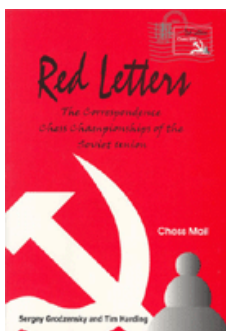




COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



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Judging Bobby Fischer

When last month's article was almost complete, another box of books arrived for consideration from Russell Enterprises, including Karsten Müller's new book of Fischer's games. Before moving on to that, here are three endgame studies from one of the other books in the box. Spend a little time trying to work them out, before coming to the final section of this article.

Study 1
Alois Wotawa, 1935



White to play and win.

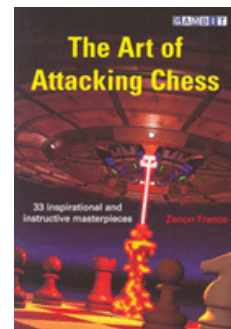
Study 2
John Nunn, 1986



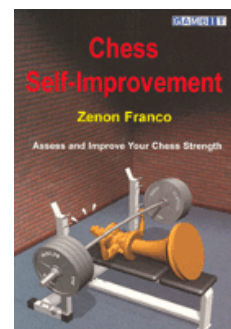
White to play and draw.

Study 3
Alois Wotawa, 1960
(Actually, the first study in the book.
The hardest move to find is White's third.)

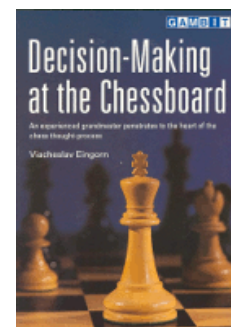
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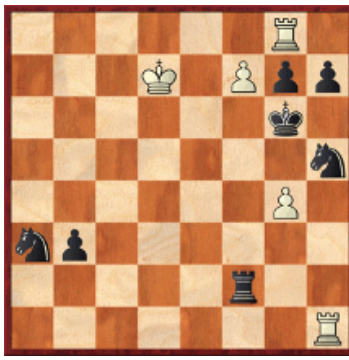
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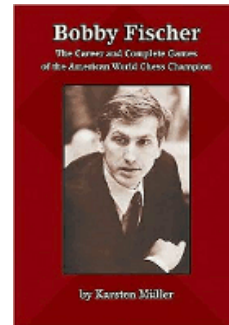
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White to play and win.

The games of Bobby Fischer

I last wrote on Fischer after his death, in the [February 2008](#) article. The occasion of returning to this topic is the recent publication by Russell Enterprises of *Bobby Fischer: The Career and Complete Games of the American World Chess Champion*, edited by GM Karsten Müller, with a foreword by Larry Evans, an introduction by the editor, and an openings survey by Andy Soltis. The book is a flexi-cover edition of 408 pages priced at \$39.95 (ISBN 978-1-888690-59-0). It includes photographs and all games have at least some annotations.



The first edition of *The Games of Robert J. Fischer*, edited by Robert G. Wade and Kevin O'Connell, was published by Batsford to coincide with his world championship match with Spassky. Afterwards a second edition appeared with the games of that match. In all, the Wade book appeared to include 770 tournament and match games, plus nineteen games played in informal events, such as clock simultaneous displays and five-minute games.



Comparing the two books is no simple matter as Wade's arrangement of the games was not strictly chronological. U.S. Championship games were placed first, followed by other American events and then various international tournaments. These were followed by Olympiads and finally games from the world championship cycles in which Fischer participated. Another drawback for the twenty-first century reader is that it was in descriptive notation. Also that book could not of course have included Fischer's last competitive event; the thirty-game match with Spassky in 1992. So clearly a new book was required.

One of the first things that puzzled me was that the new book should have more games. If Fischer had played 770 serious games by 1972 and another thirty later, there should be at least 800 games in this new volume, and at least 819 in total. Why only 735? (Actually 736 - as there is a game 429a, evidently discovered at a late stage when it was too late to renumber everything.) How can the book claim to be the "complete games" when it omits more than eighty games?

The answer is that Wade's book numbered games for which the score, and sometimes not even the result or name of the opponent were available. For example, on page ninety-five, "games" 106-112 were the Greater New York City Championship of 1956, a seven-round Swiss in which Fischer won the Class B Trophy. None of Fischer's games from this event have survived. So I went right through Wade's book looking for these "absent friends". There were seventy-three numbered but missing games from American events (mostly 1955-7); page 464 has a game that turned up after the first edition. Additionally, three games of the four-game match Fischer played with Yugoslav GM Milan Matulovic in 1958 are missing; the new book does not

have them either.

