
Fischer vers



One of America's top juniors looks back at the Fischer - Spassky match, which ended 50 years ago this month.

BY FM ROBERT SHLYAKHTENKO

us Spassky.

50 YEARS ON



It has been 50 years since “The Match of the 20th Century” took place in Reykjavik.

Writing in the 21st century, as a person born in the 21st century, it is difficult to properly convey the importance of this match between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky. Its purely chess characteristics can never be separated from the political ones, for the significance of this match – played at the height of the Cold War – transcends the chess board. Fischer’s victory was the first time an American-born player ever won the world championship, and the first time since Alexander Alekhine’s death that a non-Soviet player won. Yet Bobby Fischer’s ascension to the chess Olympus is no less amazing than his ultimate capture of the throne. Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of the Fischer-Spassky match is that it even happened.



FOREMATH

The story begins on October 24th, 1969, when Ed Edmondson of the US Chess Federation sent Fischer a formal invitation to participate in the 1969 U.S. Championship. The role of the tournament in determining the national champion was perhaps not as important to Fischer as its role in qualifying the top three finishers for the Interzonal tournament – the first step towards the world title. Fischer had participated in the championship eight times and won without exception. It was almost assured that he would qualify for the Interzonal if he participated in the championship.

But Fischer refused to play. He didn’t like that the U.S. Championship was an 11-round tournament – far too short, in his opinion, to determine a rightful champion. The championship was played without him; the three spots went to Sammy Reshevsky, William Addison, and Pal Benko. Fischer had stuck to his principles, and as a result, his overarching goal – the world championship – was once again out of sight.

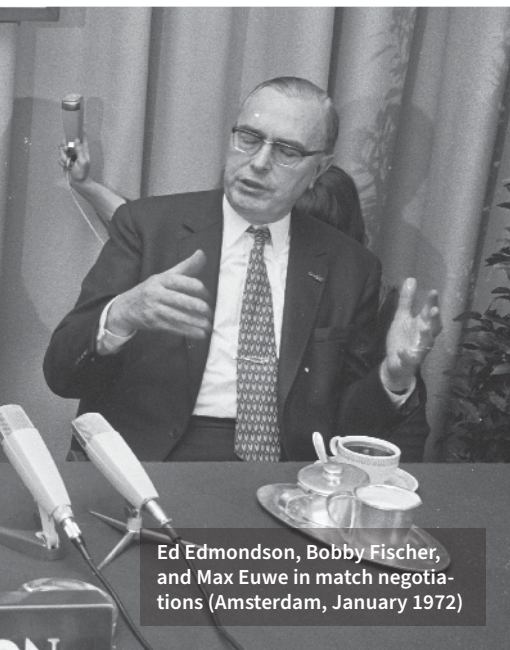
It was at this point that the first sacrifice in the saga was made by Benko – not of a piece or pawn on the chessboard, but of his own shot at the title. Benko believed that Fischer’s chances in the Interzonal were superior to his own and surrendered his spot on the condition that Fischer would not withdraw from the cycle.

Fischer did play in the Interzonal. More exactly, he cruised through the competition,

finishing 3½ points ahead of second-place Bent Larsen. In so doing, he began a 19-game winning streak (not counting a forfeit win versus Oscar Panno) that continued in the Candidates matches: with resounding scores, he systematically decimated Mark Taimanov (6-0), Bent Larsen (6-0), and Tigran Petrosian (6½-2½) – wipeouts unheard of in the arena of top-level chess. At last, no chess player stood between Fischer and a match for the world title. Yet his long, winding path to the championship had only begun.

The bids for the match were unveiled in early 1972, and presaged further difficulties for the negotiations. Fischer considered the prize fund to be the predominant factor, and so the best monetary offer – Belgrade (\$152,000) – automatically attracted him. For Spassky, a Soviet citizen, this was not nearly as important. When Reykjavik (with a bid of \$125,000) was chosen as the match site, Fischer was deeply upset: apart from the lower prize fund, he viewed Iceland as a primitive country and made disparaging remarks to that effect. Fischer signaled that he would refuse to play unless the prize fund was increased.

Days before the match, Fischer’s long-time friend Anthony Saidy shepherded him to Saidy’s family home in Long Island, where Fischer remained – trying and failing to avoid hordes of reporters. Several increasingly desperate attempts to put him on a flight to Iceland came to nothing, and, as a result, Fischer missed the opening ceremony. In a breach of regulations, FIDE President Max Euwe postponed the match but indicated



Ed Edmondson, Bobby Fischer, and Max Euwe in match negotiations (Amsterdam, January 1972)

that he would not accept any further delay. By this point, it seemed highly improbable that the event would ever take place.

An active campaign soon began to coerce Fischer into playing. British multi-millionaire James Slater offered to double the prize fund — removing “the element of money,” as he put it — almost as if he were challenging Fischer to play. Rumor had it that Fischer also received a call from none other than then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. By hook or by crook, the campaign succeeded: one way or another, Fischer was convinced.

CHESS PREPARATIONS

The players' preparations for the match could not have been more different. Fischer, staying at the Grossinger hotel in upstate New York, studied intensively — consulting the most recent chess literature and poring over hand-copied scores of Spassky's games. In early June, slightly more than a month before the planned opening of the match, Fischer flew to Pasadena, California, and began a stringent physical routine that included tennis, swimming, and boxing.

Spassky's approach was reportedly much more relaxed — perhaps too relaxed. A falling out with his long-time second, Igor Bondarevsky, did not help matters. In the end, Spassky assembled a team consisting of Efim Geller (widely renowned for his opening erudition), Nikolai Krogius (who would provide psychological help), and Ivo

Nei (whose skill as a tennis sparring partner was probably just as valuable to Spassky as his chess knowledge). Fischer was seconded by Bill Lombardy, but, as usual, worked on the chess mostly by himself.

Stylistically, the combatants were also very different. Spassky possessed a universality unmatched by any other player of his era. Though not especially innovative in the openings, he played equally well with the king's and queen's pawns and could keenly exploit any weakness in his opponent's play. He especially thrived in positions with an initiative: Spassky won many games simply by centralizing his pieces, opening lines, and launching a powerful attack.

With the benefit of 50 years of analysis, both human and silicon-based, Fischer's concrete approach to chess reminds me most of a pre-neural-net version of Stockfish. His insistence on analyzing positions move-by-move rather than on general grounds placed his opening play on a different level from any of his contemporaries. He valued extra material highly and was quite willing to defend for it, as shown by his dedication to the Najdorf Poisoned Pawn. Nevertheless, he chose active defense almost without exception; clever intermediate moves were his trademark. In the conversion of advantages (particularly when he had a safe king), Fischer played with unrivaled precision.

