



SKITTLES ROOM

From the Archives

Hosted by
Mark Donlan



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*...

Paul Keres Letter

February 2, 1968

Paul Keres was one of the most respected chessplayers in the world. In the following letter, written shortly after Fischer’s withdrawal from the Sousse Interzonal, Keres shares his thoughts on Fischer, FIDE and an incident at the Winnipeg tournament in which he had just played. The recipient is Burt Hochberg, who was then the editor of *Chess Life*.



From: Paul Keres
To: Burt Hochberg
Date: February 2, 1968

Dear Mr. Hochberg,

Thanks for your kind letter from December 31st, 1967, and for your nice New Year wishes, which I herewith cordially respond. I hope we'll have in 1968 good collaboration on behalf of *CHESS LIFE*, and that I shall find time to contribute in due time, as we agreed. I am glad that the materials I sent you found your approval, although I myself am not very much satisfied with my first article on the Winnipeg tournament – it is not comfortable to make good annotations when travelling.

Until now I have received the November issue of *CHESS LIFE*, but I am sure the next ones will arrive in good order. The mail connection sometimes is quite slow.

Now, as to your questions, I shall try to answer them as well as I can do. First, the Fischer affair in Tunisia. As far as I am informed, all the difficulties Bobby met in the tournament, including his final withdrawal, were the result of his own capricious behavior. After my knowledge, this is the first time in tournament history that a player withdraws from the tournament, having the leading position. Bad standing in the tournament has caused already many retreats, on various “reasons”, but never a leader has done so. It is a pity not only for Fischer himself, but for all American chess, that Bobby apparently does not feel the barrier which cannot be overstepped. Now he will have another three years to wait for the next competition.

At the moment I have no intention to write an article about “adventures” in my chess career, but maybe in the future I shall return to this theme. Also, I cannot remember any other player, including the World Champions, which would have caused to the organizers as much trouble as Bobby has done.

I have always been critical to the half point tactics, as you call it, in tournament chess. But I cannot fully blame the players by doing so. In my opinion, the first step in this wrong direction has been made by FIDE, and it still is continued. Take all the tournaments in World Championship series, for instance. It is good, of course, that these tournament include players all over the world. But this target should not be achieved by the World Championship, as most of the players, competing in the preliminaries, have in fact nothing to do with this title. The result is, that preliminary tournaments are played only for further qualification, not only for the first, but a couple of first places, with the only purpose to secure one of the first n places. The creative side of the game does not matter, the point is the King. As the participants are of uneven strength, every leading grandmaster will plan his “simple mathematics”, where to get the necessary points. And, of course, it is not reasonable to take a risk against any of the rivals, when points can be obtained easier from weaker opponents. Only, if the mathematics does not go according to plans, there may be necessary to “bite” some of the rivals. In my opinion, tournaments like this will lead to death of creative chess, this kind of game which thousands and millions of “puffs” like so much, and what was the reason for beginning to play chess for everyone of us. For some reasons I am quite happy to be beaten by Spassky in 1965, which gave me a good opportunity of retreating from this unsound system of competition.

Furthermore, the half point tactics is sponsored by many, and comparatively easy obtainable titles, offered by FIDE. Now almost every of the international tournaments must be some IA, IB or like that type, to give the participants the possibility of getting an international grandmaster or master title, or confirming one of these titles. As far as I can understand, the normal way in every tournament should be a tough fight for first prize, for every participant. But in these various indexed tournaments only a few players are really interested in coming

first. One needs his 10 points, the other 9, the third 7 etc., to get their corresponding titles. And here again the mathematics dominates. But what about the tournament, the games, the fight for the leadership, the dying art of chess? Proceeding this way we may soon encounter the fact that chess will lose interest among public at all.

The same problem arises also in our country, where many organizations are interested to increase the number of category 1, 2 etc. players, of masters and grandmasters. These titles should be obtained in a natural way, in my opinion, in bitter tournament fight, but not by way of combined participants, in so called qualification tournaments. But here we have a lot of problems, which cannot be solved in a few days, but which demand serious consideration by international chess organization.

The Benko-Larsen conflict in Winnipeg was a sad one, of course, and in arising the conflict a lot of fault lies on the tournament direction. I had already finished my game and was watching the terrible time trouble battle in this game. Both partners had no time left to note the moves, and suddenly Larsen shot: "Your flag is down." Then the game was restored and it was stated that Benko's flag fell on move 40. No matter that Larsen's flag also fell, Benko was declared lost, because after the FIDE rules the time control is only passed, when a player has completed his 40th move and also stopped his clock, with his flag still up.

There should have been certainly one of the referees at the table, and here lies the main fault of the tournament director. But this fault does not affect the facts, and these are, that Benko had overstepped the time limit on move 40. When both players are in severe time trouble and cannot write down their moves, usually the referee tries to do so. If he fixes the flag down on one side, the game will be stopped and the score restored. If the flag fell after the necessary number of moves have been completed, the game will be played on, otherwise the player will be forfeited.

Returning to the Benko-Larsen case, Larsen fixed the fall of Benko's flag, and Benko agreed with the fact. Then the moves were restored, and again both sides agreed that the flag fell on move 40. With these facts in mind, there cannot be another decision than forfeit for Benko, as he overstepped the time limit on move 40. The absence of a referee is regrettable, but it does not change the fact of overstepping the time limit. The complaint that there was no announcement about the fact that the tournament would be played under FIDE rules cannot be accepted. It is natural, the international tournaments use FIDE rules, rather than rules of various national federations; and if rules of a national federation are used, this should have been stated before the play began. I understand that this was a very distressing loss for Benko, as he had a won game on the board, but any other decision would have been unright and unfair towards Larsen.

The bulletins of the USSR Championship are not yet out, I hope to get the last number in a few days. You will get then a copy of them by air mail. The bulletins also include the interzonal games, as well as from other tournaments. If I am in possession of all the materials, I shall try to contribute to *CHESS LIFE* a short story about the championship, with some games, etc. As to photos, the chances here in Tallinn are bad, and a reprint from the bulletins would also not secure a good quality print.

Generally I shall try to support you with games from our tournaments, or from our players in the international events. If I plan some other materials, I shall try to inform you in due time to avoid duplication. I have not yet plans about the Spassky-Geller match, but maybe you get something from me, if I shall not be busy myself at the same time in Bamberg tournament.

The third part of the book on my games is, according to the translator Golombek, already finished and should come out in the near future.

I hope to have answered your questions to your convenience, but certainly my answers are

not ready for publication in *CHESS LIFE*. If you intend to use something, please correct my faulty English and give my thoughts the right form. I do not want to be offensive against any person or organization; I am certain they all act in good faith to the welfare of our loved game.

With kind regards and best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Paul Keres



[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

© 2007 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**ChessCafe.com**"[®] is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.