So the revised quantity of games in the Wade book (including the 1 c4 1-0 resulting from Panno's resignation protest at Palma 1970) is 694, plus the nineteen informal games in the appendix, total 713. Adding the thirty later played against Spassky at Sveti Stefan and Belgrade, there should be 743 games in the new book - in fact, a few more as Müller found some games and fragments that Wade did not, as discussed below. So why only 736? A systematic recount was necessary.

The new book does not "cheat" by giving the missing games numbers. Nevertheless, in cases from some of these early events, when the name of the opponent and result are known, it would have been good to have that included. The omission means that should in future some more games turn up, historians will still have to consult Wade's book in some cases to see where they fit in.

Müller actually has one game from the 1955 U.S. Amateur, whereas Wade and O'Connell had none. From the 1955 U.S. Junior, in which Wade had five of the ten games Fischer played, the new book adds a fragment of a sixth, but is unsure which of two opponents was black. I am a bit puzzled why, since Wade gave the full Christian name of nearly all opponents, Müller in some cases gives only their initial. Why give less information than is known?

Also, it seems that Müller did not know of Fischer's participation in a correspondence tournament in 1955. This was a preliminary section of the annual Golden Knights competition, so the future champion may have played (or at least started) six games. Only the following is known and it is in neither the Wade nor the new book. I believe it is authentic, but unfortunately I cannot provide a source reference.

A. Wayne Conger - Robert J. Fischer

Golden Knights corr, 1955

King's Indian Defense [E70]

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Bg5 h6 6 Bh4 0-0 7 f4 c5 8 d5 Qa5 9 Qd2 Qc7 10 Bd3 e6 11 Nb5 Qb6



12 Nxd6 1-0

If 12...Qxd6 13 e5 Qe7 14 d6 with the point 14...Qd7? 15 exf6 Bh8 16 f5 g5 17 Bxg5 h5 18 Qxg5+ Kh7 19 fxe6 mate.

Moving to 1956, Müller's game eight, Fischer-Nash from the U.S. Amateur, is a complete game that Wade and O'Connell did not find. Then in the 1956 U.S. Junior, Wade had one game, but Müller has two more, or at least most of the moves, apparently obtained from the opponents. The 1956 U.S. Open is the first event from which all Fischer's games survive; both books have them. Fischer played seven games in the 1956 Eastern States Open, held in Washington D.C. on Thanksgiving weekend; Wade had three, but Müller has six of them. So in total that is six more games from 1956 plus the extra game from 1955, so far seven previously unavailable games.

Moving on to 1957, the picture becomes more confusing. Wade and O'Connell have Fischer playing two Log Cabin tournaments at West Orange,

one in February (Fischer scoring four points from six rounds) and one in March, over five rounds, each player having fifty minutes for the entire game. Wade has a total of six games, Müller seven, but the accounts do not correspond. Wade listed the opponents and results of his three unknown games, but Müller transfers to the earlier event some games played in the later one.

Müller has definitely made some error here, because he says Fischer scored four points, but if you add up the total points from the games he puts under the header, it amounts to only three. The unknown wins mentioned by Wade against Faust, Hoeflin, and Sovel were therefore probably correct, and the games with Feuerstein, Hurlten, and Saidy must belong to the 50-50 event as Wade said. The one new game is Fischer's loss to Sherwin in the 50-50. Here is that comedy of errors, game sixty-one in the book, the mistakes no doubt being partly due to clock pressure.

James Sherwin – Robert J. Fischer

Log Cabin 50–50, New Jersey, 1957

King's Indian Defense [E87]

1 c4 Nf6 2 d4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 0–0 5 f3 d6 6 Be3 e5 7 d5 Nh5 8 Qd2 f5 9 exf5 gxf5 10 0–0–0 a6 11 Bd3 Nd7 12 Nge2 Nc5 13 Bc2 b5 14 Ng3 Nf4 15 Nge2

White has wasted two tempi and now comes under a typical counter-attack.

15...b4 16 Na4 Nxe2+ 17 Qxe2 Nxa4 18 Bxa4 Bd7 19 Bc2 a5 20 c5 a4 21 c6



21...b3!

