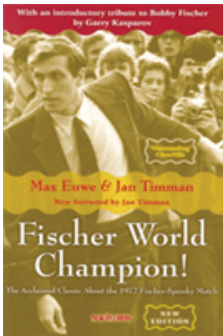


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From the Archives...

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 [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*...

The Fischer-Benko Slapping Incident

Hanon W. Russell

The 1962 Candidates Tournament that was held in the Dutch territory of Curacao was to have a profound effect on Bobby Fischer. He arrived full of optimism; he departed disappointed and cynical. Shortly thereafter, he wrote his famous article for the American magazine *Sports Illustrated* wherein he accused the Russians of cheating.

During that tournament, there was a peculiar incident that has never received much publicity. Indeed, a look at contemporary sources (*Chess Review*, *Chess Life* and *British Chess Magazine*) reveals no direct reference to the incident. In fact, it is only in *BCM* (October 1962, p.301) that we even read about “Fischer and Benko [having] a slight altercation during one of the early rounds.” (Letter from R. Cantwell).

The American contingent consisted of Fischer, Hungarian émigré Pal Benko, and Arthur Bisguier, who technically was designated as Fischer’s second, but was also providing similar help to Benko. After the fifth round of the first cycle, (it was a grueling quadruple round-robin) both Fischer and Benko had adjourned games. (This was the era when adjournments were the norm.) Fischer demanded that Bisguier assist him. Benko, who had started the tournament much better than Fischer, wanted help with his adjourned game against Petrosian. There was a shouting match, and Benko apparently lost his cool. The next day, Fischer wrote the following letter...

To the tournament committee of the 1962 Curacao Candidates Tournament:

This is an official protest of the behavior of the behavior [sic] of Pal Benko. On the night of May 9, a little before midnight, Benko entered by room without my permission; he had followed Bisguier in. I immediately asked him to leave and he refused. I repeatedly asked to leave and he refused each time. He became angry when I refused to allow my second, Arthur Bisguier, to help him (Benko) analyze his adjournment with Petrosian. He insulted me and when I answered him he struck me while I was seated in a chair. I did not strike him back. Then he finally left the room.

I suggest that Benko be fined and/or expelled from the tournament.

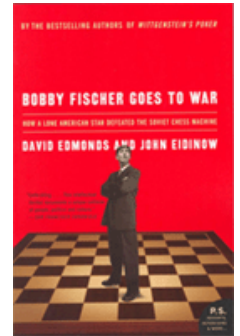
The above episode was witnessed by Arthur Bisguier.

Respectfully,
/s/ Robert Fischer

Several years ago, we asked Arthur Bisguier if he could shed further light on the incident. Although it does not specifically state that Benko struck Fischer, when asked, Bisguier conceded that had indeed happened. His response reads in full...

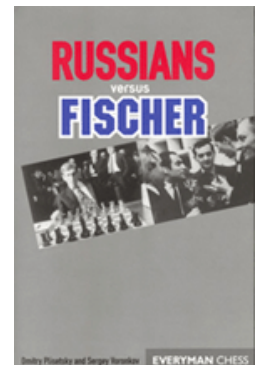
The following should help put Fischer’s protest in the proper perspective and context.

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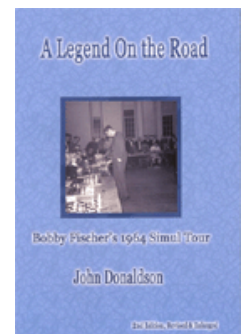
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Russians versus Fischer

by Dmitry Plisetsky
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A Legend on the Road

by John Donaldson

I was Fischer's official second at Curacao. Although I expressed my willingness to also serve in that capacity for Benko, Fischer insisted on a second all to himself. His justification was that the Candidates' Tournament is an individual tournament, not a team event, and Benko was another prospective opponent.

Curacao was expensive; there were insufficient funds to support two seconds and Fischer was a tournament favorite, while Benko was regarded as a dark horse. Still, I believe it was tacitly understood that, if there were any times when Fischer did not need my services, I would assist Benko in adjournments or analysis if it was not adverse to Fischer's interest.

The incident in question occurred after the fifth round of the first lap of the tournament. Fischer had had travel problems, arrived late and got off to a miserable start with a score of 1½ points out of his first five games. He had just lost a complicated game to Korchnoi and was feeling very despondent. He and I retired to his room where he ordered a substantial dinner from room service.

Meanwhile, so far in the tournament, Benko had done surprisingly well. Using his secret weapon, 1 g3, he defeated Fischer in round one and Tal in round three. Although he had lost to Filip in round two, he held Korchnoi to a draw in round four and after adjourning round five found himself with an extremely favorable position against Petrosian (he was to miss a win and eventually draw in 67 moves).

While Fischer was eating, I was trying to placate him when Benko knocked on the door. It was obvious that he was looking for help with his adjourned position. I tried to warn him and signalled that I would get to him after finishing with Bobby. Fischer then asked Benko what he wanted, and, upon being told, ordered Benko out of his room and forbade me to assist Benko. Words ensued, with Benko calling Bobby selfish and the two of them hurling epithets at each other. I did my best to act as peacemaker, and Benko, after making physical gestures toward Bobby, finally left the room. Fischer reiterated that I was to give no help to Pal and, moreover, wanted Benko thrown out of the tournament, threatening not to play himself unless he got his way.

After that, there was much behind the scenes action. I persuaded Bobby that the better course of action would be to continue to play but to register a formal protest with the chief tournament arbiter. That is why the protest to the arbiter was written.

This is my best recollection of those events.

/s/ Arthur Bisguier

Ironically, Fischer and Benko went on to become good friends. But, once upon a time...

This article first appeared at ChessCafe.com in September, 1997.

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