1927, his overwhelming tournament victories at San Remo 1930 and Bled 1931, his becoming (in 1937) the only man to regain the world title after having lost it, to mention only the brightest highlights – was at a level few if any could match. The authors I was then reading generally considered Alekhine to be the greatest player of all time (e.g., Reinfeld in *The Human Side of Chess* and *The Golden Treasury of Chess*), or nearly so (for example Chernev put him #2 in *The Golden Dozen*).

Beyond that, Alekhine's games have a quality – or more accurately a combination of qualities – and a stylistic variety, that are striking and unique. There are scintillating tactical brilliancies, such as against Bogoljubow at Hastings 1922, Asztalos at Kecskemet 1927, and Pirc at Bled 1931. His restless striving for the initiative, and his willingness to enter complications – as against Vidmar at Carlsbad 1911, Levenfish at St. Petersburg 1914, or, most strikingly, Réti at Baden-Baden 1925 – give his games an energy that made other masters seem torpid. He could produce positional masterpieces that showed deep strategic understanding (e.g. against Nimzowitsch at San Remo 1930, Menchik at Podebrady 1936, or Fine at Kemerli 1937). When attacking and combinative play was not feasible, he produced endgames of indomitable persistence and lethal technical precision, such as against Vidmar at San Remo 1930 and Bled 1931, and (probably most clearly and famously) in the 34th match game against Capablanca, 1927. In 1964, no less an authority than Fischer wrote that Alekhine's “play was fantastically complicated, more so than any player before or since ... He played gigantic conceptions, full of outrageous and unprecedented ideas.”

Alekhine's command of opening theory was probably supreme in his time. He seemed at home in any kind of game: open, semi-open, closed openings, romantic gambits, either side of the Ruy Lopez, Queen's Gambit, French Defense, Nimzo-Indian etc., and in both old classic lines such as the Scotch and Four Knights, and hypermodern lines such as the Queen's Indian. He was an innovator. Besides introducing the eponymous Alekhine's Defense to master practice, he is credited by *The Oxford Companion to Chess* with no fewer than 19 “Alekhine variations” in such varied lines as the Dutch, Sicilian, French, Ruy Lopez, Queens's Gambit (both Declined and Accepted), Slav, Semi-Slav, and Vienna Game. And his willingness to experiment with perhaps dubious but psy-

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chologically potent variations, and to hit opponents with unexpected novelties, was legendary. For example, his use of the Blumenfeld Counter-Gambit against Tarrasch at Bad Pistyan 1922, the Benoni against Bogoljubow and Gygli in two 1934 games, and, most strikingly, his piece sacrifice at the sixth move (!) against Euwe in their 1937 title match.

All these elements combine to make Alekhine's chess some of the most exciting, interesting, complex and beautiful ever played – and that is not just my opinion; for example GM Reuben Fine, in *The World's Great Chess Games*, ranked him among the top three of all time in this respect, along with Lasker and Fischer. So, it was natural that among the first chess books I ever bought were his best games collections of 1908-23 and 1924-37, in the old descriptive-notation Tartan reprints. Now, decades later, it has been my privilege to edit this single-volume edition of those two classics, in modern figurine algebraic.

The original two volumes have been combined into one without any abridgment. Every move of every game is here, along with all the original notes and variations; all that has been altered is that a few obvious notational, spelling, and typographical errors have been corrected, and occasionally a phrase like “and White wins” has been changed to the appropriate Informant symbol to save space.

While nothing has been deleted, some (I hope) welcome additions have been made. Many diagrams have been added, especially at points with lengthy notes. Modern opening names and ECO codes have been supplied (in the early 20th century it was common to call anything that began 1.d4 ♘f6 just “Indian Defense” or “Queen Pawn's Game”). The indexes of players and openings now include games embedded in the notes. The “Summary of Results” has been expanded to include Alekhine's entire career, not just the years 1908-37, and many corrections and additions have been made there using Leonard Skinner and Robert Verhoeven's *Alexander Alekhine's Chess Games, 1902-1946*, the most authoritative source available. With this marvelous reference, I was also able to correct some name and date errors in the original game and chapter headings.

