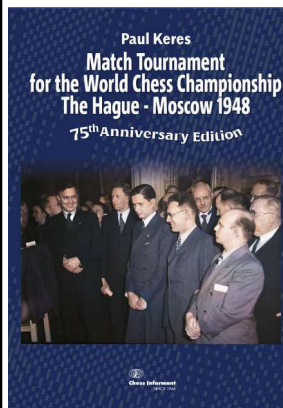


## Keres, Keres, Keres...

Book Review by Pete Tamburro, Senior Editor, *American Chess Magazine*

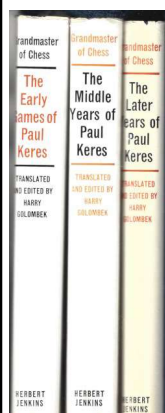
At *American Chess Magazine*, we have an award-winning book review guy in Carsten Hansen, who does ten really concise and helpful reviews every issue, which is a great service to our readers in a world awash with chess books.



It's been a while since I've written a review. I used to do quite a few for *Chess Life*, some going for four pages. So, when our esteemed *The Chess Journalist* editor asked me if I would do a review of the 75th Anniversary Edition of Paul Keres' [Match Tournament for the World Chess Championship The Hague—Moscow 1948](#), the old feelings stirred, especially since it was Keres. I'm a big fan of his play and writings (remember his column in *Chess Life*?).



There was another reason as well. For many years, I had, as did everybody else in the US and UK, relied on Sir Harry Golombek's [The World Chess Championship 1948](#) (Bell, London, 1949). It is a magnificent production: pages neatly and tightly laid out with appropriate diagramming, background biographies of all the players and their tournament and match records, insightful personal commentaries by Golombek in both the bios and at the beginning of each round's summaries, the theory of the openings section, the two-page intros to each round, opening index and who v. who index, and some very good photos. It was all you could ask for in a tournament book. Golombek could write so well, and his notes were very good and instructive for the average player.



I knew Keres had written a book on the tournament years ago, but the only annotations on the 1948 tournament I could get were in that [legendary three volume](#) translated collection of games of Keres written by Keres himself and published in 1964. It was edited and translated by Golombek, whose command of the English language still makes it a superb presentation of Keres thoughts. Unfortunately, the reader only got a taste of the '48 match-tournament as there were only three games in this set from that event. Back then, you couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to read a book by Keres with all the games annotated by him.



In 2016, Verendel publishers put out [World Chess Championship 1948](#). Were they intentionally getting a jump on 2023 and the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. I don't know and I didn't care. Finally, the whole book in Keres words!

There was background on the tournament, historical tournament and match results, an opening theory section and opening index, a

breakdown of the match-ups and it was in hardcover, as with the Golombek book, but it lacked some of the items mentioned above that Golombek had. Golombek is superior in getting you involved in the human interest in the event.

In 2023, Chess Informant has come out with their version cited above. I dutifully went through it and figured I would compare and contrast it with the prior two. It was at this point that I had to keep muttering, "Keres, Keres, Keres..." to myself to remind this reviewer that Keres' notes are the point of the book. They are so good. You can split hairs on which translation is better, but it is of little importance.

One other great feature of the book is that they came up with previously untranslated Soviet era commentary both before and after the match. It is historically fascinating.

Unfortunately, the Informant book didn't have much of the extra stuff that Golombek had: no real bios, no substantial round by round commentary with its accompanying drama and interpretations, no theory section. Still, the notes: Keres, Keres, Keres. You can't go wrong! With due apologies to Golombek, Keres' notes are terrific.

If you're a chess bibliophile or chess historian, then go look for the Golombek book on [vialibri.net](#). If not, then you will enjoy the Informant book because of "you know who" and you may develop an interest in that period of chess history due to the translations of the Soviet documents. You can't go wrong with the Verendel book either. You get Keres and a little bit more. It's a very handsome book as well.

That brings me to two final points, or curiosities, if you will. The number of pages devoted to notes on the games is about 135. The Informant edition has 214. The Verendel edition has 500 pages! Oh, my how these publishers just love white space! If you're a Rubinstein fan, you will find the same white space presentation in their new book on the great Akiba. There are 14 pages devoted to just the first games' notes vs. 6 pages in the Informant book. I have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, the white space edition is quite nicely presented while the Informant is a little, but not much, crowded. The Golombek book seemed ideal to me—a bit of a compromise. Also, aren't 500 pages going to cost more? Yup! The Verendel book is \$40, while Informant's book is \$30. That's a significant difference.

