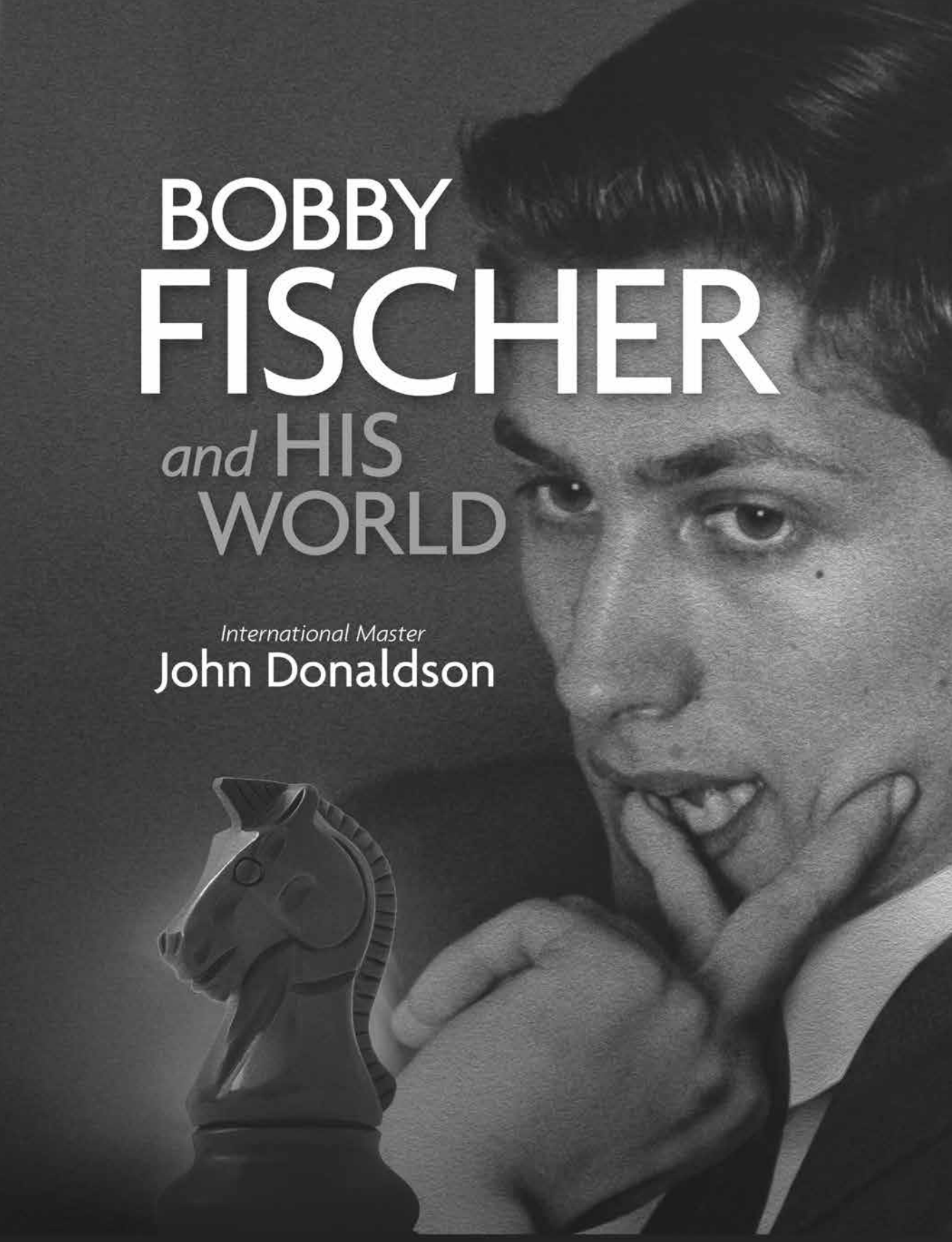
BOBBY FISCHER *and* HIS WORLD

International Master
John Donaldson



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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2013, I was invited by officers of the Marshall Chess Club to view a collection of material donated to the club by Bobby Fischer's brother-in-law. Much of the donated material consisted of family documents. However, a small portion of the collection dealt directly with Bobby's chess career, and within this mix were score sheets from some of his games, many of which had not previously surfaced. These games are what piqued my interest as they are the essence of Fischer's creative genius.

I first joined the U.S. Chess Federation in the fall of 1972, inspired by the Fischer–Spassky match in Reykjavík. Media interest in chess in those golden times was at a level never witnessed before or since with daily coverage in newspaper and broadcast media around the world. It was in the *Tacoma News Tribune* that September I found an announcement for the local chess club which started my nearly fifty-year involvement with the game.

My experience was hardly unique. Many giants of American chess of my generation, inspired by Fischer's World Championship run, began their careers around this time including: Yasser Seirawan, Joel Benjamin, Larry Christiansen, Nick de Firmian, and John Fedorowicz. Like myself, most of these players never encountered Fischer, as our "Chess Godfather" stopped playing after winning the World Championship.

Despite his early retirement Bobby stayed in the public eye until the beginning of the 1980s, with reports of a possible comeback periodically surfacing. Fischer's rematch with Spassky in 1992 led to hopes he would again play regularly but although that was not to be, his domination of the 1970-72 World Championship cycle and one-man crusade against the Soviet chess empire insured he would never be forgotten.

In the early '90s I spent a considerable amount of time tracking down Fischer's simul games for my book *Legend on the Road: Bobby Fischer's 1964 Simul Tour.* This book was followed in 1999 with *The Unknown Bobby Fischer* written with International Master Eric Tangborn. My aforementioned visit to the Marshall confirmed there was still plenty of Fischer gold to be found and a more substantial work was needed.