I think one could reasonably argue that Spassky had a wider, more original chess understanding than Fischer, but these qualities were more than compensated for by

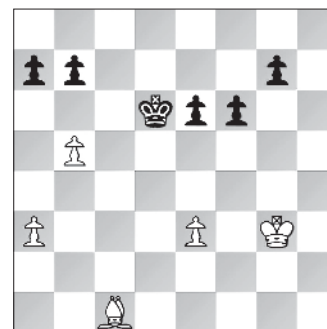
Fischer's superior opening erudition, skill in calculation, and technique.

In modern times, Fischer's aura of invincibility has so much permeated our chess consciousness that it seems impossible to imagine him as anything less than a heavy favorite in the world championship match. Yet, at the time, an informal poll of strong American masters in *Chess Life & Review* showed that many were not so sure: Reshevsky, Andy Soltis, and others went on record favoring Spassky. One reason was that Fischer had previously never won a game against Spassky.

However, several signals indicated that Spassky was in poor form. His result in the 1971 Alekhine Memorial was disappointing, to say the least, and in general, it seemed that he had lost motivation since winning the title in 1969. Mikhail Tal, in particular, privately warned that “a certain laziness, which occasionally occurs with the world champion...should be completely eliminated by the time of the match.”

Additionally, the Soviet team underestimated Fischer: they thought that his opening repertoire was far too limited for a 24-game match, and that his mastery extended only to a relatively narrow range of positions. In particular, Fischer had practically never deviated from his favorite 1. e4. A conglomerate of Soviet grandmasters were asked to provide their opinions on Fischer to Spassky prior to the match; of those, only Viktor Korchnoi even considered the possibility of Fischer playing the closed openings.





Kb4 43. b6 Kxa4 the position is a fortress draw, since White can't stop the black king from running back to c8) 39. ... f5 40. Kxg7 (or 40. Kg5 b6, and White can't improve his position: 41. Bd2 Kd3 42. Bc1 Ke4 with a draw) 40. ... f4 41. exf4 exf4 42. Bd2 (42. Bxf4 Kxf4 is drawn) 42. ... f3 43. Be1 Kd3 44. Kf6 (44. a5 b6!) 44. ... Kc4 45. Ke5 b6! 46. Kd6 Kb3 47. Kc6 Kxa4 and Black is just in time.

36. ... Kd5 37. Ba3 Ke4

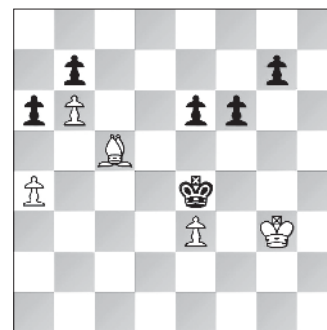
37. ... Kc4? is a mirage: 38. Bf8 Kb3 39. a5 Ka4 40. a6! b6 41. Bxg7 Kxb5 42. Bxf6 Kxa6 43. Kf4 Kb5 44. Bd4! and Black is doomed. But of course not 44. Ke5?? Kc4 45. Kxe6 Kd3 46. Bd4 Ke4!

38. Bc5 a6

Another pitfall is 38. ... b6?? 39. Bxb6!

39. b6

White keeps as many pawns on the board as possible. Now comes the critical moment of this endgame. Black is aiming for a fortress: if White plays a4-a5 and Black manages to trade off the e3-pawn, then all the second player has to do is bring the king to c8. That position is drawn, based on the theme of stalemate. If White's pawn is still on a4, however, the fortress no longer works — White can induce the move ... a6-a5 and win the fledgling pawn, after which the win is trivial.



39. ... f5??

The decisive mistake, allowing White's king to "come around" from the side.

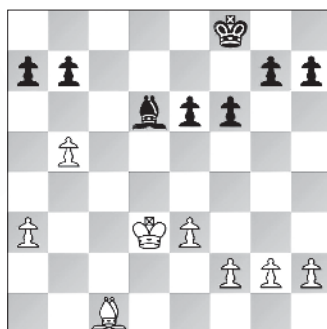
Black holds with 39. ... e5! 40. Kg4 (Kaspar-

THE MATCH

Game one began on July 11th, with Fischer playing the Black pieces. After improving on a 1958 game between Spassky and Nikolai Krogius, Fischer easily secured equality and seemed to be steering the game towards a draw. Then, on move 29, in an obviously drawn bishop endgame, he drastically, and inexplicably, changed the character of the position:

THAT BISHOP MOVE

GM Boris Spassky
GM Bobby Fischer
World Championship (1), Reykjavik,
07.11.1972



BLACK TO MOVE

29. ... Bxh2?!

Fifty years later, this move is still hard to explain. For no reason, Fischer transforms the position from an easy draw to one in which he must display a high level of precision simply to hold. This position has been so widely publicized that many people are under the impression that Black is losing after this move. However, as we will see, this is not correct.

30. g3 h5

30. ... Ke7 is met by 31. a4, and the black king cannot invade. But not 31. Ke2 Kd6 32. Kf3? Kc5 33. Kg2 Bxg3 34. fxxg3 Kxb5 and Black is the one with all the chances.

31. Ke2 h4 32. Kf3 Ke7

Many speculated that Fischer first planned 32. ... h3 33. Kg4 Bg1 34. Kxh3 Bxf2, only to miss 35. Bd2! and the f2-bishop is trapped.

33. Kg2 hxg3 34. fxxg3 Bxg3 35. Kxg3 Kd6

(see diagram top of next column)

36. a4

36. Kg4 "would have led to the goal," according to Kasparov, but Black has a miracle save: after 36. ... Ke5 37. Kh5 Ke4! It turns out that Black doesn't need to worry about the g7-pawn. 38. a4!? e5 39. Kg6 (After 39. Ba3 Kxe3 40. Bc5+ Kd3 41. Bxa7 Kc4 42. Bf2

PHOTO: COURTESY ICELANDIC CHESS HERITAGE SOCIETY (ICHS)

ov gives 40. Bf8 Kxe3 41. Bxg7 Kd4 42. Bxf6 Kc5 43. Bd8 Kb4 44. Kf3 Kxa4 45. Ke4 Kb5 46. Kd5 a5! 47. Kxe5 Kc5 48. Ke4 Kc4 49. Ke3 a4 with a draw) 40. ... g6 41. Kg3! and now even 41. ... f5 42. Kh4 f4 43. exf4 Kxf4! 44. Be7 e4 45. Bg5+ Kf3 46. Bc1 e3 47. Kg5 e2 48. Bd2 Ke4! 49. Kxg6 Kd5 50. Kf5 Kc6, forcing 51. a5 (51. Ba5 e1=Q 52. Bxe1 Kxb6 53. Ke5 Kc6 54. Kd4 a5! 55. Bxa5 b5, liquidating the position) 51. ... Kd7 and Black reaches the desired fortress.

