

**Tigran Petrosian ♦ Aleksandar Matanović**

# **THE MATCH OF THE CENTURY USSR vs. WORLD**

**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition**

Edited and revised by  
Douglas Griffin and Igor Žvegljć



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## SYSTEM OF SIGNS

±	white stands slightly better	↗	diagonal
∓	black stands slightly better	⊕	centre
±	white has the upper hand	»	king's side
∓	black has the upper hand	«	queen's side
+-	white has a decisive advantage	×	weak point
-+	black has a decisive advantage	⊥	ending
=	even	♖♗	pair of bishops
∞	unclear	♖♜	bishops of opposite color
∞	with compensation for the material	♜♜	bishops of the same color
○	development advantage	○○	united pawns
○	greater board room	○-○	separated pawns
→	with attack	♚	double pawns
↑	with initiative	♚	passed pawn
↔	with counter-play	>	advantage in number of pawns
⊙	zugzwang	⊕	time
#	mate	75/199 Chess Informant	
!	a very good move	E	12 Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings
!!	an excellent move	♚	3/b Encyclopaedia of Chess Endings
?	a mistake	N	a novelty
??	a blunder	(ch)	championship
!?	a move deserving attention	(izt)	interzonal tournament
?!	a dubious move	(ct)	candidates' tournament
△	with the idea	(m)	match
□	only move	(ol)	olympiad
△	better is	corr.	correspondence game
↔	file	RR	editorial comment
		R	various moves
		└	with
		┘	without
			etc
		—	see

## Foreword to the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition

The recent encounter between the leading chess players of the Soviet Union and a select team of grandmasters from other countries was indeed an event that held the attention of chess fans the world over. The “Match of the Century”, as it was called, fully justified the efforts of the sponsors, organizers and all who helped to make this event possible: the occasion was a contribution not only to the development of chess itself but to the cause of friendship and understanding among the peoples of the world. Five ex-champions of the world, the present champion and, most probably, several future champions assembled in the Yugoslav capital, Belgrade. With a splendid show of sportsmanship the finest chessplayers of our time, did not disappoint their fans.

The organizers of this match, all chess enthusiasts from Belgrade, wish to express their gratitude to: The World Chess Federation (FIDE), the Chess Federation of USSR, the leaders of the Soviet and World Teams, for their assistance in assuring the success of this event, to various persons prominent in Yugoslav political and cultural life for their contribution, to numerous economic organizations and news agencies for their support, to the grandmasters who participated in the match.

This publication on the “Match of the Century”, which is a lasting tribute to the creative talents of these grandmasters, brings the whole event to its natural conclusion. There are several unique features of the book, e.g. with only a few exceptions all the participants have annotated their own games (in Russian and English). In this way the reader may follow each game from the point of view of both players. The notes of the Soviet players are in Russian, and those of the World team in English\*.

Aleksandar Matanović

**Aleksandar Matanović** (b 1930) is a Serbian Grandmaster, and Chess Informant co-founder. He was the Yugoslav national chess Champion on three occasions (1962, 1969 and 1978), and represented Yugoslavia internationally at many team events, most notably Olympiads, winning several medals with the mighty Yugoslav squad. He devoted the later years of his career to Chess Informant publications, especially the famous Encyclopedias of Chess Openings (ECO) and Informant periodicals. Also, Matanović published several instructive chess manuals, and few game collections.

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\* In the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition the notes of all the players are in English.

## Foreword to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

The match between the USSR and the Rest of the World was an epoch-defining event that featured many of the greatest names in the history of chess. Five World Champions, and all of the world's highest-rated players – without exception – took part. Not for nothing was it billed as the "Match of the Century".

The idea for this book was inspired by Chess Informant's work *USSR v. Rest of the World*<sup>1</sup>, which was published in Belgrade not long after the match. It contained brief biographical details of the players, and annotations to the games by the players themselves, in English (by the Rest of the World players) and Russian (by the Soviet participants). That book was the starting point of our effort, as it was extremely satisfying to develop the original work compiled by Tigran Petrosian and Aleksandar Matanović. The present work features expanded player biographies and translations of the Russian-language annotations. It also features translations of contemporary articles from the Soviet chess press, as well as later recollections by some of the players and key characters involved in the match.

The game of chess then was very different to the modern version. Today, the fundamental role played by powerful computer engines has removed much of its mystery. But it is not only the game itself that has changed; its leading actors have also, perhaps, become less colourful. In preparing the biographies of the participants, we were struck by the extent to which many of them had been affected, either directly or indirectly, by some of the most momentous events of the first half of the twentieth century. The Russian Revolution of October 1917, the Great Terror of the late 1930s, the Nazi Invasion of the USSR in 1941 and the subsequent Siege of Leningrad, the Holocaust, the partition of Europe along capitalist and communist lines – these had all left their mark. The lives of many of today's leading grandmasters, most if not all of whom have been professional chessplayers for their entire adult lives (and sometimes even longer than that), may seem slightly one-dimensional in comparison.

It is unlikely that the game of chess will ever regain the status that it once enjoyed in the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, as well as in Yugoslavia. Truly, it is difficult to imagine the scene that took place in central Belgrade (and described in the Introduction) occurring in any city of the world today.

