

SKITTLES
ROOM

1938 Interview with Alexander Alekhine:

Text and Audio

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While dealing with the media is a regular part of the modern grandmaster's career, such was not always the case. In particular, voice recordings of the great players prior to the Second World War are very rare.

While going through our archives, we came across a tape recording of a short interview with Alexander Alekhine. It is about four minutes long. As best we can determine, the interview was conducted for the BBC in 1938. We do not know who the interviewer was. In two places, marked by [?], we could not understand what was said. If you have any suggestions, please let us know.

We have made the interview available in an mp3 audio format. Most readers should have the capability of accessing and listening to the interview in this format. It may be found at:

<http://www.chesscafe.com/zip/skittles203.mp3>

We hope you enjoy the *Interview with Alexander Alekhine...*

Interviewer: Now Dr. Alekhine, tell me, would you say that chessplayers are born, or do you think a great chessplayer can be made by hard practice?

Alexander Alekhine: No, frankly, I think the ideal chessplayer is born. Of course, I look upon chess as an art, and just as you cannot make a great painter or a musician, unless the gifts of painting or music are innate in a person, so also I believe that for anyone to become outstanding at chess the ability must be born with the player. There is

something much more in championship chess than just following the somewhat limited rules of the game. To play a really good chess, you must have vision. Vision is something of the same way that a creative artist must have if he would lift his performance out of the common realm.

Interviewer: Well, of course, as well as vision, I expect first class chess needs a very well trained memory too, doesn't it?

Alexander Alekhine: Oh, no. That is where chess is just unlike bridge. One does not require an, uh, an outstanding memory. Look forward all the time is the thing to do.

Interviewer: Sounds to me like the perfect game for optimists.

Alexander Alekhine: Yes, you might say so. I never look back on a game or a match but try all the time to see how I may improve my play. Soon, I shall have been playing [?] chess for 30years. I became a chess master, you know, at 16.

Interviewer: 16? That's amazing!

Alexander Alekhine: Yes. I won then the vase of the Tsar which I still am keeping. It was..., I was allowed to bring it out. As a matter of fact, it was the only thing I was allowed to bring out of Russia in 1921 when I left. But even my 30 years experience has not yet taught me all I should know of chess.

Interviewer: Well, I suppose by now Dr. Alekhine, you must know all the answers, as they say.

Alexander Alekhine: Oh no, believe me, a lifetime is not enough in which to learn everything about chess. If it were, I should soon be getting ready to stop playing altogether. The technique, yes, that can be mastered. But there is always so much more to know about the actual art of the game. So for instance, take my opponent in the last match, Dr. Euwe. He's considered as being one of the outstanding experts in the opening play. And even being that, in our last match, in one game, he got a lost position after already five moves. So you see, every one of us has quite a lot to learn.



Interviewer: Yes, yes. But do you find that playing championship chess involves a great amount of mental stress?

Alexander Alekhine: Mental stress, no. But there is a nervous strain, and also physically [?] It is very necessary to prepare oneself physically for a contest, for as you must realize, it demands a great amount of energy. For myself, I prepare always for a match by leading a quiet, healthy, country life. And I relax, you may laugh, by playing ping pong.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Alexander Alekhine: Yes, ping pong. It is just one of my biggest hobbies.

Interviewer: But, uh, you have no ambitions for the world ping pong title, have you?

Alexander Alekhine: Oh, not at all. I must concentrate of course in defending my chess title. And now soon I am off with my wife for South America to arrange for the next world contest to be held there.

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much Dr. Alekhine and all the best of luck.



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