40. Kh4! f4

Now 40. ... e5 41. Kg5 f4 42. exf4 exf4 43. Bg1 Ke5 doesn't hold: 44. Kg6 Kd6 45. Kxg7 Kd7 46. Kf7 Kc8 47. Ke8 f3 48. Bf2 (as given by A. Levin on *Chess.com*) 48. ... Kb8 49. Kd8 Ka8 50. Kc7 and Black is in *zugzwang*. If the white pawn were on the a5-square, this position would be an obvious draw.

41. exf4 Kxf4 42. Kh5!

Kc4 53. Kf5 Kb4 54. Kxe4 Kxa4 55. Kd5 Kb5 56. Kd6, Black resigned.

Incensed by this loss, Fischer duly found the necessary scapegoat — television cameras in the playing hall. He demanded the removal of all cameras from the venue, but managing the competing interests of Fischer, the organizers, and the producer (Chester Fox) was nearly impossible.

Two days later, at 5 p.m., the tension reached a climax: Fischer failed to appear for the second game of the match. At 6 p.m., Chief Arbiter Lothar Schmid, in what he later called one of the worst moments of his life, forfeited Fischer. Fischer once again seemed close to aborting the match, but “a massive telegram campaign, a phone call from presidential advisor Henry Kissinger, and redoubled efforts by his friends and advisors here, made him change his mind and cancel his plane reservations home”

ue the match and return home, as many of his countrymen encouraged him to do. But Spassky was too great a sportsman to allow this. He was no longer battling only Fischer, but also those at home — and himself.

Spassky agreed to play game three in a back room, away from cameras (and spectators). Subsequently, Spassky would call this a colossal psychological error, feeling that “after winning the second game through the non-appearance of my opponent, I was as though in his debt...” In any case, it was time for Fischer to strike. He chose the Benoni and implemented a novel strategic plan, accepting doubled h-pawns in exchange for dynamic counterplay. Later, ways were found for White to consolidate the position, but Spassky was insufficiently familiar with the nuances and failed to solve the problems over the board. After several weak moves, he landed in a worse position and was unable to save a difficult ending with queens and



IMAGE: COURTESY LEROY NEIMAN FOUNDATION

Black cannot force a4-a5 and get his king back to a8 in time. The rest is a matter of technique.

42. ... Kf5 43. Be3 Ke4 44. Bf2 Kf5 45. Bh4 e5 46. Bg5 e4 47. Be3 Kf6 48. Kg4 Ke5 49. Kg5 Kd5 50. Kf5 a5 51. Bf2 g5 52. Kxg5

(Robert Byrne in the August 1972 *Chess Life & Review*).

Spassky now needed only 10 more points out of 22 games in order to win the match. However, one must realize that Spassky was also under a lot of pressure at this point: he certainly had enough grounds to discontin-

opposite-colored bishops.

In game four, Spassky, on the black side of a Classical Sicilian, sacrificed a pawn in inspired fashion and gained the bishop pair and kingside pressure in return. On move 31, however, he played imprecisely and allowed White to trade queens into an opposite-col-



Above: LeRoy Neiman's sketch of Fischer leaving the hall. Right: Neiman's rendition of the spectators — check the notes below!

ored bishop ending with no real dangers. In future games, this scenario would repeat itself. It's not that Spassky never got chances; in fact, he had clear advantages in several games. However, faced with dogged defense, he all-too-often let his opponent off the hook. Fischer, on the other hand, mercilessly punished his opponent in almost every case.

In game five (annotated beginning on page 48 by IM Tibor Karolyi), Fischer chose the Nimzo-Indian, but played a different line than in the first game — an indication that he was consciously varying his openings to avoid Spassky's preparation. The game itself was a strategic brilliancy, but ended abruptly — Spassky made a shocking blunder on move 27, a tell-tale sign that the world champion was out of form.

The score was now even, but all the mo-



*Fischer - Spassky World Championship of Chess
Exhibition Hall Reykjavik Iceland July 27 72
Kids in audience take same position as Fischer does - Bobby lean forward so do they*
LeRoy Neiman

mentum was on Fischer's side. He made full use of it in game six, widely considered the best game of the match:

QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED, TARTAKOWER VARIATION (D59)

GM Bobby Fischer
GM Boris Spassky
World Championship (6), Reykjavik,
07.23.1972

1. c4!

Fischer played 1. e4 so exclusively that the possibility of any other first move was viewed almost jokingly. For example, a prophetic cartoon on the June 1972 cover of *Chess Life & Review* displayed worried Soviet leaders Brezhnev and Kosygin questioning Spassky (who sits next to a stack of 1. e4 tomes): "But Boris, what if he doesn't play 1 P-K4?" In real life, Spassky's response was flippant: "I'll play the Tartakower-Bondarevsky; what can he achieve?"



Above: Fischer arrives at the Laugardalsholl venue. Right: A young fan is clearly awed by his passing idol.



Perhaps he was counting on Fischer's lack of experience in the closed openings, underestimating the flexibility of his opponent. As this game shows, Fischer's choice was a brilliant practical decision, sidestepping much of his opponent's preparation and forcing Spassky to devote additional time to preparing the closed openings later in the match.

1. ... e6 2. Nf3 d5 3. d4 Nf6 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bg5 0-0 6. e3 h6 7. Bh4 b6

The aforementioned Tartakower-Makogonov-Bondarev variation.

In the 12th game, Spassky deviated with 7. ... Nbd7.

8. cxd5 Nxd5 9. Bxe7 Qxe7 10. Nxd5 exd5 11. Rc1 Be6

The text move is an improvement on 11. ... Bb7 12. Qa4 c5 13. Qa3 Rc8 14. Be2, and White had some chances for an advantage in Petrosian – Spassky, Santa Monica 1966.

12. Qa4 c5 13. Qa3 Rc8 14. Bb5



So far, the players have followed Furman – Geller (Moscow 1970), a game that should have been known to Spassky.

14. ... a6

The strong improvement 14. ... Qb7! neutralized this variation. According to Geller, Spassky's team had already found this move and Spassky simply forgot it during the game. If true, this is another example of Spassky's lackluster preparation for the match, but I can't help but wonder — if Spassky knew about this move during the match, why didn't he repeat this line in the three future games where Fischer played 1. c4?

The point of this improvement is revealed after 15. dxc5 (forced, as otherwise Black plays ... c5-c4!) 15. ... bxc5 16. Rxc5 Rxc5 17. Qxc5 Na6! 18. Bxa6 (18. Qc6 Qxc6 19. Bxc6 Rb8! [19. ... Rc8 20. Ba4 Rc1+ 21. Bd1 is somewhat less accurate] and White cannot save the b-pawn, because now after 20. b3? Rc8! wins) 18. ... Qxa6 19. Qa3 Qc4 and Black has excellent chances as in Timman – Geller, Hilversum 1973.

