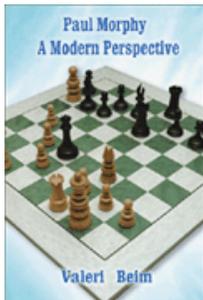




COLUMNISTS

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Jeremy P. Spinrad



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The Mystery of Colonel Moreau
Part One

When I started writing this series of columns, one of my goals was to celebrate the eccentricities of chess players. We often shy away from the fact that chess history is full of larger than life, often comic one-of-a-kind personalities; Deschappelles and the Duke of Brunswick are good examples.

Of course, not everyone involved with chess was eccentric. When you study people who are the subject of mockery in our chess stories, you often find that we have perpetuated a series of legends by a series of misinterpretations; good examples involve Morphy's shoes or Steinitz playing against God. Previous columns in this series studied Max Judd and Charles A. Buck, and found that some modern writers had been far too harsh on these people who were working selflessly in the best interests of chess.

In this column, we will look at the most famous loser in chess history. Colonel Moreau has been noted for one thing, and one thing only: he compiled an 0-26 record in his only known tournament appearance, Monte Carlo 1903. The annals of chess history present no worse debacle than is seen in this table of the final standings:

Monte Carlo, February 9 – March 17, 1903

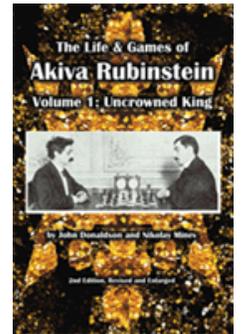
		W	L	D	Total
1	Tarrasch	+17	-3	=6	20-6
2	Maróczy	+15	-3	=8	19-7
3	Pillsbury	+14	-3	=9	18½-7½
4	Schlechter	+12	-4	=10	17-9
5	Teichmann	+12	-5	=9	16½-9½
6	Marco	+12	-7	=7	15½-10½
7	Wolf	+11	-9	=6	14-12
8	Mieses	+11	-11	=4	13-13
9	Marshall	+10	-12	=4	12-14
10-11	Taubenhaus	+8	-13	=5	10½-15½
10-11	Mason	+6	-11	=9	10½-15½
12	Albin	+6	-16	=4	8-18
13	Reggio	+6	-17	=3	7½-18½
14	Moreau	0	-26	=0	0-26

Reuben Fine described Lasker's scores in some tournaments as placing him "more than first"; one would have to say that here Moreau finished far worse than last.

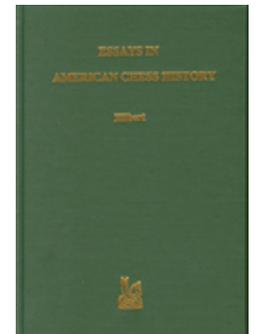
Besides that, almost nothing has been known about Moreau. Edward Winter mentioned him in *Chess Notes* #2434, 2459, and 2482, later reprinted in the "Chess Mysteries" section of *A Chess Omnibus* (2003), pp. 354-355, but as will be seen the information supplied there was in part misleading.

The tournament report in the *Wiener Schachzeitung* lists his name in the crosstable as "Col. Ch. Moreau"; it is reasonable to assume that his

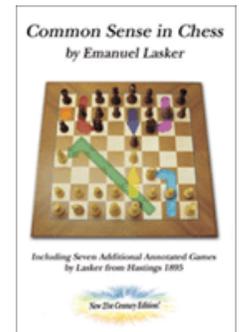
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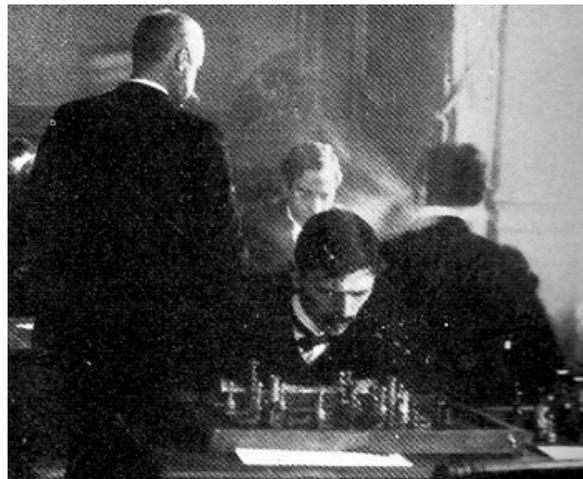
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forename was probably Charles.

The little that was known has made Moreau a figure of fun in more than a century of chess literature. How can you raise his reputation above that of a laughingstock, when even his full name is unknown? For all we know, Moreau might have been a great man. Since he was a colonel, we might imagine that he is an important military figure, perhaps even a medal winner. Despite his famous chess failure, it is entirely possible that he had extraordinary accomplishments, such as being a brilliant mathematician.

