



COLUMNISTS

Hoisting the Hippopotamus

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Lawrence



Schachgötterdämmerung to Electroshock

—World Championship Zeitgeist, Part I—

Did the invention of the electric fan enable Wilhelm Steinitz to concentrate despite the summer heat in his stuffy New York City walkup—and so play an integral part in our present day knowledge of the bishop pair? Was the development of the thermos bottle the secret, caffeinated explanation of the playing stamina Emanuel Lasker exhibited even at an advanced age? In a word or two, probably not. But if we require a reminder that gadgetry can become the focus of big events, we need only consider Florida's "vote-a-matic" or even Linda Tripp's tape recorder.

A conversation in 1990 between Lev Alburt and then world champion Garry Kasparov centered around Garry's contention that the world champions were products, even distillations of their times. Not really a revolutionary or even an anti-intuitive proposition, but an interesting one to flesh out a bit. It calls for a wide-angle, interdisciplinary view of the chess champions not normally taken. Because Garry made the initial argument, let's start with his recent reign and then go back to the first champs to see what this special focus can bring out for us.

Kasparov versus Karpov, the twilight of the chess gods

Whatever year we're living in, the old days were always better. In the 1980s, some jaded *achessionados* complained that the Kasparov-Karpov matches had become boring. The "public," they argued, grew weary of these same old, sound-alike Russians and their seething, arduous matches.

But our 21st-Century view has been refocused by recent championship overpopulation. Since just 1999, three new names—Alex Khalifman, Visha Anand and Vladimir Kramnik—have been penciled-in the once venerable list, whereas the first three world champions—Steinitz, Lasker, and Capablanca—held down the throne for a total of more than 60 years! In comparison to quick-play elimination-tournaments among 100 world-championship "candidates" (who sometimes find it easier to give winning checks than to cash those issued by the new FIDE),

the K-K cycle in five acts was pure Wagnerian *Schachgötterdämmerung*, the Twilight of the Chess Gods.

In a *más macho* metaphor, the three prizefights of heavyweight champs Muhammed Ali and Joe Frazier pack a punch. Without those fights, neither boxer's legend would have been chiseled in as large a script. In the days of 15-round, sock-'til-you-drop combat, each brought out the superman in the other. Broken jaws and cracked ribs were ignored in the quest for victory. The insiders as well as the boxing public were split in two. There was the Ali camp and there was the Frazier crowd. You were in one corner or the other. What's more, The Greatest and Smokin' Joe detested each other with the very same intensity as did the Russian K's. And, in both the case of the chessboard pugilists and the in-the-ring tacticians, the years away from the blood-sport have not brought détente.

At any rate, the great "heavyweight" bouts of both combative sports now seem only a flickering newsreel of yesteryear, from the legendary eras of Wilhelm Steinitz and Jose Capablanca and their respective sweet-science contemporaries, Gentleman Jim Corbett and Jack Dempsey.

The target of Kasparov's argument was of course his arch-nemesis, Anatoly Karpov— with whom he played matches in 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, and 1990, yielding a final total plus score of a mere two points to Garry. Karpov was world champion from the time of Bobby Fischer's no-show forfeiture in 1975 until the controversial first two K-K matches, originally intended to be a single contest. Karpov, Garry pointed out to Lev, developed and reigned during those years of decaying Soviet morale and morals symbolized by the sometimes brutal, sometimes buffoonish Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, First Secretary and then President of the Presidium from 1964 to his death in 1982. (Brezhnev could both faint under a withering dressing down during a Central Committee argument and suggest poisoning his predecessor, Nikita Khrushchev.) Unsurprisingly, in the years of his supremacy, it was generally accepted that the *apparatchik* would say anything about anyone to get or maintain an enviable position. Corruption, cronyism and dreadful mediocrity were the hallmarks of these Soviet years. Karpov, a prominent Communist party member, Kasparov's thesis went, flourished in this hot house of bureaucratic treachery.

Kasparov further supported the thesis by pointing out his own relation to his times. In 1985, the year Kasparov captured the chess crown, Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary. *Perestroika* (political and economic rebuilding), *glasnost* (forthright public information) and the fall of the Wall were the invigorating sequence leading to an anti-communist revolution from within. In 1990, the

world gawked at the paradoxical spectacle of the Soviet leader receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. This, argued Garry, was the milieu Kasparov both reflected and embodied. Despite the obviously self-serving advantages provided by his adopting such a view, Kasparov had a point.