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that great event in the Serbian capital, we invite the reader to take a step back to those years and to re-live the match as it was experienced at the time, in the words of its participants and some of the leading journalists of the day...

Douglas Griffin  
Igor Žvegljć

February 2020.

# **THE MATCH OF THE CENTURY USSR vs. WORLD**





# INTRODUCTION

## Half a Century Ago...

Half a century ago. Early April 1970. Richard Nixon is just over a year into his presidency, and will soon launch the secret invasion of Cambodia by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces that will result in the spread of the ongoing conflict in South-East Asia. In just over a week's time, on 11<sup>th</sup> April, the ill-fated Apollo 13 spaceflight will take off from the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida. The day before this, Paul McCartney announced his departure from The Beatles. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, an incredible 136,505 football fans will pack into Glasgow's Hampden Park to watch the Scottish champions, Celtic, defeat their English counterparts, Leeds United, to advance to the final of the European Cup. At the 42<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards (Oscars) ceremony, *Midnight Cowboy* will win the prize for the best film. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* is still playing in cinemas, while Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* is riding high in the music charts.

While in Belgrade, capital of the Serbian Republic and of Yugoslavia as a whole, the "Match of the Century" has been taking place...

In this unique event, two ten-player teams – one from the Soviet Union, the other from the "Rest of the World" – faced each other over four rounds in a competition that captured the imagination of the chess world, and continues to fascinate to this day. The games were played in front of two thousand spectators in the Great Hall of the *Dom Sindikata* (the House of Trade Unions), within sight of the Federal Assembly Building, home of the parliament of Yugoslavia. We may picture the scene... on the brightly-lit stage, against the background of a blue curtain, black and orange pieces are displayed on the white and yellow squares of the demonstration boards. Around them are ten operators, dressed in white. In the hall itself, it is dark. Outside, on Marx-Engels Square, the lights in the streets and in the surrounding buildings have been dimmed so that fans who had been unable to get hold of the sought-after tickets can follow the progress of the most interesting games on a giant illuminated demonstration board – a gift from the workers of the Yugoslav Atomic Centre. Commentary on the games by International Master Mario Bertok is relayed to the crowds by loudspeaker...<sup>2, 3</sup>

The event in Belgrade had been many years in the making. As long ago as 1945, following the famous USSR v. USA radio match – in which the decisive defeat of the Americans by 15½:4½ announced the coming hegemony of the Soviet Union – the idea of a USSR v. "Rest of the World" contest was suggested by Savielly Tartakower. Further conversations regarding the possibility of such a match had taken place in Moscow during the second half of the 1948 World Championship Match-Tournament. However, the idea did not begin to take concrete shape until March of 1969, when M. Molerović of the Serbian Chess Union asked whether it would be possible to organise a match under the aegis of FIDE. Following further discussions during the Petrosian-Spassky match, the preliminary agreement of the USSR Chess Federation was gained. At the FIDE Congress in San Juan (1969), draft regulations were presented, and the ex-World Champion Max Euwe agreed to appear in the role of Captain for the Rest of the World team.<sup>4</sup>

Within the Soviet hierarchy there was qualified support for the event. The USSR Chess Federation was answerable to the Committee on Physical Culture and Sport, which reported to the USSR Council of Ministers, the main executive and administrative agency of the Soviet Union. The primary concern of the Chairman of the Committee, S. P. Pavlov<sup>5</sup>, was whether or not the Soviet team could be relied on to win. The opinions of leading Soviet grandmasters were sought, and once assurances had been given, the permission of the authorities ultimately followed. However, as a result, the Soviet players were under enormous pressure to deliver. Many years later, ex-World Champion Vasily Smyslov, who played on the 6<sup>th</sup> board for the USSR team, recalled:

*What is remembered first and foremost: in Belgrade the struggle was conducted much more sharply than in any tournament. In terms of its intensity, it was an incomparable spectacle. Psychologically, we felt very strongly the responsibility that lay on us. Our leadership was convinced that we would win with a crushing score, as we did against the Americans in 1945. Then, we had been invited to the American Embassy, and we saw that the entire embassy was simply shocked by the score of 4½ : 15½. Probably, the Sports Committee expected something similar from us this time.*<sup>6</sup>

Once the decision had been made, every effort was made to ensure success. The players and some of the Soviet Union's best trainers participated in a training camp outside Moscow, which involved physical preparation as well as purely chess-related activity. However, relations among the players seem to have been strained at times, particularly over the question of board-order. Many years later, Boris Spassky said the following with regard to the question of team spirit:

*Yo know, we almost lost this match. We were not a unified team, because the board-order was decided by the USSR Sports Committee.*<sup>7</sup>

On the Rest of the World side, the main practical difficulties were around the question of the top two boards. Max Euwe had taken the sensible decision of selecting the ten players and two reserves on the basis of players' Elo ratings. At that time, Bobby Fischer and Bent Larsen were clearly the best players in the West, but Fischer had played only one game in the previous eighteen months, while Larsen's recent record gave him some justification for claiming that he should lead the Rest of the World select. For some time it was unclear as to whether Fischer would play at all, but no sooner had he agreed to take part, than Larsen stated that he would only play on condition that he were given top board. It seemed that the problem was intractable, but thanks to the remarkable flexibility and perseverance of the organizers, a solution was eventually found.

