



## BOOK REVIEWS

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## From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [ChessCafe.com Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe.com](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

## A Sure-fire Formula for Obscurity

*Napier: The Forgotten Chessmaster* by John S. Hilbert, 1997 Caissa Editions, Hardcover, English Algebraic Notation, 354pp., \$38.00 (ChessCafe Price: \$32.95)

How would you regard a player who defeated Frank Marshall in a match, beat Steinitz in a level tournament game, won the prestigious Brooklyn Chess Club championship, was the first British Chess Federation Champion and had been showered with brilliancy prizes before he turned twenty-five years old? Probably with a good deal of respect and admiration. Yet, that player, British-born William Ewart Napier, is virtually unknown and ignored by the chess world today.

A self-admitted artist at the game, he was much more interested in possible swirling complexities on the board than results on a wall chart. In his latest book, author John S. Hilbert has pulled together all the known games of Napier (320 of them) along with another 150 games that have more than just passing historical significance to Napier's career.

In his active chessplaying years (essentially the decade from 1895 to 1905) he faced all the major players of that era. His play was forceful, direct and entertaining in the extreme. So why has he not received more recognition? There are probably several reasons. First, and most obvious, is that his career was so short. And although he lived until 1952, he rarely played after 1905 at all, so he was simply forgotten. (The book really is very appropriately titled.)

Second, and perhaps almost as important, is the diminished significance usually (and unfairly) placed by modern players on the quality of play of the nineteenth century masters. Think about it. After Morphy, Steinitz, Anderssen, and Chigorin, name a nineteenth century player with whom you are familiar and whose games you admire. There you have it. A sure-fire formula for obscurity. A short career in the last century.

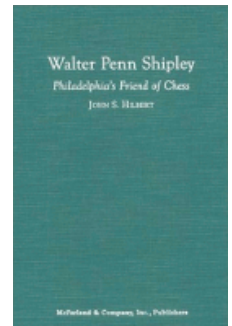
Well, Mr. Hilbert has just taken one enormous step to correct that. With meticulous research from contemporary sources, he has compiled both a first-rate biography and an fine collection of games of this British-American master. The book contains sixteen chapters and four indices that chronicle in a comprehensive and thorough way Napier's rise in the late nineteenth century chess world on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. A brief excerpt...

Of his twentieth round encounter with Chigorin at Monte Carlo, Napier wrote

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*Shady Side*  
by John Hilbert



*Walter Penn Shipley  
Philadelphia's Friend of Chess*  
by John Hilbert



*The Tragic Life and Short  
Chess Career of  
James A. Leonard*  
by John Hilbert

in "Amenities" that "at Monte Carlo in 1902 my opponent on the last day was Chigorin. [Not technically true; Napier apparently forgot he agreed to a brace of draws without play against Marco in the next, and final, round. JSH] I decided to celebrate with a gambit, and so gave him to understand the night before. In the morning I steered into the Evans, confident that he would not expect an opening that had scarcely been out of the stable since its crippling in the St. Petersburg event of 1896. He used the old defense. After the game he asked what new play I had in mind for Lasker's Defense, and when I replied 'None,' he said good-naturedly that I had a talent--for poker! After that agreeable little memento it was a bit comforting to receive the brilliancy prize for the game."

Napier won the Rothschild Brilliancy Prize for his victory over the Russian giant. The notes to the game are by Pillsbury. Interestingly enough, although the game was published in Napier's own column for April 22, 1902, he never annotated the game; the notes provided in the *Dispatch* were taken from *The Field*.

### 155. Napier - Chigorin

Monte Carlo 1902

Round Twenty Evans Gambit [C51]

**1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. b4 Bxb4 5. c3 Ba5** Mostly preferred is 5. ... Bc5, followed by the Lasker variation, for, while White may regain his pawn, he obtains no great attack. It will be seen that, after the ninth move of White, a well-known position is arrived at, and most authorities consider it all in favor of the White side. **6. d4 exd4 7. 0-0 d6 7...dxc3** brings the well-known Compromised Defense. **8. cxd4 Bb6 9. Bb2 Na5 10. Nc3 Ne7** Probably preferable was 10...Nxc4 11. Qa4+ c6 12. Qxc4 Ne7. As played, it will be seen that the Knight is left completely out of it later on. **11. Bd3 0-0 12. d5 Ng6 13. Ne2 c5 14. Qd2 Bg4 15. Ng3 Bxf3 16. gxf3 Nh4** Probably best was 16....Bc7, with a to immediate advance of the queenside pawns, and to get the Queen's knight into play. If in reply 17. Nf5, Nh4 :ms a sufficient answer. **17. Qf4 Ng6** It is possible that Black at an earlier spot may have meditated 17... Qg5 at this juncture; but after 17...Qg5 18. Qxg5 Nxf3+ 19. Kg2 Nxf3 20. h4, winning the piece. **18. Qf5 Rc8 19. Bc3** Of course to prevent the shutout of the bishop by the c-pawn advance. **19...Rc7 20.Kh1 f6 21. Rg1** A far-sighted move, seeing that Black cannot afford to take the offered exchange at move twenty-four. **21...Rcf7 22. Bf1 c4 23. Bh3 Bxf2 24. Ne2**



[FEN "3q1rk1/pp3rpp/3p1pn1/n2P1Q2/2p1P3/2B2P1B/P3Nb1P/R5RK b - - 0 24"]

**24...Ne5 24...Bxg1 25. Rxf4** (25...b5 26. Rxf4 hxf4 27. Qxg6 Re8 28. f4 with a winning attack.) 26. Nd4 and White will regain at least the Exchange. It will be noticed that the Black knight at a5 is the cause of his difficulty. **25. Rg2 Be3 26. Nf4 Bxf4 27. Qxf4 g5 27...Kh8** is probably better, but White's attack is tremendous. **28. Be6 Kh8 29.Qd2 b6 30. Bxf7 Rxf7 31. f4 gxf4 32. Qxf4 Nb7 33. Rg1 Nc5 34. Bxe5 dxe5 35. Qg4 h6 36. Qh5 Qf8 37. Rg6 Kh7** The position is hopeless. If 37...Rh7, then 38. Rxf6. **38. Rxf6+ 1-0**

So ended Napier's play in his first international tournament. Although a final, twenty-first round was scheduled, and although his opponent was the thirty-eight year old Georg Marco (2520 Elo historical rating), who ordinarily could be counted on to play fighting chess, the tournament had been a long, grueling struggle for all the competitors, and the games between them were agreed

drawn.

Regular visitors to [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com)'s [book reviews](#) may recall the very favorable comments we have had about other Caissa Editions publications; e. g., [Baden Baden 1925](#) and [St. Petersburg 1914](#). This book maintains the same high standards, with a hardcover high-quality library style binding and antique photographs nicely complementing Hilbert's thorough, but readable style. Napier's obscurity should be no more. It will form, however, both the strength and weakness of this book's appeal: It will provide those who are already familiar with Napier with the definitive work about him; those who are not familiar with him probably will be reluctant to buy it. Pity. They will be missing out on a great book.

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**Order [Napier: The Forgotten Chessmaster](#)**

by John Hilbert

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This article first appeared at [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) in December, 1997.

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