It's tempting (and we are so easily tempted) to expand Garry's idea by holding the prism of such "socio-political" interpretation over the scoresheets of the super-Ks. One might argue that Karpov's safe, positional, flexible play and Kasparov's bold and optimistic approach were at least partially products of their times as well.

In the beginning

Now let's go back to the advent of the modern chess championship, looking briefly in order at the men and their times, and how we can relate the two. Our bios are brief and basic. They don't go beyond the depth of field of our focus on contemporaneous influences and connections. Depending on your agreement or dispute with our speculations, you will find our brief sampling of each man's life and times either well selected or capricious. If you haven't already read about these fascinating legends and want to know more, see the book list at the end of this article for suggestions.

Along the way, it's a chance to share some playful pursuit of trivia. What value is it to know that Hungarian Georg Biro invented the first practical ballpoint pen during the second reign of Alexander Alekhine? Next to none. But who can resist such *non sequiturs*? Certainly not us. And as young men, both your co-authors have done their time in an academic environment, so we're professionally trained to find a way to use all of our research, relevant or not.

We've put together a program of the principals for easy reference. It gives the champions' years of birth and death, their years on top, and the countries they spent most of their time in. In fact, at the end of this series next month, you'll have a chance to download a file (viewable with the omni-present "Acrobat Reader," already living in most computers, or freely available as a quick download—go to [The ChessCafe Archives](#) page) that puts a lot of our information on one page. Use it for your private amusement only, please. It's copyrighted material—just in case Paramount Pictures decides to do a big-budget production revealing Alexander Alekhine's relationship with the aqualung (invented during his reign in 1943).

Modern Chess World Champions

Champion	Years as Champion	Country of Residence
Wilhelm Steinitz (1836-1900)	(1866-) 1886-1894	Austria, Britain, US
Emanuel Lasker (1868-1941)	1894-1921	Germany, US
José Raúl Capablanca (1888-1942)	1921-1927	Cuba, US
Alexander Alekhine (1892-1946)	1927-1935; 1937-1946	USSR, France, Portugal
Max Euwe (1901-1981)	1935-1937	Netherlands
Mikhail Botvinnik (1911-1995)	1948-1957; 1958-1960; 1961-1963	Soviet Union
Vasily Smyslov (1921-)	1957-1958	Soviet Union
Mikhail Tal (1936-1993)	1960-61	Soviet Union
Tigran Petrosian (1924-1984)	1963-1969	Soviet Union
Boris Spassky (1937-)	1969-1972	Soviet Union, France
Bobby Fischer (1943-)	1972-1975	US, Austria
Anatoly Karpov (1951-)	1975-1985; (FIDE) 1993-1999	Russia
Garry Kasparov (1963-)	1985-1993; (GMA, PCA, WCC) 1993-2001	Russia
Alex Khalifman (1966-)	1999-2000 (FIDE)	Russia
Vladimir Kramnik (1975-)	2000- (Braingames)	Russia
Visha Anand (1969-)	2000- (FIDE)	India

Wilhelm Steinitz—first champion with fans?

It's been said that Wilhelm Steinitz invented the world championship. He was born in 1836 in Prague, about the time that Englishman Michael Faraday was doing his revolutionary work in electromagnetic induction. Steinitz' contemporary, Russian Dmitry Mendeleyev, formulated the table of elements with such accuracy and logic that he was able to predict the existence of then unknown elements simply by the blank spots in his chart. Indeed, it was a time when modern science was getting serious.

Steinitz was recognized, unofficially, as champion since 1866. At 49, seven years after Edison turned night into day with his electric bulb, Steinitz sat down to win what he himself termed the first official world championship match. It was a traveling contest, against the top-contender—Polish-born Johannes Hermann Zukertort—, moving from New York, to St. Louis, and finally to New Orleans in 1886. This was the same year that saw the last in-the-ring appearance of bare-knuckle great John L. Sullivan, the Chicago Haymarket Riot between strikers and police, the surrender of Geronimo, and the dedication of the Statue of Liberty.