In fact, I will try to argue here that Colonel Moreau was all of the above: a notable officer of the French army, a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor, and an internationally respected mathematician.

Generally, we are able to make connections between a chess player and his career outside of chess, since articles about the person mention both his chess accomplishments and his achievements in other spheres. We have no such definite identifications here, so you must make your own judgments as to the correctness of my identifications. In my discussions with other chess historians, some have found my evidence to give a very convincing identification, while others think there is considerably more work to be done before the community should accept the identification as a fact. At the least, I feel that this article gives the best current theory on the identification of the mysterious colonel.



Maróczy at Monte Carlo 1903

Before trying to find more about Colonel Moreau as a person, let us review what is known, and what more can be found out, about his chess career. First and foremost, there is Monte Carlo 1903. This was a top-tier event, one of the two strongest held that year, a double round-robin tournament with fourteen players; Tarrasch, Maróczy, Pillsbury, Schlechter, Teichmann, Marco, H. Wolf, Mieses, Marshall, Mason, Taubenhaus, Albin, Reggio, and Moreau. Moreau lost two games to each of his thirteen opponents. Some of his games were awful:

Maróczy-Moreau, Monte Carlo 1903 (notes by Taylor Kingston, assisted by Fritz8)

1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.Qxd4 Nc6 4.Qe3 Be7 5.Nc3 d6 6.Bd2 Be6 7.0-0-0 Bf6 8.f4 Qc8 9.Nf3 Nh6?! 10.h3 Bxc3? 11.Bxc3 0-0??

11...f6 was necessary, though Black would still have been much worse.



12.f5 Bd7??

12...Nxf5 13.exf5 Bxf5 was the least evil, though it would have only prolonged matters.



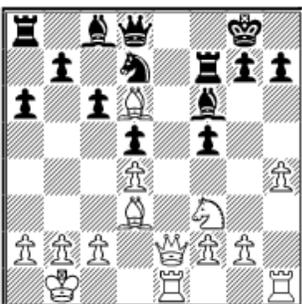
13.f6 Ne5 14.Nxe5 gxf6 15.Qg3+

Even quicker was 15.Nxd7, forcing mate shortly.

15...Kh8 16.Nxd7 1-0

Teichmann-Moreau in round six was another gruesome brevity:

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3 Qd8 4.d4 e6 5.Nf3 Nf6 6.Bd3 Be7 7.Bf4 a6 8.Qe2 0-0 9.0-0-0 c6 10.Be5 Nd5 11.h4 f5 12.Nxd5 exd5 13.Rde1 Bf6 14.Kb1 Nd7 15.Bd6 Rf7



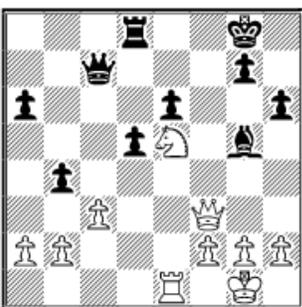
16.Qe8+ Qxe8 17.Rxe8+ Nf8 18.Bxf5 Bxf5 19.Rxa8 g6 20.Ng5 Bxg5 21.hxg5 Kg7 22.Bxf8+ Rxf8 23.Rxf8 Kxf8 24.Rxh7 1-0

In other games Moreau played relatively well, at least up to a point. For example as White against Albin in round seventeen, he had a reasonably good (if somewhat double-edged) position.



But instead of proceeding logically with, say, 28.Kf2 and 29.g4, he dithered with 28.Bd2 c5 29.Be3, the lost tempi allowing Black to take the initiative on the queenside and eventually win.

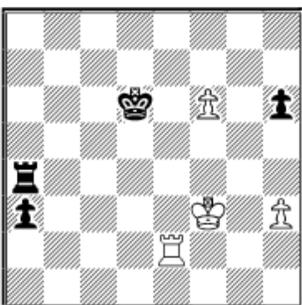
Against Mises in round five, Moreau (White) stood at least even here.



With 30.Qg4!, attacking both the b- and e-pawns, he could have forced a draw, viz. 30...bxc3 (relatively best; 30...Re8 31.Qxb4 is better for White) 31.Qxe6+ Kh7 (not 31...Kh8?? 32.Nf7+) 32.Qf5+ (or 32.Qg6+) 32...Kg8 33.Qe6+ etc. But instead he played the less forceful 30.Qh3?!, and after 30...Re8 31.Qd3 Bf6 32.f4 bxc3 33.bxc3 Qb6+ 34.Qe3? Qxe3 + 35.Rxe3 Rc8 36.Kf2 Bxe5 37.fxe5 a rook ending good for Black was reached,

which Mises won easily.