15. dxc5 bxc5 16. 0-0

Black is faced with two pins and has to develop carefully: he risks being forced to defend his hanging pawns passively, as well as being left with an inferior minor piece. Both of these things happened in the game...

16. ... Ra7

Kasparov shows the line 16. ... Qb7 (other possibilities are 16. ... Qa7, 16. ... Nc6, and 16. ... Nd7) 17. Ba4 Qb6 18. Ne5 a5 19. f4 Bf5 (19. ... Ra7!?, intending 20. f5 Bd7, is also possible) 20. Rfd1 Be4 and gives equality — the queen is a valuable defender of the queenside. It's possible to extend this line a bit further: 21. Qb3!? Qxb3 22. Bxb3 c4

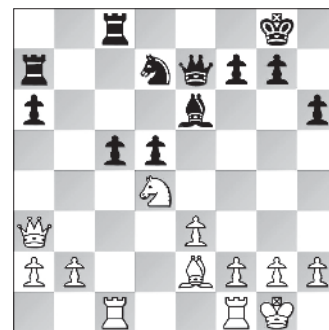
23. Bc2 Bxc2 24. Rxc2 Na6! 25. a3 Rc5 with sufficient counter-chances.

17. Be2 Nd7

Allowing White a favorable minor-piece exchange.

The alternative 17. ... a5 18. Rc3 occurred in the Furman – Geller game. Now the most accurate move might be 18. ... Kf8!?, preparing to trade queens with ... c5-c4. (The immediate 18. ... c4 is also possible, but after 19. Qxe7 Rxe7 Black's king is far from the center.) Play might continue 19. Rf1 c4 20. Qxe7+ Kxe7 21. b3 cxb3! 22. Rxc8 Bxc8 23. axb3 and Black should be able to defend.

18. Nd4



18. ... Qf8?

Spassky's first real mistake.

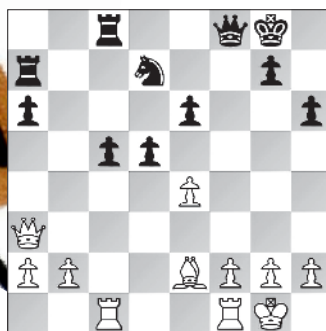
It was vital to play 18. ... Nf6, taking the e4-square under control. After 19. Nb3 (19. Nxe6 fxe6 is no longer so dangerous) Black



Left: Neiman's graphite sketches of Fischer, which, as he noted in his autobiography, were silent enough for Fischer's keen ears!

can even play 19. ... Rac7! (Kasparov's move) and Black's position is fully harmonized. Capturing the a6-pawn poses more risks for White than for Black.

19. Nxe6 fxe6 20. e4!



White wants to modify the structure in order to activate the light-squared bishop. Black should not allow him to do so, but how?

20. ... d4?

Positional capitulation: the hanging pawns are now immobilized and White is able to activate his light-squared bishop. However, I do not see complete equality in any of the alternatives either, which suggests that 18. ... Qf8 was already a serious error.

Let's take a look at the other options:

(a) I am not convinced by 20. ... Nf6 21. e5 Nd7 for two reasons:

(a1) Firstly, in Kasparov's line 22. f4 c4 23. Qh3 Rc6 24. b3 Nb6 White has strong pres-

sure after 25. Bg4 Qe7 (or 25. ... Qc5+ 26. Kh1 Re7 27. Qh5 Nd7 28. bxc4 dxc4 29. Bd1! When White successfully combines play on both flanks) 26. f5!, and again the light-squared bishop reigns supreme.

(a2) And secondly, the prophylactic 22. Qe3! creates difficult problems for Black: he can no longer play ... c5-c4. After the relatively best 22. ... Qd8 23. b3! Qb6 24. Qg3! (not 24. Kh1 a5 25. a4 c4!) 24. ... a5 25. a4 White has frozen Black's queenside counterplay and stands better.

(b) 20. ... c4 21. Qh3 Rc6 22. b3 Nb6 gives Black "a perfectly defensible position" (Kasparov), but after 23. exd5 exd5 24. bxc4 (24. Rfe1!? is also very interesting, intending 24. ... Re7 25. Bf1 Rxe1 26. Rxe1 with some advantage) 24. ... dxc4 25. Rfd1 I think White still has serious chances for an advantage: he can combine threats against the c4- and a6-pawns with play against Black's king.

(c) 20. ... Qd6 21. exd5 exd5 22. Rfd1 is simply worse for Black.

(d) 20. ... dxe4!? is surprisingly difficult to refute; somehow, Black is always able to cover his weaknesses adequately. However, I doubt that he can hope for equality in this case.

21. f4 Qe7 22. e5

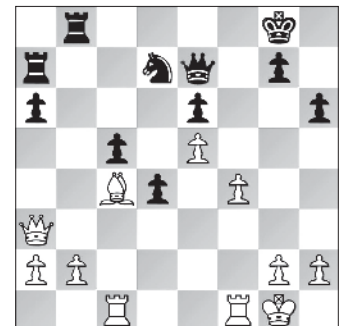
Perhaps slightly rushed.

The preparatory 22. Qh3! improves the position without committing to a specific attacking plan. For example, White can contemplate e4-e5 as in the game, but also Be2-c4 or even f4-f5 (in the case of 22. ... Nb6).

22. ... Rb8?!

Relatively best was 22. ... Nb6, though Kasparov shows that 23. Qd3! (intending Qd3-e4 and Be2-d3) is still very dangerous for Black.

23. Bc4



Now Black's position is truly lost: there is simply nothing for him to do. Fischer's conversion of the advantage is flawless.

23. ... Kh8

Here 23. ... Nb6 is refuted by Tal's 24. Qb3!

24. Qh3 Nf8

If 24. ... Rxb2 25. Bxe6, and in the long run Black can't stop the advance of White's pawns.

25. b3 a5 26. f5 exf5 27. Rxf5 Nh7 28. Rcf1 Qd8 29. Qg3 Re7 30. h4

Further restricting the black knight. All the preparations have been made for the final advance.

30. ... Rbb7 31. e6! Rbc7 32. Qe5 Qe8 33. a4 Qd8 34. R1f2 Qe8 35. R2f3 Qd8 36. Bd3 Qe8 37. Qe4! Nf6

37. ... Rxe6 does not help in view of 38. Rf8+Nxf8 39. Rxf8+ Qxf8 40. Qh7 mate.

38. Rxf6! gxf6 39. Rxf6 Kg8 40. Bc4 Kh8 41. Qf4, Black resigned.

Spassky's passive pieces are completely powerless.

