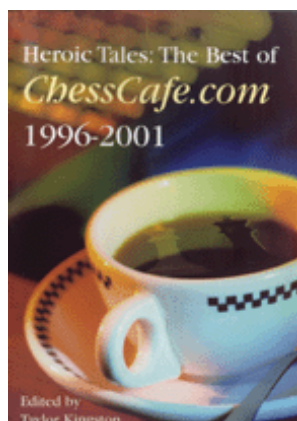




## BOOK REVIEWS

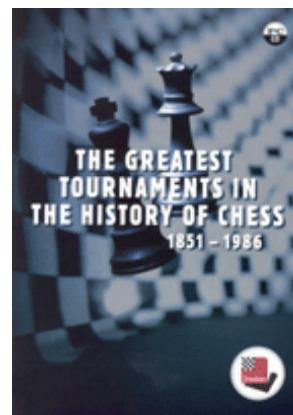


## Flavored Coffee

Taylor Kingston

*The Greatest Tournaments in the History of Chess 1851-1986*, Edited by Rainier Knaak and Manual Fruth, 2004 ChessBase, CD-ROM, \$39.95

One of the more profitable merchandising ideas of recent years has been flavored instant coffee mixes. The most costly ingredient, the coffee, is mixed with much cheaper ones (sugar, powdered milk, flavorings, etc.), put in a colorful little can, given a fancy-sounding name, and then sold at a much higher price than the coffee would fetch by itself. The producer's profit margin goes way up, but consumers are willing to pay for the convenience.



This new CD from ChessBase, *The Greatest Tournaments in the History of Chess 1851-1986*, strikes us as a similar marketing ploy, with one important difference: compared to the coffee, there is much less benefit to the consumer. For readers in a hurry we provide the following summation: save your money. Those interested in the details (some of them gory) may read on.

In principle, the idea is a good one. We imagined a database containing the greatest tournaments of all time, with games, full annotations, crosstables, photos, biographical data on the players, and each tournament's story, its historical context and significance. The CD's title aroused hopes that this might be a "Great Tournament Books" compilation, bringing together such classics as Lasker's book of St. Petersburg 1909, Alekhine's of New York 1924, Bronstein's of Zürich 1953, etc. However, the gap between concept and execution, between hope and reality, proved large.

We disagree with some of the editor's tournament choices, but that's the least of our complaints. So rather than immediately bog down in nit-picking, we've appended a full list of the CD's 51 events, and our points of dissent, at the end of the review. We'll discuss the more important problems first.

Simply put, this CD offers relatively little at a relatively high price. Amazingly little work has gone into it. The editors have simply taken games that any database worth its shrinkwrap has anyway, games that constitute a tiny portion of the full ChessBase, added a few cheap frills, and put it in a new box. There are 6,791 games, only 0.26%, about *one four-hundredth*, of the full CB Megabase's 2,600,000. The repackaging might be considered legitimate if enough new material were added, especially annotations and tournament reports, but that is not the case.

Of the 6,791 games, only 1,519 (about 22%) are annotated, few at any length, most very briefly. Compare this to a proper tournament book, where usually all, or at least a majority of the games are annotated. Furthermore, as far as we could tell from extensive spot-checking, no new work has gone into any of the *Greatest Tournament* CD's annotations: *they are simply the same as on the regular ChessBase CD*. The new "work" has been "edited" simply by mouse-clicking on a few search criteria, and loading to a new file.

This is disappointing, even dismaying, because many annotations could have been added with relative ease. Most great tournaments are commemorated in books, and most of these books have long since lapsed out of copyright into the public domain, leaving excellent notes by great masters readily available. For example, in *The Hastings Chess Tournament 1895*, edited by Horace Cheshire, all but one of the tournament's 231 games were annotated, variously by Pillsbury, Lasker, Tarrasch, Steinitz, Schiffers, Teichmann, Bardeleben, Blackburne, Gunsberg, Tinsley, Mason or Albin (and the one without notes was a forfeit). On the CD, how many Hastings games have any notes? Not 200, not 100, not 50, but ... five! Count 'em! Five games. St. Petersburg 1909 is the same: only five games annotated, and almost none of world champion Lasker's excellent notes are used. We compared the CD to various tournament books, with these results:

<b>Tournament</b>	<b>Total Games</b>	<b>Annotated in book</b>	<b>Annotated on CD</b>
Leipzig 1877	66	66	6
London 1883	242	242	40
Hastings 1895	231	230	5
St. Petersburg 1909	175	175	5
St. Petersburg 1914	75	75	37
New York 1924	110	110	40
Baden-Baden 1925	210	210	23
Karlsbad 1929			
(German edition)	231	231	37
Moscow 1935	190	189	12
Nottingham 1936	105	105	19
Los Angeles 1963	56	56	56
Santa Monica 1966	90	90	90

As can be seen, the trend improves with the two Piatigorsky Cup events. Oddly, the annotations for Santa Monica 1966, which according to the index were prepared by Lubomir Ftacnik, are heavily based on the original tournament book. Why was the same thing not done with the early tournaments? And many recent tournaments fare no better than the oldies, for example San Antonio 1972 has only five annotated games, Leningrad 1977 only ten, Bugojno 1986 seven, and Tilburg 1986 none.