After a chess-filled lifetime that included an astonishing 28 years as champ, Steinitz died in 1900, the year German Max Planck's theories—asserting that matter emits or absorbs energy only in small, discrete units called quanta—led to quantum theory, still a hot scientific topic today. Steinitz spent his whole life in an age that was amazed and enchanted by its science. Older, simpler beliefs were being challenged by scientists such as Britain's Charles Darwin, who in 1859 published *On the Origin of the Species*, the groundbreaking work leading to the modern understanding of evolution. (Darwin made his key observations while on the HMS Beagle in the Galapagos Islands, in the news at the time of this writing, more than 140 years later, as the natural victim of the latest oil-tanker spill.)

"Positivism" was a dominant philosophical school of thought in Steinitz' day. It held that philosophy should be founded only on empirical knowledge and experience. Steinitz lived in England when the British spokesman for this position, John Stuart Mill, was writing and lecturing.

So, amazing as it is outside of this context, it is really not surprising that Steinitz began the formulation of the scientific principles of chess play. He was very aware of the importance of what he was doing. Sometime around the early 1870s, it was as if he donned a laboratory jacket and sat down at his chess set with a microscope. His games in Vienna in 1873 contrast markedly with his previous play, notably wild games against Adolf Anderssen in 1866. He converted himself from the swashbuckling style of his contemporaries (he was once known as "the Austrian Morphy") to a methodical application of the principles of sound chess. He examined the popular openings of the day for White and found logical defenses. He gave up the unjustified kingside attack in favor of accumulating small, objective advantages until an invasion was justified in succeeding. Steinitz often focused in his writings on the static, or positional elements, such as pawn structure. Indeed,

although we may think of Aaron Nimzovich as the progenitor of such "modern" ideas, it was Steinitz who invented the term "holes" to indicate vulnerably weak points in pawn structure. Among other key ideas, he worked out the methods of using both the queenside majority and the bishop-pair to advantage. Steinitz invented chess theory as scientific method.

In 1888, Steinitz became a naturalized US citizen. In 1894, he was finally defeated, by 25-year-old Emanuel Lasker who had studied his elder's precepts and added his own ideas. Steinitz was 57. After losing the return match in Moscow in 1896, Steinitz became unhinged, spending time in a mental asylum abroad. Even after his return to the US, he remained markedly eccentric, claiming he could move the pieces without touching them—by projecting electro-magnetism from his fingers. He claimed to speak with God on the telephone—another contemporaneous invention (1876)—and even to give Him pawn and move at chess. It's not hard to connect these fantasies directly to important elements of Steinitz' milieu—to the experiments of Faraday and to the scientific discoveries and theories that seemed to downplay the need, at least in a mechanical way, of an all-powerful deity. Steinitz died penniless in the mental sanitarium on New York City's Ward Island.

During Steinitz' supremacy, the arts found new ways to express man's changing relationship with his universe. Claude Monet began the Impressionistic celebration of the world—painted in its midst, rather than in the confines of a stuffy studio—with *Impression: Sunrise* (1872). Two decades later, the eerie, disturbing paintings of the late 1890s by the troubled Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh, who shot himself after leaving the asylum in St. Remy, France, expressed much of the contemporaneous conflicts. His *Starry Night* depicted the fast-asleep, otherwise peaceful mountain-valley village of St. Remy, centered meaningfully around a church spire, lying exposed beneath an explosive sky full of swirling supernovae. The pessimistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer and the novels of Thomas Hardy reflected the scientific rebellion of the 19th Century and the resulting feeling of human displacement in an "unconscious," deterministic universe. Richard Wagner (1813-1883), whose operas seem long enough for even a pre-quick-play world championship match, was the dominant composer of the era. In one sense, Wagner's systematic expansion of both the orchestra and the music it played was akin to Steinitz' own lifelong devotion to the development of chess ideas.