I was interested in answering a number of nagging questions about the eleventh World Champion: Who was Fischer's chess teacher? How did Bobby make his incredible jump in strength from early June of 1955 to late August of 1958? Why did he have such a hatred of the United States government? Why, with his mother a doctor and his sister a nurse, did he possess such an aversion to Western medicine? Why did Fischer play Spassky a rematch after so many earlier planned matches had fallen through? What happened to his belongings, particularly those lost after his storage locker was auctioned off?

Despite his incredible talent and tremendous work ethic, Bobby did not become World Champion by himself. As I thought about this and dug deeper into my research it became apparent that the answers to my questions weren't absolute. I realized the first-hand observations, documentations, and opinions (some contradictory of others) that I had gathered from players, friends, supporters, and other people in Fischer's orbit wove a story. And that story is what developed into this book, a portrait of Fischer's world.

With so much already written about Fischer's life and career, I was selective as to the material presented. Accordingly, I only touch briefly on many aspects of Bobby's life. For example, I didn't include well-known Fischer games unless I could offer new analysis. For the most part, the games I've chosen are thoso that shed light on lesser known moments in Fischer's career.

There are a few exceptions to these choices. A case in point is Bobby's game with Edmar Mednis from the first round of the 1963/64 U.S. Championship. This tournament, well known for Fischer's 11-0 sweep, is also remembered for Fischer's brilliancies against Robert Byrne, Pal Benko, and the good knight versus bad bishop last round endgame squeeze versus Anthony Saidy. Edmar Mednis points out that he should have won their first round encounter and stopped Bobby's sweep before it even started.

Tigran Petrosian and Fischer appeared to have little in common in the way they approached chess, but they shared an interest in playing the Maróczy Bind, the only World Champions to do so on a regular basis. Playing 1...c5 followed by a kingside fianchetto was Bobby's habitual answer to 1.Nf3 and 1.c4 in the late 1960s and early 1970s and he scored heavily with it. Allowing the Maróczy was the price of admission, and due to Bobby's success fighting the "Bind" these games are examined in depth.

Fischer's love of the "old ones" could be seen in his resurrecting many of Steinitz's opening ideas: 9.Nh3 in the Two Knights and 5.d3 in the Ruy Lopez are but two examples. He didn't confine his borrowing to just the beginning of the game. My chapter on the Hedgehog shows just how far ahead of his time Fischer was. While this middlegame structure wouldn't become popular until

after his retirement, Bobby had already played it as early as 1966 (vs. García Soruco).

There are other examples of Fischer as a pioneer. His famous win in the King's Indian Attack against Myagmarsuren from the Sousse Interzonal (the heretical 13.a3 violated the classical rule of not opening lines on the side of the board where one is weaker), is well-remembered. Not so its predecessor Bisguier-Fischer (20...a6) from the 1963 Western Open, an earlier, less known example, albeit with colors reversed.

It's been almost fifty years since Fischer won the World Championship, but information about his life and games continues to come forward. In 2019 forty games he played against masters and experts in simuls in Solingen and Münster resurfaced. This year Florido–Fischer, Havana 1956, was made public for the first time and I was thrilled to have made contact with Tommy Nigro, son of Carmine Nigro, who was Bobby's first teacher..

In 1982 I played in the British Columbia Open held at the University of British Columbia. After round four, for relaxation, I watched the film *Body Heat* in the theater of the UBC Film Society. It was not until many years later that I realized this theater, previously called the Student Union Auditorium, was the site of the Fischer–Taimanov Candidates match and that some of the stage lights were those specifically requested by Fischer. I was on hallowed ground!

Researching Bobby Fischer is a job that could go on forever. There are so many nooks and crannies in Fischer's life that it would be easy for me to go down the rabbit hole and never resurface. I did draw the line, but my quest goes on and I welcome reader's comments, additions, and corrections.

I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I did writing it.

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October 2020

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RESHEVSKY VS. FISCHER

THE BATTLE OF THE GENERATIONS

The battle of the generations pitted the forty-nine-year-old Sammy Reshevsky against the eighteen-year-old Bobby Fischer. The match may not have found either player at his peak—Sammy's best years were behind him and Bobby's yet to come—but both players were among the best in the West and top dozen in the World. While Fischer would eventually dominate his older rival, with a life time record of +9, –4, =13 (including 7 points from their last nine games), they were closely matched in the summer of 1961. Never has there been a match involving two American players that drew as much attention as this one.

The rivalry was already well established by the time of the match. Fischer entered it having won four consecutive U.S. Championships, while Reshevsky had a magnificent result at Buenos Aires 1960 where he tied for first with Viktor Korchnoi.

The unchallenged American number one since the end of the Second World War, Reshevsky was not ready to step aside for the young generation of stars coming up in the 1950s and early 1960s. He still saw himself as the best American player, and as such, entitled to play first board for the United States in the Olympiads.

The rivalry between Bobby and Sammy was beneficial to the extent it motivated them to be at their best, but it was detrimental in that Fischer and Reshevsky were Olympiad teammates only once. Money, principally the lack of it, sometimes contributed to Reshevsky's failing to play, but the rivalry also played a role. The two only joined forces at Siegen 1970, by which time even Reshevsky had to admit that Fischer was clearly better.

Along with the huge age disparity, there were other stark differences between the two titans of American chess: Bobby was over a foot taller than Sammy who stood barely over five feet. Both players were of Jewish ethnicity, but Reshevsky was Orthodox (his refusal to play on the Sabbath and religious holidays created scheduling difficulties during the match) whereas Bobby was non-practicing. Reshevsky was married with three children. Bobby was a bachelor.