Besides the annotation shortage, the CD has some technical glitches. The most serious is that the language option for choosing of notes in either English or German, is non-functional. Some game annotations are English

only, some German only, and no amount of mouse-clicking makes any difference. Das macht uns nichts, weil wir Deutsch sprechen, but unilingual customers will be stuck. For New York 1924 there is no differentiation between the two Laskers; one must guess who is Emanuel and who is Edward. Crosstables are too wide for the page, wrapping around confusingly.

The main “extra feature” this CD has, that the standard ChessBase does not, is “tournament reports,” written or edited mostly by Manuel Fruth, some by Knaak and others. Euphemistically described on the jacket as “sometimes extensive,” these are the CD’s equivalent of powdered milk, an inexpensive additive, but unlike the flavored coffees they are added too sparingly. As with the annotations, the skimpiness of the reports is surprising, as again most of the originals are no longer under copyright and could have been used freely.

And they should have been. Leaving aside for the moment the issue of historical preservation, the original reports we could compare proved for the most part vastly superior to those on the CD. For example with Hastings 1895, the book’s introduction ran 14 pages, and various appendices giving biographies of all the players, the distribution of prize money, the pairing system, instructions for the directors, a discussion of innovations introduced at the tournament, a breakdown of the openings played, and other useful and/or interesting information, add another 27 pages. The comparable section of the CD is perhaps two pages, exclusive of photographs. Below is a comparison for several tournaments:

<b>Tournament Report</b>	<b>Pages in book</b>	<b>Pages on CD</b>
London 1883	51	2
Hastings 1895	27	2
St. Petersburg 1909	4	8
New York 1924	64	8
Karlsbad 1929		
(Russian edition)	23	5
Nottingham 1936	28	5
Los Angeles 1963	8	2
Santa Monica 1966	15	3

At least one report is missing almost entirely: for unknown reasons Moscow 1936 is treated like a subset of Moscow 1935, and is given no report besides a crosstable. The two events were entirely separate, 15 months apart.

Brief (or absent) as they are, the reports still contain quite a few errors. A sampling:

- Players other than Morphy at New York 1957 are described as “mainly elderly.” Gaige’s *Chess Personalia*, which lists 14 of the 16 participants, shows that while Morphy at 20 was definitely the youngest, only one of the others was over 50, and only four over 40. Eight were under 40, five under 30, and their average was 35, hardly elderly even by mid-19th century standards.

- The report for London 1883, by Knaak, says the Master Tournament prize fund of £ 755 was donated by the Maharajah of Vizayanagaram. In fact he donated only £ 200, and this funded not the main event, but a concurrent lesser tournament, according to J.I. Minchin's tournament book, page xiv.
- The report on Cambridge Springs 1904 repeats the tired old myth that Pillsbury had saved 7.Bxf6 for years to play against Lasker.
- Referring to Réti-Capablanca, New York 1924, Fruth says "the great Cuban loses his first tournament game in 10 years." Capa's previous loss was eight years earlier, against Chajes at New York 1916.
- Keres and Petrosian, respectively Estonian and Armenian, are described as Russians.
- Los Angeles is said to have been "the largest city in the United States" in 1963. It was not; New York then had more than twice LA's population, and still does.
- The tournament book of the 2nd Piatigorsky Cup (Santa Monica 1966) is described as "the first to set out in words what the GM had been thinking during the game," referring to the fact that most games were annotated by the players themselves. Actually this approach was tried on a partial basis with the 1st Piatigorsky Cup (1963); the 1966 book merely extended it to all games. Furthermore there are earlier examples, such as Nimzovitch with Karlsbad 1929, to name only one.

On the other hand, there are some positive exceptions to the general trend. One is St. Petersburg 1909. The CD presents a reasonable English translation of Lasker's original German introduction, which is considerably more extensive than the later English edition, translated by Teichmann. The CD's reports for San Sebastián 1911 and 1912 provide the articulate, often charming prose of Jacques Mieses, obviously not translated by Fruth but obtained from some competent (and uncredited) English source. Why was this not done with other events?

