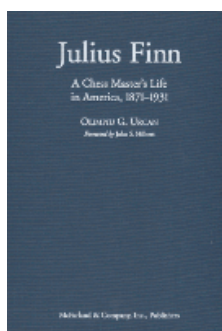




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Kostić's Long Weekend in Singapore October 1925

On October 6, 1925, H. E. Manning, one of those peripatetic colonials who all of the sudden found themselves living in Singapore for a number of years and were not quite familiar with the peculiar habitudes of the place, sent the following missive to the *Straits Times*:

To the Editor of the *Straits Times*

Sir – As there appears to be no Chess Club in Singapore, I shall be glad if you will kindly grant a small space in your paper, in order to see if there is any possibility of getting up a chess tournament, which could be open to all comers. Doubtless, there are many chess players in Singapore who will willingly support this; and I hope that the matter will be taken up by influential residents who are chess players, - Yours, etc.,

H. E. Manning
Singapore, October 6, 1925

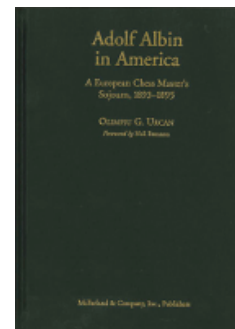
In reply, the editor appended the following telegraphic note at the end of the above letter: "The Singapore Chess Club has its headquarters at the Adelphi Hotel and the Club room is open every Friday afternoon from 5 to 8. Notice of the visit of the noted Chess master M. Boris Kostić will be found in another column." Mr. Manning was completely unaware that by the mid-1920s the Singapore Chess Club (founded in the mid-1890s) was arguably the strongest chess club in South-East Asia although rivaled by similar associations from the Indonesian islands. Through the well-entrenched exercise of exchange of chess columns, even the well-established Western chess journals often published reports and games originating from this corner of the world. But the true dimension of chess developments here were revealed to the Western eye by the first-hand accounts provided by prestigious visitors like Boris Kostić (1887-1963), the chess expert mentioned in the reply of the *Straits Times* editor. If Mr. Manning was hungry for some chess play, it was his luck that only a few days later he would be a witness to a series of exhibitions never seen before in Singapore despite the chess club's decade-long tradition.



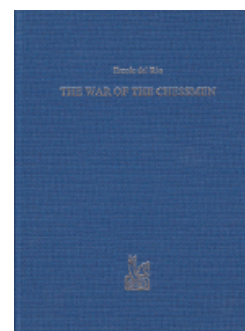
Boris Kostić (1887-1963)
Detail from a group photograph taken in Brno (1928)
Courtesy of Jan Kalendovský

Kostić was one the first top grandmasters to ever visit Singapore. This happened in early October 1925 as part of his extensive world tour that took

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him from the South American beaches to the sands of the Indonesian islands. We have first written about his Singapore sojourn on pages 88-95 of our book *Surviving Changi. E. E. Colman: A Chess Biography* (Singapore Heritage Society: Singapore, 2007). We provided a detailed account of the visit, but at that time we failed to find any games played by the Serbian grandmaster during his exhibitions at the Singapore Chess Club, except for his exhibition game against E. E. Colman (1878-1964), the colony's life-long champion. We return now to the subject with further evidence.

It appears that the idea of a visit by Kostić to Singapore gained shape as early as August 9, 1924. Motivated by the "approaching visit of the Yugoslavian chess champion, Boris Kostić," the *Straits Times* published a brief essay on the origins of chess. But the visit would materialize only more than a year later. In July 1925, Kostić transited Singapore on his way to the Dutch East-Indies, but he did not give any display. The Singapore players had to wait a couple of more months for the treat. Only on October 7, 1925, the *Straits Times* noted that "the noted Chess-master M. Boris Kostić, who has recently been touring the East, will be paying a visit of two or three days to Singapore towards the close of the present week." The *Singapore Free Press* of the same day printed similar news noting that Kostić's exhibitions in Singapore would only take a few days, as he was on his way from Sumatra to Hong Kong. It was expected that on the Friday evening of October 9, Kostić would offer an eighteen-board simultaneous display and on the Saturday, October 10, he would offer one of this widely praised blindfold simultaneous exhibitions against six players. Under the headline "Famous Chess Master in Singapore," the *Straits Times* of October 9 published an extensive report that included excerpts from an interview with Kostić given by the latter in the lobby his comfortable hotel:

