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The Big Chess Match: Fischer's Lead Lengthens

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Can Spassky Turn It Around?

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With 40 per cent of the World Chess Championship already played, Boris Spassky and Bobby Fischer know one fact of life — the coming week must show an abrupt turn-around in Spassky's play or Fischer will win.

Fischer is well ahead at 6½ points to Spassky's 3½. Though there are 14 games which could still be played, Fischer is playing as if he wants to end it with the fewest possible games, six more wins, and win 12½-3½.

Three games were scheduled this past week, but only two were played. Because of a head cold and probable tension, Spassky postponed the ninth game originally scheduled for Sunday. Each player has the right to postpone up to three games because of illness. In World Championship play it is usual for both players to use this privilege because of the severe tension involved.

The ninth game, re-scheduled for Tuesday, resulted in a tie game after a 29-move closely fought battle. Spassky accepted Fischer's offer of a draw in a clearly even game with depleted forces. World Champion Spassky had the White pieces but played conservatively in attempting to recover his mental equilibrium after his recent bad results.

The tenth game commenced on Thursday and was a stirring no holds barred contest. Fischer opened with his favorite Pawn to King 4. Spassky, for the first time in the match, allowed the Ruy (pronounced "Ree") Lopez opening, but played a modern defensive line that results in a tension-filled battle. Fischer prefers this type of fight and he met Spassky head-to-head in a struggle of major pieces clashing in the center and on the wings. Spassky gained some advantage on the queen side but Fischer, as is his style, switched his play to the king's wing, or side. Fischer's attack was very strong. Spassky also was harried for time with only four minutes left of his 150-minute

limit when he made his 40th move.

The game was adjourned in a double-edged position, giving the players a difficult overnight analytical problem. However, Fischer and his seconds succeeded, and, after the game resumed on Friday, Fischer needed only 16 precise moves to force Spassky's resignation.

With the World Champion now trailing the challenger, a new strategy is necessary. Spassky must play in a very creative and aggressive fashion to catch Fischer. True enough, there are 14 games remaining. This seems to allow time for Spassky to catch up. However, modern chess techniques make it extremely difficult to win games against adequately prepared competitors who need only to play for a tie. Fischer is fully aware of the importance of

his lead. His temperament is such that it is very difficult for him to play to merely draw the game.

Wayne Warlick, a Master from Texas who was visiting in San Diego this week, perhaps explained Fischer best. "There is no such driving force as an imprisoned ego," Warlick told spectators watching reports of the match at Gulf Computer Sciences.

"We have witnessed the highest quality of play in the match to date," he concluded. "Fischer has demonstrated his world championship caliber . . ."

What goes on in a World Chess Championship match? Perhaps we can analyze this from the point of view of watching a typical day in the life of Bobby Fischer.

Fischer is a late sleeper and usually eats his breakfast in early afternoon. A hearty breakfast it is, too — eggs and steak, liver and oatmeal are consumed with evident gusto. While enjoying his meal, Fischer constantly studies new ideas on his pocket board as well as new variations to try against future competitors. The match starts at 5 p.m., but Fischer is rarely on time. An explanation for this is his intense interest in studying chess up to the very last minute, but part of the explanation is the desire to upset his opponent before the game commences.

Each player hunches intently over the board, concentrating to his fullest power. If the game is unfinished at 40 moves, the players break overnight before resuming the next day at 5 p.m. (Friday's play was resumed 2½ hours early so as to not run into the Saturday sabbath for Fischer, who is a member of the Worldwide Church of God.)

In this interval, the players' assistants or seconds prove their full usefulness. All the night and into the next day the seconds will analyze the unfinished game, attempting to find the very best lines of play. Often the player himself will participate in the analysis sessions during the first few hours. About midnight, Fischer will go out for his final meal of the day. If

he has won the game, his feast will be gargantuan; if he has lost, a chicken sandwich will suffice. After his meal, Fischer will drop in on his seconds to find out how they are doing with the analysis. They will communicate their ideas to each other before Fischer slips exhausted into bed, about 5 a.m. When he awakens, a small book of precise analysis is presented to him for his consideration. Reviewing this with his seconds, he will criticize and attempt to find the flaws in such analysis. When the game is resumed at 5 p.m., both players have an excellent idea of the proper manner to conduct the game for at least five to ten moves. Because of the complexity in chess, it is not long before each player must rely on his own abilities and leave the pre-planned analysis.

At the end of the game, both players are of course truly fatigued. Here is where recreation and a break from chess is essential. Fischer enjoys bowling, a bit of tennis,

and swimming. After a particularly important victory, Fischer's elation shows in his exuberant bowling style. If he has lost, the bowling pins are shown no mercy.

It is not commonly known that one of the prime recreations chess players enjoy is — more chess! At every important match and tournament between rounds, chess players congregate and play speed chess. This is a variation of chess where each player is given no more than five minutes to complete all his moves. Chess clocks are used to time the players and these five minute games are extremely popular among master players. Fischer is the most renowned expert in this type of chess. In a speed tournament in Yugoslavia against all of the world's best players, Fischer led the field by an astounding margin. His superiority at quick chess thinking is unquestioned.

This week's play has also shown Fischer's superiority in regular match play. He is a probable future World Chess Champion.