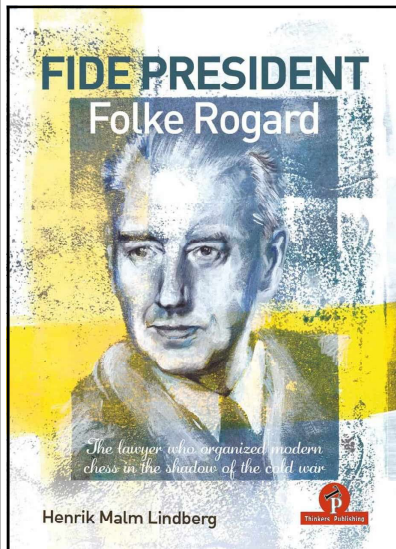


FIDE PRESIDENT: Folke Rogard, The Lawyer who Organized Modern Chess in the Shadow of the Cold War

Henrik Malm Lindberg, Thinkers Publishing, 2024, 336 pp., \$56.00 Hardcover

Reviewed by Mark Capron



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that shaped the trajectory of modern international chess. Lindberg succeeds in balancing a thorough historical analysis with a captivating narrative, offering readers a deep dive into the complexities of Rogard's leadership.

The Cold War started shortly after World War II ended, and was in full force by the time Rogard took over in 1949. Even though Rogard consistently stated that chess and politics were not compatible and should be kept separate, he had to realize that during his reign (Cold War) they were intricately coupled. The book offers a detailed examination of the tensions that Rogard navigated, particularly the conflicts between the Soviet chess machine and Western players. "Rogard was determined to put FIDE in charge of world chess, organise it efficiently, and use international chess tournaments and congresses to promote international brotherhood and peaceful relations among people of various creeds, races, and political beliefs."

Lindberg's book is more of an account of how Rogard dealt with chess matters that came up during the cold war than a strict biography. There is still some basic biographical information one would expect in a normal biography. No games or crosstables will be found in the book.

Rogard was born July 6, 1899, in Hedvig Eleonora parish in Stockholm, Sweden to Lilly and Cornelius Rosengren. He changed his last name to Rogard later in life, most likely due to having multiple lawyers with the same name in town, but there were several other stories or rumors documented in the book.

Folke's favorite subject in primary school was math and thus problem solving. He and his brother Gösta played tennis competitively. He started to play chess at the age of ten. He played his first chess tournament when he was 16 and came in 2nd in the second class.

In a time when few women could own a business, let alone property, his mother, Lilly, was an entrepreneur and ran a company called Stockholm's Uthynings (Stockholm's Rental Agency). This was very successful for quite a while, but in the mid-1920s the business went bankrupt, and so did Lilly and Cornelius.

Rogard went to law school at Stockholm University. During school he did his military service and was placed as an expedition assistant in the supply department of the Stockholm regiment, Royal Gota Lifeguard. In one of his first chess organizational feats, he initiated the Chess Club at Stockholm University. He graduated from university in 1922 with the highest grade, "pass with excellent distinction." By July 1924 he was appointed district judge, which was the highest step on the career ladder.

Rogard was married many times and had multiple children and stepchildren.

The book features footnotes at the bottom of each page. Most are references, but a few expound with more detail. The paper is of a reasonable weight and the font is easy to read. However, I would have printed it a bit darker. Had they done this, they would most likely have had to use heavier paper, because there is some bleed-through on the large, bold chapter numbers. At times, the timeline becomes a bit blurred as the author recounts events in an unusual order. The book contains many nice photographs, some pretty rare.

In November of 1939 Rogard became chairman for the Stockholm Chess Federation after Ludvig Collijn passed. He was voted in unanimously.

In 1940 Rogard was elected to the board of the Swedish chess federation and by 1941 he became vice-chairman.

Rogard might never have made it to FIDE in the first place. In 1942 he was representing the Swedish Chess Federation when Germany tried to institute the European Chess Federation to replace FIDE. It was really a political push from Germany. The regular clubs in Sweden didn't want to

join, but Rogard and Erik Olson still voted yes. They did this to help get Gösta Stolz and Erik Lundin into more international chess events. Later, a group back in Sweden formed to remove Rogard, but it was not successful. So Rogard remained vice-chairman and at least for a while Sweden was on board with the ECF. Stolz and Lundin did get more invitations, but the ECF was short-lived, and Sweden pulled its support even before the ECF collapsed due to minimal support and no trust in the German regime.

Rogard was a very successful lawyer, having several high-profile cases over the years. For example, he represented the Ford Motor company in Sweden, and he defended Ingrid Bergman in a custody battle. The latter case set new precedent in international family law. Rogard's background in law helped him mediate between conflicting interests in the backrooms of the chess bureaucracy. His commitment to fairness in the governance of chess was clear, even though he faced numerous political mines.

Rogard's rise continued and he became the FIDE delegate and president of the Nordic Chess Federation in 1947.

The organization and running of the 1948 Saltsjöbaden Interzonal, was the lynchpin that pushed Rogard into position to take over FIDE. The praise for Rogard's arrangements was widespread in the press. This was the first mega-tournament after the end of World War II that was organized by the Swedish Chess Federation. It was the brainchild of Rogard and the beginning of an infrastructure that would become the qualifying path to the world championship.

In Paris, on September 24, 1949, Rogard became FIDE president, replacing Alexander Rueb.

One of the huge obstacles Rogard continuously had to deal with was FIDE member federations not paying their fees on time or even at all. Some organizations like the USCF, consistently had no money to support players' travel expenses. Rogard worked with many Maecenas to get around this and much of what he accomplished may never have happened, if it wasn't for opening his own wallet.

The USCF had words with FIDE (Rogard) over the 1950 Budapest candidate's tournament that had no westerners in it. To help appease the USCF, Rogard tried, unsuccessfully, to get a match for Reshevsky with one of the Soviets: Botvinnik, Smyslov, or Bronstein. It came down to no funds to send Reshevsky overseas, and the Soviets refusing to come to America due to mandatory fingerprinting. Fingerprinting was considered an insult in the USSR.

Rogard spent significant time at the various countries' embassies to discuss topics that were needed to make things move forward. Many times, this was about getting visas cleared, so players could travel into the country.

Rogard oversaw the implementation of the Elo rating system. Interestingly, it took a long time before being officially realized. As early as the 1950s countries like Great Britain and Yugoslavia began to use numerical ranking systems. By 1960 the USCF was using the rating system developed by Kenneth Harkness. Around this time Arpad Elo's work was reviewed by Max Euwe and Euwe suggested it to Rogard. Rogard liked it, but it took until 1965 before it was officially discussed at the Wiesbaden Congress. It was then more formally discussed in Havana in 1966. Elo, with the help of Fred Cramer (USCF), started to do rating calculations for players and soon it was obvious that a fair rating system was paramount to the international chess arena. Finally, in 1970 at the Siegen Congress, the Elo system was officially adopted.

In conclusion, *FIDE President Folke Rogard* is an outstanding work that offers an engaging account of a key figure in chess history. The author doesn't just recount the facts; he situates Rogard's decisions against the backdrop of the global political climate and the ever-evolving chess scene. Rogard's diplomatic skills and ability to navigate the complex, often ideologically charged environment were instrumental in the survival and development of international chess. As a result, *FIDE President Folke Rogard* becomes more than just a biography—it is a window into the political intricacies and challenges of managing a global sport in a divided world. Whether you are a chess historian, a player, tournament organizer or simply someone interested in the politics of sports, this book offers a compelling story. Highly recommended, **5/5 stars**.