Steinitzian synchronicity

In 1866, the beginning of Steinitz' unofficial reign, Alfred Nobel (whose bequest established the Nobel Prizes) invented dynamite, while Prussia and Italy defeated Austria in the Seven Weeks' War. In 1867, antiseptic surgery was established. Custer made his last

stand in 1876, and the gunfight at the OK corral made news, and widows, in 1881. In 1882 the electric fan was invented, and Gentleman James J. Corbett and John L. Sullivan fought the first heavyweight championship match, in New Orleans, under new rules requiring boxing gloves. Defense and technique won in the ring as well. "Gentleman Jim" knocked out the "Boston Strongboy" in 21 rounds. The boxing champ fared better financially—the purse was \$25,000 and there was a \$10,000 side bet. Steinitz won only \$2,000 for his convincing KO of "Sweet Cake" Zukertort. Thankfully, aspirin was invented in 1888. In 1891, basketball was developed at the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The first match against Lasker took place in 1894, the year the Sino-Japanese War began, the year Dreyfus was convicted falsely of treason in Paris, the year Eugene V. Debs called the first general strike of rail workers, and the year that Thomas Alva Edison introduced his kinescope, precursor of the moving picture. The second Lasker match in 1896 took place the year Frenchman Becquerel discovered radioactivity, William Jennings Bryan delivered his famous "Cross of Gold" speech at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the US Supreme Court's *Plessy versus Ferguson* decision granted states the right to provide "separate but equal" facilities for education, transportation, and public accommodations, a policy not overturned until 1954, in *Brown versus the Board of Education*. 1896 was also the year that fudge was invented and that Athens hosted the first modern Olympic games.

During Steinitz' long championship dominance, nine US presidents, from Andrew Johnson to Grover Cleveland, carried their belongings in and out of the White House (without the recent moving-out brouhaha).

Emanuel Lasker—chess from the analyst's couch

Emanuel Lasker himself may likely have agreed with Kasparov's thesis. Lasker defined top-level chess as a contest "between creative minds representative of their period."



He was certainly as much a man of his times as Steinitz. And it seems easy to make the case that three minds very influential on his own were countryman H.G.W. Hegel, Lasker's contemporary Sigmund Freud and Lasker's personal friend, Albert Einstein. (Lasker and Einstein liked to talk together. Normally, it is said, Einstein wanted to talk to Lasker about chess, while Lasker wanted to talk to Einstein about mathematics. Both men had the common sense to find their companion's best topic.)

Lasker was a German national born late in 1868, two years after the start of Steinitz' unofficial reign. The story goes, told by his friend and distant relative Edward Lasker, that a young Emanuel Lasker was about to give up chess when one of his tournament opponent's pawns fell unnoticed from the board at adjournment. Lasker won the game, made the master title, stayed in chess, and won the world championship five years later. Tough to top that press release, especially in the days before 20th-Century publicists invented Hollywood. But his life did not have a feel-good-movie ending.

Emanuel Lasker was multi-talented and highly educated. A year after winning the rematch with Steinitz, he enrolled at the University of Heidelberg and later at the University of Erlangen, where he earned his PhD in mathematics. Lasker was thus exposed to the latest scientific and philosophical ideas of his day. Indeed, he never intended to rely on chess as a profession. Only economic necessity forced this on him. He wrote books and papers on philosophy and mathematics, a field in which a few of his contributions remain useful to this day.

One of the University of Heidelberg's most famous professors of philosophy in an era before Lasker's matriculation was G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), whose words must still have echoed in the corridors of the revered school on the River Neckar. Hegel wrote and lectured that any idea or thesis is incomplete until it struggles with its antithesis to produce a third element, synthesis, which reconciles the truths of both its predecessors. Lasker himself wrote: "On the chessboard lies and hypocrisy do not survive long. The creative combination lays bare the presumption of a lie; the merciless fact, culminating in a checkmate, contradicts the hypocrite." In 1907, Lasker published a book entitled *Kampf*, "Struggle," an ironic title given the misery later caused Lasker and millions of others by the author of a book with a similar title, *Mein Kampf*.