[top left] A young Sammy Reshevsky with Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin in 1921;

[top right] Reshevsky in 1942;

[middle] Pasadena 1932 Sammy Reshevsky, Arthur Dake, and Herman Steiner being awarded their prizes by Henry McMahon secretary for the organizing committee;

[below] Sammy Reshevsky, "breathing fire," considers his 10th move in his round nine game against Robin Ault in the 1959 U.S. Championship.

Reshevsky playing a blindfold game against James Cross. Herman Steiner (standing center) has his arm around famous violinist and chess enthusiast Tosha Seidel (Photo: Nancy Roos).

Historically, a large number of the top players in the world have been Jewish and many would not play on high holidays such as Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Reshevsky went further, unilaterally refusing to play on the Sabbath, believing it to be a violation of the Talmudic prohibition against work. This strict interpretation made Sammy unique among chess masters—fellow Orthodox Jewish Grandmasters Boris Gulko and Leonid Yudasin would play on the Sabbath, albeit with an assistant to keep score and punch the clock for them. Years later, when he followed the practices of the Worldwide Church of God, Bobby also would not play from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, but that wasn't the case in 1961.

Fischer and Reshevsky had their differences, but they also shared much in common. Beneath their bitter rivalry was a grudging mutual respect borne from being among the best in the world, yet having to struggle to earn a living in a country that had no understanding of what it meant to be a top chess player.

Both players were prodigies, although only Sammy met the definition as a pre-teen. Both had unconventional childhoods. Much has been said of Fischer's difficult childhood, but an argument can be made that Reshevsky's situation was worse. Neither followed a traditional academic path. Fischer dropped out of high school at sixteen while Reshevsky had little formal schooling in his youth—starting at the age of eight he supported his large family for four years by giving endless simultaneous exhibitions.

Reshevsky looked back upon his early years in *Reshevsky on Chess*[1] (a book rumored to have been ghostwritten by Fred Reinfeld):

> Wherever I went, great crowds turned out to see me play. For four years, I was on public view. People stared at me, poked at me, tried to hug me, asked me questions. Professors measured my cranium and psychoanalyzed me. Reporters interviewed me and wrote fanciful stories about my future. Photographers were forever aiming their cameras at me. It was, of course, an unnatural life for a child, but it had its compensations and I cannot truthfully say that I did not enjoy it. There was the thrill of traveling from city to city with my family, the excitement of playing hundreds of games of chess and winning most of them, the knowledge that there was something "special" about the way I played chess, although I didn't know why.

This abuse came to an end when Sammy was twelve and his parents wound up in District Court in Manhattan, charged with improper guardianship for not providing an adequate education for their son—they claimed that as a young boy Sammy had attended a rabbinical school in New York. The case was dismissed, and soon afterwards chess enthusiast Julius Rosenwald, the wealthy co-owner

[1] Sammy Reshevsky, *Reshevsky on Chess: The U.S. Champion Tells How He Wins*. New York: Chess Review, 1948.

of Sears, Roebuck & Company in Chicago, stepped in and became Reshevsky's benefactor, taking care of his education.

Sammy took a sabbatical from chess the second half of 1924 to the fall of 1931, playing in only one serious tournament, the 28th Western Championship in Kalamazoo. It's doubtful any other top player has taken such a long break from the game in their formative years.

Reshevsky graduated with a degree in accounting from the University of Chicago in 1934 and later specialized in tax preparation. Accounts suggest that Sammy didn't have any special aptitude for this type of work, nor did he enjoy it. He was probably frustrated knowing his state-supported rivals from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe didn't have to worry about supporting their families.

In the early 1950s, at a time when the economic necessities of supporting a family threatened to overwhelm him, a fund was raised among chess lovers by Maurice Wertheim, a wealthy investment banker, which gave Reshevsky some $3,000 a year to supplement the $6,000 to $7,000 a year he made in tournaments and exhibitions.

This stipend made it possible for Reshevsky to give up his accounting job for good and concentrate solely on chess. And having the additional time, he played in more tournaments and gave transcontinental exhibition tours—both of which upped his income. Thanks to this backing he continued to play at an elite level in his forties and into his early fifties.

Wertheim died in 1950 and a few years later a more formal arrangement of assistance was established with the founding of the American Chess Foundation (the original members were Alexander Bisno, Jacques Coe, Walter Fried, Morris Kasper, Rosser Reeves, Lessing Rosenwald, and Maurice's widow Cecile Wertheim). This organization made it possible for Reshevsky to play in important tournaments that had meager prizes, and not suffer financially. This was a welcome change, albeit small, from the amateur-first mentality that had dominated American chess to that point. Unfortunately, it seems the ACF didn't have enough money to support other American players a few years down the line—namely Fischer and Lombardy—which undoubtedly led to bad feelings.

Before the start of the match, prominent grandmasters were almost unanimous in predicting a victory for Reshevsky. Gligorić, Larsen, Keres, and Petrosian all chose Sammy, with Petrosian even predicting the final score to be a lop-sided 9½–6½. Only Kashdan backed Bobby, writing in his column in the *Los Angeles Times*:

> Your editor will go out on a limb with the prediction that Fischer will win two games through superior knowledge of the openings and win by the margin of 9–7.

Kashdan knew Sammy from way back having been a teammate on the 1937 U.S. Olympiad team which won gold. He also had firsthand knowledge of Bobby's capabilities, having captained him at the 1960 Olympiad where the Americans finished second, medaling for the first time in twenty-three years.

Why did so many favor Reshevsky when Fischer had won the last four U.S. Championships? Clearly, this was because of Sammy's incredible record in matches—he was undefeated at that point in his career having defeated Kashdan, Horowitz, Lombardy, Bisguier, D. Byrne, Najdorf (twice), Benko, and Gligorić!

