

Bobby Fischer: A Genuine American Tragedy

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Special to The Bee

The Age of Fischer has come to an end. What began as an aurora borealis of match and tournament triumphs in 1970 has wound to its murky conclusion in the subterranean passages of chess politics and technicalities. Fischer deserves the credit for its brilliant beginning, and he must share some of the blame for its ignominious end.

He has been playing a match with world chess, and he played to win totally. Never content with the draw he could have had to the last move, he remains on the board as a tipped over king. In the defense of his title since 1972 the score reads Fischer 0 — FIDE 1.

It all began brightly, brilliantly. In 1970 he emerged from a year-and-a-half retirement to face the nearly unbeatable former world champion Tigran Petrosian. He won by 3-1. In the three major tournaments of the year he finished first by two, three, and three-and-a-half points. The last was the strongest tournament.

In 1971 he played in the Candidates' Matches to determine which of the world's eight elite players would meet the champion. He beat Mark Taimanov 6-0. He beat Bent Larsen 6-0. In a rematch with Petrosian he started badly but won by 6½-2½, taking the last four games consecutively.

Fischer's feat invented the first class record: Most consecutive wins in international tournament and match play. Fischer had 20 in a row. It was something so enormous that Fischer must have felt, ever after, that each time he sat down to play a game he faced not only his opponent but his own reputation.

The Fischer-Boris Spassky match of 1972 was a beautiful encounter. There was a lot of hokum, but the two came to play chess and achieved a creative level no other players in the world

Direct Offer To Fischer

MOSCOW (UPI) — Anatoly Karpov challenged Bobby Fischer Friday to try to regain the world chess championship the American lost to Karpov by default, but only under conditions agreed to by the two contestants themselves.

Karpov said he would not discuss any such match with U.S. Chess Federation officials.

could have reached. They made many tactical blunders, but they were freely exploring ideas that other players religiously shun as party of their winning strategy.

The nervous strain was crushing. Spassky expected Fischer to collapse from it at any moment, and Fischer later told Vlastimil Hort that he was on the verge of collapse. Yet Fischer built up a three-point lead before Spassky fully realized how not-of-this-world an opponent he faced, and Fischer won by 12½-8½.

These are competitive records. Fischer is a man of no education and no cultural pretensions. He must express himself in chess because he has no other communication of the richness of his inner self. Fischer is a genuine American tragedy, one of the few individual tragedies in our culture's history.

His strength is that he has devoted his genius entirely to chess, and he has created in that genre as no one before. It is not just that he has won, but the very intensity of the fight testifies to his power.

His strength has become his weakness. That is the tragedy. A chess artist has to win to be artistic. But how can Fischer match his fantastic winning series of 1970-72.

That effort also drained his physical stamina. He has played, not because of any concern with exterior dignities. But he lives for chess. The conclusion is

that he no longer conceives of it as rewarding just for the sake of victory. The quest for victory drained his soul during 1970-72. His sleep, the first thing to go in a first-rate grandmaster's physical equipment, was dogged by the slightest noise.

Fischer is not of this world nor of this time. He is not a man of any time, although he sought to find roots for his chess mission in the past, notably in the career of Wilhelm Steinitz.

When there is an American genius, he comes out as something both special and inexplicable: Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Charles Ives, Ernest Hemingway — to these should be added Paul Morphy and Robert Fischer. These two have given more to chess and to what it can be than

Results Of Local Matches

The San Juan Chess League recently completed its series of team matches. Held in three sections the competition involved about 500 students from area high schools.

In the "A" division Hiram Johnson, the UCLA of local high school chess, came a convincing first. In the "B" division Casa Roble took first, while El Camino High School topped the "C" class players.

There will be one more tourney at Bella Vista on April 26, open to all high school students at the nominal fee of 50 cents. Registration is from 8:30 to 9 a.m.

At Tallin, Paul Keres emerged a clear first with 10½-4½. Fririk Olafsson of Iceland and Boris Spassky tried to spoil Keres hopes in his home province but could only come 2nd-3rd in a strong field with 9½ each. Seven grandmasters trailed this group.

It must have been a sweet victory for the perennially popular 59-year-old grandmaster, who refuses to be a man of yesteryear.

anyone except Steinitz — and perhaps more individually than Steinitz, from tears not sweat.

They were both accepted by their society, but they wanted to be accepted as more. Morphy retired because his mother told him to. Fischer, the stronger, rejected his mother, but he sought narrowly personal goals while he pursued the goal of making chess an art

form.

From a purely promotional point of view it is sad to see the world championship pass from the United State, but from an intellectual point of view our Morphy and our Fischer have contributed more from their sheer contrariness and individual insight to enrich the game's vitality than any "practical" competitors.