In psychology, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was busy showing that the human brain operated on both an associative and unconscious basis, revealing that we often don't know what our true motivations are—and that we're products of a constant inner struggle. Freud's revelations were explosive. In art his theories took the form of the agonized screamers of Edvard Munch (1863-1944), expressing the torment of demons within. The Cubist paintings (i.e., *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Picasso, 1907) dissected the world to show all its angles at once, in a jigsaw puzzle of perspectives that seems to reflect our own jumbled perceptions and thoughts. In music, Austrian/American Arnold Schoenberg (*Pierrot Lunaire*, 1912) and Russian/French/American Igor Stravinsky (*The Rite of Spring*, 1913) used atonal dissonance to reflect inner conflict. German

Alban Berg, one of the most important modern opera composers, combined atonal music with blatant post-Freudian themes. In still-silent film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* acted out the human struggle between tyranny and chaos. In literature, Oscar Wilde penned *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)—in which the results of the protagonist's sins were objectified on a special canvass. Bram Stoker gave the world the unforgettable allegorical battle between the best and worst inside the human, *Dracula* (1897). In 1901 Joseph Conrad published *Heart of Darkness*, exposing an even more frightening inner struggle with human "hor—ror."

Meanwhile in the sciences, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, showing that it is as correct to say that the house moved by the car as it is to say that that car moved past the house, strained the normal view of objective measurement. It argued that proper assessment is possible only in relation to more than one object. His theories showed the relation of physical constants, such as the speed of light, mass and energy, and explained the minute but pestering differences between Newtonian calculations and the observable fact.

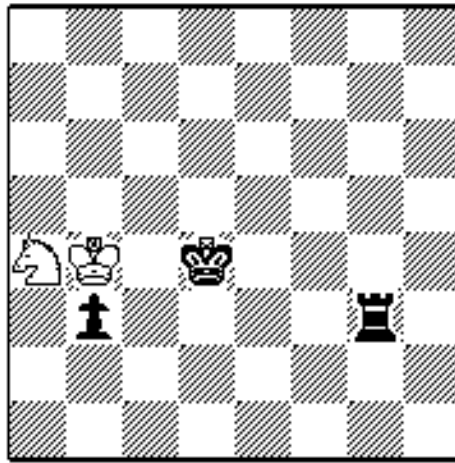
Richard Réti himself played psychoanalyst when he thought he had found the motives for Lasker's style. Réti accused Lasker of making bad moves on purpose. In reality, Dr. Lasker chose his plans with a dedication to struggle, and with psychological insight and a faith that the value of a move is relative to the complete context. A good move against one opponent may be a bad move against a different antagonist. Other things being equal, he preferred the move that led to a struggle on uncomfortable psychological turf for his opponent.

Lasker's off-the-board life was certainly a struggle as well. His victory at St. Petersburg 1914 resulted in Czar Nicholas II's honoring him—along with runners-up Capablanca, Alekhine, Tarrasch, and Marshall—as one of the original "Grandmasters." This was the same Nicholas who was married to Alexandria and was involved with faith healer Grigory Rasputin because of the staret's effective treatment of the czarevich's hemophilia. Actually, Alexandria was her merciful, adopted name. The German princess' real name was (mega-trivia alert!) Alix of Hesse-Darmstadt. But after St. Petersburg tournament, the carnage of World War I cut a bloody swath across everyone's plans. The punishing Treaty of Versailles that ended the war in 1919 assigned to Germany crushing financial reparations and the post-war economy of the Weimar Republic collapsed under the debt. Hyperinflation followed, during which it was actually possible to see people pushing wheelbarrows full of nearly worthless paper currency to the grocers'.

Lasker agreed to play a world championship match with José Capablanca, to whom he had technically "resigned the title" in a 1920 letter—in a strange way trying to handpick his successor. But

the chess world was willing to pay for a match. In fact, it was willing to pay \$25,000, with Lasker taking half regardless of the outcome. Lasker and Capablanca played in Havana. Lasker wasn't used to the hot Cuban climate (he could have used that electric fan!) and, in the process of losing badly, he had to plead illness after completing less than half the match.

Although we all sympathetically wish he'd had an easier life, it's impossible for a chess lover to regret Lasker's return, forced or otherwise. Talk about relativity and struggle—take a look at Emanuel Lasker versus distant family member Edward Lasker (New York 1924), where Lasker took first ahead of Capa and Alekhine. Emanuel created new endgame theory over the board, drawing with a lone knight against his opponent's rook and pawn! (The idea was known, but Lasker created a specifically new position.)