Correct tactics; open lines are much more important than a pawn with opposite side castling.

22 axb3 axb3 23 Bxb3 Qb8 24 Qc4 Be8 25 h4 f4 26 Bf2 Bg6 27 h5 Bf5 28 h6 Bf6 29 Kd2?

Müller writes, "White's king will not find safety in the center. 29 Bc2 is better."

29...Ra5 30 Ra1



30...Rb5!!

Preparing a queen sacrifice.

31 Ba7 Rxb3 32 Bxb8 Rxb2+ 33 Kc1 Rfxb8 34 Rd1 Bh4 35 Ra2

If 35 Rd3 Bf2 36 Qa6 Bc5 and wins says Müller.

35...R2b4?

A shame as the young Fischer spoils what would have been a fine game.
Instead 35...R8b4 "wins on the spot".

36 Qa6 R8b5?!

Müller cites 36...e4! 37 fxe4 Bxe4 38 Kd2 Bg6 (Sullivan) and Black should be able to draw.

37 Kd2 Rxd5+ 38 Ke2?



38 Kc3 "is forced, when only White can win". Now Fischer had a second chance to win the game.

38...Rxd1??

Both players missed the pretty forced mate: 38...Re4+! 39 fxe4 Bg4+ 40 Kf1 Rxd1#.

39 Kxd1 Rd4+

Or 39...Rb1+ 40 Ke2 Kf7 41 Qb7 and wins.

40 Ke2 Bd3+?! 41 Qxd3 1-0

In the 1957 U.S. Open the new book clarifies that Fischer won his first round game by forfeit; the correct name of the opponent is also stated. In the 1963 New York Open, Fischer's last Swiss tournament, in which he made a 7-0 clean sweep, it is interesting to see that the opponent simply named by Wade as "Beach" was Englishman T. John Beach, the well-known Lancastrian player and organizer. Also, the one missing game from this event was found by Soltis. This is game 429a.

Robert J. Fischer – Matthew Green

New York State Open Poughkeepsie, 1963

Sicilian Defense [B40]

[Müller 429a]

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 d6?! 5 Bd3 Nc6 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 0-0 d5?!
8 exd5 cxd5 9 c4 Nf6 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Be4 Bd6 12 Nc3 Nxc3 13 Bc6+**



13...Ke7?

13...Bd7 14 Qxd6 Nb5 "is the lesser evil" says Müller.

14 bxc3 Rb8 15 Qg4 Rg8 16 Qh4+ f6 17 Qxh7 Bb7 18 Bxb7 Rxb7 19 Re1 Qc8



20 h3

Fischer apparently assumed (correctly) that the win would come eventually without the need for effort. Müller suggests the more aggressive 20 h4!?, because if 20...Qxc3? the spectacular 21 Ba3! either picks up the g8-rook or exposes the black king further after 21...Rbb8 22 Bxd6+.

20...Kf7 21 Qh5+ g6 22 Qf3 Rb5 23 a4 Rf5 24 Qe2 Bc5 25 Be3 Re5 26 Qf3 Rd8 27 Rab1 Bxe3?

27...Rd7 is better says Müller.

28 Rxe3 Rxe3 29 Qxe3 Rd7 30 Qh6 f5 31 c4 Qd8 32 Kh2



32...a5?! 33 f4?!

33 c5 is more accurate.

33...Kf6?

The last chance to fight was 33...Qf8 34 Qh4 says Müller.

If 34...Rxb7 35 Qg5+ and Qxd8.

35 e5 1-0

Having established one apparent mistake in the new book, I did not have time to go through both books event by event to see if there are other discrepancies, but it is probably the only one. If there are others, they are almost certainly minor, but I think these Log Cabin events must be re-checked in whatever primary sources exist, and a thorough event-by-event check between the two books should be done before any reprint or revised edition is made.

I have some recommendations for any future edition. Firstly, the editor should revert to Wade's system of mentioning the undiscovered games, so that future researchers know what to hunt for. Events where no games are known (e.g., the 1957 Benninson training match) should be mentioned for the record. I also recommend that each game should have a proper header, saying what event and round it was from, or in the case of a match, what game number it was, because it is annoying when flipping through the book, or finding a game via an index, to have to flip back and identify exactly what each game was.

I think that an appendix should include the various games that are known by Fischer from lesser events, including the ones that are in the back of the Wade book and the ones in ChessBase's database, if they can be authenticated, to provide the most complete possible record of Fischer's career.