[...] Chatting with a *Straits Times* representative at the Raffles Hotel this morning, M. Boris Kostić said he was engaged on a nineteen months tour of the world. "I started in Australia in April of last year," he said, "and in the course of six months in Australia and New Zealand I played 1,500 games, and only lost 24. From there I went to South Africa, where I spent two months, and then had six weeks in Kenya. From there I went to India and after four months there, I went on a three months tour in the Dutch East Indies. I shall spend five days in Singapore, and then go to Manila via Hong Kong, and from there to Shanghai. I shall make a tour of China, possibly without playing chess at all, and then go to Vladivostok and through Siberia to my home in Yugoslavia [...]"

He met Chinese players for the first time in Surabaya, and was impressed by their knowledge of the game, and their eagerness to keep up to date with chess developments in Europe.

Kostić's statement about the Chinese players he met in the Indonesian islands was no doubt prompted by a few losses he had suffered in the blindfold and the simultaneous exhibitions he had offered there from July to September 1925. At the Adelphi Hotel, on the evening of October 9, Kostić faced a composite crowd of eighteen players that included Chinese, Caucasians, and Arabs. Even the inquisitive Mr. H. E. Manning was one of the players who attempted to score against the illustrious master. As reported by the *Straits Times* and *Malaya Tribune* of October 10, Kostić scored + 17 – 1. He lost a game to Francis C. Peck, a long-time member of the Singapore Chess Club, who would become its president in the early 1930s until the outbreak of the war. The *Malayan Saturday Post* of October 24, 1925 wrote the following lighthearted words on Peck's win:

Having, temporarily, ceased baiting company directors and fighting law suits, F. C. [Peck] must needs cast around for other objects of assault, and find out in no less a personage than Kostić, the chess master. The Serbian juggler with knights and pawns took on eighteen of Singapore's brightest intellects. Seventeen of them were discomfited. One achieved fame. It was, of course, Mr. Peck. He alone vanquished "the master." Well done, Frankie!

We shall have to train him to play law tennis, billiards, and football, run

furious hundreds and furlongs, and fight Filipinos, so that European prestige of Malayan sports and pastimes may be restored. We might even give him a newspaper to run.

The score of the game was given by the *Straits Times* of October 19 and it reveals that Kostić got the better game in the opening, but his seventeenth move allowed Peck a powerful kingside attack that swiftly turned the tables:

Boris Kostić – Francis Charles Peck

Singapore, 9 October 1925

Singapore Chess Club, Adelphi Hotel

Eighteen-board Simultaneous Exhibition

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 d5?!

One of those highly obscure moves meant to surprise the master or at least force him onto less familiar grounds.

4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.Bd2 Bxc3 7.Bxc3 e4 8.Ne5 Be6?!

8...Nxe5! 9.dxe5 Ne7 10.Qe2 Be6 11.Rd1 Qc6 was clearly superior than the text move.

9.Bc4 Qd6 10.Bxe6 Nxe5

10...fxe6 would have allowed 11.Qh5+ g6 12.Qh4 with excellent play for White.

11.Bb3

Interesting was 11.Bf5!? Nc6 12.d5! (12.Bxe4 would not be very convincing because of 12...Nf6!) 12...Nce7 13.Bxg7 Nxf5 14.Bxh8 0–0–0 15.Bc3 with an indisputable advantage for White.

11...Ng6 12.Qe2



[FEN "r3k1nr/ppp2ppp/3q2n1/8/3Pp3/1BB5/PPP1QPPP/R3K2R b KQkq - 0 12"]

Powerful was 12.f3! and if 12...exf3, then 13.0–0!.

12...f5?

Good enough was 12...Nf6! 13.f3 0–0–0 14.fxe4 Nxe4! 15.Bxf7 Nxc3 16.bxc3 Qf4 with balanced play.

13.Qb5+ Qc6 14.Qxf5 Nh6 15.Qh3

15.Qa5! Qb6 16.Qd5 was far more accurate.

15...Rf8?

15...Nf4 16.Qg3 Rf8 17.Qxg7 0–0–0 was Black's best bet in this position. The text move allows Kostić a chance to increase his advantage.

16.0–0?!