Black can't make progress because his king can't get close to his pawn:

95 Nb2 Rf3 96 Na4 Re3 97 Nb2 Ke4 98 Na4 Kf3 99 Ka3 Ke4 100. Kb4 Kd4 101. Nb2 Rh3 102 Na4 Kd3 103 Kxb3 Kxd4 draw

After a number of financially rewarding results, Lasker retired from chess again. But once more, the worst of human events

overtook him, as the family property was confiscated in 1933 and the old champion and his wife fled Nazi Germany. Once again, he had to play to earn a living. He did very well. For example, at Moscow 1935, he placed third, without losing a game, only a half point behind the modern super-class of Mikhail Botvinnik and Salo Flohr—an amazing feat for someone who won the world championship way back in 1894. (The older the player, the greater the odds his idol is Lasker!)

In 1937, he moved to New York City, where he taught chess and bridge, and wrote his last book, *On the Community of the Future*. He was still looking ahead. He died in the charity ward of New York City's Mt. Sinai Hospital in early 1941 while his sister was perishing in a Nazi concentration camp. We should note that Lasker's last years were full, active and, despite financial hardship, tolerably happy. Martha, his devoted wife of 30 years, was unfailingly at his side and was with him at the hospital at his death.

Emanuel's milieu

Jack Johnson and Jack Dempsey were the notable boxing champs

during Lasker's supremacy. The Eiffel tower poked a hole in the ceiling of European architecture in 1888. Inventors were busy with the airplane, flown by the Wrights in 1903; the thermos bottle, invented in 1904; and plastic in the form of Bakelite in 1909. The affordable automobile arrived in the form of the Model T in 1909. The Geiger counter and the zipper were patented in 1913 (although the latter innovation took awhile to catch on), and the first traffic light blinked drivers to a stop in 1914, also the year air conditioning was invented. The depth bomb made a big splash in 1916, the same year stainless steel was invented. D.W. Griffith's silent masterpiece, *Intolerance*, filled the theatres. The Bolshevik Revolution turned the old aristocracy of Russia on its collective head in 1917, the same year that the electric razor first buzzed across cheeks. The arc welder was patented two years later. Lasker as champ saw McKinley, Taft, Wilson, and Warren Gamaliel (we couldn't resist the middle name, since trivia is at stake) Harding pass through the revolving door of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NorthWest.

José Raúl Capablanca—unflappable in the era of flappers

Like the times he thrived in, our section on José Capablanca provides a respite from both the seriousness and deprivation of the first two world champs. A distillation of his milieu? This part of our argument seems a mate-in-one. Capa was a major idol of the era, the Roaring Twenties—a decade of good times, short skirts, silent movies, easy money, boot-leg hooch, hot music and frenetic dances like the Charleston and the Black Bottom. Jazz and its legendary coronet-spokesperson Louis Armstrong, along with Duke Ellington, Kay Kyser, Jelly Roll Morton and his "Red Hot Peppers," stirred the creative juices and the illegal martinis of millions.

Capa was New World, born in Havana in 1888, the quickest of studies and a man who liked a good time and easy living. Most everyone knows the story of his learning chess by watching his father, a military officer, and a friend play, then horning in to beat his dad.

Capablanca's rise is a study in ease. He became champion of Cuba while still a youngster. As a very young man, he surprised the chess world by beating American champ Frank Marshall in a match. Then Capa won his first international event, a strong one that included the world's best except for Lasker. In this tournament, San Sebastian, Spain, 1911, some of the famous masters expressed their disgust that so unproven a player as Capablanca was allowed to play. (In fact, the requirements of having won prizes in two previous international tournaments had been waived for the young Cuban at the insistence of the vanquished, impressed and gallant Marshall.) The player who objected the most vigorously was Ossip Bernstein. Capa not only beat Bernstein in his individual encounter, but the game won the brilliancy prize.

In 1913, Capa was given a job in the Cuban diplomatic core. His job description appeared to call for his touring the world playing chess. He had no other duties and the guaranteed income made life easy. The appointment also gave him an additional excuse to attend balls and wear a tuxedo. In the following years, he enjoyed continued success. Then, in 1921, he won the title from Lasker in the steamy Havana match.