As a bonus, the reader can obtain an appendix of computer-assisted analytical corrections, additions and enhancements, compiled while going through the games with the Rybka 3 analysis engine. This is provided at no charge as a PDF, which can be downloaded from <http://russell-enterprises.com/excerptsanddownloads.html>. Admittedly, this silicon-based scrutiny sometimes shows Alekhine to be wrong, but we feel, in the interests of objective chess truth, that such things should not be ignored. And, we like to think that Alekhine, whose success was based in part on thorough self-criticism, would approve.

Those looking for information and insights about Alekhine's personal life, in particular his collaboration with the Nazis in WW II, will not find them here, other than the brief summary in Du Mont's memoir. For that, interested readers may consult the aforementioned book by Skinner & Verhoeven, or *Agony of a*

Genius by Pablo Morán, *The Personality of Chess* by Horowitz and Rothenberg, historical surveys such as Hartston's *The Kings of Chess*, and various chess encyclopedias such as the *Oxford Companion*, among other works. A full personal biography of Alekhine has, alas, so far not been published, at least in English. This book deals with Alekhine the chess player only, as he explained himself in that role.

But, as a player, it is hardly a great exaggeration, if any at all, to say that in the 20th century, no one influenced the development and evolution of chess more than Alexander Alekhine. No less an authority than Garry Kasparov wrote, in the first volume of his series *On My Great Predecessors*, that Alekhine's "fantastic combinative vision was based on a sound positional foundation, and was the fruit of strong, energetic strategy. Therefore, Alekhine can safely be called the pioneer of the universal style of play, based on a close interweaving of strategic and tactical motifs. Alekhine was clearly ahead of his time in his approach to chess."

How did Alekhine do it? Information and insights on *that*, dear reader, is what you *will* find in these pages.

Taylor Kingston
San Diego
July 2012

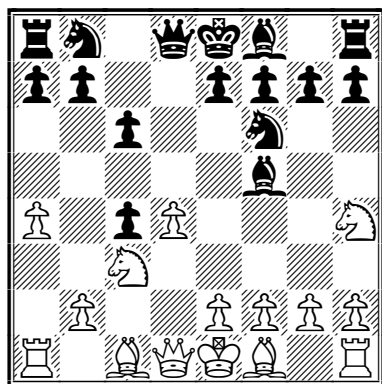
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(142) *Alekhine – Stoltz*

Bled 1931

Slav Defense [D17]

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6
4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♙f5 6.♘h4 (D)



The main objection that can be made against this move is that White wastes time in order to exchange a piece he has already developed. However, the idea (of Dr. Krause) of eliminating, at all costs, the ominous black queen bishop is not as anti-positional as generally thought and, at least, has not been refuted in the few games where it was tried.

6...e6

Natural and good enough. White, it is true, will enjoy a pair of bishops, but, as long as Black is able to control the central squares, he should not have much to fear. Less satisfactory for him, on the contrary, would be 6...♙c8 (as played, for instance, by Dr. Euwe in the 15th game of our 1935 match). In that case, White (besides, of course, the draw opportunity 7.♘f3) would have the choice between 7.e3 e5 8.♙xc4 – of course not 8.dxe5? ♖xd1+ 9.♘xd1 ♙b4+ ♞, played, to my sorrow, in the game mentioned – 8...exd4 9.exd4, with slightly the better prospects, or 7.e4 e5 8.♙xc4! exd4 9.e5 etc., lead-

ing to complicated situations like those in the 6th game of the 1937 match. Anyhow, an interesting field for investigation.

7.♘xf5 exf5 8.e3 ♘bd7
9.♙xc4 ♘b6

The knight has little to do here, but something had to be done to prevent 10.♖b3.

10.♙b3 ♙d6 11.♖f3 ♖d7

Black will lose this game chiefly because, from now on, he decides to avoid the “weakening” move g7-g6 and tries to protect his f5-pawn by artificial methods. As a matter of fact, there was not much to say against 11...g6, as 12.e4? would have been refuted by 12...♘xe4 13.♘xe4 ♖e7! and 12.a5 answered by 12...♘bd5 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 etc.

12.h3!

Threatening 13.♙c2 g6 14.g4± etc. Black’s next move parries the danger.

12...♘c8 13.a5

Playing simultaneously on both sides of the board, my favorite strategy. The threat is now 14.a6 b6 15.d5! etc.

