

0:02

Alonzo Ross: Hi, my name is Alonzo Ross and I am acting as interviewer for John Curdo who has had a very colorful and productive chess career and I've gotten involved because I've seen the amazingly high quality of chess that he's played over the years as well as being a gentleman and a sportsman. So he's going to tell you about many aspects of his career. John...so John why don't you...do you want to...

0:45

John Curdo: Yeah, around fourteen years of age, I think I started chess around fourteen years of age. And magazines had (I don't even know what they'd call them) but you could sell products and get a premium; and the products I sold were—believe it or not—Christmas seals, which are a dime a dozen now, so to speak, and seeds—flower seeds and vegetable seeds. And you'd sell them to your neighbors and friends. And so I was going to get a premium and I wanted a hunting knife. And my parents thought that I'd end up cutting my fingers off so they said, "You've got to choose something else." I says, "I don't like anything else." But they insisted so I decided I would get a chess set. It was a small peg-in chess set. The kind with little cardboard drawers with the pieces were kept in. Board about four and a half inches square, roughly. And I got it on the condition that my brothers (I had three brothers, one younger and two older) that they would learn chess with me. So I got the premium and I went to the local branch library and they had one chess book. It was a beginner's book by a fellow named Hoffer, I remember, H-O-F-F-E-R. And I remember looking in the back of the book, and I saw some printed games and descriptive notation. And it looked like algebra to me. But then again, I went back to the front of the book and read how the pieces move and apparently the book was pretty good because by the time I got to the games, I started playing through them. And that sort of lit the fire. 'Course my brothers soon tired of playing with me at all. I don't think any of them ever played any chess after that. So I had a problem and I went to the big library in downtown Lynn. Lynn had about a hundred thousand people at the time, so the library was pretty large. They had a half-a-dozen chess books and they were in the adult section so I needed special permission to go to the adult section. And two of the books that influenced me greatly were *The Game of Chess* by [Siegbert] Tarrasch and *My System* by [Aron] Nimzowitsch. And I went through the books over and over and it there was another one: *The Golden Treasury of Chess* which is—I don't know how many games it had in it—but it was just mostly short games. I actually remembered the author's name, I think it was a priest, his name was Wellmuth, Francis Wellmuth. Anyways, I went through those games quite a bit so I needed more. It sounds a little archaic, but I called up the Lynn Chamber of Commerce and said, "Is there a chess club around?" and they said, "Oh yes, right in downtown Lynn, in the railroad station." I think it was on the second floor. So I went there and I walked up to the second floor and I opened the door and there was a model train set up. You know, a little village and grass and trains and towns and all that sort of stuff. Wrong club. Next door was the chess club. And the windows in the chess club actually opened up onto the railroad tracks; I don't ever remember that trains bothering us at all, I don't know that. But one of the most interesting things that happened then was I found a chess magazine. It was *Chess Review* by [I.A.] Horowitz. So naturally, I stole it. A magazine all about chess! Nothing but chess! It's hard to realize how primitive things were in

