



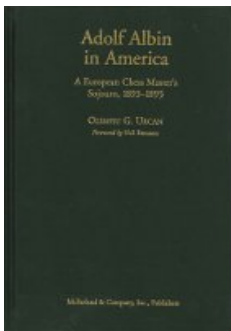
COLUMNISTS

Past Pieces

Olimpiu G. Urcan



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Reshevsky: A Forgotten Interview & Game

We found the following brief but suggestive interview with Samuel Reshevsky on page three of the *Anaconda Standard* (Montana) of June 3, 1921. We have taken a few editorial liberties with the text (including standardizing the old form of the player's name – "Rzeschewski" – into the more popular "Reshevsky.") The interview came a day after Reshevsky gave a twelve-board simultaneous exhibition at the Butte Chamber of Commerce. Before the eyes of 150 spectators he defeated all those in attendance, players from Butte and Anaconda.

The June 5 edition of the same newspaper gave the score of the game that caused the biggest stir in the city: Reshevsky's tense game against H. L. Maury, an attorney in Butte, which we reproduce below with our comments. It was the last game to finish and, according to a June 3 report in the same source, Maury said the following at the conclusion of his game: "The boy is a marvel, he is absolutely telepathic. The moment he arrived at my table he seemed to know instantly what I had in my mind and how to meet it. I have kept in touch with his performance and I wish to say that he has developed wonderfully in the past six weeks. He is a much greater player than when he started west. He has not and has never had an equal. I do not mean to say that he is a 'grand master.' What I mean is that it is almost past belief that a mere child should possess such wonderful ability as this lad has shown this evening." This particular exhibition and stay in Butte, Montana was left unmentioned in V. Fiala's account of Reshevsky's first American tour in the *Quarterly for Chess History* 8/2002 (pages 19-157).

An Unspoiled Boy is Sammy Reshevsky World Chess Marvel Doesn't Study Out His Game in Advance, He Says. Can See at Least Twelve Moves Ahead and Often More. Thinks He Might Like to Be a Physician.

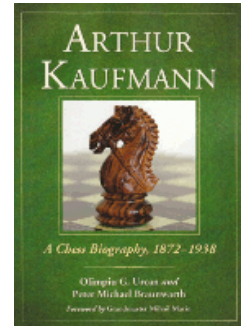
A little boy with steady blue eyes, clad in a blue sailor suit sat in the lobby of the Thornton hotel last evening and discussed with visitors his nation-conquering chess tour which is soon to come to a close. The boy was the infant prodigy of Lodz, Poland, one of the foremost chess players in the world, Samuel Reshevsky.

Samuel Reshevsky is small for his age. His skin is fair. His head is of the long type, bulging slightly in the back. He is very French in his manner. He purse his lips to expresses doubt, lifts the corners of his mouth, first one and then the other, to express indifference, and shrugs his shoulders in characteristic French fashion, to express lack of knowledge.

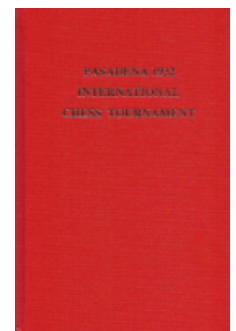
Sammy, as he likes to be called, speaks English with a slight accent. He has been learning only six months and has as yet mastered only the simple words.

"I don't study out my game in advance," he said, then, leaning forward and speaking earnestly a though trying to impress some great truth, "you can't do it. I have to see how the game develops. My play depends on what's called for by the game."

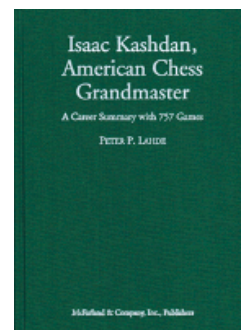
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AN UNSPOILED BOY IS SAMMY RZESCHEWSKI WORLD CHESS MARVEL

Doesn't Study Out His Game in Advance, He Says. Can See at Least Twelve Moves Ahead and Often More. Thinks He Might Like to Be a Physician.

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pressive contortion of the facial muscles and a lifting of the shoulders. "I played a lot of chess in Europe. The best players are in this country. The best players I think are in Philadelphia and Denver."

"What am I going to become when I grow up?"

Up went his shoulders again while he gave the inquisitor an appraising look as if to gauge his sincerity of purpose. "I have lots of time to think of that. Would I like to be a policeman? No, I don't see anything in that. The leader of a band wearing gold braided uniform and a shako? I like music but I don't think I want to be a band leader. A physician—?"

Sammy's face took on a speculative look as if the last suggestion had possibilities. "Maybe I might like that," he said, "but I don't know yet."

Suggests Engineering.