My last gripe is with all three of them. It's a small one, but considering my love and study of chess history, they all left one aspect out: Ruben Fine and Miguel Najdorf. The Fine story is especially interesting because if you read old *Chess Reviews* from that era, you'll see his reasons and the substantial commentary about his non-participation. I listened to Fine explain it in the 1970s at the Toms River Chess Club in NJ, and he had changed his story a bit! And poor Miguel—he didn't have the necessary influential support. The American angle gets left out. For completeness, perhaps, it would have dotted the i's and crossed the t's of this historical episode. BUT REMEMBER: Keres, Keres, Keres. Get one. Get them all! Above all enjoy and learn from the notes.

# Keres left a lasting legacy in those notes and that is the overriding point of all of this.

## Example pages from Golombek's book:

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**ROUND 16, April 22nd**

White	Black	Opening	Moves
Keres (4½)	Dr. Ewe (3)	Ruy Lopez, Morphy Defence	34
Botvinnik (4½)	Smyslov (4½)	Q.G.D., Slav Defence	41

Botvinnik had the bye.

Dr. Ewe's form touched its lowest level in this round. He played his favourite open defence against Keres's Ruy Lopez, a variation with which he has had success in the past and one of which, until this tournament, he had been generally recognized as the chief authority. But Keres, instead of following the usual book line, sprung an innovation on his opponent on the 12th move that was exceedingly strong. Dr. Ewe, as though smothered by being taken out of normal paths, defended most indifferently, and soon got into a deplorable position. He hastened the end by a sheer blunder that allowed Keres to fork his Queen and Rook with a Knight, but the game was in any case already past saving. Rarely can a grand player have been so much a victim of his own carelessness as was evidenced by Dr. Ewe's play in this game.

The other two players produced a game of higher quality. For a brief while it followed their Sixth Round encounter, but then Botvinnik chose a much safer and better line than the dangerous continuation he had tried before. He played the early middle game energetically—over-energetically, in fact—since in an attempt to win a Pawn he prematurely broke open the central position. He K-side Pawn formation. Eventually the serious return of the Pawn was forced, and Smyslov, playing safely with numerous threats on his opponent's somewhat compromised game, appeared well to the way of victory.

Now Botvinnik's resourcefulness was seen at its best, for by a series of ingenious moves he thwarted all Smyslov's attempts to win and finally equalized the position. After numerous exchanges, a drawn King and Pawn end game resulted.

The mainline which Smyslov conducted this difficult game shows how his play was improving by leaps and bounds throughout the Moscow series. Perhaps, being the youngest player, he was not tired of stamina to call upon than the other competitors, with the result that he was never swayed in fresh ideas, whilst his opponents (excepting Botvinnik) were becoming stale and tournament-weary.

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a system of play costs much time, and it is a very rare occasion indeed when one finds him with any time to spare on his clock. He is, however, one of the world's best lightning players, and as a rule is able to find the best move with only seconds to spare.

On the whole, his results in this tournament were a little disappointing. It is true that he played some fine games and was the only master ever to appear really dangerous against Botvinnik. But, in view of his potential capabilities, one feels he should have run the World Championship close. Lack of practice and inadequate preparation were no doubt factors in his comparative lack of success. But the chief reason lies deeper. Normally, self-confidence is his greatest asset. Here, the knowledge that he could never be so much better served and prepared in opening theory seems to have shaken this confidence, and once he was lost on time, he visibly flustered in critical situations, and once he was lost on time, what one wonders, would he have achieved with due preparation and practice? Certainly not! It is a pity that the author of the present writer that he would still not have been able to play a game better than winning the Championship. However, he could have been a very good second.

**TOURNAMENT RESULTS**

Rank	Name	Points	Score	Points lost
1922	New York	...	2nd	...
1924	Detroit	...	3rd	...
1927	Baltimore	...	4th	...
1931	Tulsa	...	5th	...
1932	Minneapolis	...	6th	...
1933	Pittsburgh	...	7th	...
1934	Chicago	...	8th	...
1935	St. Louis	...	9th	...
1936	San Francisco	...	10th	...
1937	Los Angeles	...	11th	...
1938	San Antonio	...	12th	...
1939	San Diego	...	13th	...
1940	San Jose	...	14th	...
1941	San Francisco	...	15th	...
1942	San Francisco	...	16th	...
1943	San Francisco	...	17th	...
1944	San Francisco	...	18th	...
1945	San Francisco	...	19th	...
1946	San Francisco	...	20th	...

Percentage, 73.14

**25 BIOGRAPHS OF THE PLAYERS**

**MATCHES**

White	Black	Score
1941 Harwitz	...	3-0
1942 Rabinovitch	...	2-1
...	...	9-2

Percentage, 62.50

**SMYSLOV**

Vasily Smyslov was born in Moscow on March 24th, 1921, and is the youngest competitor in the World Chess Championship Tournament. His father, who taught him to play chess at the age of six and a half, was himself a strong player (first category), and once beat Alkhine in a small tournament at St. Petersburg, 1912. It is to his father too that Smyslov initially owes his astonishing command of theory. He possessed a large chess library, and the young Smyslov studied the games of Lasker, Tartakower, Tarrasch, and above all Nimzovitch and Alkhine, with keen and fascinated interest. He also devoted much of his spare time to solving and even composing end-game studies. A better training for an incipient grand master cannot be imagined.

