

Why is Bobby Fischer such a boor?

STUARY WARREN

Robert James Fischer is a gauche eccentric American man-child who has just won the coveted title of world chess champion. However, his moves off the board have attracted more attention. In a game noted for its staid intellectual severity, Fischer seems especially incongruous. In fact, more print has probably been devoted to his outrageous behavior than to the artistry of his chess. As we read of the "ugly American" image Fischer is projecting to the rest of the world, it has become very easy to be harsh in our judgments.

America, of course, loves a winner, and a short time ago the former boy wonder was being extolled as a hero in the media. Right now, one thing our country could really use is a celebrity of Fischer's international stature. When our heroes don't salute and sing on key, however, they sometimes pay for it with a return to oblivion. Even such celebrities as Muhammed Ali and Charlie Chaplin were once decried as unpatriotic and poor examples for America's youth by flag-waving columnists. Fischer's coarse, callow personality is the new target of these journalists and, perhaps, deservedly so.

Indeed, the current treatment he is getting in the press is a far cry from the praise that was lavished upon him as a child prodigy in the Fifties. Young "Bobby" received nothing but praise and admiration from everyone.

He was the shy, innocent all-American crewcut kid who happened to possess the most amazing chess mind the world had ever seen. The same naive ingenuousness exists today though it is too often obscured by the boorish side of his nature. Unfortunately, the latter aspect of his character gets the most attention from the press.

Despite the many articles about the life and exploits of Bobby Fischer, scant attention has been paid the roots of his artistic and psychological development. As a result, the American public has very little sympathy for the enigmatic champion and hardly any notion of what chess is about. Therefore it is now very much in order to attempt to understand a little more about this strange genius who is rapidly making "checkmate" a household word.

Bobby Fischer developed his chess skills in the heated competition of the most fertile chess incubator in the country — the metropolitan area of New York City. Whether he was in the refined atmosphere of the venerable Chess

Club or in the seedy joint on 42nd Street known as the "Fleahouse", he was able to earn the respect of Gotham's chess community. This was quite a feat for anybody, especially a ten-year old kid.

New York has traditionally claimed the highest percentage of top players and only a very special talent will make woodpushers sit up and take notice. If not for his exceptional ability, Fischer would have been just one more of the many precocious Jewish kids who frequent the city's clubs and parks. In the manner of their forefathers from chess-crazy Eastern Europe, they savor any test of intellectual acumen. Whether they chose to master the royal game, academia, or the violin, these kids play different games to gain status among their peers instead of displaying the usual brand of macho prowess.

In the milieu in which Fischer grew up, a special proficiency in chess was a shortcut to respect and acceptance. This fostered a fierce competitive drive and Fisher grew up knowing only the fleeting sort of admiration reserved for a winner. Of course, the lonely young prodigy from a broken home thrived on all this attention.

While the royal game enjoyed an important place in the spawning grounds of Fischer's acculturation, it was still viewed with a jaundiced eye by the public. Perhaps it is because as George Bernard Shaw once said in effect, that to take any promising young writer or artist and teach him chess would be a sure way to divert his talents and ruin his life. Indeed, many ghosts of faded prodigies now haunt downtown clubs as penniless chess bums. Professional chessplayers have usually starved in this country, and the game often acts as a mental narcotic which takes over their lives.

Fischer's impoverished childhood and the pauper's life he faced as just another chess pro gave him added incentive to excel. In addition, it created the preoccupation with money which the public finds so distasteful. If they only knew how young Bobby was exploited by unscrupulous tournament directors who many times reneged on their offers to the defenseless child. Boris Spassky never had to worry about such concerns with the Soviet government acting as his patron and benefactor.

Fisher's early misadventures have made him the world's most demanding chessplayer and his efforts to improve conditions have blazed the way for others. Chess professional Jude Acers has remarked, "I owe my livelihood to that man. Bobby Fischer is pro chess."

While Fischer has become financially successful, his nouveau richesse often stands in the way of his relationships with people. A brusque, rude manner in general has kept him aloof from the masses and has also made him the bete-noire of tournament directors.

What few people realize, though, is that Fischer's stubbornness and immaturity are the inevitable by-products of his chess tunnel vision. Consider the nature of the game. Chess can be thought of as a contest involving some of the most profound truths that can be perceived by the rational mind — the vectors of nature . . . time, space and force. The essence of the game almost rests on the integrity of the physical laws of the universe in a surreal setting prompting many to remark, "Life is like a chess game."

There is one prime difference, however. In chess Karma, or the law of cause and effect, is always observable. If you move your pieces to their strongest posts with an appreciation of the equilibrium of the

position, and make less mistakes than your opponent, victory is the probable outcome. There is no wheel of fortune. You determine your own fate.

Of course, Fischer is accustomed to having things happen according to his desires and plans in such a world — a world where he has spent most of the waking hours of his life. Unfortunately, he carries over such expectations as well as the super-rational axioms of the royal game to every-day interaction. The intricate balance of chess is quite a far cry from our world of contrived social games.

Understandably, the transition can be especially traumatic for a chess genius. In the same way, it is difficult for artists and other creative people to march to a different tune other than to the music of the spheres. In effect, Bobby Fischer is an alien to our mundane world of chance occurrences.

An additional perspective on chess players in general is supplied by Dr. Reuben Fine, oft-times U.S. Chess Champion, and a practicing psychoanalyst. In "The Psychology of a Chessplayer," Dr Fine examines the game in terms of its Freudian symbolism. He suggested that Killing the King, or checkmate, the object in chess, makes it a game rife for people intent on toppling authority figures. He puts forth the view that many chess players could possibly use the game to vent a masked Oedipus complex, using checkmate to act out revenge on their fathers. Fischer, as a product of a broken home, and as a man in constant conflict with authority, seems to fit very well into Dr. Fine's theoretical speculations.

Whatever, Bobby Fischer faces many problems in a nation which has been notably inhospitable to the eccentricities of creative people. It isn't often that a non-conformist artistic temperament attains celebrity status in a nation weaned on baseball. Sports figures are traditionally help up as models of deportment and Fischer is too much of an individual to be plasticized into the mold. Crazy Bobby, notwithstanding, the time is right for chess in America. With more leisure time, more education and a growing boredom with T.V. and baseball, Americans may be ready to embrace a new hula hoop. "If only it weren't for that damned kid," the game manufacturers' mutter under their breath.

It seems likely that Bobby Fischer will encounter complications in the future that even he couldn't foresee.

GROOVY eye

* glasses *

FRAMES

IN STEP WITH TODAY - The now look-oversized shell and wires-including antiques, pre-civil war, thin metal rims, rimless-all shapes-custom designed..

LENSES

all safety-plastic & glass-clear or custom tinted-photogrey duplicate your lenses or your Doctors' prescription.

Consult:
Dr. L.D. BRONSON
General Optometry
Eyes Examined
Glasses Fitted
Contact Lenses

4838 Van Nuys Blvd.
Sherman Oaks, Calif. 91403
Phone 783-3446 For Appt.
Van Nuys exit of Ventura Fwy.
Phone or write for illustrations

Prices on request only.

Bobby
Fischer
LIMIT



macondo

COMING