

## Chess

by R. E. Fauber with Frank Garosi

# And Then There Are Real Grandmasters

Boris Spassky, by the magic of his name, drew more than 800 chess players and fans to the Paul Masson American Class Championships at the Masson Winery in Saratoga, Santa Clara County. The most famous chess player in America — next to Bobby Fischer — Spassky attracted people as though he were George Washington and people wanted to see him in the flesh so they could tell their grandchildren. The annual tournament was held July 19-20.

Spassky was not granting private interviews, but he did not object when I joined him, Max Euwe and Walter Browne in the shade of the oaks by the pool at the Masson "chateau."

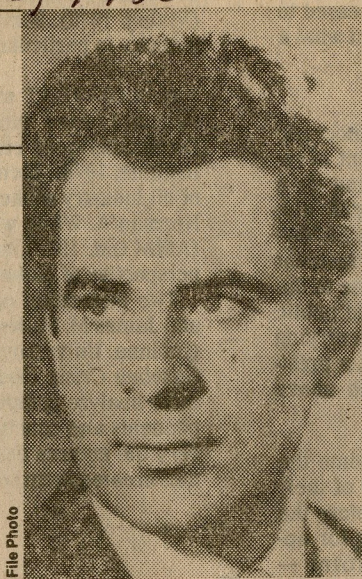
Browne introduced me, and they returned to their discussion of the match Spassky recently drew with Lajos Portisch. "The final result was logical. I have chances, but I can't win it," Spassky said. "Both of us played the match badly, but I played worse than Lajos. Portisch played without ideas, but he was very good at resisting."

The conversation turned to other players when Spassky declared: "Portisch does not know how to play simple positions. Even Lasker had this problem ... with Capablanca in 1921."

When Spassky was growing up, Mikhail Botvinnik — the best Soviet player — was like a god, to be studied and mimicked by all. Spassky took a different course. "Botvinnik's style is not artistic; I don't like his games." Instead he studied Lasker's games and "Bobby's (Fischer) games too."

Spassky feels that there are grandmasters and then there are *real* grandmasters. When he was world champion, he attended a chess lecture by Paul Keres. "I was very glad to be in the audience, because I was very impressed with the way he would analyze a position. A grandmaster has to be very precise. Keres would say of a position: 'I think it is a win, but it needs more analysis.' (Then he would explain why it looked like a win and took more analysis.) The subtlety and precision of evaluation. Other players would just glance at the position and say, 'Oh, White must win.' They would miss too many things."

It is hard to capture all of what Spassky says, because he talks with his hands and whole body. He is relaxed, and he uses his athletic, medium build with



File Photo

Boris Spassky, left, is a big man intellectually and spiritually

great control. In a question-and-answer session for the players at the Paul Masson he was asked who he thought could take the world championship from Karpov.

"Kasparov," he said, "Kasparov is a good crocodile." He bared his teeth and lunged at the audience, to appreciative laughter. Earlier, at poolside, Spassky had characterized Gary Kasparov as a player "of strong character." Among the strongest players, he explained "you have to be a little bit of a barbarian."

The killer instinct — which Kasparov has in exquisite abundance — and "energy," a combination of will, physical condition and emotional equilibrium, were items to which Spassky referred frequently. He is very friendly and very open — even though he responded to my introduction with: "Oh, the press, then I must be very careful of what I say."

He feels that his principal problems reside in the

area of killer instinct and "energy." The presence of his wife at a match gives him added energy "because she provides some balance."

He is thinking that his powers have not diminished and that he could be king of the chess hill once again. "Now I am becoming a little more ambitious," he said.

Inevitably his 1972 match with Fischer intrudes into conversations, public appearances. He does not believe that Fischer was ever trying to unsettle him in 1972 by raising constant objections to match conditions. "He was fighting with the organizers and the television people."

Constantly he referred to his great respect for Fischer's games and creativity, as though — even as the most successful opponent of Fischer before 1972 — he had succeeded because he had learned from his adversary.

He hoped to be able to contact Fischer after the Masson tourney. Fischer occasionally resides in Palo Alto these days (he was in Europe at the time of the tournament). "I called Bobby 16 months ago to find out how he was and where he was living. He was somewhat mysterious about that," Spassky said.

The two names are forever linked in history. Spassky recalled that during the 1972 match the most helpful letters and telegrams came from his supporters in the United States. Russian partisans were not very helpful, except one who wrote: "You must be thankful to God that you have a chance to play a match with Bobby Fischer." Spassky thought that letter struck a good note — that he very much wanted to play Fischer and that it was a historic moment.

"I love Bobby Fischer," he told the Paul Masson audience. There was a ripple of laughter at the thought of his defeat. And he squelched it before it could build by saying, "this is a very serious answer."

Boris Spassky is a big man intellectually and spiritually, a man who commands respect and affection. He is no plaster grandmaster. "I am very independent, and I have my own ideas," he said.