

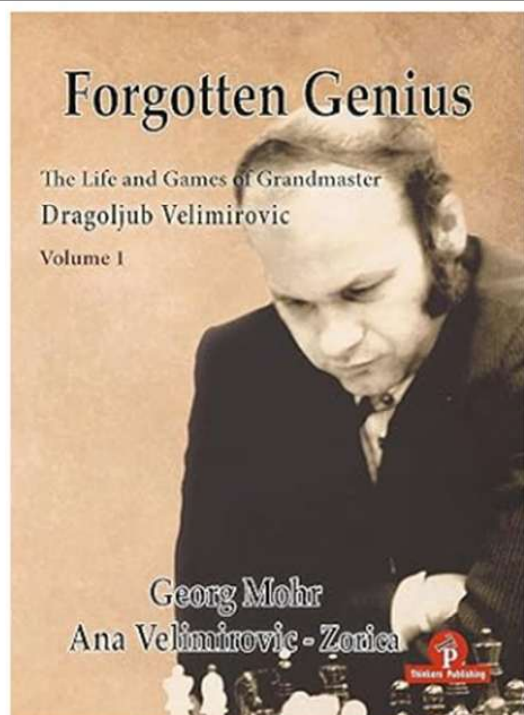
Forgotten Genius: The Life and Times of Grandmaster Dragoljub Velimirovic

By Georg Mohr & Ana Velimirovic-Zorica

Thinkers Publishing: 2024, [Two Volumes](#)

Reviewed by ICCF GM Jon Edwards

32nd World Correspondence Chess Champion



Kindly imagine an era in which excellence in chess was guided not by engines, databases, and technical prowess but rather by inspiration, creativity, and dedication. We sometimes dismiss the Grandmasters of the past because their chess ideas do not pass muster with modern engines, and because their repertoires contain choices that are sub-optimal by our modern, neural net-influenced standards. We are so busy adopting to a modern age that we might be forgiven for forgetting about the geniuses who inspired our chess past.

The chess author of these two volumes, Slovenian GM Georg Mohr, was born in 1965, a generation behind Velimirovic. He reached an agreement with Thinkers Publishing to commence a series on the Forgotten Geniuses of chess. His first book in the series (co-authored with GM Adrian Mikhalchishin) explored the career of Alvin Planinc (Forgotten Genius - The Life and Games of Grandmaster Alvin Planinc, Thinkers Publishing: 2021) is well worth a place in your chess library.

Velimirovic is the subject of the second part of this series, in this case a remarkable and pleasantly well-written, two-volume tome. Here, he is joined by a different co-author, Ana Velimirovic-Zorica, who emerged unexpectedly midway through the project with cartons of games personally and comprehensively annotated by her father, as well as photos and car-

toons that now appropriately personalize these two volumes. In total, Velimirovic had annotated 316 of his games, but died before publishing the material.

These games and Ana's observations form a lasting tribute to her father, who left her "with beautiful memories." The material she provides is so rich that it became possible, through Velimirovic's own thoughts, to reveal the thinking behind the development of his opening ideas and his very distinct, very aggressive approach to the game.

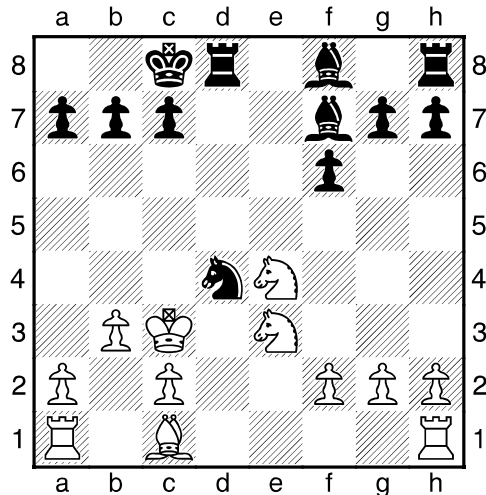
Perhaps "forgotten" to modern fans of the game, GM Drasko Velimirovic (1942-2014), the "Gazda" (Boss), was an inspiration to many of us growing up with chess. His is a career worth remembering, an attacking style reminiscent of Tal, his commitment to complex chess, his numerous tournament triumphs, and his extraordinary theoretical contributions to our opening repertoires. Add in his coaching of many future Grandmasters and his wonderful anecdotes and you wind up with a chess legend whose story demands to be told and remembered.

Volume 1 focuses upon his chess life and career from 1958, his late start in tournament chess, through to his victory at Novi Sad in 1975, the strong 30th National Championship of Yugoslavia.

Volume 2 picks up the story in 1976, and reviews Velimirovic's chess through to his last tournament in 2011. Infrastructurally speaking, these are solidly constructed books. I obtained the hard cover editions which I wholeheartedly recommend, if readers can afford the extra few dollars, because they make it much easier to read while reviewing the games on ChessBase.

