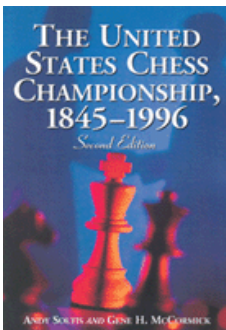




BOOK REVIEWS

From the Archives

Hosted by Mark Donlan



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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...

Simply the Best

by Hanon Russell

The United States Chess Championship, Second Edition, by Andy Soltis and Gene H. McCormick, 1997 McFarland & Co., English Algebraic Notation, Hardcover, 233pp., \$39.95 (ChessCafe Price: \$33.95)

Over the last few weeks, we have taken a look at a few books that have been re-released by the original publishers. Dover certainly comes to mind, but let's not forget McFarland's re-issue, with (unfortunately) little change, of the Steinitz biography by Landsberger. Well, McFarland has done it again, but this time they got it right. The second edition of *The United States Chess Championship* by Soltis and McCormick has been well worth waiting for.

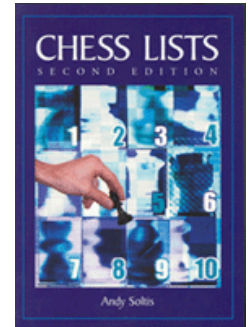
First released in 1985, the original edition was a first-rate account of the American championship from 1845, when Charles Stanley was recognized as the first U.S. Champion, through the 31st U.S. Championship, won by Alburt, in 1985. The only criticism then was the use of English Descriptive Notation, which limited its appeal to readers familiar with the more quaint, less popular notation. (Soltis' very popular column in *Chess Life* remains the last vestige of English Descriptive Notation in any major English-language chess journal.)

With the addition of material bringing the book current through the 1996 championship, the conversion to algebraic notation, and the addition of more than a dozen vintage photographs, a very good book has become a great book. The authors' anecdotal style combines insight into one hundred and fifty years of U.S. championship chess with dozens of well annotated games from these matches and tournaments, leaving the reader with a real sense of "having been there."

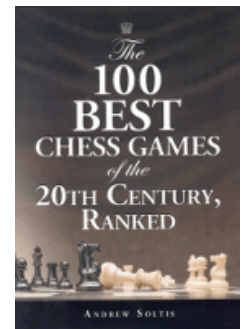
The format of the second edition is somewhat larger, so, although there is more material (with the addition of the updated material), there are actually fewer pages. The production is excellent, diagrams clear, and the recounting of a century and a half of the championship of the U.S., well, fascinating.

Before presenting an excerpt, a slight introductory digression: As many of you may already know, this reviewer was a personal friend of the late American grandmaster Sam Reshevsky. When he was asked why, in his opinion, Reuben Fine never won a U.S. Championship (a fact that surprises many chess players), he just smiled and said that answer was easy; whenever Fine played in a U.S. Championship, so did Reshevsky.

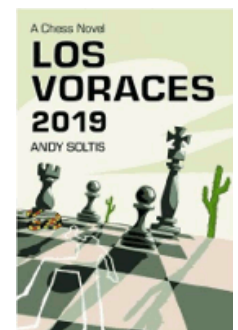
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With that in mind, here is an excerpt from Chapter Six, "The Reshevsky Years" - the game is from the 1938 championship and was the closest Fine ever got to winning the title; a win would have won the title for Reuben:

But there was still Fine. He had overcome the Kupchik loss to pile up 10 wins and four draws - a score comparable to his 1938 finish. Reshevsky, who had shaken off an early illness, had rolled up a score of 10 wins and five draws. And Sammy had not lost a game in a championship since the fourth round in 1936. All he had to do to earn his third title was get by Fine on the final day.

C59 Two Knights Defense

white Fine, *black* Reshevsky

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4! Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Be2 h6 9 Nf3 e4 10 Ne5 Bd6 11 f4

Fine began with a good - psychologically good - choice of opening: His opponent needed only a draw. But in this 4 Ng5 variation Black is virtually forced to sacrifice a pawn, and this places Reshevsky in

the uncomfortable situation of having to play for sharp positions when he would prefer quieter ones. Also, he must do so in unfamiliar waters.

The recommended line, which leads to a rough equality, is 11...0-0 which permits Black to regain his pawn after 12 Nc3 Re8 13 0-0 Bxe5 14 fxe5 Qd4+ and 15...Qxe5. In the line played, however, White doesn't have to spend a tempo on the somewhat useless Kh1 move.