In all, the event had cost more than \$100,000 – more than \$650,000 in today's money – to organise<sup>8</sup>. Then, at 17:00 on 29<sup>th</sup> March, the event was opened by the president of the Yugoslav Government, M. Ribičić.<sup>9</sup>

A flavour of just what had been going on behind the scenes up to this point can be read in the following articles from the contemporary Soviet and later Russian press.

# Articles in The Soviet & Russian press

In this chapter we present you the extracts from articles in the contemporary Soviet press – as well as from later memoirs by some of those involved – which should allow you to sense the flavour of the events in the lead-up to the match.

Note: In agreeing to the participation of the Soviet team, the USSR Sports Committee let it be known that on no account should their opponents be known as the “World Team”. Their argument was that the team could not be termed as such, since it necessarily did not include players from the Soviet Union. Thus, in the Soviet literature of the time the rather clumsy term ‘Team of Selected Chess-players of the World’ is used. For this extended and revised edition, we have used the simpler term “Rest of the World” whenever possible.



Article by M. A. Beilin<sup>40</sup>, *Po Gvozdike Za Pobedu Nad Sbornoi Mira – Podvodnye Kamni* “Match Veka”, “64” (№ 4, 2000).

## Carnations for Victory over the World Team – The Submerged Reefs of the “Match of the Century”

Thirty years ago the path from the Central Chess Club on Gogolevsky Boulevard to the Sports Committee, which was then to be found on Skatertny Lane, was short and well-trodden. But this time I completed it more rapidly than usual. A call to the Chairman himself was an unusual event for the head of the Chess Department.

The large office, which after its refurbishment and the arrival in it of S. P. Pavlov<sup>41</sup> was nicknamed by the staff the “Pavlov Palace”, was brightly lit. My eye was immediately caught by the backs of the heads of four World Champions. “Black, redheaded, grey and blond” flashed in my mind. The champions were seated in front of the chairman’s writing desk. I excused myself for my lateness, reminding Sergei Pavlovich that the department was now located in a different building. He nodded and returned to the theme.

– “What will the result of the match be?”

Botvinnik, the oldest and not for nothing known as the “Patriarch”, replied:

– “We will win”.

Short and clear, in the style of the champion.

Everyone smiled in a friendly way. Spassky, Petrosian and Smyslov confirmed Botvinnik’s assessment; the atmosphere warmed. The champions took responsibility and the chairman reached the conclusion that there would be a match.

The grandmasters dispersed. Sergey Pavlovich turned to me and asked, seriously: “How did they know that the match was in question?”



**Chairman of the Committee on Physical Culture and Sport under the USSR Council of Ministers from 1968 until 1983, S. P. Pavlov. (Photo source: commons.wikimedia.org)**

I guessed that it was most likely of all from me, since I had called one of them that morning on the telephone. But just in case, I answered evasively “Sergey Pavlovich, World Champions have access to wide information”.

The chairman did not manage to clarify my role...

Already in 1945, when the USSR team won a radio match against the USA team by the sensational and more than convincing score  $15\frac{1}{2} : 4\frac{1}{2}$ , the ingenious grandmaster Tartakower noted that it would be good to hold a match between a USSR team and a World team. Almost a quarter of a century passed, and in 1969 the FIDE Congress instructed the Yugoslav Chess Federation and the Serbian Chess Union to organise such a match. The host country was a natural choice. Yugoslavia had contributed enormously to the world chess movement. The world calendar without the international tournaments in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Skopje and other Yugoslav cities would have been much poorer.

Soon the official invitation arrived in Moscow. The conditions appeared good; the organisers had foreseen everything, even as far as insurance. The World Champion, the grandmasters and the Chess Federation liked the idea of the match. No-one objected to it.

After simple estimates with pencil in hand, as advised by the wise leaders outlining the make-up of the team, the matter was reported to the chairman of the Sports Committee. He picked up the phone and called a very important comrade. And he gained approval. At all this I was present.

A short time passed, and the bosses said that there had been an objection. Supposedly, the objection was by Comrade Zimyanin<sup>12</sup>, the editor of *Pravda*. Although he did not have any immediate concerns with sport and chess, he did have some regarding questions of the wider world, and indeed they were of the most immediate sort.

I of course understood that there was some risk of losing this match, but like all ordinary chess-players I wanted the match to take place. There was no personal interest: Yugoslavia held no particular appeal, as in the plan for the year I had two other trips. All that remained for me were worries and risk.

Once the powers-that-be had turned their attention to the match, I was asked the ritual question: “Whose idea was all this?”. I decided it was better not to answer.

In place of a reply, as I have already said, I picked up the phone and called the World Champion, as they say, “cold”. In my heart, a conflict between these officials and chess did not arise. Further events unfolded by force, although in the manner of champions various subtleties were observed. For example, on one occasion I was required to send a written request to the Moscow city chief regarding the reconstruction of the Central Chess Club. The task seems simple enough, but in what order was it to be signed? Memories of ancient localism were alive in the minds of the contemporaries. We had to introduce rationalisation – the signatures were arranged not one under the other, but side-by-side, on one line. In general, when the matter gets as far as defending chess as a whole, agreement is achievable.