[FEN "r3kr2/ppp3pp/2q3nn/8/3Pp3/1BB4Q/PPP2PPP/R4RK1 b q - 0 16"]

Missing 16.d5! Qb6 17.Ba4+ Kf7 18.d6 with a very strong attack for White. Kostić's kingside castling offers Black a chance for a powerful attack led by the black knights. Kostić: "A better move for White would have been 16.0–0–0 followed by 17.d5 etc, or else 17.0–0–0 16...Nf4 17.Qe3 Nxc2 18.Qg3 and wins."

16...Nf4! 17.Qe3

Giving up the initiative. 17.Qh4! e3 18.Qg5 Rf5 19.Qxg7 e2 20.Rfe1 0–0–0 21.Bd2 was the good path to a successful defense for White.

17...Ng4

17...Qg6! 18.g3 Ng4 19.Qd2 Nh3+ 20.Kg2 Nxf2 was quite conclusive for Black too.

18.d5 Qg6! 19.Ba4+ Kd8

19...c6! was an excellent reply here.

20.Qc5 Rf5

20...Nh3+! without delay was stronger.

21.Qb5



[FEN "r2k4/ppp3pp/6q1/1Q1P1r2/B3pnn1//2B5/PPP2PPP/R4RK1 b - - 0 21"]

21...Nh3+! 22.Kh1 Nxf2+ 23.Rxf2 Nxf2+ 24.Kg1 Nh3+ 25.Kh1 Nf2+ 26.Kg1 Qf7

Kostić: "Black righteously declines to draw the game by perpetual check, for he now has excellent winning chances, and does also win the game by his ingenious subsequent play."

27.Rf1?

27.Qe2 h5 28.Re1 Qe7 with complicated play was White's best choice.

27...e3! 28.Bd4 c6 29.Qe2



[FEN "r2k4/pp3qpp/2p5/3P1r2/B2B4//
4p3/PPP1QnPP/5RK1 b - - 0 29"]

29...Nh3+!! 30.gxh3 Rg5+ 31.Kh1 Qxd5+ 32.Qf3 Qxd4

32...e2!! was even more to the point: 33.Qxd5+ Rxd5 34.Re1 Rxd4 35.Rxe2 Rxa4.

33.Qf8+ Kc7 34.Qe7+ Kb6 35.Qxg5 e2 36.Re1 Rf8 37.Qg1 Rf2!



[FEN "8/pp4pp/1kp5/8/B2q4/7P//
PPP1pr1P/4R1QK w - - 0 38"]

38.Qg4 Rf1+ 39.Kg2 Qxg4+ 40.hxg4 Rxe1 41.Kf2 Ra1 42.Kxe2 Rxa2 43. Bb3 Rxb2 44.h4 Kc5 45.Kd1 Kd4 0-1

On the next day, Saturday, October 10, Kostić gave a six-board blindfold simultaneous labeled as a "marvelous display" by the local chroniclers and witnesses. The *Straits Times* of October 12 reported that Kostić scored + 6 – 0 = 0. The newspaper also noted that one of the players, Dr. Gilbert E. Brooke (1873-1936), "was in a winning position at one stage, and M. Kostić offered him a draw, but Dr. Brooke preferred to play out the game and was defeated." Worth note, Brooke, who came to Singapore in 1902, was one of the founders of the College of Medicine (Singapore) and was one of the pioneers of large-scale health-work in Malaya. He served as Chief Health Officer of Singapore for twenty-six years until his retirement in 1928. A slightly more detailed report appeared in the October 13 *Straits Times* edition from which we learn that Brooke played on board five and that on board three, against F. G. Stevens, a Justice of Peace on the Supreme Court, at his thirty-third move Kostić announced a mate in five. The full score of this particular game appeared in the *Straits Times* of October 17 with some very brief notes by the master himself:

Boris Kostić – F. G. Stevens

Singapore, 10 October 1925

Singapore Chess Club, Adelphi Hotel

Six-board blindfold simultaneous

1.e4 c5 2.b4 e6 3.bxc5 Bxc5 4.d4 Bb6 5.c3 Nc6 6.f4 Nge7 7.Nf3 d6 8.Bd3 Bd7 9.Nbd2 Ng6 10.Nc4 Bc7



[FEN "r2qk2r/ppbb1ppp/2npp1n1/8/2NPPP2//
2PB1N2/P5PP/R1BQK2R w KQkq - 0 11"]

**11.Ba3! Nxf4 12.Nxd6+ Bxd6 13.Bxd6 Nxd2+ 14.Kd2 Nh4 15.Rg1 Ng6 16.
h4 h5 17.e5 Nce7**



[FEN "r2qk2r/pp1bnpp1/3Bp1n1/4P2p/3P3P//
2PB1N2/P2K4/R2Q2R1 w kq - 0 18"]

18.Ng5!?