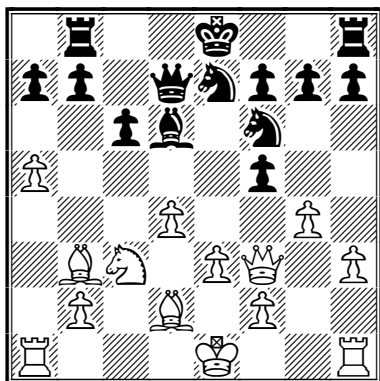
13...♘e7 14.♙d2

Instead, White could at once try 14.g4, but to do so would be to miss the developing bishop’s move which he makes now. Besides, it was not without importance to prepare, against certain eventualities, the possibility of castling on the queenside.

14...♞b8

This plausible move – made in order to weaken the effect of the possible advance a5-a6 – will prove an important, if not decisive, loss of time. The only possibility of offering a serious resistance consisted in 14...h5!

15.g4! (D)



With this transaction, White at least obtains the extremely important e4-square.

15...b5

According to his aggressive style, Stoltz tries to solve the difficult problem in a purely tactical way, with the result that his queenside soon becomes lamentably weak. Also, 15...f×g4 16.h×g4 ♖×g4 17.♗×g4 ♘×g4 18.♞g1 f5 19.f3 ♘f6 (after 19...♘h2 20.♞e2 etc., the knight would not come out alive) 20.♞×g7 etc. would have been quite unsatisfactory for Black. But, the quiet 15...0-0 (to which White's best answer would be 16.♞g1) would still leave him some possibilities of defense.

16.g×f5

16.g5 would be answered by 16...b4!, by which Black would have obtained the central squares for his knights.

16...♗×f5 17.♗×f5 ♘×f5 18.♙c2!

White will succeed in exploiting the queenside weakness before the opponent finds time to concentrate his forces for the defense. The following part of the game is convincing and easy to understand.

18...♘h4 19.♞e2 0-0 20.♘e4 ♘×e4 21.♙×e4 c5

The exchange of this pawn brings

him but a slight relief as the fatal weakness of the queenside squares still remains.

22.d×c5 ♙×c5 23.♞ac1 ♙d6

Or 23...♞bc8 24.a6, threatening 25.♙b7, followed by 26.♙a5 etc.

24.♞c6 ♞bd8 25.♞a6 ♞fe8 26.♙c6 ♞e7

For the moment, everything is more or less in order as 27.♙×b5 ♞b7 etc. would not be convincing. But White's following move, by which the lack of coordination of Black's pieces is underlined in a most drastic way, brings the fight to a rapid end.

27.♞d1! ♘f5

The bishop did not have any suitable square of retreat. If, for instance, 27...♙b8 28.♙b4 ♞×d1 29.♙×e7!+-.

28.♙b4 g6 29.♙c5!

Threatening to confiscate the a- as well as the b-pawn. Black, in his despair, sacrifices the exchange.

29...♙×c5 30.♞×d8+ ♞g7 31.♞d5!

Faulty would be 31.♞d7 or 31.♙×b5 because of 31...♘d4+.

31...♙d4 32.♞d7

Now, after the d4-square has been taken by the bishop, this move is strong.

32...♞e5 33.♞d3 ♙×b2 34.♞a×a7 ♞c5 35.♞×f7+ ♞h6 36.♞×h7+ ♞g5 37.♞af7!

With the most unpleasant threat of 38.f4+ etc.

1-0

(143) *Alekhine – Nimzowitsch*

Bled 1931

French Defense [C15]

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♘ge2

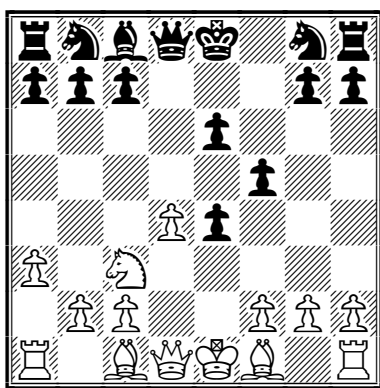
This move, which is quite satisfactory in the MacCutcheon Variation

(1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙g5 ♗b4 5.♘ge2), is perfectly harmless at this moment. I selected it, however, in the present game because I knew that, already on one occasion (against Sir George Thomas in Marienbad 1925), Nimzowitsch had shown an exaggerated voracity (6...f5) without having been duly punished for it.