Capa certainly cultivated the Easy Life—in fact, sometimes he must have seemed like a character stepping from the pages of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Once at a tournament in England, his adjournment session was interrupting a tennis date. Capa appeared in tennis whites, racquet tucked under one arm! Somehow, Capa seemed able to play nearly flawless chess apparently without serious work. He was the "chess machine." He lost only one game in 10 years. In fact, he had lost *none* from 1916 to New York 1924, when Richard Reti made worldwide headlines by beating him. When his losing a single game was the biggest of news, how could he help but become a bit prideful? He often played serious tournament games as if they were mere simuls, coming to the table when it was his move only to look over the situation briefly, not bothering to sit down. In a few moments, he'd make a move and then strut off again to a conversation.



Until his unexpected loss to Alexander Alekhine in 1927, we can understand why some of Capa's hardworking and struggling contemporaries found him nearly insufferable. The handsome champion spoke of chess being "played out," implying that it was just too easy. He suggested adding pieces to make it interesting again. Even on the rare occasions when he lost a game, Capa must have seemed intolerably arrogant to the mere mortals of the game. He would say that it was good that he lost occasionally, to dispel the illusion that he was unbeatable!

If we were arranging things to fit our theories perfectly, we would have had his defeat take place in 1929, of course, the year the Easy Life ended, with the worldwide stock-market crash. But you have to admit, the real facts come pretty close.

Even Capablanca's life worsened. Top-flight chess was becoming too complicated for someone who didn't study, no matter how gifted. After his loss to Alekhine, his marriage became difficult. His health suffered. Finally, following his divorce in 1937, his influential in-laws got revenge by having him demoted to a Cuban foreign office position that actually required a bit of work.

But the Cuban could still make headlines. In 1938, when he married the stunningly beautiful Russian princess Olga Chagodayev, newspapers around the world carried the story front page. The January/February 2001 issue of *Chess Life* magazine, in a brief perspective of Capablanca, mentioned that Olga was still alive. Alas, this is not the case. After more than a hundred years on earth, even she had to yield to the inevitable. Olga was a very interesting personality of her own, holding court to chess players on a number of occasions in her elegant New York apartment, and both of your co-authors count themselves lucky to have met her. After Capablanca, her second husband, died, she married the famous World War II admiral Joe Clark.

Capablanca died in 1942, fittingly enough, at the Manhattan Chess Club. He received a Cuban burial with full military honors.

Capablanca-era context and contraptions

During Capa's dominance, Gene Tunney, recipient of the famous "long count," outboxed Dempsey (1926). The push-button elevator (1922) was a sign of the opulence necessary to make life easy. Frozen food first disappointed diners in 1924, the same year loudspeakers amplified our voices. The circuit breaker (1925) and the aerosol spray (1926) were more of the non-essentials developed in this prosperous time. The rocket engine began to blast us into a new age of exploration in 1926. Talking movies and television were the latest ideas during Capa's final year on top, and Duke Ellington opened at New York's Cotton Club. Curmudgeonly US president Calvin Coolidge sat in incongruous near-silence through the boisterousness of the flapper era. In 1927, Gutzon Borglum (50 points!) began sculpting presidential faces into Mt. Rushmore in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Die Zeit ist um!

Sometimes we think of the pre-eminent in an intellectual field as being "ahead of their times." Usually, however, those accurately cursed with this designation don't win the laurels while they can still smell them. Those so adorned are normally very much within their own *Zeitgeist*. But speaking of time, ours is up for this month.

Although we've dropped just three champions' names, we've covered more than 45% of the years from 1866 to 2001! Next month we'll actually be able to finish our selective review of the champs

and their times. We'll pick it up again with the problematic Alekhine, during whose reign electro-shock, perhaps appropriately, was first employed.

As both Garry Kasparov and Gutzon Borglum could tell you, even the faces carved in Mt. Rushmore are made from the same rock as the mountains they decorate.

Here are some books you can go to for more information on the world champions and their matches (in some cases, more recent editions are likely available):

The Kings of Chess, Hartston, Harper and Row, 1985; *The Oxford Companion to Chess*, Hooper and Whyld, Oxford University Press, (2d ed.) 1992; *The Adventure of Chess*, Edward Lasker, Dover, 1949; *Kings of Chess*, William Winter, Pittman Press, 1954.

Please Email suggestions for future columns and other comments to AlForChess@aol.com. We enjoy your comments and learn from your criticism.

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