Risky but entertaining play by Kostić.

18...Nxb4 19.Rb1 Bc6 20.Be4 Nhf5 21.Bxc6+

21.Rxb7 Bxb7 22.Bxb7 h4 23.Bxa8 Qxa8 24.Qa4+ Qc6 25.Qxa7 h3 26.Rb1
0–0 was not sufficient for White.

21...bxc6 22.Bc5 Qd7 23.Qe2 a5 24.Rb2 g6

An unnecessary weakening. 24...Ng6 25.Kc2 Nf4 26.Qf3 Nd5 was better.

25.Ne4 Kf8 26.Rgb1 Kg7 27.Rb7 Qd8 28.Nf6 Nd5 29.Rd7! Qc8 30.Rbb7



[FEN "r1q4r/1R1R1pk1/2p1pNp1//
p1BnPN1p/3P4/2P5/P2KQ3/8 b - - 0 30"]

30...Nh6?

Even after the seemingly better 30...Kh6 31.Rxf7 Nxf6 32.exf6 Rb8 33.Rfc7
Rxb7 34.Rxc8 Rxc8 35.Qxe6 Rcc7, it was impossible for Black to avoid
losing.

31.Qf3

31.Nxd5! exd5 32.Qf3 was a more direct way to wrap up matters.

31...Nf5?

This allows a mating attack. White would also have won after 31...Rb8 32. Ra7 Ra8 33.Nxh5+ Kg8 (33...gxh5 34.Rxf7+ Nxf7 35.Qxf7+ Kh6 36.Qg7#) 34.Rxf7 Rxa7 35.Rf8+ Qxf8 36.Qxf8+ Kh7 37.Nf6+ Nxf6 38.Qxf6 and it's all over for Black.

32.Rxf7+ Kh6 33.Rh7+ Rxh7 34.Rxh7+ Kg5



[FEN "r1q5/7R/2p1pNp1/p1BnPnkp//3P4/2P2Q2/P2K4/8 w - - 0 35"]

35.Rxh5+! gxh5 36.Qxh5+ Kf4 37.Qg4# 1-0

On Sunday, October 11, Kostić was pitted in an exhibition game against E. E. Colman, the President of the Singapore Chess Club. The game, printed in the *Straits Times* of October 16, is now reasonably well-known:

E. E. Colman - Boris Kostić

Singapore, 11 October 1925

Singapore Chess Club, Adelphi Hotel

Exhibition Game

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.bxc3 d6 5.exd6 Qxd6 6.d4 g6 7.Nf3 Bg7 8. Bd3 c5 9.0-0 0-0 10.Rb1 cxd4 11.cxd4 Nc6 12.c3



[FEN "r1b2rk1/pp2ppbp/2nq2p1/8/3P4//2PB1N2/P4PPP/1RBQ1RK1 b - - 0 12"]

12...e5! 13.Nxe5 Nxe5 14.dxe5

Kostić: "If 14.Bf4, then 14...Rd8."

14...Bxe5 15.Qf3

If 15.h3, then 15...Rd8 16.Bg5 f6 17.Bc4+ Be6 18.Qb3 Bxc4 19.Qxc4+ Qd5 20.Qxd5+ Rxd5 21.c4 Ra5 22.Be3 b6 with superior play for Black.

15...Be6

Kostić: "Better would have been 15...Bxh2+ 16.Kh1 Be5 and as analysis showed, White had no compensation for the sacrificed pawn."

16.Be4 Rac8 17.Rd1 Bxh2+ 18.Kh1 Qe5 19.Bh6?!



[FEN "2r2rk1/pp3p1p/4b1pB/4q3/4B3//
2P2Q2/P4PPb/1R1R3K b - - 0 19"]

19.Rd4! Rfd8 20.Be3 and White could have easily balance the game. In his notes Kostić wrote "The proper move was here 19. Rd4, upon which Black's best reply would have been 19...Rc5, with a very difficult game for both sides."