"It is my impression," said Charles Asenberg, his manager and tutor, "that the boy will make a fine engineer if that particular profession

A cutting from the *Anaconda Standard* of June 3, 1921

Will Give Away Queen

"Do I feint the other player into a move I want him to make? Sure, I trade and give away pawn. I even give away my queen if by doing so I can get the move I want."

"Am I tired after the game? No, no, it doesn't tire me at all. I can't put in a lot of time studying moves. When I get to the board I have to move right away. Yes I have studied the moves of the old masters. I don't care much for them," with an expressive contortion of the facial muscles and a lifting of the shoulders. "I played a lot of chess in Europe. The best players are in this country. The best players I think are in Philadelphia and Denver."

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Samuel Reshevsky in Cleveland in 1920
(detail from a larger photograph)

Suggests Engineering

"It is my impression," said Charles Azenberg, his manager and tutor, "that the boy will make a fine engineer if that particular profession should appeal to him."

Mr. Azenberg holds the degree of Bachelor of Science of the University of London. "The boy is not only bright at chess," he said, "but in other things as well. He is apt at mathematics, learns languages quickly and had a keen delight in things of motion. Perhaps this is why the auto appeals so strongly to him. He knows every make of car in the country."

"We do not intend that Samuel shall be spoiled by too much adulation," Mr. Azenberg said. "The present trip will be concluded in about a fortnight. We will play in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans and St. Louis, then back to New York, where the boy's parents now live. At home Samuel has three tutors. He is being given every opportunity to develop a wonderful mind. Much has been said about the relationship between chess and mathematics. I do not see it except in a general way. A mathematician might excel in chess merely because mathematics require a clear mind just as does chess. Samuel, as it happens, is good at mathematics. He is quick in calculation. He has a wonderful conceptive mind. He has enormous visualizing powers. He can see 12 moves ahead on the board."

Can See More Than 12

"Twelve?" interjected Sammy. "I can see more than 12."

"The Germans have said that he could see at least 17 moves ahead, but..." turning to the boy, "let's be conservative and say 12 at least."

"Those who pin their faith to the doctrine of heredity," Mr. Azenberg went on, "will find small comfort for their theories in this case. Samuel's father plays a poor game at chess – what you might call a rotten game. His mother takes no interest at all. Samuel is the only wizard in the family. He has played 846 games in this country and lost only eight. He was beaten by two players who had previously won from Marshall and Capablanca. In Salt Lake, he beat one player who had once beaten Marshall and drew with another."

Not Spoiled

Samuel does not seem to attach much importance to his skill at chess. He gave no evidence of being spoiled by praise. He submits to an interview with good grace, acknowledges an introduction with a handshake and says he doesn't mind travelling. His eyes glisten and a smile spreads over the attractive little face when tops, marbles and swimming are mentioned. "I will have those things when I get home," he said. The only subject on which he best likes to talk is chess. He does not view himself as a world beater, but as one who is trying to do his best and let the results take care of themselves. The boy is accompanied by his father and mother as well as his tutor.



Reshevsky's exhibition was featured on the front page of the *Anaconda Standard* (June 3, 1921).

[\[Click here to see entire page.\]](#)

Samuel Reshevsky – H. L. Maury

Butte (Montana), twelve-board simultaneous exhibition
 French Defense [C01]

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Nf6 5.Bd3 Be6 6.0-0 Nbd7 7.Bf4 c5 8.
 dxc5 Bxc5 9.Nc3 0-0 10.Ng5 h6 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Re1**



[FEN "r2q1rk1/pp1n2p1/4pn1p/2bp4/5B2/2NB4/PPP2PPP/R2QR1K1 b - - 0 12"]

12.Qe2 was much safer.

12...Qb6

Maury should have gone for 12...Bxf2+! 13.Kxf2 Qb6+ 14.Be3 (14.Ke2? is met by 14...Ng4! 15.Qd2 Qf2+ 16.Kd1 Rxf4 and Black wins this easily.) 14...Ng4+ 15.Kg1 Nxe3 16.Na4 Nxd1+ 17.Nxb6 Nxb6 18.Raxd1 Rf6 with an excellent position for Black.

13.Qe2 Rae8

The direct 13...e5!? would have been rather forceful: 14.Bg3 e4 15.Bb5 Qe6

16.Rad1 Nb6 with chances for both sides, although Black's position appears to be easier to play (especially against a player focused on eleven other boards).

14.Na4 Qc6 15.Bb5 Qc8 16.c3 Ne4

16...e5 17.Bd2 a6 18.Nxc5 Qxc5 19.Bxd7 Nxd7 20.Rad1 e4 offered good play.

17.Nxc5 Nexc5 18.Bd6 Rf7 19.Bd3 Nxd3 20.Qxd3 Qc6 21.Bg3 Rfe7 22. Rad1 Nf6 23.Bh4 Kf7?!