In this moment of great psychological stress, after everything that had occurred, Spass-

Right: Spassky takes his leave from the stage while Fischer ponders his next move. Unfortunately we do not know which game this is!

ky showed true magnanimity: when the spectators applauded Fischer, the world champion joined in. It is hard to imagine any other champion acting the same way in that situation. Perhaps only Tal would do such a thing.

The seventh game was drawn after a sharp fight, but in the eighth, Fischer struck again. He played 1. c4 for the second time, showing that the sixth game was not just an aberration. On this occasion, Spassky responded with 1. ... c5 and reached a playable position, but made an awful blunder and succumbed once more.

Only six games before this, Spassky led by two points; now the scores were reversed. Something in the world champion's approach had to drastically change. On July 28th, he met with his trainers and resolved to start "afresh," significantly altering his daily regimen. He drew the ninth game but lost the 10th — in a Breyer Ruy Lopez, Fischer gained a strong attack and transposed into a superior ending, which he conducted with utmost precision. Spassky's attempted comeback would have to wait until the 11th game:

SICILIAN DEFENSE, NAJDORF VARIATION (B97)

GM Boris Spassky

GM Bobby Fischer

World Championship (11), Reykjavik, 08.06.1972

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Bg5 e6 7. f4 Qb6

Fischer sticks to his guns, repeating the same variation he played in Game 7. In all other match games, he constantly varied his openings to avoid Soviet preparation. For this encounter, Spassky came prepared...

8. Qd2

The critical move, both then and now. Spassky's only experience facing this variation before the match was in a 1970 exhibition game against the readers of *Pravda*, where he, obviously not wishing to show his cards, played the placid 8. Nb3.

8. ... Qxb2 9. Nb3

Nowadays 9. Rb1 is played exclusively. Fischer had faced the text move only once, in a blitz game against Matulovic in 1970.

9. ... Qa3 10. Bxf6

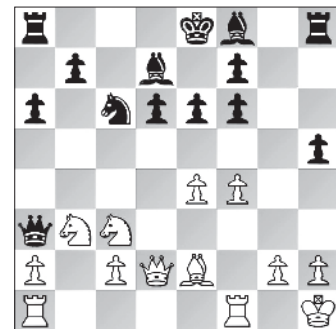
Spassky tries to improve on 10. Bd3, which brought him little success in the seventh game of the match: 10. ... Be7 11. 0-0 h6!

12. Bh4?! (as the game proves, this spirited sacrifice is insufficient) 12. ... Nxe4 13. Nxe4 Bxh4 14. f5! exf5 15. Bb5+! axb5! 16. Nxd6+ Kf8 17. Nxc8 Nc6 18. Nd6 Rd8 19. Nxb5 Qe7 20. Qf4 g6. Black has consolidated his position and Spassky was fortunate not to lose the game.

10. ... gxf6 11. Be2 h5

A standard move in this pawn structure, preventing White from playing Be2-h5. Later, most players came to the conclusion that the text is not strictly necessary, and continued simply with 11. ... Nc6.

12. 0-0 Nc6 13. Kh1 Bd7



14. Nb1!?

Spassky's novelty! Black needs to play accurately to keep his queen out of trouble.

14. ... Qb4

On 14. ... Qa4 white can try 15. a3!? and the e4-pawn is immune. The alternative 14. ... Qb2?! is very risky on account of 15. a4! and



White threatens Nb1-c3 (or Nb1-a3) followed by Rf1-b1, trapping the black queen.

15. Qe3 d5!?

Fischer's trademark: he defends as actively as possible. Most annotators consider this to be a serious error, but I am not so sure.

More solid is 15. ... Ne7, and now: (a) 16. a3 Qa4 17. Nc3 Qc6 18. Rad1 with an unclear position. (b) 16. N1d2! is interesting, in which case Black should play 16. ... Rc8! to prevent Nd2-c4. (c) 16. c4 is well met by 16. ... f5!.

16. exd5 Ne7 17. c4

The most natural move: White maintains the central pawn on d5.

17. ... Nf5 18. Qd3

(see diagram top of next column)

18. ... h4?

This is the real mistake: however risky Black's strategy might be, it is too late to deviate from it now.

Perhaps 18. ... Rc8! deserves consideration, e.g., 19. Nc3 b5 20. dxe6 fxe6 21. Rad1 Rc7.



I think the best move is the surprising 18. ... exd5!, which looks incredibly dangerous in view of 19. Nc3! dxc4 20. Qe4+ Be7 21. Nd5 Qd6 22. Bxc4



POSITION AFTER 22. Bxc4

and it seems that White has a strong initiative. However, appearances are deceptive: 22. ... Rc8 23. Rad1 Be6!! 24. Rfe1 (24. Nxf6+ Bxf6 25. Rxd6 Nxd6 is equally unclear) 24. ... Kf8! and Black holds miraculously, e.g., 25. Ne3 Rxc4 26. Nxc4 Qb4!.

19. Bg4!

Black's momentary counterplay is nipped in the bud. Now sacrificing the knight on g3 does not work, as White's bishop can block on h3. Fischer evidently counted lines such as 19. Nc3?? Ng3+! 20. hxg3 hxg3+ 21. Kg1 Bc5+ 22. Nd4 e5 and wins.

19. ... Nd6

Black is strategically lost after 19. ... 0-0-0 20. Bxf5 exf5 21. h3!! — he simply has no counterplay.

20. N1d2 f5 21. a3!

With a series of strong intermediate moves,

Below: Neiman captures a moment from the match. The sketch is dated July 27th (game nine) but Fischer played White that day!



IMAGE: COURTESY LEROY NEIMAN FOUNDATION

Right: A draw is agreed with a handshake. Can anyone figure out which game this might be?

Spassky destroys Black's position.

21. ... Qb6 22. c5 Qb5 23. Qc3 fxc4 24. a4! Trapping the queen; the rest becomes a formality. An incredible disaster for Fischer.

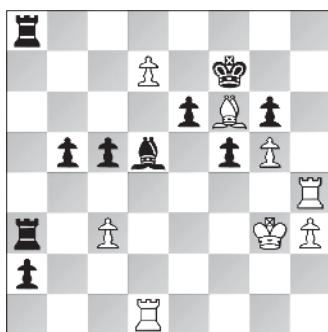
24. ... h3 25. axb5 hxg2+ 26. Kxg2 Rh3 27. Qf6 Nf5 28. c6 Bc8 29. dxe6 fxe6 30. Rfe1 Be7 31. Rxe6, Black resigned.

In the 12th game, Fischer returned to the Queen's Gambit Declined (as in game six) but found no similar success: the element of surprise had passed and Spassky's vast experience in this line came to the forefront. The game was drawn without much excitement.