I also think that when editor and publisher are absolutely convinced they have corrected all discrepancies, they should issue (at least some copies of) the new edition in [hardcover](#).

As Fischer became involved chiefly in more important events, the record of his career becomes complete. However, as the notorious case of the "algebraicised" [My Sixty Memorable Games](#) (discussed in that earlier column) shows, a big issue must be: is this book accurate in the game scores? I think so, but I leave it to the likes of Edward Winter to seek for errors. I would have been happier if the editor had explicitly asserted that he had corrected the record in cases where this collection differs from previous ones.

In his *Chess Notes* column recently (item number 6367), Winter discussed the case of Hort v. Fischer from the Palma de Mallorca interzonal 1970, where Black's fifty-third move was given incorrectly in the Wade and O'Connell book (and other sources). The move as printed (53...Bb6) would suggest Black missed a mate in one at move fifty-five, but in fact 53...Be3 was played, as correctly given in Müller's book. I hope that this is a good sign we can trust the accuracy of this book.

Somebody else recently asked me about a supposed match Fischer against Gligoric, which has been suggested (and refuted) on the Internet a couple of years ago. Publisher Hanon Russell assures me that very thorough research was done and they found no evidence of any such match having been played. If anyone thinks they know better, please write in, but only if you have definite source information.

As for the prefatory material, I think it is somewhat Americo-centric and probably contains little that is new, but nevertheless it makes light reading. The part I liked the least was the openings survey, but even this has some interesting points. Soltis's attempt to portray Fischer as an innovator seems unconvincing. What he was good at was refuting other people's ideas, especially published Russian ideas, and at reviving some old nineteenth century variations from analysts like Steinitz.

Yes, Fischer did find a lot of new strong moves in specific situations, but they were mostly based on tactics (as in the Poisoned pawn Najdorf) or just on positional judgment rather than a major re-assessment of how a line should be played. The one exception, perhaps, is his revival of the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez with 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 and now 5 0-

0! rather than the older 5 Nc3 or 5 d4. He played that in nine serious games, never losing.

I do not include his advocacy of 3...d6 as a defence against the King's Gambit, as this was really something he did in print rather than in actual play, and it was left to other subsequently to work out the details. There is not one serious Fischer game with 3...d6. With white, until late in his career, Fischer relied almost exclusively on 1 e4; "best by test" as he supposedly once said, although Soltis does not quote this. Fischer's limited repertoire, as he came to realise, made it easier for his top opponents to prepare against him. The versatility of Spassky, Kasparov, and Karpov, equally at home in all major openings, was not a feature of Fischer's repertoire.

It is hard to make a case for Fischer as a strategic trailblazer in any opening, and here perhaps is his greatest limitation in the pantheon of world chess champions. Even relatively "minor" world champions (if that is not a contradiction in terms), such as Euwe and Smyslov, brought new strategic ideas to the openings. The main exception, of course, is Tal, who was probably responsible for even fewer strong opening ideas than Fischer. The genius of Tal was in the middlegame, and that is where he showed his creativity.

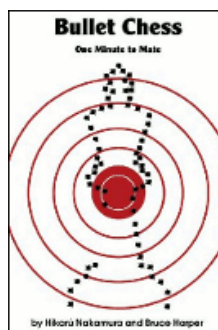
As for the 1964 remark from *Chess Life* which Soltis quotes, that Fischer was "just waiting for a chance to play the Evans against a grandmaster," that is nonsense. Fischer never played 3 Bc4 in an international match or all-play-all tournament, even in the United States. Maybe he said it so opponents would waste time preparing the Evans. The record shows that in 1963 he played the Evans in the friendly against Reuben Fine, which he included in *My Sixty Memorable Games*. In 1964 he played 3 Bc4 in his last open event, the New York State Open at Poughkeepsie, and both his games against Bisguier and Radojcic were in the Steinitz 9 Nh3 line of the Two Knights, which Soltis mentions. Thereafter, the only Fischer games with 3 Bc4 in the ChessBase Mega Database 2009 were from simul, although it is true that if his opponents replied 3...Bc5 he invariably played the Evans Gambit.