Thus, the champions conspired together and the joint visit to the chairman of the Sports Committee took place. A submerged reef had been successfully circumvented. However, the chairman attached a condition – not under any circumstances were the opponents to be referred to as the “World” team. This is how the vague pseudonym “Team of Selected Chess-players of the World” came into being. Later, journalists christened the event “The Match of the Century”, and everything fell into order.

The political problems having been solved, prosaic ones came to the fore: how was the team to be recruited? There was no shortage of willing candidates – ten full team members and two reserves had to be chosen on merit. Behind the cordon, ex-World Champion M. Euwe, captain of the Rest of the World team, solved the problem in simple fashion – by taking

account of individual ratings. The only hitch was that Bent Larsen had declared his right to first board. The uncompromising Fischer, in his turn, astonished everyone – there was to be no dispute, although he seemingly said that he all the same knew himself to be the stronger player. Our team in general was thrown together without difficulty, but who would play on which board immediately became particularly important and, naturally, was kept absolutely secret. So secret that it was not even revealed to the director of the Chess Department. Nor did the Presidium of the USSR Chess Federation ask. I was hardly left out for humane reasons, but this was convenient rather than offensive.

When the board order, which had previously been reserved for the press family, was made public, Botvinnik proved to be on the eighth board. The Patriarch was offended. But he complied. And played at ‘full voltage’. Only at the airport, when the team was seen off to Belgrade and the photo-correspondent wanted to take a snapshot for posterity, Mikhail Moiseevich flatly refused to be pictured with everyone. I tried to speak with him, but he replied shortly and clearly to me, in the style of the champion, that he would not be photographed with “them”. Probably, he suspected someone of disloyalty. Or, perhaps, all of them. Aleksandr Roshal, performing an analogous request on behalf of the photographer, received the conclusive response: “No! I will not be photographed with this... gang.”

The photo-correspondent took Botvinnik’s photo separately. Then, admittedly, a photo-montage was done. The contemporary technique of reconstruction solved everything.

The struggle in the match unfolded gravely. On the first boards we proved to be in deficit. Fischer picked up 3 out of 4 against Petrosian. On the other hand, ‘old’ Keres, who was ‘stuck’ on the tenth board, collected the same number of points. Botvinnik, Smyslov, Geller and Taimanov won their micro-matches. Victory was gained with difficulty and by the minimal score  $20\frac{1}{2} : 19\frac{1}{2}$ . Nonetheless, victory. Our team and federation received congratulations from various countries at the state and public level. But “no-one is a prophet in his own land”. Not having won in this way!

At the airport the grandmasters were met modestly. Each of them was handed a single red carnation...

Thirty years have passed. There is no Soviet Union; there is no USSR team; many of the participants in the match have passed away. But in chess history the ‘Match of the Century’ remains a memorable event, eloquent evidence of the high authority of our native school of chess. In 1984 this authority was confirmed in a so-called ‘Return-match of the Century’. But it did not have the resonance of the previous one.

And if it were to again be repeated? Perhaps, a truncated USSR, that is, Russia, and this time without mistakes?

## Ahead – A Great Match

This week there begins a match that is everywhere being called “The Match of the Century”. The captain of the team of our opponents – grandmaster and ex-World Champion Max Euwe gave a wholly logical justification for this shrill title: now and in the next few decades, there is no doubt that no single country will manage to achieve such supremacy in the sport of chess as that which is presently enjoyed by the representatives of the USSR – hence, the Match of the Century, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century!

Around an event that promises much, there are many prognoses. No-one is in any doubt at all about the victory of the Soviet team; the headline of one article, on the contrary, asks “Does the World Team Have Any Chance?”. But first of all, regarding the accuracy of the wording. Can a team for which our outstanding grandmasters do not appear be called a ‘World Team’? Of course not. And therefore the collective of our opponents has gained the name ‘Team of Selected Chess-players of the World’.

Two days before the departure of our grandmasters, a reception was held in the embassy of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia – the organising country of the match. As always, foreign journalists actively assailed the members of the Soviet delegation, interviewing the champions. In exchange they were informed of the latest news: Miguel Najdorf and Friðrik Ólafsson were already in Belgrade, Bent Larsen, despite the recent statement [Translator’s note: that he would only play on condition that he was given 1<sup>st</sup> board], had requested his airline ticket from Copenhagen to Belgrade, Robert Fischer was flying in the first-class cabin of the Indian airline company Maharajah...

To the reception of which I have spoken, our grandmasters had come almost directly from the Moscow Region Rest Home, where they had all been preparing together for the match (Boris Spassky considers the possibility of conducting such a training camp to be an important advantage of the Soviet team). I was fortunate enough to spend a few days in this rest home and to witness this preparation. The impressions of one of the directors of the training camp, Master L. Abramov, have been added. Regular skiing excursions (on the last day, on the notice board: “Today – farewell to the skis!”) revealed their leaders. The spectators’ favourite was Lev Polugaevsky. At table tennis, Paul Keres was best, at billiards – Leonid Stein. However, there were also other opinions...