Why was Reshevsky so successful? It definitely was *not* because of his sometimes indifferent opening play—blamed at one time on a lack of study, we now know this was the not the case. Pal Benko, who seconded Reshevsky in his 1968 Candidates match against Viktor Korchnoi, spent a month prior to the event training with him and attributed Sammy's opening difficulties to a poor memory, making it difficult for him to remember long opening variations.

Reshevsky was often in time pressure, a result of spending too much time on the opening, but handled *zeitnot* well, aided by a good eye for tactics and excellent calculating ability. He was also a fine positional player, but what he really had going for him was tremendous fighting spirit.

William Lombardy remarked:[1]

> In my initiation to the Manhattan Chess Club, various masters would observe a game in progress and then opine, "Don't worry, Sammy's (Reshevsky) lost, but that's when he is the most dangerous! There have been and are top players who make a habit of winning hopeless positions. In this respect Reshevsky was at the head of the list of miracle workers. Despite the fact that he was one of the worlds' truly great chess geniuses, the little toupéed man still found himself in lost positions.
>
> Why? His physical stature was that of the smallest ape. But he had the heart, the courage and determination of a gorilla protecting his turf and family. Sammy took risks and mostly played relentlessly for the win. This policy often put him in trouble in which genius did not help. His determined focus to fight in the process of playing the game he loved was at the heart of success. Such a personality rarely fails. Even as a budding master I analytically observed the "little" man like grim death glued with iron will to his seat! If such were his sole contribution to chess that would have been enough, particularly in verification of the iron will to follow Emanuel Lasker's observation. "Chess is a struggle!"

Lombardy is right on the mark in his assessment of Sammy, especially that of family protector. Reshevsky was very much a family man devoted to his wife

[1] William Lombardy, *Understanding Chess: My System, My Games, My Life*. In association with Russell Enterprises, 2011, (p. 232).

Norma and their three children Malke, Joel, and Sylvia. Outside of his faith they were everything to Sammy, and when he played tournaments and matches he would do whatever it took to take home the prize money.

Reshevsky played with "sharp elbows" and he was involved in a number of controversies during his career. Some of them were minor (participants in blitz tournaments in New York, played with a ten second timer instead of clocks, expected Reshevsky to move around the twelfth second), but others were more serious. Two that come readily to mind are the incidents with Denker at the 1942 U.S. Championship and his taking back a draw offer against John Fedorowicz at Lone Pine 1981, which saw some karmic justice as the "Fed" went on to win. One could also mention the various matches Reshevsky played against significantly lower-rated players in the late 1970s and early 1980s to earn rating points to qualify for the U.S. Championship. This was technically legal but definitely against the spirit of the regulations.

An international master's eyewitness account confirms that Reshevsky's competitive instincts were still strong as he neared eighty:[1]

> We met in the 1990 U.S. Open in Jacksonville, Florida, and had a wild game in which first White (Reshevsky) and later Black had the better of it. The time control was 50/150 and I got in bad time pressure in an interesting ending in which I had three minor pieces and a pawn against White's rook and four pawns. Reshevsky noticed after playing his fifty-first move that my flag was down and tried to claim a win on time. I replied that we were in a new time control. Reshevsky continued to maintain he had won on time at which point I suggested we call a tournament director over to make a ruling. At this point Sammy finally agreed to the draw. Reshevsky may have looked like a kindly old grandfather but his will to win no matter what was still there.

Reshevsky's wife Norma often accompanied him to tournaments, helping him keep to the strict kosher diet he adhered to. While he had a professional relationship with Benko, who was perhaps closest to him of the American players, calling them friends would have been a stretch. It's not clear if Reshevsky had any real friends among top American players with the possible exception being I. A. "Al" Horowitz. Sammy was very much a "lone wolf." He was respected but not loved by his colleagues.

A 1955 vivid portrait of Sammy that appeared in *Sports Illustrated*, captures him well:[2]

> At forty-three, Reshevsky, despite his smallness, is an imposing figure whose icy boardside manner is a weapon which powerfully complements his wits. Barely five feet two inches tall, with a wide, bulging brow and

[1] John Donaldson commenting on the 1990 U.S. Open.

[2] John Kobler, "Icy Wizard of the Royal Game." *Sports Illustrated*, October 17, 1955, (p. 46).

> steely eyes, he sits unmovingly erect for hours on end, his head in his cupped hands, his mouth pursed in an expression of ineffable hauteur. Most players nibble and sip at something at intervals during a game; Reshevsky eats nothing and only seldom drinks a glass of water. He chain-smokes, but in him even this habit betrays no sign of nerves. "Sammy," a colleague once observed, "plays chess like a man eating fish. First he removes the bones, then he swallows the fish." His self-confidence is so boundless that in tournament play, where forty moves must be made within two and a half hours, he will spend half that time pondering a single move, feeling sure of finding one that will make the next moves virtually automatic. On rare occasions only does he leave himself so little time that he blunders through sheer haste.