those days, there was no rating system...chess clocks were hard to come by. Some of the clubs—we ended up playing in the local metropolitan league, I guess it was the Boston Metropolitan League, and some chess clocks were electric and you'd have to plug them in and in those days, you didn't have an outlet on every wall, lot of times the tables had to be moved over to the outlet so you could plug in the clock. And the clock had no flag and the hand would keep going a little bit even after you threw the toggle switch. So I ended up with a little plastic...chess clock, which was like two pocket watches set into a plastic base with the on and off. You needed a clock—it seems to me I remember times where I actually had to play a league game without a clock because you didn't have them, people didn't have them. And of course if a person gets in a loss position, and not too much of a hurry to move anyways, you know. So I ended up playing first board for Lynn...and there was again, next to no tournaments, there might have been around the country, but of course couldn't travel at all. So I ended winning the state title again, I tied with Doctor Katz, Gerald Katz. He was—he had a very heavy German accent. But we ended up tying for first so...but I should back up. The first tournament I won was in 1947. I went into Massachusetts' Schoolboy Championship. They didn't call them "scholastics" in those days, it was "schoolboy "championship" and I won that. And I have the games from that. And then of course, as I've already said, I won the state adult title in '48, tied for it in '49. I'm trying to remember whether I did it—I'll have to look it up, whether I won a New England title then in but in the end of 1949, I ended up going into the service, and I read in the recent past, that it was actually a recession in 1949. I mean, I don't think they called it a recession in those days but there wasn't any jobs to be had. It was no fast food joints or anything like that, I couldn't get a job. In my family, you didn't stay home. You joined the army. My kid brother joined the navy and I had—one of my older brothers was in the service during the Second World War. So I spent three years in the service, luckily, I didn't end up in Korea. But the Korean War started while I was in the service and my group was divided in half: we were engineers. I'd like to back up a little. When I went in and enlisted in the army, I wanted to take up mechanical drafting. That's what I had in high school, I went to the Lynn Trade. And I learned what they call "machine design" it's a fancy way of saying "mechanical drafting." So I wanted to be a draftsman. And they said "We don't need draftsmen, choose something else." It's like me with the chess set, I don't like anything else! "You gotta choose something else if you want to go in!" So I chose to be an electrician, sounded good. In eight weeks, the army taught me how to do everything from climbing telephone poles to wiring a house. When I came out I didn't know a darn thing. So when they divided my group in half, half of them went to Okinawa (this is before the Korean War, just before it) and our group, luckily, went to England. And all the time I was in England—for two full years—I played three games of chess, serious games. I joined the Oxfordshire Chess Club. I met Leonard Barden at the time, I hope he's still alive. He wrote a column over there for a gazillion years and he walked me around the Oxford University and he introduced me to Daniel Yanofsky[?] who ended up in Canada, I believe. And, well, Yanofsky is no longer with us either. But I played three games of which I won two and lost one. And the person I lost to was named Love, L-O-V-E. Which brings me to my first marriage.

12:01

AR: Well before you do that, John, let me just ask a question. It's clear you took to chess very quickly, what was it about chess that grabbed you? Why was it that you were—you said it was the only thing, why was it that you got so excited?

12:24

JC: Well first of all, I don't know what they called them in those days, but nowadays we probably called them a "nerd." I wasn't athletic, I had nothing. So when chess came along and I found out, obviously, I was pretty good at it, I mean, it became the thing, the only thing I had. So I put all my time into it at that stage. And of course, you know, the army sort of jumbled things up a bit but I could have done a lot of things then. But I resumed when I came out, even though I got married shortly—I came out in 19—January, 1953. I was demobed as one of these chess columns points out. And it took me a while to get going again. I ended up winning a number of tournaments in that period: say '54, '55, '56. Oh, I should back up too; the rating system came in while I was in the army. It came, I think, in around 1950 or so. And what they did was, they went through results they had, and determined people's ratings. I think my first rating was in the two thousand category. But even after winning a bunch of tournaments in the '50s, early '50s, I did not make master until 1959.

14:12

AR: Now let me just ask again, what was it about the chess? Was it that you discovered something you were really good at or—I know in my own feeling, when a combination works, it's a thing of beauty or when you have an idea...and it works, I just get all excited, what is it that drew you in?

14:36

JC: It was the games I went through, you know. Particularly, the—what do you call it?—that *Golden Treasury of Chess*, you know. They were short games and the brilliance of the games was a real turn on. And I ended up, in time, publishing three—they were self-published—three *Caviar* books. *Chess Review*—well first of all, *Chess Life* came out, I think around the early '50s, so it was just a newspaper of sorts and *Chess Review* had a column of short games and Horowitz called them "the hors d'oeuvres of chess, caviars, chess caviars" so I took his—I gave him credit in my first *Caviar* booklet and... the short games, basically, they were just beautiful, you know. And of course my results, in doing well at it, I mean, that certainly had a...had input. But I actually have a certificate in here, here's the picture that I was telling you about, was in the *Chess Review* that I wanted to show the guy in the flea market. Let's see...this is actually in the Lynn Chess Club. This kid was checker champion of New England, look at me: I'm sixteen years old, he was older than I was. Although that's just when I won the state championship. He wrote a lot of the earlier chess columns in *The Globe*. Here's...I played Arnold Denker, when we went to the Manhattan Chess Club, they were laying for us. I was on like sixth board or something like that and I was playing a former champion. Where am I here? Ok, it'll come. Oh here we are. I achieved the rank of US-rated master, 2242 points and bear in mind, I already won the state championship four or five times and won a New England Championship at least

once, I'd have to look up, I have no memory of that anymore and it makes you wonder about the rating system.