4...dxe4 5.a3 ♗xc3+

Also, 5...♗e7 is good enough for equality.

6.♘xc3 f5 (D)



Played against all the principles of a sound opening strategy as the dark-colored squares of Black's position will become very weak, especially because of the exchange of his king bishop. The correct reply, which secures Black at least an even game, is 6...♗c6!, and, if 7.♗b5, then 7...♘ge7, followed by 8...0-0 etc.

7.f3

This sacrifice of the second pawn is tempting, most probably correct and yet unnecessary, as White could obtain an excellent game without taking any chances by playing first 7.♗f4, and, if 7...♘f6, then 8.f3 exf3 9.♙xf3, after which 9...♙xd4 would be refuted by 10.♗b5.

7...exf3 8.♙xf3 ♙xd4

Contrary to the opinion of theorists, this move is as good – or as bad – as

8...♙h4+ 9.g3 ♙xd4; in that case, White would play 10.♗b5, and Black would not have had – as in the actual game – the defense 10...♙h4+ 11.g3 ♙e7 etc.

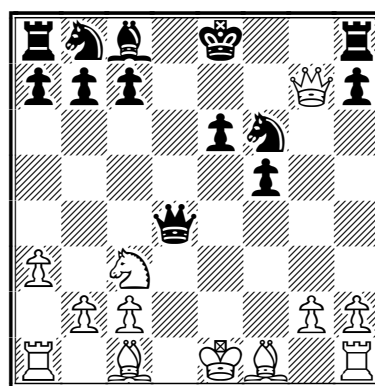
9.♙g3!

A by-no-means-obvious continuation of the attack. White's main threats are 10.♗b5 (10...♙e4+ 11.♗e2) and 10.♗f4 or 10.♗e3.

9...♘f6

This bold move is Black's comparatively best chance. Insufficient would be 9...♘e7 because of 10.♗e3! ♙f6 11.0-0-0± etc.

10.♙xg7 (D)



10...♙e5+?

Inconsequent and, therefore, fatal. Black, in order to keep a fighting game, should give up also the c-pawn as, after 10...♗g8 11.♙xc7 ♘c6, there would not be a win for White by means of 12.♗b5 because of 12...♙h4+! 13.g3 ♙e4+ 14.♗f2 ♙xc2+, followed by ...♘e4 etc. The check in the text allows White to win a development tempo, and time, in such a tense position, is a decisive factor.

11.♗e2 ♗g8 12.♙h6 ♗g6 13.♙h4

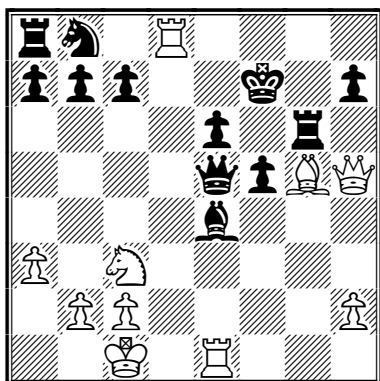
White does not need to protect his g-pawn by 13.♙h3 as, after 13...♗xg2, the answer 14.♗f4 would have been decisive.

13...♗d7 14.♗g5 ♗c6 15.0-0-0

Qxg2

Under normal circumstances, this capture should be considered as another mistake, but, owing to White's tremendous advance in development, Black's game is hopeless (if, for instance, 15...♖bd7, then also 16.♞he1, followed by a move with the king bishop). His morbid appetite cannot spoil anything any more.

**16.♞he1 ♖e4 17.♖h5 ♗xh5
18.♞d8+ ♜f7 19.♞xh5 1-0 (D)**



Nimzowitsch quite rightly resigned here as there are no more decent moves for Black; even 19...♜g7 would lose the queen after 20.♗xh5 ♜xh5 21.♖h6+ etc. This was, I believe, the shortest defeat in his career.

(144) *Alekhine – Vidmar*

Bled 1931

Semi-Slav Defense [D55]

**1.d4 d5 2.♗f3 ♗f6 3.c4 c6
4.♗c3 e6**

This is not exact since, in the orthodox defense, the move c7-c6 is not always of use. Until now (summer, 1939), no clear way has been found for White to gain an advantage after 4...dxc4.

