

At 100, New York 1924 still casts a spell

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With modern grandmasters routinely battling each other over the board multiple times every year, it may be hard for chess devotees today to conceive of the excitement generated by the great New York Tournament of 1924, held 100 years ago this year at the Almanac Hotel at 71st Street and Broadway.



Top players played far fewer games back in the day, and tournaments featuring the world's best were even rarer. Consider: For the top three finishers in New York — former world champion Emanuel Lasker, reigning world champion Jose Raul Capablanca and future world champion Alexander Alekhine — the 11-player double round-robin event was the only classical chess they played (aside from simulms and exhibitions) the entire year.

The play at the board for once justified the hype. The 56-year-old Lasker, dethroned by Capablanca just three years earlier, came out of semi-retirement with a performance for the ages, finishing a point and a half ahead of his great Cuban rival with an astonishing 16-4 score. Capablanca's one loss to Czech hypermodern star Richard Reti, his first loss at the board in some eight years, was considered so remarkable that it rated a front-page story in the next day's *New York Times*.

American champion Frank Marshall, who turned in a very credible fourth-place finish in the world-class field, took the second brilliancy prize (and a prize of \$50) for his smashing Round 18 win over Russia star Eim Bogoljubov, which many rate as the best attacking game in an event studded with beautiful games.

What starts as a kind of Trompowsky morphs into a QGD Cambridge Springs. Marshall as White gives up the bishop pair for some good pressure on the kingside, smoothly assembling a strong attacking array after 20. dxc5 Bxc5 21. Kh1 Re8 (Re8, bolstering the bishop, was a better way) 22. e4. White pounces when Black allows the game to open up to his opponent's advantage: 22... Bb4? (sougher was 22. dxc4 2.3 Nxc5 bxc6 24. Nxe4 Rxe4 25. Rxe4 Nxe4 26. Qxe4 g6, though White holds the edge after either 27. f5 or 27. Qxc6) 23. Nxc6 bxc6 24. e5! Ng4 25. Qh7+ KEB 26. g3! Qb6 27. Bf3, undeterred by Bogoljubov's threats against



Marshall-Bogoljubov after 32...Bd4

the White king. Marshall ignores the threats to his own pieces in a single-minded quest to run down the Black king: 29. Qh8+ Ke7 30. Qgg7! Kd8 (Bxe1?? leads to mate after 31. Qf6+ Kf8 32. Qxh6+ Kg8 [Ke7 33. Qd6 mate] 33. Bh7+ Kh8 34. Bg6+ and mate in a couple of more moves) 31. Qf6+ Re7 (Ke7 32. Na4 Qb5 33. Qxf7+ Kd8 34. Qd7 mate) 32. e6!, and Black's defense implodes.

White ignores another attack, this time on his queen, in the finale — 32...Bd4 (see diagram; on 32...fxc6 33. Rxe6 Qc5 [Bc5 34. Rxc6 Qb7 35. Qf8+ Re8 36. Rd6+ Bxd6 37. Qxd6+ Qd7 38. Qxd7 mate] 34. Qf8+ Kc7 35. Rxe7 and wins) 33. e5f7!, giving up one queen to get another. The end comes quickly for Black's decimated forces after 33...Bxf6 34. f8=Q+ Kc7 (Re8 35. Qd6 mate) 35. rxc7+ Bxe7 36. Qxa8 (the fireworks show is over and White emerges a piece and a pawn ahead) Kd6 37. Qh8 Qd8 38. Qe5+, and Black resigned as mate is coming on 38...Ke5 39. Na4+ Kb5 (Kc4 40. Qc3+ Kb5 41. Bd3+ Kxa4 42. Qc2 mate) 40. Qe2+ Kxa4 41. Bc2 mate.

Despite failing to keep pace with Lasker, Capablanca dealt the German his only loss of the event, an epic struggle that taxed the nerves and judgment of both players. Capablanca, known for the precision and fluidity of his play, makes several positional blunders here and even gets into a very rare bout of time trouble ahead of the first time control at Move 30. Lasker, perhaps the most ruthless realist the game has ever known, offers up a brilliant defense but then uncharacteristically overrates his chances to fatal effect.