And what did Bobby think of Sammy? We have no written record until three years after their match when the first issue of Frank Brady's classic but short lived magazine, *Chessworld*, ran Bobby's article "The Ten Greatest Masters in History."[1] Bobby wrote of his fellow countryman:

> For a period of ten years—between 1946 and 1956 Reshevsky was probably the best chess player in the world. I feel sure that had he played a match with Botvinnik during that time, he would have won and been World Champion.
>
> His chess knowledge is probably less than that of any leading chess player; many B players have greater opening knowledge than he. Had he really studied instead of settling for knowledge of a few main columns in *Modern Chess Openings*, he would have a lot easier time of it today.
>
> He is like a machine calculating every variation, and has to find every move over-the-board by a process of elimination. He can see more variations in a shorter period of time than most players who ever lived. Occasionally, in fact he comes up with new moves—spontaneous ideas he has fabricated from no knowledge.
>
> Still, he gets into fantastic time pressure, and sometimes has to make twenty moves in a minute; but he has emerged from such lapses dozens of times to win.
>
> Reshevsky seems to know the openings better today than at any previous times in his career, but his powers of concentration have fallen off a bit. At fifty-two, he is the oldest of the leading American players (he was once the youngest), and by reason of his tenacity and ability to fight overwhelming odds deserves a place on this list.

The two major omissions from Fischer's "Ten Greatest Masters" list were Lasker and Botvinnik. So, when Fischer writes that Sammy could have beaten

[1] *Chessworld*, "The Ten Greatest Masters in History," Bobby Fischer as told to Neil Hickey, v. 1, #1, January–February 1964, (p. 56–61).

Botvinnik, it is important to keep in mind that Fischer might have been somewhat prejudiced as he found the "Patriarch's" style too boring. As he expressed in his well-known mantra, "The players have gotten soft on the Botvinnik–Barcza–Benko diet", he had no warm feelings for players who opened 1.Nf3 or 1.c4 and fianchettoed one or more bishops. Back in 1964 Bobby only believed in 1.e4! International Master Anthony Saidy believes he expresses Fischer's sentiment about Reshevsky more accurately: "SR would have been world champ if he'd lived in the USSR."

The final word goes to Lombardy:[1]

> Reshevsky was neither a tactician nor a positional player. He was a complete player who combined and applied pertinent principles with flawless execution. Reshevsky knew how to wait, and how and when to advance.

THE MATCH

The Fischer–Reshevsky match was set for sixteen games, with the first four in New York, the next eight in Los Angeles, and the final four to be played in New York. The full sixteen games would be played regardless of one player reaching 8½ points prior.

New York City:
July 16 (2PM), July 18 (5PM), July 20 (5PM), July 24 (5PM)

Los Angeles :
July 27 (7:30PM), July 30 (7:30PM), Aug. 1 (7:30PM), Aug. 3 (7:30PM), Aug. 6 (7:30PM), Aug. 8 (7:30PM), Aug. 10 (7:30PM), Aug. 12 (7:30PM)

New York City:
Aug. 15 (5PM), Aug. 17 (5PM), Aug. 20 (2PM), Aug. 22 (5PM)

Games one through four were played at the Empire Hotel in New York (44 West 63rd Street, near Lincoln Center), starting on Sunday, July 16,1961. Why the games were played there instead of the Henry Hudson Hotel at West 57th street, where the Manhattan Chess Club was headquartered at the time, is not clear. It is but one unanswered question in a match that would have undoubtedly benefited from stricter regulations.

The Fischer–Reshevsky match was sponsored by the American Chess Foundation and Jacqueline Piatigorsky. This was the first of several world class events that Piatigorsky would be involved with in the 1960s—the 1963 Interzonal playoff, the two Piatigorsky Cups, and the three-player playoff for the last spot in the 1968 Candidates matches being the others.

The first leg of the match went smoothly with no controversies on or off the board. The first two games were dramatic, Fischer and Reshevsky trading wins.

[1] William Lombardy, *Understanding Chess: My System, My Games, My Life*. In association with Russell Enterprises, 2011, (p. 21).

One of Bent Larsen's many great tournament victories was his triumph at Le Havre 1966 where he took first with 9 from 11, two points ahead of the Soviet representatives Lev Polugaevsky and Nikolai Krogius, both of whom he defeated. Here he is in the opening stage of his game from round seven against Polugaevsky.

Menu

Consomé mosaico

Lenguado a la Normanda

Pollitos de grano grillé Americana
Patata Paja
Tomates Provenzal
Judías Verdes

Tarta de Conmemoración

Café y Licores

DOMINGO, 13 DICIEMBRE 1970

JORGEN BENT LARSEN

Jorgen Bent Larsen won his grandmaster title in 1956 at the Moscow Olympiade. Also participating in this tournament was Mikhail Botvinnik, who had achieved a 75% score, but was topped by Larsen with a 77.8% score. Larsen was born in Denmark on April 3, 1935. A young schoolmate taught him chess when he was seven years old. Twelve years later, in 1954, he won the Danish Championship, a crown he has captured whenever he played in the 1955, 1956, 1959, 1963 and 1964 championships. His International Tournament victories are impressive. As follows:

Scandinavian Championship, Oslo 1955. Tied with Olafsson and won the play-off with 4½-3½.

Hastings, 1956-1957. Tied with Gligoric for 1st and 2nd place.

Mar del Plata, 1958. Winner. Lombardy, 2nd. Panno, Eliskases and Sanguinetti in 3rd, 4th and 5th place.

Beverwijk, 1961. Tied with Ivkov, Uhlmann, 3rd and Olafsson, 4th.

Interzonal, Amsterdam, 1964. Tied with Spassky, Tal and Smyslov.

IBM Tournament, Amsterdam, 1964. Winner, Donner, 2nd.

Le Havre, April 1966. Winner. Polugajevski and Krogius, 2nd and 3rd. Matanovic and Forintos, 4th and 5th.

In the 1965 World Candidates Matches he beat Ivkov. In the second round after 9 games he had an even score against Tal but lost the match in the 10th game. In a recent match he beat Geller 5-4.