[FEN "4r3/pp2rkp1/2q1pn1p/3p4/7B/2PQ4/PP3PPP/3RR1K1 w - - 0 24"]

23...Rf7 was safer.

24.Re3

Reshevsky should have grabbed the opportunity: 24.Bxf6! Kxf6 25.Qh7 and Black seems in trouble.

24...g5 25.Rf3 Kg7 26.Bg3 e5



[FEN "4r3/pp2r1k1/2q2n1p/3pp1p1/8/2PQ1RB1/PP3PPP/3R2K1 w - - 0 27"]

27.Rf5 Qc4

According to *Anaconda Standard's* column, Maury declared that he could have won with 27...a6 instead of the text move. Not so. Maury's text move is fine although perhaps less ambitious. If he wanted to force matters, he could have tried 27...e4!? 28.Qd4 Kg6 29.Re5 Qa6 30.h4 Re6 31.Rxe6 Rxe6 32.Be5 Ng4 with equal chances but more complicated play.

28.Qxc4

28.Qf3?! was rather risky because of 28...e4 29.Qe3 Kg6 30.Rxf6+ Kxf6 31.Qxa7 Qe2.

28...dxc4 29.Re1 Nd7 30.h4 Kg6 31.Rf3 g4 32.Rfe3 Kf5 33.f3 e4

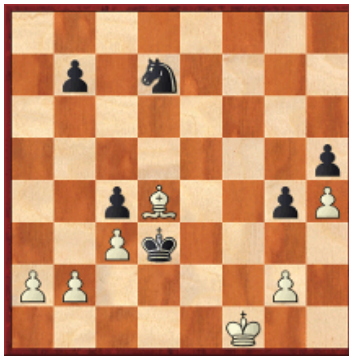


[FEN "4r3/pp1nr3/7p/5k2/2p1p1pP/2P1RPB1/PP4P1/4R1K1 w - - 0 34"]

34.Kf1

After the game, Reshevsky confessed to Maury that this move was a mistake. While it wasn't a decisive error, it was clearly not the best. 34.fxg4+ Kxg4 35.Rf1 was a simpler path to maintain the balance.

34...Re6 35.fxe4+ Rxe4 36.Bf2 h5 37.Rxe4 Rxe4 38.Rxe4 Kxe4 39.Bxa7 Kd3 40.Bd4



[FEN "8/1p1n4/8/7p/2pB2pP/2Pk4/PP4P1/5K2 b - - 0 40"]

40...b6?!

Now Maury, probably under the pressure of the moment and with the crowd watching, began to develop some wrong ideas about what should be done. 40...Kc2! 41.b3 cxb3 42.axb3 Kxb3 43.Kf2 Kc4 was an easy path to draw. Alternatively, he could have tried 40...Nf8!? 41.Ke1 Ne6 42.Be5 Kc2 43.b4 cxb3 44.axb3 Kxb3 45.Kd2 Kc4 46.Ke3 b5 47.g3 Nc5, but with few chances to win the endgame anyway.

41.b3

41.a4! was more accurate here, with some concrete chances to punish Maury immediately: 41...Kd2 (41...Kc2? 42.Ke2 Kxb2 43.Ke3 Kc2 44.Kf4 and White gets dangerously ahead.) 42.Kf2 Kd3 43.Ke1 Ke4 44.Kd2 Kf4 45.Bf2 Ke4 46.Kc2 Kd5 47.Bd4 Ke4 48.b4 cxb3+ 49.Kxb3 with chances for a win.

41...cxb3 42.axb3



[FEN "8/3n4/1p6/7p/3B2pP/1PPk4/
6P1/5K2 b - - 0 42"]

42...Nc5?

Almost any other rational move keeps the balance, but this impulsive idea loses the game for the Butte attorney: 42...b5 43.Bg7 Kc2 44.Ke2 Kxb3 45.Bh8 Nc5 46.Ke3 Kc4 47.g3 Na4 48.Kd2 with equality.

43.Bxc5 bxc5 44.b4 cxb4 45.cxb4 Kc4 46.Kf2 Kxb4 47.Ke3 Kc4 48.Kf4 Kd4 49.Kg5 Ke3 50.Kxh5 Kf4 51.Kg6 Kg3 52.h5 Kxg2 53.h6 g3 54.h7 Kf1 55.h8Q g2 56.Qh3 Kf2 57.Qh2 Kf1 58.Qf4+ Kg1 59.Kf5 Kh1 60.Qh4+ Kg1 61.Kf4 Kf1 62.Kf3 g1N+ And White won at move sixty-five.

Olimpiu G. Urcan is the author of [Arthur Kaufmann: A Chess Biography, 1872-1938](#) (2012) and other chess history books by McFarland Inc.

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