The result: a tense, dramatic, all-too-human clash that rates as one of the greatest chess battles of all time. We can't begin to do justice to all the subtleties in the Queen's Gambit Exchange, but Lasker as Black if the first

to unbalance the game with a provocative early knight sortie: 9. 0-0 Nh5? 10. Be3! (the most pointed way of challenging Black's unorthodox idea) f5 (f6?! 11. Bf4 Nxf4 12. exf4, and the Black backward pawn on the e-file is particularly vulnerable) 11. Re1 Nf6 12. Bxf6! (a difficult trade to make, but Black's knight can't be allowed into e4) gxf6! (better than the more natural 12...Bxf6?! 13. Bb5 Bd7 14. Na4, with good queenside pressure) 13. Nh4! — the start of a quick kingside mobilization at a time when much of Black's queenside army is still trying to get into the game.

White's 16. Rh3?! is a bit of un-Capablanca-like sloppiness, as the rook should have gone to g3 right away as part of White's plan to open the h-file. And another tempo loss allows the alert Lasker to equalize the play after 20. Kf2 (White tucks his king behind the pawns and clears the way to the h-file for the major pieces; Black has to respond actively if he is not to be steamrolled here) Na5 21. Qf3! Nc4 22. Qe2 (guarding the b-pawn and acknowledging the queen should have gone here a move earlier) Nd6!, setting up a rock-solid fortress and squashing any White ideas involving a line-opening sacrifice on f5.

But after an inspired defensive patch, Lasker puts himself back in peril on 23. Rh1 Ne4+? (Bf7 24. g4 Ne4+ 25. Bxe4 fxe4 was equal) 24. Bxe4 fxe4 25. Qg4 f5 (Bxa3, apparently not seen by annotators at the time, leads to double-edged play after 26. Qxe6 Bxb2 27. Nxd5 Rc2+ 28. Kgl Rc6 29. Qxe4 Re1+ 30. Kh2 Rxl+ 31. Kxhl Be6 32. Qc2 Qxd5 33. Qxb2 a5), and Capablanca seizes the opportunity to unbalance the position again by sacrificing a piece for three valuable pawns: 26. Nxf5! exf5 27. Qxf5 h5 28. g4 (Nxd5? Rc2+ 29. Kgl Qd6 30. Qxe4 Re1+ 31. Kh2 Rxl+ 32. Kxhl Be6 33. Qxe7 Qxd5 34. Qe5+ Qxe5 35. dxe5 Be4, freezing the White pawn mass) R66, and now it appears 29. Nxd5! would have been winning for White; e.g. 29...Re2+ (Bh4+ 30. g3 Rc2+ 31. Kgl Re1+ 32. Kg2 Rc2+ 33. Kh3 hxc4+ 34. Kxe4 Bd7 35. Rxf4+ Qzh4+ 36. gxf4 Bxf5+ 37. Kxf5 Rxb2 38. Ke6 Kg7 39. f5 Kf8 40. h5 Rh2 41. Nf4 Rc2 42. d5 and wins) 30. Kg3 h4+ 31. Kh3 Qd6 32. Qe5+ Qxe5 33. dxe5 Bd8 34. Rd1 Rxb2 35. e6, and the pawn is decisive.

Once again Lasker walks the tightrope back to equality after 29. g5?! Kg8 30. Nxd5 Bf7 31. zNxc7+ Qxe7 32. g4, and — just at the first adjournment — could have guaranteed the draw

with the stunning line 32...Re2+ 33. Kg3 (Kgl? Qc7) and suddenly it's the White king in a mating net) Re2 34. g6 h4+ 35. Rxf4 Rxe3+ 36. Kg2 (Kf2?? Qxh4+ 37. Kxe3 Qel mate!) Re2+ 37. Kf1 Rel+ 38. Kxe1 Qxh4+, and Black has at least a perpetual check.