Fischer prepared an opening surprise for the 13th game as well: he chose Alekhine's Defense, a rare guest in world championship matches. Spassky's team had devoted minimal attention to this variation, and Spassky handled the opening unconvincingly. Nevertheless, a pawn sacrifice gave him a serious initiative and the middlegame became an open fight. After reaching a sharp ending with rooks and opposite-colored bishops, Spassky seemed close to achieving a draw. However, Fischer found his only chance and exploited it masterfully:

HIGH PRAISE

GM Boris Spassky
GM Bobby Fischer
World Championship (13), Reykjavik,
08.10.1972



BLACK TO MOVE

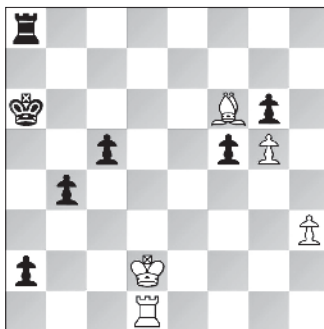
Botvinnik considered this endgame to be the "finest creative achievement" of Fischer's whole career. It all began with the next move.



44. ... e5!

Rather than accept a perpetual check, Fischer decides to sacrifice a piece! The next 10 moves are practically forced. Here 44. ... a1=Q 45. Rh7+ Kg8 46. Rh8+ is an immediate draw.

45. Rh7+ Ke6 46. Re7+ Kd6 47. Rxe5 Rxc3+ 48. Kf2 Rc2+ 49. Ke1 Kxd7 50. Rxd5+ Kc6 51. Rd6+ Kb7 52. Rd7+ Ka6 53. R7d2 Rxd2 54. Kxd2 b4



Black's queenside pawns are menacing. White has to act immediately to create chances on the other side of the board.

55. h4! Kb5 56. h5! c4

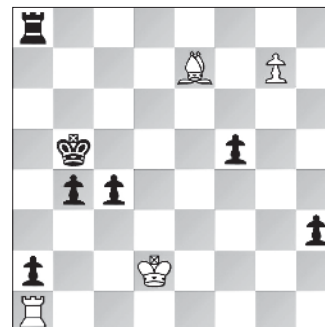
Threatening ... c4-c3+, so White's next move is forced.

57. Ra1 gxh5 58. g6 h4 59. g7

59. Bxh4? Rg8 60. Rxa2 Rxc6 is lost for White. He needs the g7-pawn to hold down Black's rook.

59. ... h3 60. Be7

Here 60. Kc1!? should draw as well.



60. ... Rg8!

"The American found a paradoxical solution: he stalemated his own rook, but blocked White's passed pawn and pinned down his bishop. Now there were five passed pawns fighting against the white rook. Nothing similar had ever been seen previously in chess. Spassky was shocked and lost. Soon Smyslov found a draw for White, but would he have found it at the board, sitting opposite Fischer?" (Botvinnik)

61. Bf8 h2 62. Kc2 Kc6 63. Rd1

Not the only drawing move, but the most precise one: Black's king is cut off.

63. ... b3+ 64. Kc3

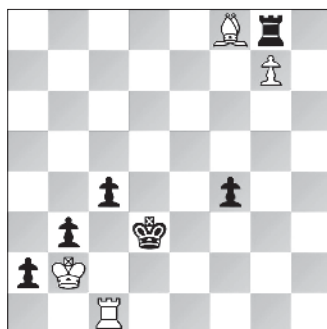
Gligoric's 64. Kb2 indeed holds the draw more easily: 64. ... f4 65. Rd6+ Kc7 66. Rd1 f3 67. Kc3 f2 68. Kb2, and Black cannot further improve his position.



64. ... h1=Q 65. Rxh1 Kd5 66. Kb2

In my view, the simplest path to a draw was 66. Re1. By keeping the king on c3, White prevents Black's king from penetrating to d3: 66. ... f4 67. Rd1+ Ke4 68. Re1+ Kf3 69. Rf1+ Kg2 70. Ra1! f3 71. Kxc4 f2 72. Kxb3 f1=Q 73. Rxf1 Kxf1 74. Kxa2, with a draw.

66. ... f4 67. Rd1+ Ke4 68. Rc1 Kd3



69. Rd1+??

After a long defense, Spassky finally cracks. Instead, White saves the game with 69. Rc3+ Kd4 (or 69. ... Ke2 70. Rxc4 f3 71. Rc1) 70. Rf3 c3+ 71. Ka1 c2 72. Rxf4+ Kc3 and now, for example 73. Bb4+ Kd3 74. Rf1 Rxc7 75. Kb2 as given by Smyslov.

69. ... Ke2 70. Rc1

Note that White isn't in time to play 70. Ra1, as in the above line.

70. ... f3 71. Bc5 Rxc7 72. Rxc4 Rd7

72. ... f2 also wins, because the a- and b-pawns are so far advanced.

73. Re4+ Kf1 74. Bd4 f2, White resigned.

Black threatens ... Rd7xd4, and if the bishop moves, there is ... Rd7-d1. Therefore, Spassky threw in the towel.

The next several games saw a complete turnaround. Spassky, sensing that his title was in danger, went on the attack and put significant pressure on Fischer in the 14th and 15th games and had serious chances in the 18th. But he was unable to convert any of these advantages into full points on the scoreboard — due as much to exhaustion and his poor form as to Fischer's defense.

The 19th game was perhaps Spassky's last realistic chance to save the match.

ALEKHINE'S DEFENSE (B05)

GM Boris Spassky
GM Bobby Fischer
World Championship (19), Reykjavik,
08.27.1972

1. e4 Nf6

Returning to his choice from the 13th game, but by this time Spassky had studied this variation more carefully.

2. e5 Nd5 3. d4 d6 4. Nf3 Bg4

Deviating from the 13th game, where Fischer played 4. ... g6.

5. Be2 e6 6. 0-0 Be7 7. h3 Bh5 8. c4 Nb6



Above: Neiman's ink and watercolor vision of the spectators. Right: the commentary room in Reykjavik.

IMAGES: COURTESY LEROY NEIMAN FOUNDATION



Above: Interest in the match was global; here Donner comments in Amsterdam. Right: anxious fans peer into Larsen's on-site analysis!

9. Nc3 0-0 10. Be3

Now this is the main line, but at the time this whole variation was relatively new — for example, it isn't mentioned in Bagirov's 1971 monograph on the Alekhine Defense. At the time, 10. exd6 cxd6 11. Be3 d5! was becoming popular. With the text move, Spassky avoids this possibility.

10. ... d5

Now after 10. ... Nc6 White could play 11. exd6 cxd6 12. d5!, considered favorable for White both then and now. The inclusion of h2-h3 is helpful, because after 12. ... exd5 13. Nxd5 Nxd5 14. Qxd5 the h5-bishop hangs.

