

Robert James Fischer (1943-2008)

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Robert James Fischer, child prodigy and world chess champion, passed away yesterday in Iceland at the age of 64. He had been ill for quite some time, but the specific cause of death has not yet been released. The pinnacle of his life was when he took on the legendary chess machine of the Soviet Union in 1972 and defeated reigning world champion Boris Spassky to capture the crown. He was the 11th world chess champion!

Here is his obituary on CNN website: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/01/18/fischer.obit/index.html>

Any story on Fischer must begin with a word of caution. It is always important for us to separate Bobby Fischer the player (1955-1972) from the many controversial and vile statements he made (1990-2005), especially against the United States and the Jewish faith. I would like to focus on his chess games, but we must never forget that this genius had a much darker side as well.

There is no doubt that Fischer was the greatest American player of all time and many people genuinely believe he was the best player of all time, even ahead of Garry Kasparov. His rise to US Champion in his early teens and then on to the world championship in 1972 reads like a fairytale to those of us not old enough to have witnessed it. At that time, the Soviets were the "bad guys" in world politics and they were supposed to be unbeatable in chess--until Fischer won! In fact, the US Chess Federation and would not be the same today without the boom in American chess inspired by the man who took on the Soviet Union and won! Most of the adults over 45 who attend tournaments today started their chess playing days in the Fischer era.

Fischer's playing style is very much the ideal that chess teachers try to achieve for their students. He developed his pieces on the best possible squares and typically castled early, rarely breaking any of Reuben Fine's rules. Yet when the middlegame started, Fischer turned into a tactical monster, one who saw combinations that many fellow Grandmasters never saw coming. It always seemed that Fischer magically had all of his pieces exactly on the perfect squares. How he did that is still beyond me.

The following game from the 1956 US Championship has been called the Game of the Century (the 20th Century). Keep in mind that Fischer was just 13 at the time. No, he didn't win the US Championship that year--he would do that the next year. However, he left an impression on the world of chess that reached all the way across the Iron Curtain to world champion Mikhail Botvinnik himself. Watch for the key moves 11... Na4!! (the knight cannot be taken), 15... Nxc3! (this knight also is immune) and finally the stunning queen sacrifice 17... Be6!!

For more about this brilliant game, read the article on Chessbase: <http://www.chessbase.com/newsdetail.asp?newsid=3434>



Bobby Fischer (on the right) against Boris Spassky in 1972.



Bobby Fischer in Japan in 2005, en route to Iceland.