19...Rxc3! 20.Bxf8

The alternative 20.Qe2 Rfc8 21.Rxb7 Bf4 22.Bxf4 Qxf4 would have given Black an equally strong initiative.

20...Kxf8

Kostić: "Of course not 20...Rxf3 upon which White wins with 21.Rd8 etc. But now, with two Bishops (if spite of an exchange minus) Black has a very strong game." Interestingly, 20...Rxf3 was quite playable, with sharp and entertaining play: 21...Qc7 22.Ra8 Bc8 23.Bxf3 Bf4 (23...Kxf8 allows 24. Rxb7!) 24.Ba3 Qc2 25.Rf1 Kg7 and Black seems to have the better chances.

21.Rd8+ Kg7 22.Rd3 Rxd3 23.Bxd3 Bf4

23...Bd5 24.Qg4 Bf4 25.Kg1 Bc6 was even more precise.

24.Qe2 Qg5 25.Qe4??

An unfortunate blunder. Best was evidently 25.g3 Be5 26.Bc4 Bd7 27.Qf3 Qf6 28.Qxf6+ Kxf6 29.Kg1 b6 with a playable position for both sides.

25...Qh4+ 26.Kg1 Qh2+ 0-1

On Monday, October 12, Kostić was convinced to offer one more display of his skill, this time at the Chinese Garden Club where he gave a simultaneous exhibition against fifteen players who were members of the Chinese Garden Chess Club and Singapore Chess Club. Kostić scored + 13 – 0 = 2, drawing against George Parbury and S. J. Chan. The ending of the draw against the latter was provided by the *Straits Times* of October 15:

S. J. Chan - Boris Kostić

Singapore, 12 October 1925

Chinese Garden Club,

Fifteen-board Simul, White to move



[FEN "8/6k1/1r6/8/7p/1p1K1P1P/6P1/2R5 w - - 0 1"]

Chan continued with **1.Kc3**, but the only way out was easy to be found by a master of Kostić's calibre: **1...Kf6! 2.Rb1 Kf5 3.Rxb3 Rxb3+ 4.Kxb3 Kf4 5.Kc3 Kg3 6.Kd3 Kxg2 7.Ke3 Kxh3 8.Kf2 Kh2 9.f4 h3 10.f5 Kh1 11.f6 h2 1/2-1/2**

The other drawn game, against the forty-nine-year old George Parbury, was given by the *Straits Times* of October 20 again with Kostić's annotations. Parbury, who came to Malaya in 1911 as a merchant and rubber estate agent, and spent some time in Kuala Lumpur before moving to Singapore in 1916, was a Justice of Peace and a pre-war municipal commissioner. His wife died of heart disease in England in 1936. Two years later Parbury retired, remaining in Singapore. He survived the war and died at the Singapore General Hospital on September 29, 1954. In recognition for his services as a municipal commissioner since the 1940s there is a "Parbury Avenue" in the eastern side of Singapore. Kostić's game against Parbury was a comical affair by any measure. The Serbian master blundered in the opening, but Parbury's reaction did not take full advantage of Kostić's error. After thirty moves were made, Kostić had a clear advantage, but dramatically failed to materialize it. Furthermore, he allowed Parbury some clean winning chances in the endgame before making a last successful effort to avoid defeat:

George Parbury - Boris Kostić

Singapore, 12 October 1925

Chinese Garden Club, Fifteen-board Simul

1.e4 d5 2.d3 dxe4 3.dxe4 Qxd1+ 4.Kxd1 Nc6 5.Bb5 Bg4+ 6.f3 0-0-0+ 7.Bd2 Nd4 8.Bd3 Bh5 9.Ne2 e5 10.Nbc3 Nf6 11.Nxd4 Rxd4 12.a3 Be7 13.Ke2 a6 14.Be3 Rd7 15.g4 Bg6 16.h4 h6 17.h5 Bh7 18.Rad1 Rhd8 19.Rd2 Ne8 20.Rhd1 c6 21.Na4 Kb8



[FEN "1k1rn3/1p1rbppb/p1p4p/4p2P//N3P1P1/P2BBP2/1PPRK3/3R4 w - - 0 22"]

22.f4

Much stronger was **22.Nb6 Rd6 23.c4 Nc7 24.c5 Rd4 25.Nc4!** (or **25.Bxd4 exd4 26.b4 Bg5 27.Rb2** with a clear advantage for White) **25...f6 26.Bxd4 exd4 27.b4** and White's play is clearly superior.

