



AP Photo

BOBBY FISCHER, REAR, SMASHES TENNIS BALL
With him, sports is a means to playing better chess

Chess Champion's Mysterious Life

LOS ANGELES (AP) — He could be a television star, a noted lecturer, a famous author or simply a millionaire if he chose. He could dine with the President, travel like a king and be toasted on every continent.

Instead, world chess champion Robert J. Fischer has chosen to lead a life of seclusion and mystery since his smashing victory over Russia's Boris Spassky in 1972.

Fischer, 30, came home from that triumph in Iceland with offers of every sort. He could have become as much a pop hero as Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz. Yet Fischer has remained in virtual hiding, turning down all offers except for a couple of television appearances.

When he returned he lived with friends in nearby Pasadena, home of the Worldwide Church of God, a religion he follows. Recently, he has been living in Denver. Most of his former friends say they haven't heard from him in months.

One said Fischer's reluctance to accept the money offers is because "he's the most principled person I know. I don't know what motivates him much of the time, but I do know he doesn't like his name attached to products."

Another, however, says Bobby wants more than what has been offered.

"If someone says they'll give him a million dollars, he thinks there's a lot more available and he wants it all. He's very immature in that respect," the friend said.

"He once said he thought Wilt Chamberlain was the most overpaid athlete and I told him that Chamberlain brings a lot of people into the box office and pays a lot of other people's salaries. But Bobby won't settle for anything. He wants to be paid what he feels he's worth."

The offers would seem overwhelming:

—The Las Vegas Hilton Hotel offered him \$1 million to defend his title there against anyone, his lawyer, Stanley Rader said.

—Warner Brothers offered him \$1 million to turn out a series of records which had been pre-sold, Rader said. He estimates it would have cost Fischer about five to 10 hours of his time.

—A publishing company offered him a small fortune to write a book on his views of the title match.

—A television producer wanted him to make a series of chess films which could be marketed throughout the world.

—An electronics firm wanted to use a picture of Bobby, holding one of their radios, in its advertising. Bobby admits he loves the radio and wouldn't own any other brand, yet did not agree to the use of the photo.

—An automobile manufacturer offered Bobby \$75,000 and a new car if he'd say he drove only that car. The offer was declined.

Larry Evans, an international chess grandmaster and the man who helped Bobby train for the title match, says Bobby's reluctance to take such offers is a bit strange but not unusual for Fischer.

"His lawyers have been trying to convince him to take some of those offers," said Evans, who writes a nationally syndicated chess column

from his home in Reno, Nev.

"I think he feels that lending his name to something is beneath his dignity. He's just basically lazy about things other than chess and he's basically suspicious of people he doesn't know."

Fischer's friends know the quickest way to alienate him is to talk about him to other people, especially the press. He has become upset with a former close friend, Lena Grumette, because she talked with newsmen in Iceland about Fischer.

Two people willing to talk candidly about Bobby are his West Coast attorney for the past year, Rader, and Evans, the grandmaster.

"There's no way to predict how Bobby is going to react about anything you say, so I'm perfectly honest about him. I don't think he dislikes me because for one thing he knows I'm not out to gain fame by hanging onto his coattails," Evans said.

The driving force in Bobby's life may be the most mentally demanding of all games, but his approach to the rest of his life is nearly non-cerebral.

Wherever he goes, he carries a transistor radio which blares rock music. He walks through city streets at such a pace that friends jog to keep up.

At 6 feet 1 and 190 pounds, however, he looks like an athlete and approaches chess matches with the rigor of a boxer.

He swims and runs and bowls to stay in shape. He plays a vicious game of tennis, darting around the court like a madman.

When he studies the game of chess, his mind enters a different realm. Fischer's depth of concentration is unmatched in chess history, some masters say, and they admit that probably no man has ever devoted the amount of time to all facets of the game as has Bobby.

Chess is his vocation, hobby, pastime and obsession. When he wants to relax, he occasionally plays chess.

Chess devotees realized as early as 15 years ago, when Fischer won his first U.S. title at 14, that here was a true chess genius.

Fischer's obvious difference from the others was his fear of people he didn't know and his desire to satisfy his own, enormous ego. George Koltanowski, a longtime chess promoter, said Fischer's mistrust of people has been known for some time.

"The Germans have a word for it," he says. "It's Verfolgungswahnsinn."

It means "prosecution mania" and by that I don't mean to belittle Bobby. It's just that chess in this country has never been accepted as a normal activity so he's had to fight public opinion."

Evans said, "Chess in this country is not a normal thing, it's a freak thing. Bobby did it for intensely personal reasons. Before the world championship match, Bobby told me:

"'Chess will be very big in this country after I win the title. This country doesn't know what it's got. I'm going to be a superstar.'

"Why he has chosen not to accept that superstar status only Bobby knows."