5.♖g5

Also, 5.e3 is thought to be good for White.

**5...♖e7 6.e3 0-0 7.♞c2 ♗e4
8.♖xe7**

Has anybody ever tried in this kind of position 8.h4? The move might be taken into consideration.

8...♞xh5 9.♖d3 ♗xc3

After 9...f5 10.♗e5 ♗d7 11.0-0, the exchanges in the center should profit White since he would have a minor piece more in play than the opponent.

10.bxc3

In this particular case, more promising than 10.♞xc3 because Black will be forced to lose a tempo for the protection of his h-pawn.

10...♜h8

As the sequel will prove, this is only a temporary defense (11.♖xh7? g6) that permits White, from now on, to build up his plan of attack. Less binding was, anyhow, 10...h6.

11.cxd5!

Both logical and psychological chess. The object of this exchange is, first and foremost, to prevent Black from obtaining, by means of d5xc4 and b7-b6, the a8-h1 diagonal for his bishop; but, independently of this consideration, White was entitled to suppose that, *after having avoided weakening g6 by not playing h7-h6, Black would now profit by this and try to bring his bishop to g6 via g4 and h5.* By provoking this last maneuver, White rightly considered that the opening of files on the kingside, ensuing from the eventual capture of Black's h-pawn, could only be favorable to the better developed party.

11...exd5 12.0-0 ♖g4

If 12...♗d7, White would have started a promising play in the middle with 13.♞ae1 ♗f6 14.♗e5, followed by f2-f4 etc. The text move is the start of an adventure.

13. ♖e5 ♗h5 14. ♗xh7!

The bishop will now be in no more danger than his black colleague.

14...g6 15.g4 ♗xg4

Thus Black, for the time, avoids material loss. But, his horse still remains in the stable, and White's defensive moves serve, simultaneously, for attacking purposes.

**16. ♖xg4 ♖g5 17.h3 ♖xh7
18.f4 ♖h4 19. ♖h2 ♗d7**

At last.

20. ♖ab1!

Provoking the answer, which weakens Black's c-pawn. How important this detail is will appear half a dozen moves later on.

20...b6 21. ♖g1 ♗f6 22. ♖e5

Threatening 23. ♖xg6, the f-pawn, and also the c-pawn.

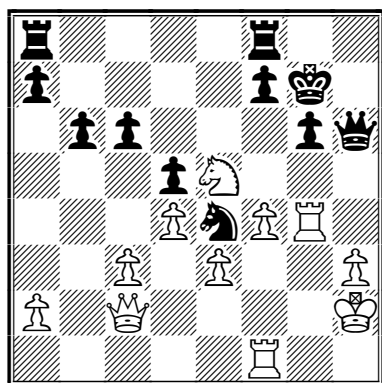
22...♗e4

Not only parrying all the threats (23. ♖xc6 ♖fc8) but also intending to simplify by 23...♖f2+.

23. ♖bf1 ♖g7

Black's possible threats on the h-file are insignificant in comparison to White's attack along the f- and g-files.

24. ♖g4 ♖h6 (D)



25.f5!

The tactical justification of this energetic advance is based on two variations: that played in the actual game, and the other, starting with 25...g5. In that case, I intended *not* to exchange



Milan Vidmar, Sr.

two rooks for the queen by continuing 26.f6+ ♗xf6 27. ♖xg5+ ♖xg5 28. ♖g1 ♖xg1+ 29. ♖xg1 ♗e4 (which would also be quite good but, still, not quite decisive), but to sacrifice the exchange: 26. ♖xe4! dxe4 27.f6+ ♖h8 (or 27...♖g8) 28. ♖xe4 etc., with a winning positional advantage. Dr. Vidmar selected, therefore, the by far more promising line of resistance.

25...♖xe3!

This finally loses only the exchange for a pawn and leads to a difficult endgame. It is easy to see that, apart from 25...g5, there was nothing else to do.

26. ♖g2 ♖d2

Or 26...g5 27.f6+ ♖h7 28. ♖h4+! ♖g8 29. ♖xc6 etc., with even more tragic consequences.

27.f6+ ♖g8 28. ♖xc6

The deserved reward for the well-timed 20th move.

