

CHESS BARBS

by Jude Acers (U.S senior master)

FISCHER MANIA AND BOOKS: A Review of a Recent Publication, "Bobby Fischer's Conquest of the World's Chess Championship" by Reuben Fine (Reviewed by JAMES R. SCHROEDER, Cleveland chess master, noted writer and world-famous acid critic. Schroeder has done exceptional service for the cause of prison chess: He deserves our help! Send him money, chess literature, new or used, and anything else that you can think of to keep his foundation going. Mail donations directly to Prisoner Rehabilitation Fund, Cleveland Chess Foundation, P.O. Box 5268, Cleveland, Ohio 44101.)

...the publishing of poorly written books and articles about the World Champion. Two of these are at hand: BOBBY FISCHER'S CONQUEST OF THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - The Psychology and Tactics of the Title Match, by Reuben Fine, Ph.D., International Chess Champion. And PROFILE OF A PRODIGY: THE LIFE AND GAMES OF BOBBY FISCHER, by Frank Brady. New Edition. Including the 1972 World's Championship Match. Both of these books contain absurdly incorrect analysis of Fischer's personality and bad analysis of the games presented.

Reuben Fine was born October 11, 1914 in New York. He learned the moves when he was eight and played in High School. He began serious play when he was fifteen, at which time he joined the Marshall Chess Club. His inherent ability and capacity for studying chess have never been surpassed. Had he received financial support, he might have become World Champion.

Like all great players, he abandoned almost everything to pursue chess, but unlike the others remained in college: "Since my college studies were fairly easy for me I was at the chess clubs every weekend, and often many evenings during the week. By 1931 I was regularly winning first prize in the rapid-transit tournaments (probably ten-seconds per move--J.S.) no matter who played. The only one who beat me with ease at that time was Capablanca, who rarely took part."

His first International Tournament was at Pasadena, Calif. 1932 where he finished last, but drew with Alekhin. "Up to that time I had not read any chess books. My knowledge of the game came from intensive over-the-board play.

One reason was that there was so little worthwhile literature in English. I had picked up a tournament book of St. Petersburg 1914, but the notes contained many errors. When I found these errors, I thought that I must be wrong, and that I was not really good enough to play over such games yet; only later did I discover how sloppy many chess authors can be."

"After Pasadena I began to study chess much more thoroughly. To do so I had to delve into German literature, then almost the only think worth the effort, and for this purpose learned German. The rewards were immediate." Fine began annotating games, as Botvinnik did, to improve his analytical ability and understanding of chess. Fine's work on Alekhin-Bogoljubow 1934 Match and Dr. Lasker's Chess Career, Part I, contain exceedingly deep and extensive analysis.

Hitting the tournament circuit in Europe, Fine became one of the seven best players in the world. Alexander Alekhin was World Champion in 1937 but declining in strength, having been born in 1892. The FIDE (World Chess Federation) tried to arrange a World Championship Match and named Salo Flohr of Czechoslovakia as 'Official Challenger.' This suited Alekhin because Flohr was not in his class and was not even one of the top seven. Flohr was a 'sucker-killer' who won tournaments by winning from players in the bottom half and drawing with all the players in the top half.

Next, a Challengers tournament was arranged in Holland. This was the greatest tournament ever and is known as AVRO 1938. The players were Alekhin, two former world champions, Max Euwe and Jose Capablanca, a future world champion, Mikhail Botvinnik, and Samuel Reshevsky, Paul Keres, Reuben Fine and Salo Flohr. Keres and Fine tied for first and Keres was declared the 'Official Challenger' because of better Sonnenborn-Berger score. Flohr finished dead last and didn't win a game. Alekhin said he couldn't play a match with Keres until after the match with Flohr. The Second World War began in 1939 and international chess was suspended for many years.

Fine wrote that before AVRO 1938 he had decided to retire from chess and return to his studies. He played in only a few tournaments in the USA and was

surpassed by Reshevsky, finishing behind him in the USA Championship tournaments in 1938 and 1940 and the International Tournament at Hollywood 1945. Reshevsky won the USA Championship every time he competed: 1936, 1938, 1942 and 1946. Fine never won the Championship, finishing second to Denker in 1944.

In Russia, Botvinnik far surpassed Keres and was considered the likely next World Champion. Alekhin accepted Botvinnik's challenge for a match, but died in 1946.