Smyslov cannot be regarded as a native genius, careless and carefree of all bookish knowledge, who attained mastery by the light of Nature. Naturally, he has remarkable gifts, but these were trained and cultivated by carefully directed study. And, indeed, the more I delve into the history of all chess masters, the more sceptical I become of the fantasy that proclaims some great players as natural born geniuses who never or hardly ever have devoted time to the study of books or articles on the game. My advice to the unwary is: "Beware of the player who says he knows little and cares little about theory. He generally turns out to have spent several weeks' hard secret work reading some of your published analyses."

Smyslov himself acknowledges his great debt to Nimzovitch's *My System* and to the games of Alkhine, and the student will note the two strains running through his games under the influence of these examples. Like Nimzovitch, he is fond of complicated, subtle maneuvers in the opening and early middle game, whilst the

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the weakness on Black's QH1. Since 9. P-B3 allows Black an excellent game and since, moreover, 9. Q-K2, at the very least, preserves White's initiative, the reader will realize the importance of this line.

However, the sting comes later. In Game No. 31, Dr. Ewe played 9. ... B-K2, but after 10. R-Q1, Castles (better 10. ... K1-R1), 11. P-B4, K1-P3; 12. B-P, White enjoyed a great advantage. The P-B4 maneuver was the theme of White's strategy in all the games played with this variation. When Black manages to avert this move, or when White omits to play it, Black's position is satisfactory on the other hand, when White does play it Black's game is practically indefensible.

In Game No. 36 Botvinnik improved on Dr. Ewe's move and played 9. ... K1-B4; 10. R-Q1, K1-B4; 11. R-P-K1, Q-B1, and now Keres played the subtle, over-subtle 12. B-K3, P-B3; 13. B-B4, B-QH4; 14. K1-B3, P-K4, when Black has good counter-chances after 15. B-K3, by the Pawn sacrifice, 15. ... Q-K2!

At the time the game was played, I felt that Keres's twelfth move was not convincing, and in the very next round Smyslov showed that White had a better move by the Hamelberld 12. P-B4; 13. B-K3, P-B3; 14. Q-K2, P-B3; 15. B-B4, B-QH4; 16. K1-B3, P-K4, when Black has good counter-chances after 15. B-K3, by the Pawn sacrifice, 15. ... Q-K2!

The close, or Telugu, variation of the Morphy Defence was not so illuminating or clearly dealt with, but there were some interesting refinements on previous theory.

Dr. Ewe introduced an improvement for Black in the 6. Q-K2 line (sometimes known as the World's Best) in Game No. 12. After 1. P-K4, P-K4; 2. K1-K3, K1-QB3; 3. B-K15, P-K15; 4. B-R4, K1-B3; 5. Castles, B-K2; 6. Q-K2, P-QH4; 7. B-K3, Castles, 8. P-B3, B-K2; 9. Q-K2, P-QH4; 10. K1-Q1, 11. K1-K1, Q-K1; 12. B-K3, he played 12. ... Q-Q3

## Example page from the 75th Anniversary book note the white space comparison:

ered one of the greatest experts in the chess world. His decision is psychologically justified, but from the objective point of view, it is a rather dangerous experiment, especially since White has found new methods of attack against the Open Variation, and since Black's blockade is expensively defended.

**6.44 B5 7. B3**

If White wishes to avoid the variation prepared by Black, desisting after 6. ... B-K2, sharp continuation 7. Q-B3 is the best Black 8. B2!

However, Black's strong own center continues him to repulse the opponent's attack, and then to gradually obtain a positional advantage.

**7.65 8. Q5**

Another possibility of avoiding the main lines in the ancient continuation 8. Q5 is to play 8. Q5, which gives Black 8. Q5, but White prefers to choose the main variation.

**8. A6**

Black's move 8. A6 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**9. B2**

Clarify the main advantage of this move which I have previously employed in my work. It is a move which is not so much a matter of tempo as it is a matter of space.

**10. A6**

Black's move 10. A6 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**11. B3**

Black's move 11. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**12. B3**

Black's move 12. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**13. B3**

Black's move 13. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**14. B3**

Black's move 14. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**15. B3**

Black's move 15. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**16. B3**

Black's move 16. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**17. B3**

Black's move 17. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**18. B3**

Black's move 18. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**19. B3**

Black's move 19. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

**20. B3**

Black's move 20. B3 is a long time ago, but it is still worth mentioning. It is a move which has been employed in the past, but it is not so common as it once was.

## A couple pictures of Paul Keres.



## Filling out your library

**PAUL KERES WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP 1948**

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