17:34

AR: Nothing's perfect in this world.

17:37

JC: [Laughs]. Well, they talk about inflation, I just don't know. I have something in here, a postcard saying my rating just popped over twenty-five hundred at some point. But that was—it didn't stay there very long. But I stayed in the twenty-four hundreds for quite a period of time.

18:01

AR: So I interrupted you, but at one point you were about to say—you mentioned an opponent named Love and you were about to talk about getting married, so you want to go back to that? I don't want to disrupt your flow...

18:18

JC: No, it's...you mentioned an opponent there?

18:34

AR: Love.

18:35

JC: Oh, Love! [Laughs]

18:37

AR: And you said you wanted to segue to talking about your marriage and I stopped you because I wanted to find out what drew you to chess.

18:46

JC: So, the person I got married to I brought over from England. She was Scottish and she was born in Glasgow. And so I brought her over and we got married. Had a couple kids reasonably fast. And I played when I could, but basically, I was just, you know, working full time. I'd play on weekends.

19:20

AR: And did you use your skills from the army to continue as an electrician?

19:26

JC: It took me a while, I imagine, to gain strength, but I mean I was still, you know, you might say I was still one of the better players in the area actually. And...I'm trying to remember when I bumped into Harold Dondis.

19:55

AR: Yes, I know he was your long-time friend.

19:58

JC: Oh yes. And they held a testimonial to—for him at the *Boston Globe* offices and I gave the, you might say, the keynote speech. My first recollection of Harold Dondis was when we were both going to a tournament at Brown University in Rhode Island. We were both lost on campus. And we both were looking at signs and we bumped into each other. And to ensure we didn't get lost in the future we teamed up and started going to tournaments together. Invariably, I would drive him. But over the years we played in countless tournaments. He took me to Bermuda a number of times. St. Martin's: one of my most memorable tournaments, once. Canada once: a very memorable tournament. We traveled to the US Senior Open...I forget what year it was, but I noticed one year the US Senior Open was won by an expert. A fellow from, I don't know, the midwest. And I says, "Boy, that looks pretty good if an expert can win it." So Harold and I went to, I think it was San Diego, and this was the Senior Open at the time, and who shows up but Larry Evans. *The Larry Evans*. I says, "Oh boy!" Well it turns out he was—it was the tail end of his career. We never even met in that particular tournament. I drew in the first round, almost lost. Won the rest of my games. And Larry drew with a couple of seventy-year-old people. So we ended up tying for first. And I know we went to a least two other Senior Opens, one in Salt Lake City and one in Arkansas. And I think I either won those or tied for first, who knows. But we played in venues all around the United States. And as far as my tournament records go, I was playing locally and I would win a very high percentage of tournaments but once I started playing in US Opens with Harold or the World Open for instance, I'd get my head knocked off by grandmasters. So my records weren't quite as sterling. I don't know if you want to jump to another...

23:25

AR: Well let's see...why don't you, since you've been talking about tournaments, why don't you talk a bit about the number of tournaments that you've won and which is the most memorable to you...Well you're up to nine hundred and thirty-four wins, right?

23:51

JC: Nine thirty-six. [Laughs].

23:53

AR: I apologize! I apologize!

23:57

JC: Well there's a—again when I was with Harold I would play sometimes in three or four tournaments a month. I used to talk about—I'd go to a tournament, sometimes by myself and I'd put in an entry for next week's tournament. I'd mail it on the way to this particular tournament.

