

Richard Shorman**Chess**

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was condensed from a lecture delivered in Leningrad by Grandmaster Mark Taimanov. ("64", No. 13, 1971, pg. 2)

Regarding my forthcoming match with Fischer . . .

Even before the pairings were announced, I expressed the hope that I would meet him in the very first elimination match. Many people have offered their condolences, but it is not possible to think seriously about fighting for the world championship and avoid a confrontation with Fischer at the same time. And so long as he must be dealt with, it might as well take place right at the start of the competition, while he still lacks match experience, which, by the way, he lacks completely.

Unquestionably, Fischer has had striking success, but he is a tournament competitor and not a match player. He likes a variety of opponents, so that weaker ones are mixed in with the strong.

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BESIDES, FISCHER is no chess psychologist, and in a match this factor weighs heavily. I would gladly play a match with either Geller or Korchnoi (but not with Petrosian, as he presents difficulties for me). With Fischer, however, it is another matter entirely. I appreciate the extent of my obligation. Although onerous to be the initial barrier on Fischer's path to the world's chess throne, it is also a great honor.

Admittedly, I have already met Fischer over the board. And it is true that in my two games with him I scored only half a point. But in both games I had obtained decidedly better positions. I even refused to draw by repetition of moves in one of them.

Possibly, I am not a very comfortable opponent for Fischer. Such things happen in chess. Botvinnik, for instance, has lost more than once to Kan, while Petrosian has suffered at the hands of Portisch. I have already alluded to my problem with Petrosian . . .

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MANY PLAYERS FEAR Fischer. I respect him very much and consider him remarkable, perhaps even a chess genius. Just the same, for me he is first and foremost a man and not a god. Also, I know that this match represents the most important chess event of my life.

I have played over about 200 of the approximately 500 games by Fischer in my collection, which I studied in reverse chronological order, as Fischer's early games are mainly of biographical interest. On the basis of this material I have reached some tentative conclusions regarding Fischer's chess.

I trust you will forgive me for understandably withholding some of these observations from you. After the match, whatever the outcome, I promise to be more open.

Meanwhile, I will say only that even such a chess machine as Fischer has his weaknesses. At 28 years of age Fischer stands at the height of his powers. He has achieved extraordinary results and is properly looked upon as one of the strongest chess players not only of modern times but also of the entire history of the game. Fischer occupies a unique place in the western chess world. Anywhere and everywhere, he proclaims himself for all to hear that he is not one of the strongest players, but the very strongest. For all of this, however, Fischer remains quite unsure of himself. He is afraid of set-backs, afraid of retreating. He knows full well that his patrons and the western press, heaping praise on him now, will abandon him instantly at the first sign of weakness, and this realization carries over to mar his chess.

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I BELIEVE THAT this reason lies at the heart of Fischer's refusal to play a match with Botvinnik .Afraid to lose; he strives to escape defeat at any price. Even Fischer's style has changed of late. He has become more cautious, avoiding complications since they increase the factor of risk.

At critical points in his chess career Fischer has failed to prove himself. He has lost decisive games to Spassky at the last chess olympics and to Larsen at the interzonal in Malorca.

Fischer knows everything there is to know about chess. But this very knowledge is his weakness, sometimes turning against him by supplanting and infringing upon the free exercise of his imagination.

Nevertheless, the American grandmaster is a professional in the highest and best sense of the word. He dearly loves chess. For him chess is everything. For him, mankind is divided into two groups, those who play chess and those who do not.

Fischer is erudite, possessing vast and creatively comprehensive knowledge. In competition, however, he plays unevenly, notwithstanding his uniformly excellent results.

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LAST YEAR IN BUENOS Aires and in the "Match of the Century" he performed brilliantly. But at Malorca he achieved success largely at the expense of his opponents' misfortunes. Gligorich hung a piece against him. Uhlmann fell into a book trap. Geller lost a position that he should have held in his sleep. Fischer also played below capacity at the Siegen chess olympics.

Botvinnik thinks that I have chances in a match with Fischer. I usually do not argue with Botvinnik, and in this case I am especially motivated not to contradict him.

My winning chances in the West are rated at about 45 per cent. These odds are wholly acceptable to me, the more so because I will try to make up the difference with my optimism, which I am constantly being reminded of from all sides.

I am aware that there are those who will be betting that Fischer will overwhelm me in our match. I will exert every effort to make certain that they lose their bets . . .