[above] Larsen and Fischer each signed this menu from the closing ceremony dinner for the Palma de Mallorca Interzonal;

[left] Bent Larsen's biographical page from the 2nd Piatigorsky Cup program, which he has signed. Larsen's win over Petrosian on the White side of a Maróczy Bind featuring a queen sacrifice is well remembered, but so should his beautiful positional squeeze near the end of the tournament using the King's Indian—an opening the reigning World Champion rarely lost against.

3
FISCHER VS. BENT LARSEN

The semi-finals of the Candidates matches started just five weeks after the quarter-finals. The match between the two best players in the West was eagerly anticipated and, unlike the previous round, there was no argument about what country would host the match, as Larsen preferred the United States to the Netherlands, Spain, or Sweden.

This might seem strange in view of the travel and jet lag Larsen would have to endure, but the August 1971 issue of *Chess* provides the answer: Larsen is said to have remarked, in memory of unfortunate experiences in other lands: "In the States I shall get the money!" Evidently, he had not been paid his honorarium/prize money by some European organizers.

The Great Dane had played in the United States several times before—Dallas 1957, the Second Piatigorsky Cup in 1966, and Aspen 1968 to name a few—and was comfortable there. Jack Spence, in his article on the match for *Chess* notes, wrote that Fischer was not the overwhelming fan favorite one might have expected playing on home ground. He wrote from Denver in July of 1971:

> The atmosphere is neutral. While the audience respects Fischer and holds his play in awe, few have witnessed him in action before, knowing him only as a name, which has dominated international chess for a dozen years or more. On the other hand Larsen, with his friendly personality, is well known to Denver chess fans primarily due to his popular victory in the 1968 U.S. Open at Aspen, a few hundred miles to the west.

Chess players in Colorado who attended Fischer's April 1964 exhibitions in Denver and Colorado Springs already had the opportunity of seeing Bobby in person, but Spence makes a good point. Larsen was a friendly person and great conversationalist who was a popular figure in the chess world.

Just as in Vancouver, Fischer came to Denver accompanied only by Ed Edmondson. Larsen merely brought his wife. This is likely the only time in the past fifty years that two world class players have met in a match connected with a World Championship cycle and not used seconds.

Larsen entered the match known for his fighting spirit and willingness to take risks. This aggressiveness had enabled him to win many important tournaments,

but caused skeptics to question his ability to adjust to match play against strong opposition. The final score against Fischer reinforced this faulty perception—Larsen was in fact an excellent match player in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the six years prior to Denver 1971 he had defeated Ivkov, Geller, Portisch, Kavalek, and Uhlmann in matches, split two with Tal, and lost to Spassky.

The lifetime score between the two players going into the match was close, 3½–2½ in Bobby's favor. Count only the four games played between them in the previous five years and they were even. Curiously, the player who had Black won every game.

His 1968 victory in Aspen (first place with 11–1) may have brought back good memories of Colorado for Larsen, but he would be in for a surprise as the Mile High City experienced a major heat wave in July 1971 with temperatures in the nineties, occasionally reaching triple digits. Larsen had not anticipated the heat and that it would have such a heavy impact on him. The age difference between the players was not significant as it was in the Taimanov match (Larsen age thirty-six to Fischer's twenty-eight), but Fischer, growing up in New York summers, was used to warmer weather. All this said, the playing hall was air conditioned (Fischer played in a suit) and major hotels of the time would have been as well.

Years later, in an interview he gave to *New in Chess*, Larsen blamed his defeat on the heat:

> They had the hottest summer in that place in thirty-five years. And very, very dry. This is not for me. I cannot sleep. It is absolutely impossible. After Round two I asked to see the doctor. The bad thing is that the doctor is part of the organization. He just thought I am someone who always runs around with high blood pressure and doesn't believe that I am not...I have to just put down my foot and leave or I have to play on. I didn't put down my foot.

In another article he stated:

> Yes, it was an insufferable match. The organizers chose the wrong time for this match. I was languid with the heat and Fischer was better prepared for such exceptional circumstances... I saw chess pieces through a mist and, thus, my level of playing was not good. It was a nightmare that I will never forget! Fortune didn't give me a single chance to win over him

The one-sided result did not cause Larsen any long-term problems as he quickly bounced back. Following the sound advice that the cure for a bad result is to have a good one, he got back in the saddle and had a successful year in 1972, winning two strong tournaments in England—Teesside, in which he won all six games with 1.b3 (an opening that now bears his name), and Hastings.

The playing schedule in Denver was the same as Vancouver. The match started July 6th with games scheduled to be played Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays starting at 4:00PM. As in Vancouver, this schedule allowed Fischer to observe the Worldwide Church of God's Sabbath. The time control was forty moves in two-and-a-half hours and after five hours play the game would be adjourned.

The games were played July 6, 8, 11, 13, 18, and 20. Larsen took a postponement on grounds of health after game four, so no game was played July 15.

The playing hall was the Houston Fine Arts Center at Temple Buell College located in eastern Denver. Foote Music Hall in the same building hosted live commentary by Isaac Kashdan and Anthony Saidy.

The equipment used in Denver was not as grand as Vancouver where a beautiful table from the 1966 Havana Olympiad and a nice wooden set were provided. Fischer and Larsen played with a Drueke Players Choice set and a generic board placed on a table. No other important match is known to have used non-wood pieces, but Fischer was fond of the hard-plastic simulation wood Players Choice set and had played with it before in important competitions, one example being his game with Spassky from the 1966 Piatigorsky Cup when he was Black. Fischer's favorite set appears to have been the one made for the 1950 Dubrovnik Olympiad, which was used in the 1992 Fischer–Spassky match. Fischer praised this set on several occasions for the artistry of the design and the feel of the pieces. He appreciated that the Dubrovnik set had no hard edges, which is something it had in common with the more modest Player's Choice model. Larsen, who played in several American Swiss system tournaments between 1968 and 1970, would likely have been familiar with the Players Choice set, which debuted at the 1965 National Open.