As far as memorable tournaments go, ones that I mentioned, the one in Canada, St. Martins were really memorable because I won a fair amount of cash. And, let's see, the one in...St. Martin's first. It's extremely strong, and I ended up losing to a...Mexican fellow named Zapata. God...I can't remember. I...my mind's going because...I had to knock off a pretty strong player who had just won the New York Open. And going into the last round, I drew with John Fedorowicz who was pretty decent at that time and I ended up sharing one of the class prizes, which was quite substantial. A further memory on that is Harold had to go home. Our motel or whatever it was, was some distance away so we took the bus home. I had to wait around to get my money. So I waited and waited and had a couple of drinkypoops along the way and they ended up paying in cash. Fifty dollar bills, it was very nice. So I had something like...thirty-five hundred dollars in fifty dollar bills. So then I had a problem of how to get home to the motel. So I put the money in my trousers and started walking. And the roads in St. Martin's aren't built with sidewalks, the jungle was right up to the road. So I was stumbling around the highway and this car drove by and screamed out that I was crazy. He used a little profanity, actually. He said, "You crazy—you stupid bugger!" [Laughs] So I realized I was going the wrong way. I was heading away from town. So I turned around and starting coming back and then I finally hit civilization and there was a motel there and I tried to wake somebody to drive me back. I was willing to pay—I had a couple bucks on me, you know? And I ended up still, just walking the rest of the way home and that was one of the more memorable of my tournaments. Canada...in Canada we played in North Bay, Ontario. And again, it was a top-heavy tournament. My mind's going around in circles now.

28:11

AR: Well no one expects you to remember nine hundred and thirty-six tournaments.

28:16

JC: Well, if I concentrated just on that I might be able to do it. But I'd like to mention some of the people that really helped me directly or indirectly. One of them was the organizer of the Log Cabin Chess Club.

28:34

AR: Yes, you told me this story earlier. About the man who took you to New Jersey. Why don't you tell us that story?

28:41

JC: Ok. This fellow in New Jersey, he gathered as many strong players around as he could. He had a fellow from Pennsylvania, I think the fellow's name was Hermann Hesse, H-E-S-S-E. And he had the champion in New Jersey and he had me, the champion of Massachusetts. So he didn't have grandmasters but he had a pretty strong team. So he decided besides playing in the New York Metropolitan League, he wanted to travel around the country by automobile. And the average...working chess player wasn't free to take two or free weeks off in the summer. So I ended up playing first board on his first tour. And his first tour was rather haphazard, it wasn't plan out well in advance. We drove out to California and if we wouldn't have a match scheduled

he would call ahead and try to arrange a match. And so the matches were few and far between. And then we came back through Texas, Louisiana, and up to New Jersey. But the second year he was better organized.

30:21

AR: And your parents agreed to just let you go on these—this trip with him?

30:25

JC: Well, I was seventeen, you know. And there was a bunch of people on the trip. Ok, you know it was—we did get in some sort of hairy situations which I'll get into. The next year, there was decided to hold a match across the United States and Canadian border, in other words, some team from Minneapolis would play a team just over the border and somebody in Washington State would play and so on. We played in Montreal. And we played a match and that was the beginning of this particular tour. And we came down through...Detroit, Michigan and somewhere along the line we had two cars. And he had a real innovative idea so that the cars could keep track of one another. He had these little lights installed, just, you might say, between the doors so that you could see the two little lights ahead of you when you were following the other car. Anyways, one of the cars broke down. So what do you do when you're in the Michigan area? You buy another one. Which he did. So we headed straight down into Mexico; I've got the match here somewhere. We played in Mexico City. But...prior to that we went sightseeing, some of the sights I can't tell you about but we went up a volcanic mountain and the mountain was named "Popocarterpedal" [Popocatépetl] and if anyone is old enough, they remember a song from in the 1940s about "Popocarterpedal! Popocarterpedal!" it was a real snappy little ditty. Anyways, we drove up this mountain, parked the car, and walked around. And then when we came back to the car and got in, the car started to slide into the volcanic ash. So we had enough bodies to hoist the car back up onto the firm road and get out of there. We traveled further down and played one more match. I'd have to look up the specifics, it's all in here by the way. And then we came back up through Louisiana and Washington D.C. But the matches were generally arranged ahead of time and we did pretty good, actually. [?????] I think he ended up dying at a chess tournament which is the way to go. I think it was in Puerto Rico. But another fellow I'd like to mention who has since, recently departed in the last year or two is Frank Berry from Oklahoma. He traveled around the country, he showed up in Massachusetts, California, I guess his family owned a bank in Oklahoma and his twin brother I think is still down there. But Frank Berry was the real organizer and he invited me out there to a tournament...few years back. And at the same, time he arranged a match between two of the strong players, two of the—how do we say it?—the...immigrant players. I don't know if you remember, we used to call him [?????] he has since passed away.