Moreau also came within an eyelash of a draw against Taubenhuis in round sixteen:



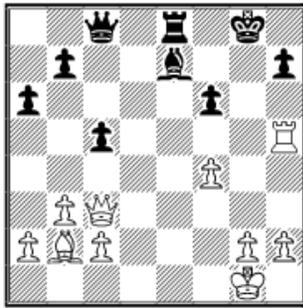
Though Taubenhuis (Black) had mostly outplayed Moreau, he missed several opportunities to increase his advantage, and was here at a critical position where he must play 53...Ra8 to have objective winning chances. Instead he played 53...Ra7?, when after 54.Kg4! White would have had excellent drawing chances, e.g. 54...Kc6 (or 54...a2 55.f7 Rxf7 56.Rxa2) 55.Rf2 a2 (not 55...Rf7?? 56.Kh5! and wins) 56.f7 a1Q 57.f8Q etc. But

instead, the colonel erred with 54.Ra2??

Ke6 55.Kg4 Kxf6, losing his f-pawn and soon the game.

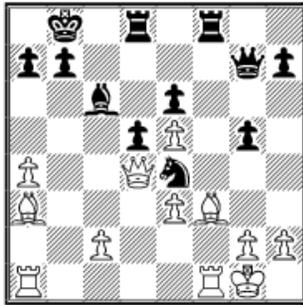
Moreau managed to extend some games out to respectable lengths: he

lasted 48 and 50 moves vs. Mieses, 50 vs. Maróczy, 56 vs. Tarrasch, 61 vs. Teichmann and Marco, 63 vs. Taubenhau, and 70 vs. Mason. But in most of these his position was resignable much sooner. More often, he lost by middle-game blunders in inferior positions. For example in the third round against Taubenhau:



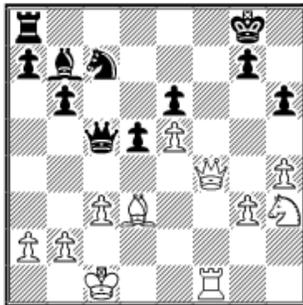
Though Black is worse he is not immediately lost, but after **24...Qg4??** **25.Rg5+** he was lost (25...fxg5 26.Qg7#).

And here in the fourth round vs. Albin,



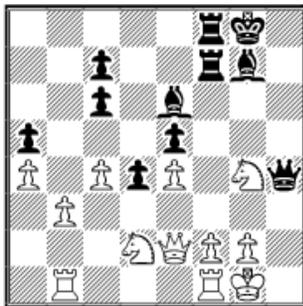
Black should move his attacked rook to g8. Instead Moreau played **22...Rf7??**, losing a piece to **23.Bxe4**.

And here is Wolf-Moreau, round eight:



With **27...Qe7**, Black would still have had some hope, but not after **27...Rf8??** **28.Qxf8+!** **Qxf8** **29.Bh7+**.

Marco was the beneficiary in round eleven.



Here Moreau had to play **29.Nh2**, but play continued **29.f3?? Bxg4 30.fxg4 Bh6! 31.Rf3** (or **31.Rxf7 Be3+!** **32.Qxe3 dxe3 33.Rxf8+ Kxf8** and wins) **31... Bxd2 32.Qxd2 Rxf3 33.gxf3 Rxf3 34.Qg2 Rg3 35.Rb2 Rxc2+ 36.Rxc2 Qe1+ 37.Kh2 d3 0-1**

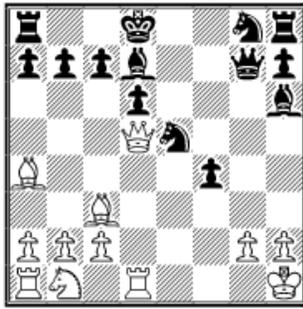
Moreau's only real winning chance came against Marshall in round twenty-three. The young American master

essayed a risky Muzio Gambit: **1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.Bc4 g4 5.0-0 gxf3 6.Qxf3 Qf6 7.e5 Qxe5 8.Bxf7+**

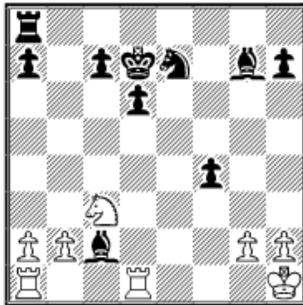


All book, believe it or not, going back to early editions of Bilguer's *Handbuch*. Here Moreau might as well have grabbed the material and tried to weather whatever tactical storms Marshall conjured up. Instead he played **8...Kd8?** declining the second piece. Even so, he got another chance. After **9.d4 Qxd4+ 10.Kh1 Bh6 11.Bd2 Qg7 12.Bb3 Nc6 13.Bc3 Ne5 14.Qd5 d6 15.Rd1 Bd7**, Marshall erred grievously with **16.**

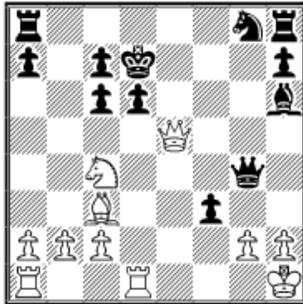
Ba4??.