11. c5 Bxf3



12. Bxf3

The alternative 12. gxf3!? became popular only later. White prevents ... Nb6-c4, and after 12. ... Nc8 13. f4 Black will need some time to make use of his "counter-chances." (Less kind, but more accurate, is to say that White is just better — Black's position is solid, but very passive).

12. ... Nc4 13. b3

This move is beneficial only from a dynamic point of view — White opens the f-file and prepares e3-e4 in some cases.

It's better to preserve the bishop: 13. Bf4 b6 14. b3 Na5 15. b4 Nc4 16. Rc1 with some advantage, as in Beliavsky – Alburdt, Daugavpils 1974. Black can't play 16. ... a5 in view of 17. b5 bxc5 18. dxc5 Bxc5 19. Nxd5!

13. ... Nxe3 14. fxe3 b6

Stronger is 14. ... Nc6, followed by ... b7-b6 or in some cases ... f7-f6.

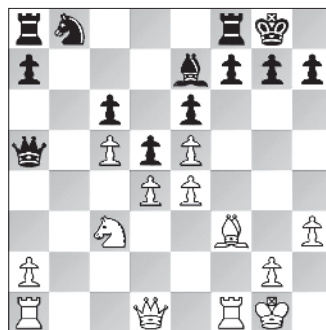
15. e4!

Increasing the tension while Black's queenside is still undeveloped.

15. ... c6 16. b4 bxc5!?

Fischer avoids 16. ... a5 17. a3 axb4 18. axb4 Rxa1 19. Qxa1, which leaves Black with a tenable but prospectless position.

17. bxc5 Qa5 18. Nxd5!?



This sound move greatly complicates the position.

However, the strongest move was 18. Qe1!, creating the threat of Nc3xd5. After 18. ... Qb4 19. Rd1 Na6 20. exd5 cxd5 21. Bh5 Nc7 22. Kh2 Black's position is difficult.



18. ... Bg5!

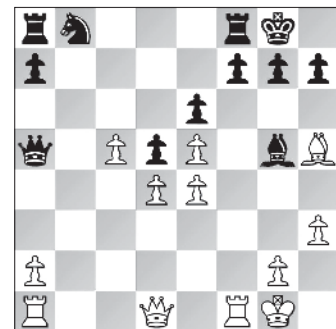
According to the sacrifice is too dangerous; Kasparov gives 18. ... exd5 19. exd5 Bg5 20. Kh1! (but not 20. d6? Be3+ 21. Kh1 Qc3) 20. ... Na6 21. d6 and the pawns are simply too strong.

19. Bh5

According to Kasparov, 19. Qd3 was better, missing that after 19. ... exd5 20. exd5 Na6 21. d6 Nxc5 22. dxc5 Qxc5+ 23. Kh1 Black can hold with 23. ... Rae8! (incorrect is 23. ... Qxe5? 24. Bxc6 Rab8 25. Rae1 Qc5 26. Bd5 and with two rooks on the board, White's attack is overpowering) 24. Rae1 Rxe5 25. Rxe5 Qxe5 26. Bxc6 g6! 27. d7 Bd8.

19. ... cxd5

There was no choice, as after 19. ... g6 White has 20. Nf6+.



20. Bxf7+

20. exd5! is also very interesting. Here the paths diverge, and Black has a number of reasonable moves to consider.

(a) 20. ... Na6? allows 21. Qg4!! Be3+ 22. Kh1 Qc3 23. Rad1 and it transpires that Black does not have a good move: 23. ... exd5 loses to 24. Bxf7+ Rxf7 25. Rxf7 Kxf7 26. Qd7+. In contrast, 21. Bxf7+ Rxf7 22. Rxf7 Kxf7 23. Qh5+ Kg8 24. Qxg5 exd5 25. e6 Qd8! (missed by Kasparov) 26. e7 Qd7 allows Black to survive.

(b) 20. ... exd5 21. Bxf7+ Rxf7 22. Rxf7 and now:

(b1) 22. ... Qd2 23. Rc7 Na6 24. Rd7 Be3+ 25. Kh1 Qxd4 26. Rxd5 (curiously, Kasparov does not comment on this move) 26. ... Qxd1+ 27. Raxd1 and White has some winning chances, since 27. ... Nxc5? loses immediately to 28. e6!.

(b2) 22. ... Qc3? is bad due to 23. Rb1! Nc6 24. Rbb7 Bh6 25. Kh1 Nxd4 (or 25. ... Qxd4 26. Qxd4 Nxd4 27. g4) 26. c6!.

(c) The counterattacking 20. ... Qc3!! was best, and after 21. dxe6 Nc6! 22. exf7+ Kh8 23. Bf3! Rxf7! 24. Bxc6 Rxf1+ 25. Kxf1!? Rb8. White is up three pawns but has great difficulties in consolidating his advantage, e.g., 26. Kg1 Rb4.

20. ... Rxf7 21. Rxf7 Qd2!

The most human move, forcing the trade of queens. 21. ... Nc6! is very complicated, but appears to hold as well, while 21. ... Be3? loses after 22. Kh2 Kxf7 23. Qh5+.

22. Qxd2 Bxd2 23. Raf1 Nc6 24. exd5

After 24. Rc7!? Black can only save the day with 24. ... dxe4!! (originally noted by Olafsson) 25. Rxc6 (or 25. Rff7 e3 26. Rxc7+ Kh8 [26. ... Kf8 can transpose] 27. Rxh7+ Kg8 28. Rcg7+ Kf8 29. Rg4 e2 30. Re4 Kg8! 31. Rxe2 Be3+! 32. Rxe3 Kxh7 33. Rd3 Nb4 and the knight makes its way to d5) 25. ... e3 26. Rxe6 (26. Rb1 Rf8!) 26. ... e2 27. Kf2 exf1=Q+ 28. Kxf1 Rd8! and Kasparov analyzes this complex endgame to equality.

24. ... exd5 25. Rd7 Be3+ 26. Kh1 Bxd4 27. e6 Be5!



Slowly, the position clarifies and the result becomes clear.

28. Rxd5 Re8 29. Re1 Rxe6 30. Rd6 Kf7! 31. Rxc6 Rxc6 32. Rxe5 Kf6 33. Rd5 Ke6 34. Rh5 h6 35. Kh2 Ra6 36. c6 Rxc6 37. Ra5 a6 38. Kg3 Kf6 39. Kf3 Rc3+ 40. Kf2 Rc2+, draw.

The 20th game was drawn after haphazard play by both sides.

The 21st game was the last of the match. Fischer played the Taimanov Sicilian and equalized effortlessly. Spassky played weakly and was soon fighting desperately in an Exchange-down endgame. He was unable to save it.