John Howell and John Harris were key players in Colorado chess in the late 1960s and early 1970s and were responsible for Denver getting the match, beating out alternative bids from New York and Los Angeles. Paul Klein of Ecuador was the chief arbiter and he must have done a good job, as he was on Bobby's short list of officials to referee the never played 1975 World Championship.

There was much more press in Denver compared to Vancouver, where it was only local journalists and Al Horowitz writing for *The New York Times*. Horowitz was back but so were *Los Angeles Times* chess columnist Isaac Kashdan and International Master David Levy who would write the nice little book *How Fischer Plays Chess* a few years later. Judging from the photos of Fischer talking to journalists after the match and the interviews he gave at the time, Bobby appears to have been quite relaxed with the media, much different than a year later.

National Master Curtis Carlson and long-time Colorado chess player Mike Archer both attended the match. Carlson wrote:

> I also saw all six games, what great memories! The first was awesome. After Larsen tipped over his king the audience gave Bobby a well-deserved standing ovation. After winning the 1974 World Open Larsen gave a simul in Denver. After he crushed me (and thirty-five others) I asked him who would win a Fischer–Karpov match; he said no one could beat Bobby!
>
> It cost $3 a game to watch or $20 for a pass for the whole match. I made the mistake of buying a pass when it would have been cheaper to pay by the game!
>
> After the Larsen match Lubos Kavalek gave a simul in Denver before Bobby left town, and he came by to watch. He glanced briefly at my game vs. K (which was ultimately drawn), and his face contorted like he was looking at a dead animal or something. So much for my fifteen seconds of fame with the god of chess.

Carlson kept the time the players spent on each move for the first two games, the only record for this we know of.

Archer remembered:

> The entire match Fischer looked trim, fit, relaxed and perhaps even a bit dapper. He had a somewhat gangly but confident walk. I met him very briefly when he borrowed three books from my collection a few days before the match. He seemed like a regular guy to me with whom you'd be happy to go to a bar, push down a couple of brewskis. He was lanky, seemed a little awkward, really almost shy/self-conscious. Larsen on the other hand looked rumpled and tired from the get-go—I recall people mentioning this at the time. His hair was always a mess and his suit looked poorly fitted to me, but perhaps that was the style in Europe for all I know.
>
> Game One was the most exciting to watch. I remember everyone with their pocket chess sets analyzing it real-time. On one or two occasions I recall Fischer turning to the audience and giving us a quite stern look because of noise he apparently detected.
>
> In Game Three Larsen played a novelty in the Sicilian (as Black) which Fischer basically refuted over-the-board. At that point I don't think there was anyone following the match locally who would have bet any outcome other than 6–0. The remainder of the games definitely had an anti-climactic air about them.
>
> Larsen played the last games looking for wins only, so the 6–0 is a bit overblown in my eyes. Larsen eschewed drawing moves, always striving for "only" a win, and got clobbered because of it. Especially combined with his normal looseness, this created a disaster, but one that looks worse on paper than it really was.
>
> I would be curious to know when Larsen hit town vis-a-vis Fischer. I know for fact the latter was here several days early as my five-minutes-of-fame was at least a couple of days before the match.

Nebraskan Jack Spence, famous for the many tournament bulletins he produced, described the board mannerisms of the two players in the report he wrote for *Chess*:[1]

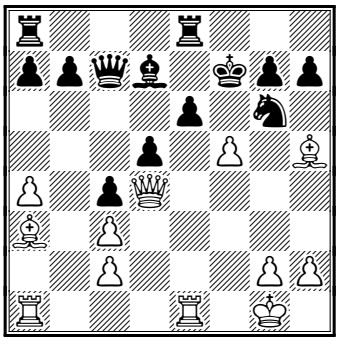
> When matters are going well Fischer has a tendency to sprawl back in his chair with his legs crossed at the ankles full length outside the table leg with his hands resting on his lap but a moment later he will be seated erect at the table with elbows resting close to the board with one hand on his chin or ear, stroking his hair back. He does not move around too often and seldom leaves the table while Larsen is studying. On the other hand Larsen leaves the stage at almost every opportunity. Generally he hunches forward in his seat with his elbows on his knees and his face close to the pieces. Occasionally he sits immobile for minutes at a time with his chin cradled in his hand and, when matters begin to worsen, runs his fingers nervously through his hair.

The following observation adds to Spence's account:[2]

> Several time Colorado state champion (1955, 1967, and 1970) E. Victor Traibush was the official scorekeeper for games one and two and he observed that whenever Fischer moved, he very carefully and politely slid the piece to the center of the square he was moving it to. However, there was an exception to this behavior in game one. When Fischer played 19.f5!, Traibush noticed that Fischer actually picked up the pawn and tilted it slightly toward Larsen as he moved it forward.

(71) French
Fischer – Bent Larsen
Denver (1) July 6, 1971

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 Ne7 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 c5 7.a4 Nbc6 8.Nf3 Bd7 9.Bd3 Qc7 10.0-0 c4 11.Be2 f6 12.Re1 Ng6 13.Ba3 fxe5 14.dxe5 Ncxe5 15.Nxe5 Nxe5 16.Qd4 Ng6 17.Bh5 Kf7 18.f4 Rhe8 19.f5



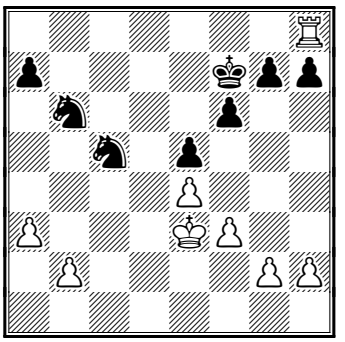
[1] *Chess*, August 1971.