Fruth, it may be remembered, was a translator on the egregious *Chess Comet Charousek*. While the CD improves on that linguistically tormented book, its English still suffers considerable anguish:

A problem caption that should read "Dedicated to Morphy" says "A problem of dedication for Morphy."

The schedule at St. Petersburg 1895-96 is confusingly described: "There was one round on every second day when both games were played simultaneously."

Of Nuremburg 1896: "Nobody was contacted in vain, chess lovers, but also people who had nothing to do with chess, the chess clubs of Bamberg, Regensburg, Augsburg, Fürth and Kronach donated considerable amounts."

Of Karlsbad 1911: "They are classics of chess literature without exception, and one has to the *[sic]* conclude that all of us must have learned from this tournament more or less

consciously.”

Of Rubinstein in 1912: “He has never had a failure and is at the very least a dead certain each way bet.”

Of Matisons-Rubinstein, Karlsbad 1929: “An outstanding endgame achievement of Rubinstein’s (4th Round), in which his opponent proved not to be fully grown.” (Herman Matisons was 34 at the time.)

Of Bled 1931: “...severe losses on the part the [*sic*] conservatives, the youngsters conquer three mandates!”

Even when outright gaffes are avoided, the language is often clumsy:

“For this reason, even today at the start of the year 2004, we are not over-provided with world championships, but at least, even to mention only such tournaments as are played on the all-play-all system, there are some involving many of the top players ...”

Perhaps the German version reads better; at least the language option, inoperative for games, does work on narrative text.

Reliance on German sources has produced some strange results. The report on New York 1924 quotes extensively (without attribution) from Herman Helms’ and Norbert Lederer’s introductions, but the texts are slightly off, having evidently been retranslated from a German edition. Why not simply use the original English? This circuitous English-to-German-to-English route produces some odd phrasings, for example “It’s true, yes” rendered as “Ain’t that the truth.” In the original *Second Piatigorsky Cup*, an Isaac Kashdan anecdote reads as follows:

“‘Oh, gosh,’ a lady exclaimed, ‘he doesn’t look like a chess player; so handsome, so neat, and everything!’ — ‘Who?’ someone inquired. — ‘Spassky, of course!’”

In Fruth’s hands, this becomes strangely mutated and embellished:

“One lady exclaimed in astonishment on seeing Boris: ‘For goodness sake! He doesn’t at all look like a chessplayer: so handsome, so clean and quite...!’ — ‘Who?’ somebody asked her... — ‘Spassky of course!’ she replied in high dudgeon.”

One wonders if Fruth actually understood that last phrase, and why he felt compelled (or entitled) to add it. Fruth’s approach to both Piatigorsky Cups is a careless parsing of Kashdan’s original reports. One anecdote begins “*Bent Larsen*: ‘Many years ago my wife wrote ...’” giving the impression the speaker is either Larsen or Fruth, when it was actually Kashdan.

Overall, the CD’s treatment of tournament reports strikes us as not just careless, but disrespectful. A tournament book is an important historical document, recording not only the games but the event as a whole, its social, cultural, financial, and political dimensions, its impact on opening theory, on the development and popularization of the game, etc. etc. As CDs increasingly replace printed books, those historical records should be

properly preserved on the new medium. They should not be revised unless warranted by valid research. This CD's sloppiness, and more dangerously the gratuitous embellishments, strike us as steps toward the proverbial slippery slope — the kind of thing that can ultimately result in tales of Paul Morphy disrobing on a bus while smashing Alekhine's furniture with a bathtub full of wooden shoes.

Alarmist hyperbole aside, the plain fact is that this CD is a lousy buy. As we said above, practically any all-purpose database of the last few years: Chess Assistant, MasterChess 2000, ChessBase etc., is likely to have all these games, and some provide millions of games for about the same price as this CD's few thousand. The hit-or-miss annotations and abridged tournament reports hardly add enough value to justify the price.

Below is our discussion of the CD's selection criteria:

The disk contains 51 tournaments, selected somewhat arbitrarily but not unreasonably. Team tournaments and national championships seem to be tacitly excluded. Expressly excluded are world championships and their qualifying events (a separate CD is planned for them, according to editor Knaak). These limitations have some logic, but they rule out many of the very strongest events, such as Hague-Moscow 1948, Soviet Championships, and FIDE zonal, interzonal, and candidate tournaments. Within these strictures, the main criteria seem to be historical significance, the number of top-ten players in the field, and overall strength (based mainly on Jeff Sonas' chessmetrics for events before 1971, and on Elo ratings since then). Here then is the CD's list, in chronological order, with the tournament winner(s) in parentheses:

- London 1851 (Anderssen)
- New York 1857 (Morphy)
- Vienna 1873 (Steinitz and Blackburne)
- Leipzig 1877 (Paulsen)
- London 1883 (Zukertort)
- Hastings 1895 (Pillsbury)
- St. Petersburg 1895-96 (Lasker)
- Nuremberg 1896 (Lasker)
- Vienna 1898 (Tarrasch and Pillsbury)
- London 1899 (Lasker)
- Paris 1900 (Lasker)
- Cambridge Springs 1904 (Marshall)
- St. Petersburg 1909 (Rubinstein and Lasker)
- Karlsbad 1911 (Teichmann)
- San Sebastián 1911 (Capablanca)
- San Sebastián 1912 (Rubinstein)
- St. Petersburg 1914 (Lasker)
- Mährisch-Ostrau 1923 (Lasker)
- New York 1924 (Lasker)
- Baden-Baden 1925 (Alekhine)
- Moscow 1925 (Bogolyubov)
- Bad Kissingen 1928 (Bogolyubov)
- Karlsbad 1929 (Nimzovitch)
- San Remo 1930 (Alekhine)
- Bled 1931 (Alekhine)
- Moscow 1935 (Botvinnik and Flohr)

- Moscow 1936 (Capablanca)
- Nottingham 1936 (Capablanca and Botvinnik)
- Kemerli 1937 (Reshevsky, Flohr and Petrovs)
- AVRO 1938 (Keres and Fine)
- Salzburg 1942 (Alekhine)
- Sverdlovsk 1943 (Botvinnik)
- Groningen 1946 (Botvinnik)
- Moscow 1956 (Botvinnik and Smyslov)
- Dallas 1957 (Reshevsky and Gligoric)
- Bled 1961 (Tal)
- Havana 1963 (Korchnoi)
- Los Angeles 1963 (Petrosian and Keres)
- Santa Monica 1966 (Spassky)
- Moscow 1967 (Stein)
- Moscow 1971 (Karpov and Stein)
- San Antonio 1972 (Portisch, Petrosian and Karpov)
- Milan 1975 (Portisch)
- Moscow 1975 (Geller)
- Leningrad 1977 (Romanishin and Tal)
- Bugojno 1978 (Karpov and Spassky)
- Tilburg 1978 (Portisch)
- Montreal 1979 (Karpov and Tal)
- Moscow 1981 (Karpov)
- Bugojno 1986 (Karpov)
- Tilburg 1986 (Beliavsky)

On the whole, a reasonable list, containing most of the essential events. However some inclusions and omissions raise eyebrows. Mährisch-Ostrau 1923 had little significance beyond Lasker's return from a 2-year layoff. Moscow 1936, Salzburg 1942, Sverdlovsk 1943, Dallas 1957 and Leningrad 1977 are marginal choices at best. Havana 1963, with few top players and many lessers and locals, hardly qualifies as an all-time great event.

Any or all of these might have been replaced by any of the following, which together would make a considerable CD by themselves. What we consider the worst omissions are in boldface: London 1862 (Anderssen), Baden-Baden 1870 (Anderssen), Paris 1878 (Zukertort and Winawer), **Vienna 1882** (Winawer and Steinitz), New York 1889 (Chigorin and Weiss), Budapest 1896 (Charousek and Chigorin), Monte Carlo 1903 (Tarrasch), Barmen 1905 (Janowski and Maroczy), Ostend 1905 (Maroczy), **Ostend 1906** (Schlechter), Ostend 1907 (Tarrasch), Karlsbad 1907 (Rubinstein), Prague 1908 (Duras and Schlechter), **Mannheim 1914** (Alekhine), **London 1922** (Capablanca), Marienbad 1925 (Nimzovitch and Rubinstein), Semmering 1926 (Spielmann), **New York 1927** (Capablanca), Berlin 1928 (Capablanca), Semmering-Baden 1937 (Keres), **Budapest 1952** (Keres), Bucharest 1953 (Tolush), Moscow 1959 (Bronstein, Smyslov and Spassky), Belgrade 1964 (Spassky), **Rovinj-Zagreb 1970** (Fischer), Leiden 1970 (Spassky), or Johannesburg 1981 (Andersson). Other events may merit consideration also.

Perhaps the most serious error is with New York 1927, omitted because, according to editor Knaak, "at the time it was an unofficial candidates' tournament." It has been well known for years that it was no such thing. Thus Capablanca's two best results as world champion (London 1922 is the other) are missing for no good reason. Furthermore, if Knaak had been

consistent on this criterion, AVRO 1938, which definitely *was* an unofficial candidates' tournament, would have been excluded.

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**Order** *The Greatest Tournaments in the History of Chess 1851-1986*  
Edited by Rainier Knaak and Manual Fruth

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