In general, in the training games the grandmasters were inexhaustibly inventive. Keres, for example, with Black, played the King’s Indian Defence in very original fashion, demanding in exchange from Petrosian that on 1. e4 he would necessarily reply 1... e5. But here the opponent of the Estonian matador landed a ‘sucker punch’ by employing Keres’ own system. Already in the next game, retribution awaited this ‘breaking of convention’: Keres played the King’s Gambit, beloved of him in his younger years, and Petrosian, smiling, raised his hands in the air. While the pleasure that the spectators took from the meeting of Mikhail Tal and Semyon Furman defies description...

Why was Furman here? This grandmaster, as well as Igor Bondarevsky, as well as Ivo Nei and Isaac Efremovich Boleslavsky – helped the team members in their theoretical preparation. I have called Boleslavsky by his name and patronymic since here he was christened ‘Academician’. This grandmaster gave lectures to the entire team. Admitted to one of these lectures, I was at first simply moved by the spectacle that had opened up to me.



On the entrance of Boleslavsky, the entire cohort of mischievous grandmasters, as if in a school lesson, jumped up and respectfully froze. Outwardly, no-one expressed their surprise; the 'Academician' allowed himself to sit down and set about delivering the lecture. Replies during the exercise he categorically avoided: "I did not give you the floor" (this, to Vasily Smyslov), "You do not understand such positions" (to Efim Geller). Boleslavsky was harsh, but fair, and thanks to this, such lessons soon became mainstream and everyone was fascinated by the work.

Individual lessons included preparation for encounters with the specific opponents. In so doing, account was naturally taken of the previous relationship between each pair. Strictly speaking, I did not interview anyone, but I gradually became interested in the score of the previous encounters, the prognoses for the coming ones, and the possible results of the match as a whole. No-one expressed any doubt about the victory in general. From the modest 21 : 19 (Bronstein) to the convincing: 23 : 17 and 24 : 16 (Korchnoi and Tal, respectively).

I very much wanted to know how the future opponents had previously played against one another. It should be noted that the greater the advantage in score they have over their probable opponents, the more reluctant the great grandmasters are to talk about this topic.

– "My business with Wolfgang Uhlmann in chess has turned out to be perhaps even better than with you in ping-pong", noted Mark Taimanov, having won another match against me.

I thought that from six, he had won two with four draws, but recently in Dresden I learned from Uhlmann's wife that he had won three. It turns out that Frau Uhlmann counts better than us...

Gradually I came to know that Spassky had twice defeated Fischer with the same number of draws, and that the 'peaceable' Petrosian had to play a whole ten games with Larsen in order to agree on a first draw, and the general score stood at  $6\frac{1}{2} : 3\frac{1}{2}$  in favour of the ex-World Champion. Viktor Korchnoi had also made only one draw with Lajos Portisch, but, having won two games from the Hungarian, had lost as many. Polugaevsky and Vlastimil Hort had met only twice, and both games had finished peacefully. I did not elicit a response from Geller regarding the score in his numerous encounters with his Yugoslav friend Svetozar Gligorić, but his comrades told me that the advantage in the results of the games was on the side of the Soviet grandmaster – 3 : 1. Smyslov and Samuel Reshevsky had something similar. True, the Muscovite had seemingly won an additional game. Mikhail Botvinnik had twice defeated Milan Matulović, Tal had won the same number of times (here one should add, with two draws) against Najdorf. The "oldest of the veterans", as he jokingly called himself – the young-looking Keres – flatly refused any counting of scores, but all the same confidentially advised that he retained the most pleasant memories of his meetings with Ivkov. The veteran's colleagues confirmed: "Paul Petrovich very often beats Borya!"

All of the meetings excited me, but, drawing some general conclusions, I was convinced that particular attention would be fixed on the duels on the first three boards. Interesting games were also expected on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> boards: Botvinnik v. Matulović (if Mikhail Moiseevich did not grip the Yugoslav in a strategic vice, noted one) and Tal v. Najdorf (if Misha showed excessive activity, noted another).

Summarising all that has been said, I would question the suggested results in the individual matches that were sent to the editorship of '64' by the reader P. F. Shatalov from Piatigorsk. Of course, now is not the time to present readers' prognoses, but we thank comrade Shatalov for the information and calculations. Certainly, not the most pleasant of them is the contrast in the average age of the two teams: the USSR team, roughly 42½ years; the Rest of the World, 4 years younger. Interestingly, the youngest participant in the event is Hort, who was born in 1944. While Fischer is already 27... Four days before the start of the match, Smyslov turns 49.

On the day of the first round Uhlmann will mark his 35 years; on the day of the last, Portisch will turn 33.

To judge the sporting form of our grandmasters is seemingly straightforward: the results of many competitions, active rest on the eve of the match, serious preparation – these are all evidence of good form. Tal (it is now accepted that one must talk of his health) felt himself to be normal, for the time being... correspondents don't ask him about this! At that same reception at the Yugoslav embassy I heard how a journalist, long known to him, cried "Oh, you are looking very fine! You are probably in good form?" – Tal replied: "I still suspect that my form is all the same worse than my health".