There are so many highlights. Frankly, readers should read the wonderful stories themselves. I was well bemused by the Tunisian bear at the Sousse Olympiad chasing **Svetozar** Gligoric, who managed to escape by flinging himself into the ocean only to ruin his only clothes, an airline having lost his luggage.

But you are here for the chess, so here is a taste from his schoolboy days.

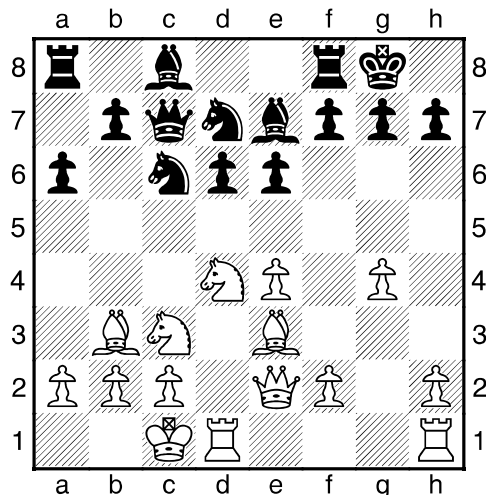


Kosanski-Velimirovic, Pristina, 1060

From one of Velimirovic's early games, saved from his "dusty old notebooks" and thereby shared for the first time. White resigned after 14...f5 because the knight retreats, such as 15.g5, meet up with 15...b5+ 16.b2 a3 17.b1 c3#.

It's always fun to see games that have never appeared in any printed source or database, but the lasting contribution of this book, for me at least, is how well it reveals Velimirovic's development of the Sozin variation that will forever carry his name. Volume 1 contains six games in the Velimirovic Attack, well highlighted by this note in his 1971 game against Vladimir Bukal:

1.e4 c5 2.f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.fxd4 f6 5.c3 c6 6.c4 e6 7.e3 e7 8.e2 a6 9.0-0 c7 10.b3 0-0 11.g4 d7



"It's this critical position that prompted Bobby to call me into the room in Palma de Mallorca, where he chose the

bad 12.h4? against Larsen and gave Black the initiative on the queenside. I immediately showed Fischer, without hiding anything, the move 12.f5. He just smiled. A sequel followed a few months later. Gligoric came back from a tournament in New York and immediately looked for me. 'Come quickly so that we can reanalyze your 12.f5 together!' Fischer informs you that the sacrifice is completely correct!"

Of course, Velimirovic's opponent in this game could not have known any of this."

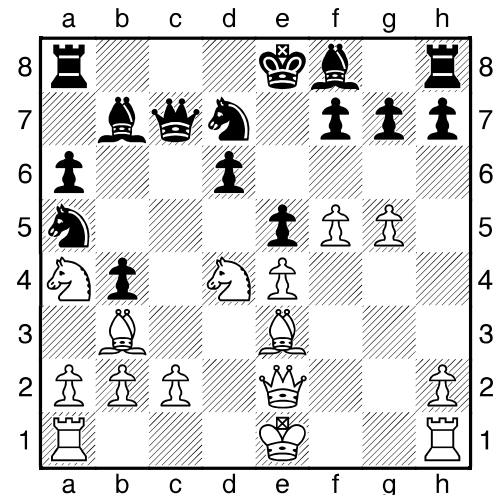
The game continued: 12.f5 exf5 13.d3 d8 14.gxf5 with a very well annotated win ahead. For those of you who care, modern neural nets also find and approve of 12.f5!

You will forgive me please for continuing to focus here upon games in both volumes that involved the Velimirovic Attack.

Velimirovic – Ivanovic [B89]

Budva, 1981

1.e4 c5 2.f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.fxd4 f6 5.c3 d6 6.c4 e6 7.e3 a6 8.e2 c7 9.b3 a5 10.g4 b5 11.g5 d7 12.f4 b4 13.a4 b7 14.f5 e5



15.f7+

"This sacrifice was prepared by Velimirovic! Modern analysis shows that not everything is completely correct, but we will see how quickly Black can become confused and how difficult it is to defend such positions over the board. On paper, you stand better, but everything is conditioned by a series of individual moves, and any mistake leads to defeat. And since humans are not computers (yet), such mistakes never disappear entirely. The computer suggests two other interesting sacrifices, 15.e6!? fxe6 16.fxe6 c5 with some classic Velimirovic compensation, and even 15.g6, when White sacrifices the d4-knight again in a different way."

15...♟f7 16.♞h5+ ♟g8 17.f6 g6 18.♞h3 ♞c4 19.♜e6 ♜xe4
20.♞f1 ♟f7

Modern engines find 20...♜f5 21.♞xf5 gxf5 22.♞xf5 ♞h4+
23.♜f2 ♞h5, but that's a lot to expect of a human playing
over-the-board.