One of the reasons Fine gave up serious chess was financial. Reshevsky received some support from wealthy chess patrons, but there was none for most other players.

The World Championship was resolved when Botvinnik won a tournament in 1948, ahead of Vassily Smyslov, Reshevsky, Keres and Euwe. Fine was invited but refused to participate. His stated reason was that the tournament was "fixed" and it would be impossible for a non-Russian to win. He was correct, although Botvinnik probably didn't need the help anyway.

Fine's last tournament was New York 1951, where he finished a poor fourth, behind Reshevsky, Najdorf and Euwe. One of Fine's astounding feats was to win four simultaneous blindfold games at ten-seconds per move. Fine wrote the most important book in chess literature: BASIC CHESS ENDINGS and edited the famous 6th edition of MODERN CHESS OPENINGS, albeit keeping the best lines for himself.

He was the best games annotator in the world, and his work, originally published in Chess Review, was later published in two books: Chess Marches On and The World's a Chessboard. He annotated the 1942 USA Championship match between Reshevsky and Issac Kashdan for The Chess Correspondent. Suddenly, the quality of Fine's writing deteriorated. The World's Great Chess Games, published in 1951, is mediocre. Lessons from My Games, published in 1958, contains disappointingly superficial analysis. In this book, 43 out of 50 games are introduced with word "I." "I attack on both wings." "I master routine." Etc. I didn't pay much attention to this originally, but now it appears significant.

Much worse is The Teenage Chess Book, published around

1961. When I read this book I was amazed at how bad it was, easily equal to the worst of Reinfeld. Fine published a paper in 1961 titled: Psychoanalytic Observations On Chess and Chess Masters. This work is so ridiculous that even the layman would refute Fine's game propositions...

His book on the Fischer-Petrosian Match contains unjustified inaccurate, derogatory remarks about Petrosian and the style of play of the Soviet masters. His annotations of the games are very poor and not worth reading.

In his latest book the evidence of his inanity is more pronounced and appears to be caused by his failure to become world champion (in addition to the other emotional problems which one can infer from his autobiographical writings). In listing World Champions he gives: "1946/48, Fine and Keres official candidates or co-champions." On the next page he writes: "In the light of this historical record, it seems to me only fair that Keres and Fine

See page 22

MORE CHESS BARBS

From page 20

should be listed as co-champions for the period 1946-48."

This astounding claim is absurd. There wouldn't be anything at all 'fair' about it. Regarding Fischer's achievement of winning all eleven games in the 1963/64 USA Championship tournament Fine writes: "In 1939 in the North American Championship in New York I won with a score of 10-1/2 out of 11, qualitatively perhaps the equal of Fischer's feat." This is another absurd claim. Fine frequently praises himself and his tournament record in this book, which is supposed to be about Fischer and Spassky...

On page 84 I read: "I have also challenged Fischer to a match for a purse of \$1 million." Incredible. His obsession with becoming World Champion (and probably increasing regret that he didn't try for the Title in 1948 and later years) actually makes Fine believe that, at age 60, he can win a match from Fischer!

Fine's remarks about Alekhin are incorrect: "During the war Alekhin remained in Nazi-occupied Europe. Unlike other masters who remained in Nazi-occupied territory Alekhin was glad to play in chess tournaments. Further, he wrote a series of notorious anti-Semite articles." "When World War II ended in 1945 all the leading masters of that day, incensed by his behavior, objected to his participation in International Tournaments."

Many other masters played in tournaments in Nazi-occupied Europe. Chess was then considered non-political. Alekhin did not write the articles, which were published under his name without his knowledge or consent. Alekhin was invited to play in a chess tournament in England immediately after the war but the invitation was withdrawn when CHESS MASTERS OF THE USA OBJECTED. The other masters were willing to play against Alekhin... dered non-political. Alekhin did not write the articles, which were published under his name without his knowledge or consent. Alekhin was invited to play in a chess tournament in England immediately after the war but the invitation was withdrawn when CHESS MASTERS OF THE USA OBJECTED. The other masters were willing to play against Alekhin...

This book contains 92 pages of preliminary 'history' and Fine's absurd deductions about the psychological motives of Fischer, Spassky and a few other masters. Don't believe anything that you read. Then follows 200 pages to analyze the 21 games of the match

and to give more nonsensical 'reasons' for the players' errors.