The information from the latest foreign tournaments is evidence of the full battle-readiness of the Rest of the World team. Larsen won a double-round tournament of eight grandmasters in the Swiss town of Lugano, with  $9\frac{1}{2}$  points. Second there, a point behind, was the first reserve in the team of our opponents, Ólafsson. Matulović appeared in the homeland of Ólafsson, in the Icelandic capital, Reykjavík. In a not very strong tournament the Yugoslav did not take anything like a high place, but this means nothing; it is generally known that the young grandmaster is someone with a very interesting style, but who – as it often turns out – also plays very unevenly. The last names in the list of participants in the forthcoming Interzonal are those of Portisch and Ivkov, having taken 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> place in a small (four-player) playoff event after the zonal tournament. This tournament finished the other day in Prague, and now, finally, all of the participants in the Interzonal are known. The right to continue the struggle for the world crown is held by all of the main Rest of the World team... except for the its leader. All!

The senior trainer of our team, I. Z. Bondarevsky, does not exclude the possibility of defeat on one or two boards. "But" – he all the same adds – "overall victory for us is worth ten times as much, and in the coming struggle we should achieve it, with such an outstanding team!"



Article by B. Kažić<sup>14</sup> : *Match Veka – Dnem za Dnem*, Shakhmaty v SSSR (№ 6, 1970).

## The Match of the Century – Day by Day Pre-history of the Match

Like all major events, the 'Match of the Century' has its pre-history. A quarter of a century ago, when the chess-players of the USSR delivered a major defeat to the strong USA team in a radio match, grandmaster S. Tartakower said "The result of  $15\frac{1}{2} : 4\frac{1}{2}$  appears fantastical, but it is quite real. I think that Soviet chess-players could have fought on level terms with a team made up of the strongest grandmasters of the rest of the world. It is clear to me that the great era of Soviet chess is beginning".

I could not believe that someone would take over the organisation of such a match. The representative of the USSR Chess Federation, D. Postnikov, recalled that a conversation regarding such a match took place in 1948 in Moscow, during the match-tournament for the World Championship. M. Vidmar, who was chief arbiter of that event, said that his greatest desire would be to be the arbiter of such a match.

Much water subsequently flowed under the bridge. Sometimes, during major events, the idea of such a match resurfaced, but then it was once again forgotten about, because an organiser capable of bringing the idea to reality could not be found. In our day too Soviet chess-players dominate in individual and team events. The very successes of Soviet chess have made an enormous impression in the development of chess art over the whole world.



In recent years, in various countries there have appeared a series of chess-players of extra-class – B. Larsen, R. Fischer, V. Hort, L. Portisch. To them should be added S. Gligorić, W. Uhlmann, M. Najdorf, S. Reshevsky, who already had the reputation of being leading grandmasters.

In the Serbian Chess Union, the match ‘USSR – Rest of the World’ was spoken about for the first time in March 1969. The member of the Presidium of the Union, M. Molerović, known among us as a good organiser, asked me whether it would be possible to organise such a match under the aegis of FIDE. I replied that first of all it would be necessary to obtain the agreement in principle of the Soviet Federation, and only then to ask FIDE to take the match under its patronage.

During the Petrosian – Spassky match, a conversation took place regarding the possibility of a USSR – World match. And the preliminary agreement of the USSR Chess Federation was gained.

At the FIDE Congress in San Juan (1969) we presented draft regulations for the match, while the ex-World Champion M. Euwe agreed to appear in the role of captain of the Rest of the World Team. According to the regulations, the organiser was obliged to take upon themselves all of the expenses associated with the match. It must be said that at that time we did not have the means, and believed that such a grandiose event could not take place without the support of tourist organisations, entrepreneurs, newspapers and magazines.

The main difficulties lay elsewhere. Would we manage to create a team of the strongest chess-players of various countries? After all, these grandmasters were involved in a major programme of appearances in various tournaments. At the congress in San Juan, the Soviet representative B. Rodionov correctly noted that the absence of some leading grandmasters, such as B. Larsen and R. Fischer, would significantly lessen the interest in the match.

In October there began the ‘hunt’ for the strongest, first of all for those who probably ought to be included in the team of the World select. Particularly unclear was the question of Fischer, who had not appeared in tournaments since September 1968.

I had wanted to exploit my stay in the USA and to meet with Fischer, but to find the American grandmaster proved not to be simple due to his frequent travelling. After some unsuccessful attempts, I all the same managed to get on the telephone with the elusive American. Fischer said that the idea of the match was very interesting, but that four games was too few, and that any sort of chance events were possible. I reminded him that team events could not last 20 rounds. We agreed that he would be sent an official invitation and also the regulations. All this was sent to Fischer, after which a lengthy period of waiting began.

Meanwhile, on the 8<sup>th</sup> December a protocol regarding the match was signed, and at the beginning of January M. Euwe announced the line-up of the Rest of the World team. In a letter of 19<sup>th</sup> January, B. Larsen wrote to me: “I agree to participate in the match. I am not pushing for any special conditions. But I would be very disappointed, were I not to be playing on 1<sup>st</sup> board...”.