28...♖xg2+ 29. ♖xg2 ♖fe8

Part IV (1929-1934)

There was no other reasonable defense against the threatened mate in two.

30. ♖e7+ ♜×e7

And now 30...♞f8 would have been victoriously answered by 31.♗×d5 (not 31.♞h4? ♗×f6), threatening both 31.♞h4 and 31.♗c7.

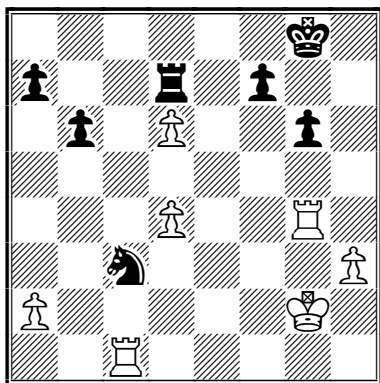
31. f×e7 ♞e8

Again forced, since 31...♗×c3 would lose rapidly after 32.♞c1, followed by ♞c7 or eventually ♞c6.

32. c4!

Without this possibility, whereby White secures a passed pawn, the win would be still rather doubtful.

32... ♞×e7 33. c×d5 ♗c3 34. d6 ♞d7 35. ♞c1 (D)



35... ♗b5

If 35...♗×a2, White, in order to force the win, would select the following sharp continuation: 36.♞c8+ ♞g7

37.d5! (threatening to win the knight) 37...a5 38.♞c7 ♞×d6 39.♞f4 ♞f6 (otherwise, White gets a mating attack) 40.♞f3 ♗b4 41.♞×f6 ♞×f6 42.♞e4, and, in spite of equal material, Black would lose as his two queenside pawns have but a short life.

36. ♞g5! ♗×d6

After 36...♗×d4, the win would be technically easier: 37.♞d5 ♗f5 38.♞c7! ♞×d6 (or 38...♞d8 39.d7) 39.♞×d6 ♗×d6 40.♞×a7 etc.

37. ♞d5!

From now on, the purely technical part of the endgame begins. Through combined play of his two rooks and king, White must make the utmost of the pinning of the hostile knight.

37... ♞f8 38. ♞e1!

The black king must not be allowed to approach the center before all White's units are brought to the most effective squares.

38... ♞d8 39. ♞f3 ♞d7

It is obvious enough that the exchange of rooks, after 39...♗b7, would not make any serious resistance possible.

40. ♞f4 ♞g7 41. ♞e8!

A further restriction of Black's moving capacities.

41... ♞f6 42. h4 ♞g7 43. a4

Bled 1931

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
1	Alekhine	X	1½	11	½½	1½	1½	11	1½	½½	1½	11	11	½½	11	20½
2	Bogoljubow	0½	X	½0	11	0½	11	1½	10	0½	01	00	11	½1	11	15
3	Nimzowitsch	00	½1	X	00	½½	11	0½	½½	½1	½½	1½	1½	11	0½	14
4	Kashdan	½½	00	11	X	½½	0½	1½	00	½½	1½	10	11	½½	½½	13½
5	Vidmar	0½	1½	½½	½½	X	½0	½0	½½	½0	11	½½	½1	½1	½½	13½
6	Flohr	0½	00	00	1½	½1	X	½½	10	½1	1½	11	½0	½1	½½	13½
7	Stoltz	00	0½	1½	0½	½1	½½	X	11	½1	½½	½1	00	01	1½	13½
8	Tartakower	0½	01	½½	11	½½	01	00	X	½½	½0	½½	11	½½	½½	13
9	Spielmann	½½	1½	½0	½½	½1	½0	½0	½½	X	½½	0½	00	1½	11	12½
10	Kostic	0½	10	½½	0½	00	0½	½½	½1	½½	X	½½	01	1½	11	12½
11	Maróczy	00	11	0½	01	½½	00	½0	½½	1½	½½	X	½1	½½	½½	12
12	Colle	00	00	0½	00	½0	½1	11	00	11	10	½0	X	0½	11	10½
13	Asztalos	½½	½0	00	½½	½0	½0	10	½½	0½	0½	½½	1½	X	0½	9½
14	Pirc	00	00	1½	½½	½½	½½	0½	½½	00	00	½½	00	1½	X	8½