Perhaps expecting 16...Bxa4? 17.Bxe5!, but overlooking that 16...Ne7!! is devastating, e.g. 17.Qxb7 (if 17.Qe4 f3! 18.g3 Bxa4 19.Qxa4 (19.Bxe5? Bc6!) 19...Nf5, intending 20...Nxc3+ with a winning attack) 17...Bxa4 18.Qxa8+ Kd7 19.Bxe5 (19.Qxa7 Bc6) 19...Rxa8 20.Bxg7 Bxg7 21.Nc3 Bxc2



with an easily won game. Also very strong in reply to 16.Ba4?? was 16...f3. But alas, the colonel instead played one of the worst moves on the board, **16... Bc6??**, and after **17.Bxc6 bxc6?? 18. Qxe5** he was toast. By the time Moreau did hit on the idea of ...f4-f3, after **18... Qg4 19.Na3 Kd7 20.Nc4 f3**,



it only served to hasten the end by allowing Marshall the chance for one of his patented slam-bang brilliancies. Here he announced mate in eleven: **21.Rxd6 +!! exd6 22.Qxd6+ Ke8 23.Qxc6+ Kd8 24.Rd1+ Ke7 25.Qd6+ Ke8 26.Re1+ Kf7 27.Ne5+ Ke8 28.Ng6+ Be3 Or 28... Kf7 29.Nxh8#. 29.Rxe3+ Qe6 30.Qxe6 + Kd8 31.Ba5# 1-0**

All in all, while Moreau at his best probably played chess at a respectable club level, it must be conceded that he was well below master strength, and should certainly not have been playing in a tournament of this kind, which otherwise consisted of very strong masters. Half the field – Tarrasch, Maróczy, Pillsbury, Schlechter, Teichmann, Marshall, and Mason – were, would be, or had been among the world's top ten, and even the least eminent, Reggio, was around Elo 2400 strength. Compared to them, Moreau was the proverbial one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest.



Marco (second from left) playing Mieses, and Hoffer (standing) at Monte Carlo 1903

It is not entirely clear how Moreau came to be playing in this tournament. Many people have made the natural assumption that he was a last-minute substitute, supposedly for Chigorin, who came but was barred after a famous dispute with tournament committee member Prince Dadian. A

sentence in the *British Chess Magazine* of 1903 is consistent with this theory.

However, there is evidence that Moreau was more than a last-minute sub, as shown by this story, which appeared in *The New York Sun* and *Salt Lake Herald* of December 21, 1902:

“Arnous de Rivière, the manager of the forthcoming international chess tournament at Monte Carlo, said today that he would accept the fourteen competitors – Lasker, Maróczy, Pillsbury, Delmar, Burn, Teichmann, **Moreau**, Taubenhau, Mieses, Tarrasch, Tschigorin, Schiffers, Marco and Schlechter. Marshall and Napier will not be allowed to compete this time, while Janowski has also been excluded. Independent special prizes of over \$2800 will be distributed among the competitors, who will have to play two games against each other. Drawn games will be counted as half points.”

This shows that at the very least, Moreau was considered as a possible entry long before the final list of players was settled. Furthermore, other sources have named Wolf, not Moreau, as the substitute for Chigorin.

Why would Moreau be allowed to enter such an elite event? In fact, it is not unusual to have one or more local players in such a high-class tournament. I am just speculating, but since Taubenhau was the only other French entry, and he was not native to France, it might have been considered important to accept an entry from a native French player. Moreau's score is particularly horrible in part because he was the only such player invited; often, several local “rabbits” score points against each other while being blanked by the grandmasters. For example, Paris 1900 was a great French tournament from the same period, with greats such as Lasker, Pillsbury, Maróczy, Marshall, Burn, Chigorin and others. However, Moreau would have had a much better chance of avoiding a shutout there, since he would have faced such tail-enders as Brody, Rosen, Mortimer, Didier and Sterling, who were much weaker than anyone at Monte Carlo.

Moreau was also a member of the tournament committee for the previous year's event, Monte Carlo 1902. The director of play was Arnous de Rivière, and the committee members (as given in the *New York Times* of January 12, 1902, page 9) are: Prince Dadian of Mingrelia, Albert Clerc, Louis Hoffer [*sic*; probably Leopold Hoffer], H. Delaire, S. Rosenthal, Isaac L. Rice, Col. C. Moreau, Dr. E. Lasker and others.

Thus the tale of Colonel Moreau at Monte Carlo 1903, and a possible explanation of how he came to play there. Having shown his considerable shortcomings as a chess player in this first part of the article, I will in the second part investigate just who Moreau was apart from chess, and why he should be regarded with far more respect than he is usually accorded.

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