[2] First reported in the *Rocky Mountain News* and later in the obituary for E. Victor Traibush in the *Colorado Chess Informant*, April 2011.

19...exf5 20.Qxd5+ Kf6 21.Bf3 Ne5 22.Qd4 Kg6 23.Rxe5 Qxe5 24.Qxd7 Rad8 25.Qxb7 Qe3+ 26.Kf1 Rd2 27.Qc6+ Re6 28.Bc5 Rf2+ 29.Kg1 Rxg2+ 30.Kxg2 Qd2+ 31.Kh1 Rxc6 32.Bxc6 Qxc3 33.Rg1+ Kf6 34.Bxa7 g5 35.Bb6 Qxc2 36.a5 Qb2 37.Bd8+ Ke6 38.a6 Qa3 39.Bb7 Qc5 40.Rb1 c3 41.Bb6, 1–0.

After the first game, Trailbush drove Bobby to his home for dinner, and during the ride asked Fischer if he was aware of how he moved the f-pawn at move nineteen. The mortified Fischer had no idea what he had done and said, "That was very unprofessional."

Contrast that with the behavior of another World Champion as described by Yasser Seirawan.[1]



> The position in the diagram, from Kasparov–Seirawan, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988, is right before White played 29.Rb8!.
>
> With this move Garry lashed out and smashed the clock with a closed fist. Unfortunately, the table happened to have little give to it and the end result was that all the pieces jumped off their squares. I was furious. Indeed, Garry had been so violent that on the adjacent board the game between Karpov and Gulko was also disturbed by Garry's outburst as their pieces jumped as well. So here I was, pieces spewed about, my clock running and now this. For the last few moves, Garry had been doing his "piece screwing" business, and I had had enough.
>
> I decided right there and then that a solid right punch to the jaw was the required response and I clenched my fist. Garry's sense of self-preservation kicked into high gear faster than I could "make my move." Garry put his hands in the air and kept saying, "Sorry. Sorry. Sorry!" repeatedly. All the while readjusting the pieces and putting them on their proper squares. Garry's sudden change to a fawning apology disarmed me. The rush of adrenalin that wanted me to put Kasparov in a different time zone had nowhere to go, and I found that it took me many minutes to restore my concentration.

[1] Yasser Seirawan, *Chess Duels: My Games with the World Champions*. London: Everyman, 2010, (p. 272–73).

> While not in time-trouble, I was beginning to drift in that direction, and the whole incident had a completely unnerving effect upon me. In my whole career I had never been in such a situation, although some opponents had been well and truly rude. But this? Talk about enfant terrible behavior. What had caused Garry to behave so badly? I have no idea of the pressures that he was under (or those expectations he placed on himself), but there was simply no excuse. It was a really unpleasant business and put me off from the tremendous respect I had, and have, for him as a player. A great player, but in this instance a terrible sportsman.

Fortunately, such behavior by world-class players is rare. Early in his book Seirawan writes of watching Paul Keres in his last tournament (Vancouver 1975) and what great manners he had.

Fischer was still very approachable in Denver, as evidenced by his going to Boulder to Traibush's house for dinner during the match and playing tennis with John Harris and several other local chess players. Things were much different a year later.

While both players got along well at the board, noise issues periodically caused problems throughout the match. This was always a problem for Fischer who was hypersensitive to even small sounds. Spence wrote:

> Until now Chief Arbiter Klein found matters running relatively smoothly but it was only a lull before the storm. At the start of the fifth game a cameraman from a national magazine was given permission to photograph the match in progress high above the stage in the projection booth. However he overstayed his time limit and the rustle of sounds from above forced a brief cessation of play while he packed his gear and departed. But as the ending approached Klein again had problems with the audience. After the last piece was exchanged Fischer had an outside passed pawn while Larsen had three pawns to two on the other wing. The ending became one of mathematics in a race to queen. Whispers became noticeably audible forcing Klein to descend into the auditorium where he gestured frantically to various spectators in an effort to eject them. They refused to move. Play halted as Fischer arose from the table in despair. Finally the worst offenders were removed and as play resumed Larsen was forced to journey over to stop the pawn while Fischer's king advanced to the other wing and victory.

Isaac Kashdan, in an unpublished article on the Fischer–Larsen match (originally planned for *Sports Illustrated)*, explained how exacting Bobby was when it came to proper lighting:

> The lights were a problem, based on demands from Fischer. Most chess players are satisfied if they have a reasonably clear view of the board and men. Fischer had made a special study of the subject.

> His specifications called for twenty fluorescent fixtures, each with four daylight tubes, to be twenty feet above the playing surface. There must be no glare or shadow on the board or men. This was the ideal he had established after considerable experimentation in other matches and tournaments.
>
> The committee ordered the work done, and all was set when Fischer arrived. It turned out to be too bright. The electricians explained the fluorescent tubes are brighter than rated when newly installed.
>
> Fischer asked for changes, and changes were made, on the average of once each playing day. A typical request was: add four blue tubes, to replace the whites, and lower the fixtures three feet.
>
> Yellows were tried as well, but, were not successful. Soft-whites did better. All told, the committee owned close to 200 tubes, with only eighty needed during any one game, and none when the match was over.

Six-time U.S. Champion Walter Browne is one top player who shared Bobby's exacting standards concerning proper illumination, going so far as to withdraw from the 1978 U.S. Championship in a dispute over proper lighting.