However, the choice of players and the board order was a matter for the captain, not the organiser.

## Conversations with Fischer

On 10<sup>th</sup> February the US Chess Federation advised of the fact that S. Reshevsky, and also P. Benko and L. Evans, who were included in the 'long-list' of the Rest of the World team, had agreed to participate in the match. Regarding R. Fischer, they advised in the telegram that "for the time being, nothing is known of his decision".

A few days after the telegram, there arrived a letter from Fischer himself. "The idea of the match" – wrote the American grandmaster – "appears very interesting to me. I wish the organisers every success. This match will undoubtedly be the event of its era." Fischer wrote further that he would have happily participated in this grandiose event, but wanted to have the possibility of playing a "great match" with one of the Soviet grandmasters that would last until six victories, with draws not counting.

In conclusion Fischer expressed the hope that the organisers would meet his conditions, with which they were probably familiar, since he usually pressed for them. He went on to list them: during play any sort of analytical help for the participants should be prohibited; the players should first make their moves and only then write them down; still and film photography should be prohibited in the tournament hall; spectators should be no less than 25 feet from the participants; there should be artificial daylight in the tournament hall; the chess pieces should be suitable, otherwise he would reserve the right to play with his own ones.

An agreement accepting all of Fischer's conditions should be signed by the tournament committee. Regarding participation in the match, R. Fischer limited himself to the reminder that "play in such a short event does not lack risk for my name..."

### 14<sup>th</sup> February

A telegram was sent to Fischer with the reply: "The match in Belgrade is an excellent opportunity for you to fight against Spassky, who as World Champion is risking significantly more. Your agreement to participate would represent a friendly gesture..."

### 15<sup>th</sup> February

Telegram from Fischer: "After your telegram I have reconsidered my position. I still need your clarification of a series of points, after which a final decision will be taken. You should give me your opinion of my special conditions. Send me also a picture of the lighting in the tournament hall, a list of the prizes, the authority of team captain Euwe etc."

### 16<sup>th</sup> February

The organising committee, after detailed analysis of Fischer's conditions, came to the conclusion that they were not so terrible. The most questionable was the requirement that moves should be written down only after they have been played. But we took a "Solomon-like" decision: the interpretation of the rules would be the prerogative of the arbiter. A telegram was sent to Fischer: "Your conditions have, in the main, been accepted. You are invited to come to Belgrade no later than 22<sup>nd</sup> February, and once here, to decide whether to participate in the match or not. The expenses associated with the trip are on our account."

The organising committee decided to take this course since on 25<sup>th</sup> February there was supposed to take place the exchange of team line-ups by board, after which no re-ordering would have been possible, other than changes of the two reserve players. Simultaneously, we asked the USSR Chess Federation for a postponement in the exchange of team lists until 1<sup>st</sup> March. Our proposal was accepted.

## **18<sup>th</sup> February**

Fischer telegraphed: "I agree to come for a week, so that I can decide whether to play or not. Send ticket and money for the trip".

## **19<sup>th</sup> February**

A ticket was sent to Fischer; on the same day there arrived another telegram from him: "We can arrange everything by telephone." The same day, Fischer spoke by telephone with the vice-chairman of our federation, A. Matanović.

## **20<sup>th</sup> February**

Telegram from Los Angeles: "I agree to participate in the match USSR – Rest of the World. Fischer."

It seemed that the matter with the American grandmaster had been resolved. Now we could occupy ourselves with Larsen.

## **26<sup>th</sup> February**

The chairman of the organising committee, S. Majstorović and the match director D. Perović headed to the Netherlands. There at the time was B. Larsen, who was giving a series of simultaneous displays. They failed to catch him in Amsterdam, but managed to speak to him by telephone. Larsen was unhappy at being given 2<sup>nd</sup> board, but he intended to play in the match.

## **28<sup>th</sup> February**

No sooner had the representatives of the organising committee returned from the Netherlands, than in the newspapers there appeared a statement by B. Larsen, given by him in Lugano. The Danish grandmaster had reconsidered, and would not play in the match if he was left on 2<sup>nd</sup> board.

In a letter sent to the president of FIDE, the organising committee and the team captains, he explained the reason for his refusal: in the last years he had achieved many more tournament successes than Fischer had in his entire life.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> March**

Fischer sent a new 9-page letter. Until now he had not once raised the question of an extra-honorarium for participation. But this time the letter was dedicated in the main to financial questions. It turned out that Fischer had only agreed to participate in the match so that the team captain could shortly afterwards present the list of participants. He would make his final decision only once a decision had been made on a number of important questions, in particular regarding the extra-honorarium (\$5000), the prize for 1<sup>st</sup> board, special prizes, play on Fridays and Saturdays, lighting, expenditure on telegrams, etc.

He concluded by writing: if the tournament organisers are not able to meet the conditions regarding the tournament hall, then he was ready to play in a different room... Replies on all points were sent to Fischer.