35:08

AR: Oh, did he pass? I didn't know.

35:09

JC: Oh, he passed away quite a while ago, yeah. And the other guy was a Russian. Oh God, he's still around. But anyways, that was match was going on concurrently with the particular tournament. Anyways, Frank Berry not only brought me out there, you know, he put me up and I ended up, you know, winning a decent prize there too. Which...those are the good times...ok...

35:45

AR: Well, let me ask something that has always impressed me. During the time we've known each other, at the greater Worcester Chess Club, most of the time, you're clearly the strongest player in the club, and yet, I notice you prepare for the games. You want to know whom you're playing and you want to maybe have an opening innovation. Even though you're already the strongest player, you never slack off, you always try to come in as strong as you can. How do you keep up that enthusiasm over so many years?

36:26

JC: Well, I've just always done it. But the real problem with the Worcester Chess Club and it's a big one for me, is the fact that I play you guys well over a hundred times each. I'm talking about you, Mike, Donna is another one. And as you get—as you age it's very difficult to play a lot of different openings any more. So that's why we tend to play a lot of the same stuff. It's very hard to vary so that's what I'm always looking at. I go over our prior games we play, particularly if I know which color and so on and I've just always done that wherever possible of course.

37:21

AR: But many people would just get lazy with time and you never do that.

37:29

AR: You want to know the real big incentive? Money! I've always—you know, it's rather a rather narrow way of thinking, but I always tried to work at chess where money was involved. I played for the Boylston Chess Club for a period of time (I forget which years these were) but I used to charge the organizer that ran the tournament (not the matches I should say; the match captain would pay me five dollars per game, and of course if he didn't pay me for about eight games it added up to what in those days was serious money) but in around 1980—I'm not sure of the exact year—I decided to quit a wonderful job that I had. My family was bought and paid for, so to speak so I actually quit a real good job and became a chess professional. But I had the money attitude *long* before that. Because that gave me incentive because I had to work for a living and I generally had menial jobs and anytime I could win some extra money, it made all the difference in the world. And anyways I became a chess professional and then I started making money. I was already teaching. Writing when I could make money at it. And selling books and of course playing. And I used to give exhibitions whenever I could. The most people I've ever played at one time in a "simul" was fifty-two if I remember right. I'd even have to look that up. And that isn't too startling anymore but... I gave an occasional exhibition, like at the Burlington mall for instance. And then some woman at a mall down the road, I'm trying to think of where it was. It was one of the lessor malls towards the south. She wanted to hold a chess exhibition. So

when I showed up there, I was afraid nobody would come. The one at the Burlington Mall was very well advertised: it was part of a “men in sports” exhibition. They had hockey players there and basketball players. I remember Terry O’Reilly stopping by when I was giving my chess exhibition at the Burlington mall. He was one of the famous Bruins players and I says, “Look there’s Terry O’Reilly!” I was the star and I was pointing out Terry O’Reilly. Anyways, when I got to this other mall, the woman and I were afraid no one would come. That’s been one of my standard jokes: suppose you held a chess event and nobody came. So we went to this toy store and bought some chess sets. They were cheap little chess sets, hollow pieces and so on. And we set them up on the tables and we got little kids to come along. You know, if you stay here for a while and play with the set, you can take it home with you. So that way we got a small crowd. And the most memorable person in that crowd was Jim Rizzitano who went on to be quite a strong player and a pain in my neck. And he ended up drawing with me but at the time his mother brought him to the exhibition. [Laughs] So that ended happily ever after.