Other books

Studies for Practical Players by GM Mark Dvoretsky and study composer Oleg Pervakov (Russell Enterprises, 211pp., \$24.95, ISBN 978-1-888690-64-4) is a book that will give hours of delight and fascination to advanced players, or even players of 1800+ who like endgames. The examples I set as exercises at the start of the column are relatively straightforward; most of those in the book are much more complex. However, they share the common aim of giving the practical player an insight into the types of surprising resources that may occasionally be of value in actual games. This book is highly recommended.



On the other hand, as an "old fogey", I don't really see the point in writing a book about *Bullet Chess: One Minute to Mate* as Hikaru Nakamura and Bruce Harper have done - at least not one of 247 pages (Russell Enterprises, \$19.95, ISBN 978-1-888690-67-5). Chess is a game of **thought** and bullet chess is about making as many moves as you can in as little time as possible, which doesn't involve thought as there is no time for it. If you think, you lose on time.



Admittedly, in my younger days, I frequently played "reductions," which started at five minutes each with the winner of a game having a minute less next time. To win the reduction, you had to win with only one minute on the clock - which was usually easier with white at one minute against two than with black at one minute each. It was very hard on clocks, which were not cheap. However, the Internet has transformed all this. Now it's a question of who is quicker on the mouse click,

or in selecting a "pre-move" during the opponent's clock time, which will be played instantaneously (if legal) as soon as the other player moves. It may be fun, but it's not chess. As for buying such a book, why bother reading one that is full of examples of blunders, however amusing, when you could buy a book of Fischer's games or the brilliant and instructive endgame studies in the previous book reviewed?

Solutions to the studies

Study 1 Black's king is stalemated; how to give the decisive check? One way would be with the rook on h7 or h8, which means that any time White has his rook on the seventh or eighth rank, Black's rook must wait on, or return to, the h-file to prevent this.

The principal threat is for White to manoeuvre his R to g3, threatening Rxh3 mate, and if Black stops that by ...f4xg3 then f2xg3 is mate with the pawn.

Black's only defence to that idea is to have his rook on the second rank to pin the pawn, for example 1 Ra1 Rb7 2 Rg1?? Rb2 with a draw.

The winning line combines these ideas: **1 Ra8** forces **1...Rh6** and then **2 Ra1** followed by 3 Rg1 and 4 Rg3 wins. Because Black is a tempo behind, he cannot get his rook to the second rank in time.

Study 2 This study is in keeping with the theme of the book: unnatural play in positions that could occur naturally in games. If White plays the "obvious" 1 Kf6, he loses. Thus 1...b3 2 Kg7 b2 3 Kxh8 b1=Q 4 Kg7 Qg1+ 5 Kf7 Qd4 6 Kg8 Qg4+ 7 Kf7 Qf5+ 8 Kg7 Qg5+ 9 Kf7 Qh6 10 Kg8 Qg6+ 11 Kh8 and the white king is stalemated, but he still has a pawn. So 11...Kc5 12 b6 Qf7 13 b7 Qf8 mate.

Once you understand why, the solution is easy: **1 Kd4! Kxb5** (Otherwise 2 Kc4 Ka5 3 b6 and Black must exchange his last pawn.) **2 Ke5 b3 3 Kf6 b2 4 Kg7 b1Q 5 Kxh8** with, despite the lost tempo, a standard draw of king and rook's pawn on the seventh against queen.

Study 3 Wotawa specialised in studies aiming at checkmate. After the introductory moves **1 f8=Q! Rxf8 2 gxh5+ Kf7**, which are not so hard to find, White cannot win by the obvious 3 Rxf8+ Kxf8 4 Rf1+ Kg8 5 h6 (or 5 Ke7 h6) because after 5...gxh6 6 Ke7 comes 6...h5! 7 Rg1+ Kh8 8 Kf7 h6 and there is a flight square for the black king. Of course 3 Rf1+ does not work because of 3...Kxg8. Indeed if it were Black's move, and he played 3...Rxf8 then 4 Rf1 would be checkmate while (even if he had no queenside knight and pawn), 3...Kxg8 would save him.

The winning move is the incredible **3 Rh8!!** which threatens (for example in reply to 3...b2) 4 Rf1 mate. So Black must play **3...Rxb8** and then comes **4 Rf1+** forcing **4...Kg8** incarcerating Black's own rook, which also takes away a flight square if White later checks on the g-file.

After **3...Rxb8 4 Rf1+ Kg8**, White finishes him off by **5 h6! gxh6 6 Ke7** which now forces mate.

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