Fine's analysis of the games is very poor. In the first game he overlooks that Fischer has four distinct ways of drawing after 29...BxKRP. The simplest begins with 37...P-QR3! Fine comes close to a good variation in the 4th game, trying to prove a win for Black with 29...R-Q1! 30 P-B3 R-R1, but even here he is superficial and doesn't find the best moves for White, which probably holds the draw. Fine grossly overestimates White's position in the 5th game and claims Spassky could have drawn with 27 Q-N1. Black's superiority at that time is so great that the win is a matter of technique.

Fine makes, and repeats several times, the ridiculous claim that: "Spassky's preparation for the match was superb, far superior to Fischer's. It was he who introduced the opening innovations which will stick." Fine cannot judge the games properly due to his lack of analytical ability, and his opinions are not valid.

More important, it is a serious mistake to believe that superior preparation manifests itself in the Openings. QUITE THE CONTRARY. It is precisely in the middle-game and the end-game that superior preparation becomes apparent. During his career Fine was, and still is, lacking an understanding of the subjective factors in chess. He writes: "Botvinnik commented quite inappropriately: 'Both Fischer's strong and weak point lies in that he is always true to himself and plays the same way regardless of his opponents or any external factor.' This comment is much more true of Botvinnik than of Fischer."

The great exponents of the subjective style of play were Emanuel Lasker, Alekhin and Botvinnik. Botvinnik's remarks about Fischer may have been true at that time, except for the games Fischer played against USA players. Fine accuses Petrosian of lacking imagination, which is impossible. He confuses 'imagination' with aggressive play, but defensive play can also be imaginative, as demonstrated by Reshevsky, Botvinnik, Steinitz, etc. All chess matches between equal, or nearly-equal players have been decided by subjective factors. Fischer's superior match preparation was proven by his ability to play very rapidly in the Openings and by the manner in which Spassky was induced to make errors.

Many ignorant writers have referred to Spassky's 'uncharacteristic blunders.' That is exactly what proves that Fischer's preparations were superior. If Spassky had only made charac-

teristic errors he would have won the match. In many of the games Spassky used far too much time in the Opening and this caused him to make errors later, because he was short of time. The accounts I have seen giving the times that Spassky used for his moves show that his Opening preparation was far inferior to Fischer's.

In game 4 Spassky spent 30 minutes before playing 18...Q-N4. This was the celebrated 'prepared' variation by Spassky and indicates that he had not analyzed this line in depth and completely misjudged what Fischer would do -- accept the Pawn sacrifice! In the 8th game Spassky spent 50 minutes before playing 11...Q-R4, which is a painfully obvious move that could have been played in 50 seconds. No wonder Spassky later 'blundered' in that game, he was never 'with it.'

Fine writes: "Fischer was lost in eight games..." "No games of really notable stature were recorded." I have read the same comments about all the world championship matches ever played. One, or other, of the players is always described as being 'out of form.' The number of 'lost positions' that weren't lost is always enough to make the winner the loser. The games are never 'worthy of a world championship match.' These negative comments are always wrong.

Fine's attempt at psychoanalysis of the players can be exposed as worthless by quoting one example. He writes: "In annotating the games I was struck by two...considerations, the frequency with which Fischer made dubious moves of pieces to the edge of the board, and his preferred method of counterattacking against the center from the side."

Were this not so pathetic it would be humorous. During the match I mentioned to the audience that, every time Spassky was in a bad position he advanced one of his Rook Pawns. That drew a big laugh, which is what Fine's book is worth, lost laughs.

BOBBY FISCHER'S CONQUEST OF THE WORLD'S CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP-The Psychology and Tactics of the Title Match by Reuben Fine can be ordered from TRU-TEST CO., P.O. Box 5268, Cleveland, Ohio 44101. Price, \$7.00, postpaid. Phone (216) 432-2924.

* * * *

LAST CALL FOR SUPER-TOURNAMENT: Come to Chabot College Student Center, 25555 Hesperian Blvd., Hayward, Feb.

16-18, for the 1st California People's Chess Festival! If all goes well, you can expect to see IGM Walter Browne and U.S. CO-Champion John Grefe in action. Many other local masters (Barnes, Fritzing, McCormick, Waterman, etc.) have also indicated that they will attend the \$5,000 six-round Swiss in six sections. Call 843-2875 for complete details. This is one you won't want to miss!