## **18<sup>th</sup> March**

Judging by his telegram, Fischer was not happy: "The financial conditions", he wrote, "are unsatisfactory. If the particular playing conditions in the hall cannot be guaranteed, I agree to

play in a different hall with special lighting. At the same time Fischer advised that he intended to come to Belgrade a few days before the start of the match.

### **19<sup>th</sup> March**

We let the American grandmaster know that none of the participants would receive an extra-honorarium. The tournament hall had been prepared with lighting as per his wishes. The refitting of the lighting had incurred additional expenditure. The airline company advised that Fischer had reserved tickets, but that he had not collected them.

### **24<sup>th</sup> March**

In Belgrade there arrived the oldest participant in the match, the Argentinian grandmaster M. Najdorf, who on the 15<sup>th</sup> April would turn 60 years old. A few days earlier, the Icelandic grandmaster F. Ólafsson had arrived.

In terms of temperament, M. Najdorf was undoubtedly the youngest participant in the match. It would be difficult to find another such cheerful chess-players. Without even having had time to settle in to the hotel, he immediately headed to the international women's tournament that was taking place in the city. There he found himself a blitz partner, and he played until the middle of the night.

Najdorf spoke of the fact that it was his great fortune to play in the 'Match of the Century'. He spoke about his opponent as a genius of attack. "Alekhine had everything" – he said – "but no-one in the history of chess was such a master of attack as Tal."

### **25<sup>th</sup> March**

Two unpleasant pieces of news and one good one. The airline company advised that Fischer's tickets had been taken, and that he would be guaranteed "special service" during the flight, such as it was offered by the Indian *Maharajah* company. We saw this news as a good omen.

However, in the evening the latest telegram from the American arrived: "I would like to get a reply regarding the possibility of playing in another room with special lighting." That's how it was! On the one hand, the company Air India maintained that Fischer would arrive on 26<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup> of March. On the other – a telegram. Once again, uncertainty. After a short consultation the organising committee sent Fischer the following reply: "The hall has been prepared according to your wishes. \$2000 has been spent on the refitting of the lighting."

The second surprise was with Najdorf. During dinner he suddenly discovered that he had lost his documents and chequebook. Exactly the same thing had happened to the Argentinian grandmaster the previous October in Mallorca.

They were looked for in every place that Najdorf had been during the day, but without results. We decided to make an announcement in the chess section of the newspaper *Politika*.

### **26<sup>th</sup> March**

In the morning a young man came to the hotel 'Metropol' and gave Najdorf his documents and chequebook. "I found them in the street", he said. In the evening S. Reshevsky arrived. He also had problems. He had lost a package containing belongings for religious observance. Reshevsky was in desperation. But on the next flight from London his package arrived. The American grandmaster's mood lifted. Reshevsky considered that the Soviet team was the favourite. While the make-up of the World team was, in his view, poor. On the bottom four boards the Soviet chess-players had a clear advantage.

## **27<sup>th</sup> March**

The USSR team arrived in full. Old acquaintances and friends. Interviews, conversations, un-ending photography.

In the afternoon, B. Larsen and K. Darga arrived. Larsen was accompanied from the airport to the hotel by the chairman of the organising committee, Majstorović. Conversation naturally centred on the match, but there was no word on whether the Dane would definitely play. Meanwhile, to the questions of the journalists, Larsen replied that he would not play, and that he had come to Belgrade in his capacity as a journalist. Judging from everything, the Dane was quite unable to accept the fact that he had been put on 2<sup>nd</sup> board.

We went to meet R. Fischer. But at the airport we learned that his aircraft has landed earlier. On our return to the *Metropol*, Fischer was already there. We spoke with him on the telephone. We excused ourselves for having been late. We hoped that everything was in order with his participation. He predicted the victory of the Soviet team.

## **28<sup>th</sup> March**

All of the remaining participants in the match arrived. In the evening, the captain of the Rest of the World team, M. Euwe, also arrived. On the way from the airport we informed him that everything was in doubt, but it was possible that neither Fischer nor Larsen would play. Fischer had still not seen the tournament venue and could demand to play in a different room, to which we would not agree. Larsen did not want to appear on 2<sup>nd</sup> board.

Everyone was worried. The absence of two such chess-players would greatly reduce the significance of the match.

At the hotel, a sensation awaited us: Fischer had announced that he was ready to play on the 2<sup>nd</sup> board. In recent years Larsen had indeed achieved greater successes, the American grandmaster recognised. But was it really possible that Fischer had voluntarily rejected the 1<sup>st</sup> board? Such an idea did not enter our heads. Now it was necessary to clarify just how serious was the declaration.

Half of the work was done. But in the protocol it was written that once the team lists had been exchanged, modifications to the board order were prohibited. M. Euwe appealed to the captain of the Soviet team, D. Postnikov, with a request to consider the possibility of a change. A short time later both captains and the arbiter signed a new protocol, according to which Larsen would play on the 1<sup>st</sup> board, and Fischer on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The display of good will on the part of the Soviet team was welcomed by all.

Meanwhile, Fischer and two members of the organising committee examined the tournament hall. Fischer remained content. Seemingly, everything was in order...

And thus to the drawing of lots. In the 1<sup>st</sup> round the Soviet team would play with White on the odd-numbered boards.