Instead, Black overreaches on 32...hxg4?! 33. Qh7+ Kf8 34. Rh6 Bg8 35. Qf5+ Kg7 (Ke8 36. Rxc6 bxc6 37. Qc8+ Kf7 38. Qxc6 is better for White) 36. Rxc6 bxc6 37. Kg3 Qe6? (the last mistake; Black still survives on 37...Bf7! 38. b4 Qe6, and White can't play 39. Kxg4?? [Qxg4 Qh3] because of 39...Bh5+ and wins) 38. Kxg4 Qxf5+ (Qc4 39. Qf6+ Kh7 40. Qh6 mate) 39. Kxf5 Bd5 — the Black bishop is reduced to an ineffectual blockading role and Capablanca plays the ending at least with his impeccable technique.

Even an endgame genius like Lasker can't hold back the White pawn horde: 42. f5 Bb3 43. Kf4 Be2 (Bd5 44. Ke5 Kf7 45. a4 Kg7 46. b5!) 44. Ke5 Kf7 45. a4! (A classic Capablanca minitactic in the ending) Kg7 (Bxa4 46. Kxe4 and the White pawns squadron will roll) 46. d5! Bxa4 (cxd5 47. b5 axb5 48. axb5 Ba4 49. b6 Bc6 50. Kd6 Bb7 51. Ke7) 47. d6 c5 48. bxc5 Be6 49. Ke6 a5, 50. f6+ and Black resigned.

Marshall-Bogoljubov, New York Tournament, New York City, March 1924

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e5 3. Bc5 d5 4. e3 Nc6 5. f4 c5 6. cxd5 exd5 7. Nc3 Qe8 8. Bf3 Ne4 9. Qc2 Nc5 10. Nxe3 h5 11. Ng3 Be7 12. 0-0 0-0 13. a3 Qf8 14. Re1 a5 15. Qe2 Nf6 16. Ne5 Bb5 17. f4 e5 18. Bb1 Bd7 19. Qc2 Be6 20. dxc5 Bxc5 21. Kh1 Re8 22. e4 Bf4 23. Nxc6 h6 24. e5 Ng4 25. Qh7 Kf8 26. g3 Qe5 27. g6 Nf2+ 28. Rd2 Bx2 29. Qh8+ Ke7 30. Qxg7 Kx8 31. Qf6+ Re7 32. e6 Bf4 33. e7f7 Bb6 34. Bc1+ Ke7 35. Re7+ Bxe7 36. Qxg8 Kd6 37. Qh8 Qd8 38. Qe5+ Black resigns.

Capablanca-Lasker, New York Tournament, New York City, March 1924

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 d5 4. cxd5 exd5 5. Nf3 Ne6 6. Bf4 e5 7. e3 Bc7 8. Bc3 0-0 9. 0-0 Nh5 10. Be5 f5 11. Re3 Nf6 12. Bb5 g6 13. Nh4 Rf8 14. f4 Rf8 15. Bf3 Bd7 16. Rh3 Be8 17. a3 Rg7 18. Rg3 Rg3 19. hcg3 Rf8 20. Rf2 Na5 21. Qf3 Nd4 22. Qe2 Nf6 23. Rh1 Nd4+ 24. Bxe4 Be4 25. Qg4 f5 26. Nxe5 e6 27. Qe5 h5 28. g4 Rf6 29. g5 Kf8 30. Nxd5 Rf7 31. Nxe7+ Qxe7 32. g4 hcg4 33. Qh7+ Nf8 34. Rf8 Bg8 35. Qf5+ Kg7 36. Rxf5 bxc6 37. Ng3 Qe6 38. Kgg4 Qe5+ 39. Nxf5 Be5 40. b4 a6 41. Kgg4 Bc4 42. f5 Bf3 43. Nf4 Bc2 44. Ke8 Kf7 45. a4 Kg7 46. d5 Bxc4 47. c6 c5 48. bxc5 Bc5 49. Ne6 a5 50. e6+ Black resigns.

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