41:58

AR: So should we be doing more things like that to try to make chess more popular? To draw people in?

42:07

JC: Well nowadays, a lot of the stuff is so commonplace. It’s not that flashy anymore, if you know what I’m saying. I actually gave a blindfold exhibition at one of the malls, but just played one game, you know? I remember they actually put a women’s scarf around my eyes and people would walk by and say—you know, it was quite an attraction but I can’t see that getting...I’m just not sure what should be done nowadays. And particularly...the *Globe* column is in trouble again, I don’t know if you’ve noticed online, they’re trying to get a write-in crusade or campaign—that’s what Harold, when they tried to cancel it on Harold Dondis, they got such a influx of complaints, shall we say. Very eloquent ones. Larry Eldridge wrote a beauty. He said something about the *Globe* if they knock out the chess column, they’d sink to tabloid status. [Laughs] Anyways, they’re trying to give Chris Chase—oh there’s a good thing too. I helped Harold write the column. Harold was only—at his strongest he was two thousand, but generally speaking he was a little lower than that, I think. So he enlisted me to write notes to the column. And for a period of time, he used to put “annotations by JC” but then he figured they would confuse me with somebody else. So he started putting my name in. And then when I retired, Pat Wolff took over. And when he retired, Chris Chase took over. And now Chris Chase has been writing it for two or three years and they’re threatening to cut it off too. There’s something else in there about players that I’ve taught.

44:32

AR: Yeah, why do they want to cut it off? It seems as though it would cost almost nothing. I mean...

44:39

JC: Oh, it's not nothing. Oh they can get, by syndicated columns, like crossword puzzles, and Shelby Linemen's thing. They can get those for (I'm not sure now) but for like five dollars each, because it's a hundred papers across the country. And there's a lot of difference. I don't know if we should even talk about money now. But you know, it's a fair piece of change. But one of my most famous pupils is Patrick Wolff. At the time, the American Chess Foundation was—they had a (I don't know what you would call it) they had a program where they would pay strong players to coach promising youngsters and somehow the parents got involved. I imagine there was tax-deductible money in there. But I used to get paid by the American Chess Foundation. Anyways, I acquired Pat Wolff as a student when he was—rated in his eight hundreds and he ended up winning the United States Championship a couple times. Yeah, he was really quite strong. I'm trying to think if there's any others. I have a student now that's been coming to me (this is really ad libbing) for about fifteen years. And after fifteen years, at a certain age, you don't learn too much. So I end up entertaining both of us I think. The fellow still comes after fifteen years, I mean, we've become very dear friends, you know.

46:38

AR: So what do you try to teach your students? What lessons do you think are most important?

46:46

JC: Well, that's a good point because it mentions something in there...I follow Tarrasch's dictum: the end game first. You gotta do it first. I mean, there's no sense in winning a bunch of pawns if you don't know what to do with them. So you start with the end game and of course, basically, it's easier because you're dealing with fewer pieces, in a sense. And then you go to the middle game and if you make it far enough, then you get to the openings. But that's the way Tarrasch's book is laid out and that's just the way I believe you should teach. I actually have a syllabus that I used as a lesson plan. I had problems along the way and so on and I would give homework...

47:47

AR: So in the middle game, do you tell your students to—do you try to teach them how to find the best path or do you try to—

47:59

JC: Well you talk about things—real basics like pawn structures, for instance. That's critical and that's where people really fall down, they don't use their pawns properly. And who was it? Philidor said that "pawns are the soul of chess" or some such thing. So pawn structure and not only structures generally but how they relate to the openings you play that would lead you into openings. And then of course there's always tactics. I mean, they either jump out at you—I believe in giving tactics names and some people use flashcards and things of that nature but if you talk about the Arabian Mate, you should know right off what it is or the Epaulette mate. Or of course, the smothered mate and on and on. And double attacks—which pieces can double attack and they'll say pieces can fork. The only pieces that can fork, really, are the knight and king. Because the pieces they are attacking are equidistant whereas a bishop might be attacking a piece five squares away and another two squares away so that's not a fork in my

book, you gotta be more specific. And that's where a lot of teachers vary. Even Bruce Pandolfini varies there. I believe in being very specific when it comes to that kind of stuff. I drum it in.