11...Qc7? 12 0-0 0-0 13 Nc3 Bxe5 14 fxe5 Qxe5 15 d4! exd3 16 Qxd3

Here White is a bit better developed than in the line cited above and has excellent prospects in the form of the two bishops and superior pawn structure. Black's QN is out of play but his other pieces are temporarily active. Reshevsky tries to make the most of the latter while Fine goes after the former.

16...Ng4



[FEN "r1b2rk1/p4pp1/2p4p/n3q3/6n1/2NQ4/PPP1B1PP/R1B2RK1 w - - 0 17"]

17 Bf4?!

Now the psychology begins to work against Fine. He sees that 17 Bxg4 Bxg4 18 Bf4 Qc5+ 19 Kh1 would give him excellent winning chances. But the exchange of pieces also creates the possibility of an endgame with bishops of opposite color--a likely draw. To avoid that, and meet the threat of 17...Qxh2 mate, he makes a promising but unnecessary exchange sacrifice.

17...Qc5+ 18 Kh1 Nf2+ 19 Rxf2 Qxf2 20 Rf1 Qh4

The Black queen would be too far away from the center of action if it retreated to the queenside (20 ... Qb6 21 Qg3!, threatening both 22 Bc7 and 22 Bxh6).

21 Qd6! Bg4?

This brings Reshevsky to the brink of defeat. The tournament site was once again the Astor Hotel grill and many of the dozens of spectators there realized after White's next move that the defending champion had erred.

22 Ba6!

The Black bishop is needed at e6 to help the knight back to civilization. The threat of 23 b4 or a queen attack on the knight costs Black time. Fine plays skillfully on both wings:

22...Bc8 23 Bd3! Be6 24 Qb4 Qh5 25 Bc7! Nc4

This could almost be called desperation. The knight has been encircled and only tactics can rescue it. According to witnesses, Reshevsky was in tears as he considered the hopelessness of the situation. Reinfeld, his good friend, called it the most miserable moment in Sammy's life.

26 Bxc4 Qh4



[FEN "r4rk1/p1B2pp1/2p1b2p/8/1QB4q/2N5/PPP3PP/5R1K w - - 0 27"]

Now 27 Rf4 will win. Fine, a United States champion, saw a more intricate winning try, involving three forcing moves followed by an apparent killer. After weighing the two alternatives, he decided against 27 Rf4!

27 Bf4??

"A miracle happened." - Reshevsky.

"I must confess that I was overcome by the fantastic feeling that nothing could possibly win for me." - Fine.

27...Bxc4 28 Qxc4 g5 29 g3 Qg4

All foreseen by Fine. Now he intended the knockout blow, 30 Ne4, which threatens 31 Nf6+ and relieves the pin on the fourth rank. That would permit White to keep his two minor pieces for a rook under circumstances more favorable than after 27 Rf4, but...

30 Qxc6

...before he could play 30 Ne4, Fine saw to his horror that Black has 30... Qe6!! as an answer. After 31 Qxe6 fxe6, for example, there is a new pin, this time on the f-file. And on 31 Qd4 Black plays 31...f5! 32 Nc5 Qe2 33 Rf2 Qel + 34 Kg2 gxf4. Fine had miscalculated. The win was gone:

30...gxf4 31 Rxf4 Qe6 32 Qf3 f5! 33 Qd5 Rae8 34 Kg2 Qxd5+ 35 Nxd5 Re2 + 36 Rf2 Rxf2+ 37 Kxf2 Kf7 38 c4 a5 39 b3 Re8 40 a3 Rc8 41 Nc3 Ke6 42 Ke3 Ke5 43 Kd3 Rb8 44 Nb5 Rd8+ 45 Kc2 h5 46 b4 axb4 47 axb4 h4! 48 c5 hxg3 49 hxg3 Kd5 50 Kd3 Rg8

and the game was **drawn** in another dozen moves after seven hours of play. It

was enough to discourage even Fine and he never entered another U.S. championship when Reshevsky was around.

The second edition of *The U.S. Chess Championship* is the best account of the history of American champions and championships. It reads well, informs without being tedious and even plays well. It will be a valuable addition to any chess player's library. Bravo Soltis, McComick, and McFarland!

[Order](#) *U.S. Chess Championship 1845-1996*
by Andy Soltis

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