22...exf4 23.Bxf4+ Bd6??

This places Black in hot water. Better was **23...Ka7 24.Be3+ Kb8 25.Kf3 b5**

26.Nb6 Rc7 27.e5 with balanced play.

24.e5 Bxd3+ 25.Rxd3 b5



[FEN "1k1rn3/3r1pp1/p1pb3p/1p2P2P//N4BP1/P2R4/1PP1K3/3R4 w - b6 0 26"]

26.Rxd6??

Kostić: "The right move was 26.Nc3 which would have kept up the threat on Black's d6. For instance, 26.Nc3 Re7 27.Kf3 etc." Stronger was in fact 26.Nc5 Re7 27.Kf3 Bxc5 28.Rxd8+ Kb7 29.R1d7+ Rxd7 30.Rxd7+ Kc8 31.Rxf7.

26...Nxd6 27.Nc3

27.Nc5 was the appropriate way.

27...Re7 28.Ne4 Nb7 29.Rxd8+ Nxd8 30.Nc5 Ne6 31.Nxe6 Rxe6 32.Ke3 Kc8 33.Kd4 Kd7 34.Ke4 f6

Kostić: "A bad move. The proper one was 34...g6."

35.Kf5 c5 36.Bg3 a5 37.b3 a4 38.bxa4 bxa4 39.c4 Rb6 40.Bf2 fxe5 41.Bxc5 Re6 42.Bf8

White's and Black's forty-second moves deserve little comment.

42...e4

Kostić: "Here Black could win the bishop with Rf6+."

43.Bxg7 e3 44.Bxh6 e2 45.Bd2



[FEN "8/3k4/4r3/5K1P/p1P3P1/P7/3Bp3/8 b - - 0 45"]

45...e1Q?

Missing 45...Re3! 46.g5 Rxa3 47.h6 Rd3 48.Be1 Rd1 49.Bc3 Rf1+ 50.Kg4 Rc1 51.h7 Rxc3 52.h8Q Rxc4+ 53.Kh3 e1Q and Black wins.

46.Bxe1 Rxe1 47.h6 Rh1

Kostić gave a "!" to this move.

48.Kg6



[FEN "8/3k4/6KP/8/p1P3P1/P7/8/7r b - - 0 48"]

48...Kc6??

And he gave a "!!" to this move, which is in fact a outright blunder. Better was 48...Rh4! 49.g5 Rxc4 50.Kh7 Ke6 51.g6 Rg4 52.g7 Kf7 53.g8Q+ Rxc8 stalemate.

49.h7

Kostić: "Here White could have won the game as follows: 49.g5 Kc5 50.Kh7 Kxc4 51.g6 Kb3 52.g7 Rg1 53.g8Q+ Rxc8 54.Kxc8 Kxa3 55.h7." In fact, White is winning easily with the text move just as well.

49...Kc5 50.g5 Kxc4 51.Kg7 Kb3 52.h8Q Rxh8 53.Kxh8 Kxa3 54.g6 Kb2 55.g7 a3 56.g8Q a2 1/2-1/2

After a day of rest, Kostić left Singapore for Hong Kong on Wednesday, October 14 as noted by the *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*. Kostić spent about 100 hours in Singapore, and out of the forty games he played, he scored + 37 – 1 = 2. His Singapore sojourn ended overall successfully, but not without experiencing the steel of the local players. While Mr. H. E. Manning was never seen again in the local chess tournaments, the effect of Kostić's visit over the more loyal members of the Singapore Chess Club was tremendous. Fully energized they took the local chess life to new heights in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Less than a decade later, in February and March 1933, they did everything possible to have Alexander Alekhine, the world champion, give a series of exhibitions at the club. We have first set the record straight about Alekhine's visits to Singapore in an article for [The Skittles Room](#) some years ago but – just as with Kostić's visit until recently – we had failed to find the scores of the games. Perhaps, if fortunate, one day we shall return to the subject as we did in the present column.

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