21.♜g7 ♜f5 22.♞xf5 gxf5 23.♞xf5 ♞d8 24.b3 ♞d5 25.♞d1
♞h1+ 26.♟d2 ♞xh2+ 27.♟c1 ♜xg7 28.♞xd6 ♜f8 29.g6+ 1-0

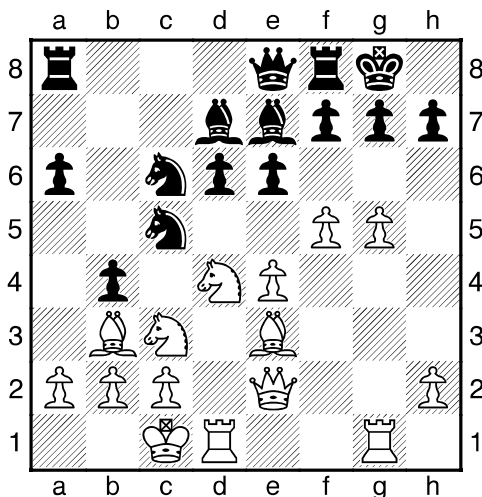
And, while I am tempted simply to soak up pages in this
review by replicating all the book's fun annotations, I will
constrain myself to one more example:

Velimirovic - Vuckovic, B
Belgrade, 2000

1.e4 c5 2.♜f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 ♜f6 5.♜c3 ♜c6 6.♜c4 e6
7.♜e3 ♜e7 8.♜b3 0-0 9.♞e2 a6 10.0-0 ♞e8 11.♞hg1 ♜d7
12.g4 ♜c5 13.g5 ♜d7 14.f4

Correctly avoiding 14.♞h5 ♜xd4 15.♜xd4 ♜xb3+ 16.axb3 f5!

14...b5 15.f5 b4



16.f6 bxc3 17.♞h5!

"Velimirovic keeps the game at a high level of tension. It
did not even occur to him to take on g7 or e7, whereupon
his game would gain clarity but offer Black a break to close
his ranks in defense.

"The power of the white pawn on f6 is incredible, because
with it White cuts off the black pieces that cannot defend
themselves. The material is no longer important at all
(Lubomir Ftacnik)"

The game continues, interspersed with Velimirovic's own
notes taken from those newly discovered dusty old boxes.

17...cxb2+ 18.♟xb2 ♜xe4 19.♞df1 ♞d8 20.fxg7 ♞a5 21.♜xc6

"I could have chosen 21.♞f3 but in the upcoming time
crunch, did not notice the wonderful 21...♞e5 (21...♟g7
22.♞f3 +-) 22.gxf8(♞) ♞f8 23.♞f5!!, when Black would lose
control over the fifth rank and the break-through of the g-
pawn would decide. For example, 23 ♞g7 24.♞f7! ♞xf7
25.g5! hxg6 26.♞xg6 or 23...exf5 24.g6 with checkmate"

21...♜xc6 22.♜d4 ♞d2 23.gxf8♞+ ♞xf8 24.♞d1 ♞a5 25.♞h6

These are the sorts of annotations that permeate both vol-
umes and make them a lengthy, very fun read. At this
stage of my advancing chess book collecting, shelf space
is at a premium. I have made it a priority to find room for
these two volumes.

***** Continued from Page 24 *****

Morphy's aversion to mix money and chess further re-
moved him from the game that had brought him so much
fame. It seemed everyone wanted to talk chess, and he
struggled in his attempts to be "normal."

The Civil War took its toll on the Morphy family, and they
ended up fleeing to Paris until the war was over. While in
Paris Morphy avoided most chess situations. After coming
back to New Orleans, he tried to practice law, but it just
never worked out.

"His growing morbidity, extreme sensitivity and increasing
suspiciousness of those around him culminated in an im-
balance that deprived him of practically all company ex-
cept that of his immediate family." p.348. Morphy died on
July 10, 1884 from "congestion of the brain [stroke]" while
taking a midday bath.

The second to last chapter details Morphy's mental illness
(deterioration) from the perspective of the author's profes-
sional opinion. Using modern diagnostic tools, Herten says
quite a bit about Morphy's illness. Evaluating the origins
and symptoms that became apparent. "Paul Morphy's life
reads like the most pathetic of Greek tragedies, and it is
certainly tempting to view his illness as the culmination of
an astounding fall from grace." p.357. This chapter is ex-
tremely enlightening, and I won't divulge its secrets. I leave
that to you the reader to uncover for yourselves.

The book paints a well-rounded portrait of Morphy—not
just as a chess prodigy, but as a complex individual, navi-
gating the pressures of fame amid his personal struggles
and mental deterioration. The only negative comment I
have about the book is that I wish it were longer! It is a
must have for Morphy fans and any student of the game.
Highly recommended. **5/5 Stars.**