49:49

AR: Well, I agree with you. Tactics, that's something solid that people need to practice and I like puzzle books and...

50:02

JC: You like which?

50:03

AR: Puzzle books? I think they're helpful for students. Now, suppose you have a student and they're playing the Ruy Lopez or something, do you try to teach them how the middle game—what the proper course of the middle game is as an extension of the opening or...

50:22

JC: No, I'm more apt to just point out more specific plans in the position. Like in this position you're trying to get the F pawn free and you know, advance it and so on, just it that sense. I just had another thought that jumped in. Oh yes! Somewhere along the line, Horowitz (I.A. Horowitz) sold out to USCF and that's when they started calling *Chess Life*, *Chess Life and Review* at the time and they, right now even, there's wonderful problems if you just do the ones in *Chess Life*. Andy Solits' problems are a little on the difficult side I would say but he has a half a dozen problems there in month, and an easier set of problems are Pandolfini's. If you can't get those, you've got a problem. But they are very basic and they are also worth doing. And then there's two problems related to the endgame, which are rather stiff. I don't want to start bad mouthing certain individuals...

52:04

AR: Ah, ok...So, I know you told me that you at one point, met Bobby Fischer. What did you think of Bobby Fischer?

52:18

JC: Oh yeah! That's great! [Laughs] Back before the Fischer boom, Bobby was going around the country giving simultaneous exhibitions. Upfront, I want to state that I think Bobby Fischer was the greatest player that ever played, current crop notwithstanding, ok? Because I'm going to badmouth Bobby a little bit but as far as chess goes, he was number one! Ok, so Bobby Fischer was going to give an exhibition in Pittsburgh, which is still very active chess club to say the least. And working up to the exhibition, they were concerned they might not be able to have enough people. So they decided...they decided to bring in half a dozen reasonably strong players, I was one of them. And I guess they had a girl champion too. I forget who the other people were. But they figured if they couldn't get x number of people (probably twenty-five or thirty people) that they would have a small exhibition, ok. So I happened to be in the car when they picked up Bobby Fischer. And I'm in the backseat with Bobby Fischer. We're driving to this

fellow's house (Fred Lawrence, his name was), he not only picked up Bobby at the airport but he was going to put him up for the period of time. And so I'm in the backseat and I don't know, maybe they introduced me to Bobby and Bobby showed a little interest when I was called a chess master and I said, "Oh, I'm just a local master." He never talked to me again. So it turns out they don't need us specialists, they had plenty of people. And one of the most important people was Harold Dondis, who actually beat Bobby and it's his famous game. He beat him with the Two Knights Defense and they actually carried Harold around on their shoulders. But, when the exhibition was over (I mean, naturally Bobby did quite well) he's at Fred Lawrence's house and Fred said, "Bobby, I don't want to put you out, but I'd really love to tell my grandchildren I played with you." Bobby said no to this fellow that was putting him up and so on. That's sort of a sad story. But again, let's see...go on...

55:55

AR: I am curious, I saw a special on HBO once about Bobby. And it just struck me that he didn't seem happy. You know, he had so much success but he just didn't look like a happy person. Is that just the—do you think that's true?

56:15

JC: Well you gotta go to his childhood, he didn't really know who his father was. And his mother was an activist. You know, she would do things like chain herself to a fence or something like that until he was able to get what he wanted or something. So his childhood was really...sort of fouled up. And I assumed, too, that people would try and take advantage of him. But he would take likings to certain individuals and that photographer that's getting a lot of play nowadays, apparently, they really got along, he and Bobby. And Bobby would just gravitate to certain people. And again...during the first match, the match in 1972, we all know how difficult it was to get Bobby up there....

[OFF RECORD FROM 57:29 TO 58:12 (END)]