Spassky resigned by telephone after the adjournment. Bobby Fischer was now the world chess champion. He won with a score

of 12½-8½, a resounding result given that he started with two losses. But more than that, he ended 30 years of Soviet dominance in world chess. The static nature of top-level chess was gone — all of a sudden, the general public had an interest in who won! Fischer showed that a single person working almost entirely by himself could become the world champion. In the short-term, his victory surged enthusiasm for the game in America — *Chess Life & Review* reported that membership nearly tripled between 1969 and 1972.

For a brief moment in history, chess was on the front pages — even news such as the Watergate scandal was considered secondary to Fischer’s win. This boom did not last long, but Fischer’s influence endures to this day. Some of his attributes — his striking will to win, for example — have become central stylistic components of many American players after him. He was not a prolific writer, but his main work — *My 60 Memorable Games* — has been a favorite book of many players, myself included.

After such a triumph, Bobby Fischer’s story, as we all know, takes darker and darker turns. Fischer never defended his title. As a person, he was (putting it mildly) enigmatic and difficult, which further complicates his legacy. But Fischer the chess player will always be firmly engraved in our chess history for his unparalleled play and accomplishments.

And I think that this is right. ♠

WHO WAS LEROY NEIMAN?

LEROY NEIMAN (1921-2012) WAS ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN painters in twentieth-century America, famous for his vibrant renditions of sporting events like boxing, horse racing, and Super Bowls. Neiman’s fame grew due to his camera-friendly persona and style, with television work for ABC’s Wide World of Sports and multiple Olympics. Regular readers of *Playboy* magazine will certainly remember his illustrations in those pages.

Neiman’s sketches of the 1972 Fischer – Spassky match were done on assignment for ABC, partially as a consequence of Fischer’s continual complaints regarding the sounds made by television cameras. It was for this reason that ABC’s Roone Arledge summoned Neiman to Iceland, and the sketches you see in this issue are part of the work he produced there.

In his autobiography, Neiman explains that Fischer’s legendary sensitivity to noise was not restricted to audio-visual equipment. After beginning to sketch with a radiograph, Neiman saw Fischer sit “bolt upright,” and glare in his direction. The scratching of the pen was too much for Bobby to endure.

So Neiman turned to a felt-tip marker — a silent instrument, but one with an odor that Fischer instantly noted with disdain.

Only when Neiman resorted to a soft graphite pencil was Fischer appeased, leaving Neiman to document the games and goings-on in his trademark style.

We would like to thank the LeRoy Neiman and Janet Byrne Neiman Foundation (leroyneimanfoundation.org) for allowing us to reproduce these fascinating mementos of the match.



PHOTO: COURTESY LEROY NEIMAN FOUNDATION

Saidy on **Fischer versus Spassky**



INTERNATIONAL MASTER ANTHONY SAIDY is an eight-time U.S. Championship participant, and the author of *The March of Chess Ideas* and other notable works. Prior to the match, Saidy accommodated Fischer at his family home in Long Island and was instrumental in convincing Fischer to play.

Chess Life: A lot of turmoil preceded the match, in much of which Fischer was involved directly. How was he able to prepare so well for the match, in spite of all this? What was the extent of the help he received? How focused was he on chess in the days before the match, when he stayed in your Long Island home?

From his departure from Los Angeles with me to his departure from New York to Iceland, I did not see him with a chessboard. We did play one game in the air over the continent, but it was blindfold. He mated me, but later I discovered that he'd made an illegal move — when it was too late to forfeit him! I have a score. I do not think he analyzed with anyone before this match or during the Candidates matches.

Several things happened just before the

match — the call from Kissinger, and the doubling of the prize fund by Slater. What ultimately convinced Fischer to play? Would he have decided to play last-minute even without the added monetary incentive?

He was a deeply ambivalent person and unpredictable from hour to hour. Slater shamed him into cooperating. He told Kissinger he had decided to play.

Though many rated his chances favorably before the match, Spassky collapsed in the early stages. In your opinion, what was the main cause of Spassky's defeat?

Fischer's antics were not intended to discombobulate Spassky, but they did. A great sportsman, Spassky also withstood horrendous pressure to go home in triumph after the forfeit.

Karpov once wrote that Fischer forfeited game two deliberately in "a stroke tailor-made for Spassky." You've said above (and previously) that Fischer did not want to disturb Spassky intentionally. To what extent do you think he was aware of how his demands affected Spassky psychologically?

He did develop a bit of empathy, which made him write Spassky an abject apology. Karpov's notion is typical Soviet nonsense.

It's probably not possible to conduct an interview about the match without asking this question: Why did Fischer take on h2 in game one?! Krogus opined that this was an attempt to show Spassky that Fischer was willing to fight in literally any position. Do you agree?

Immediately, he called himself a "fish." Problem one: he played out drawn positions too long. Problem two: he underestimated Spassky and thought he'd left a pawn *en prise*. Problem three: he failed to calculate.

You've said that Fischer's true reason for avoiding a match with Karpov in 1975 was that Fischer inwardly feared losing. Do you think he would have played if all of his conditions had been met?

The 1972 match was a near-miracle, because every one of 20 factors broke the right way. Flip a coin 20 times and try to get 20 heads. Compare Morphy, who turned away from chess after conquering Europe and would not touch the game again. My answer is no.

In the short-term, what was the effect of Fischer's victory on conditions for top American players such as yourself? How long did the Fischer boom last?

Chess did not become a viable profession for the rest of us. Ed Edmondson of the USCF sent me to play in Europe for a couple of years, I think to repay me for my trouble with Bobby. I beat some GMs but could not achieve the title (which was *way* harder then). I faced the music: chess could not be my profession. My coming memoir, *I Coulda Been a Contender*, will take a light-hearted look at my erratic career. Shelby Lyman of TV fame got a column and students out of it. Bill Lombardy wrote about seconding Fischer in the popular press and his reward was ostracism from Bobby. Any American who lived from chess before recent decades did so from hand to mouth.

Fischer versus Spassky was quickly labeled as "The Match of the Century." Has any event surpassed it since?

The Cold War political aspect made it unique, not the quality of the games. Publicity in this country was unprecedented. Bobby was even promised a White House visit, which did not materialize. In recent years, I tried to stir up press interest in our gold-medal U.S. Olympic team and in the title match involving Caruana. Editors did not even return my calls.

In your opinion, how did the match compare to others world championships of the time in terms of chess quality?

The quality was spotty. For example, Botvinnik raved about the 13th game. Game six was beautiful. But there were blunders.

In your November 1972 *Chess Life & Review* article, you spoke of a "new era in American chess" thanks to Fischer. Half a century later, what do you see as Fischer's legacy?

It was wishful thinking. His chief legacy was to model the triumph of an individual over a vast bureaucratic machine. Many top players have thanked him for bringing real money into championship chess. The incomparable genius Mikhail Tal once said, "Fischer is the greatest genius to descend from the chess heavens." ♠