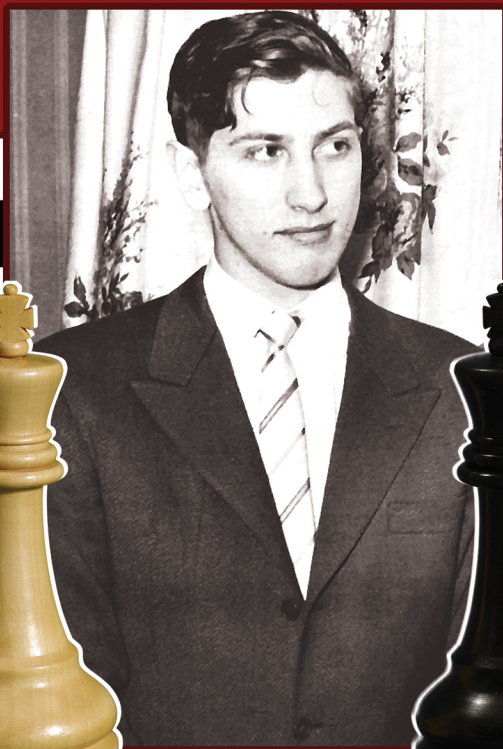


CHECKMATE

BOBBY FISCHER'S *BOYS' LIFE* COLUMNS



BOBBY FISCHER

FOREWORD BY ANDY SOLTIS

Checkmate

Bobby Fischer's
Boys' Life Columns

by

Bobby Fischer

Foreword by Andy Soltis



2016
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

Checkmate
Bobby Fischer's *Boys' Life* Columns
by Bobby Fischer

ISBN: 978-1-941270-51-6 (print)
ISBN: 978-1-941270-52-3 (eBook)

© Copyright 2016
Russell Enterprises, Inc. & Hanon W. Russell
All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be used, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any manner or form whatsoever or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the express written permission from the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Chess columns written by Bobby Fischer appeared from December 1966 through January 1970 in the magazine *Boys' Life*, published by the Boy Scouts of America. Russell Enterprises, Inc. thanks the Boy Scouts of America for its permission to reprint these columns in this compilation.

Published by:
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
P.O. Box 3131
Milford, CT 06460 USA

<http://www.russell-enterprises.com>
info@russell-enterprises.com

Editing and proofreading by Peter Kurzdorfer
Cover by Janel Lowrance



Table of Contents

Foreword	4	April	53
by Andy Soltis		May	59
From the Publisher	6	<i>Timeline</i>	60
		June	61
		July	69
<i>Timeline</i>	7	<i>Timeline</i>	70
		August	71
1966		September	77
December	9	October	78
		November	84
1967			
February	11	1969	
March	17	February	85
April	19	March	90
<i>Timeline</i>	22	April	91
May	23		
June	24	May	98
July	31	June	99
<i>Timeline</i>	32	July	107
August	33	August	108
September	37	September	115
<i>Timeline</i>	38	October	116
October	39	November	122
November	46	December	123
1968		1970	
February	47	January	128
March	52		

Foreword

Bobby Fischer's victory over Emil Nikolic at Vinkovci 1968 is one of his most spectacular, perhaps the last great game he played in which he was the bold, go-for-mate sacrificer of his earlier years.

But you won't find it in *My Sixty Memorable Games*. That book was going to print shortly after the game was played. And unless you have access to his terse notes in *Chess Informator* Number 6, you probably don't have a clue what was going on in Fischer's mind when he played it.

But thousands of chess-playing Boy Scouts knew what he was thinking: Fischer annotated the game in some detail in the February 1969 issue of *Boy's Life*. And unlike in the *Informator*, Fischer explained his thought process – why he spent a lot of time on move 19, for example.

Fischer's notes to that game, in the February 1969 *Checkmate*, are one of the quirky aspects of these remarkable columns. The material ranged from the very elementary to the extremely sophisticated.

For example, can you imagine any other world-class player answering the simplest of chess questions? (What is en passant? Is there a penalty for incorrectly calling checkmate? and “Can you call a draw right after you are checkmated?”)

On the other extreme are the composed problems and studies – what *Checkmate* strangely labeled “puzzlers.” They are difficult, often extraordinarily difficult. And they weren't just the “White to play and win” or “White to mate in three moves” compositions that veteran solvers are familiar with. One of the early columns, November 1967, featured a helpmate in two (White cooperates with Black and allows a mate in two moves).

We learn some biographical details in *Checkmate*. Perhaps it's no more than an answer to a trivia question today, but it's interesting to know that Bobby paid one dollar for an hour-long lesson when he was starting out as Carmine Nigro's student. And through his readers, we get to ask Fischer questions: What did he think, circa August 1968, about a chess-playing machines becoming world champion? “I've never played a computer,” he writes. “Eventually, though I think a computer can become champion. After all, it can't be as hard as getting a man on the moon.” Bear in mind, some of Fischer great successors were doubting as late as the 1990s that computers could play grandmaster chess.

Some of his move comments are sophisticated but many are aimed at the post-beginners who comprised most of this readers. When he retreated a White bishop from c4 to b3 in a game annotated in February 1967, he explained simply: I moved the bishop because it was unprotected.”

Bobby Fischer's *Boys' Life* Columns

An obvious question the reader may ask is: Did Bobby really write the columns? Or, rather, how much of them did he write?

Today, almost every book whose authorship is attributed to a world-class player is really a collaboration. These columns appeared at the end of the four-year period in which Fischer worked on *My Sixty Memorable Games*. The role of his close friend Larry Evans played in that book may never be known. But Evans hinted that it was considerable when he said that at one point in the writing process he was due 40 percent of the *Memorable* royalties. That's a huge amount for an editorial assistant.

Hanon Russell points out that the columns repeatedly use an odd grammatical construction. In an annotated game a comment about the last move might begin without a noun. For example, in explaining Algebraic Notation, the comment about 9. Rb1 is – “Means white rook moves to b1 box.” That was typical of Evans. It doesn't seem to appear in Fischer's other writing.

In addition, Fischer thanked Dave Daniels for filling in and writing the December 1967 *Checkmate*. For those who don't recall Dave, he was a Marshall Chess Club regular in the 1950s and 1960s and a solid master. Today he would probably be rated above 2300. What's relevant here is that Daniels was reputed to be one of the ghost writers of Al Horowitz's *New York Times* chess column.

Readers may also be puzzled by some of the chess-clumsy terminology that appeared in *Checkmate*. Surely Fischer would know better than to write, in the October 1967 column, about “an interesting match” he had with Svetozar Gligoric. People who are unfamiliar with chess may refer to a game as a match, but no serious player would. And why does *Checkmate* refer to squares as “boxes”? (“He has moved his pawn to box b5”).

Boy's Life must not have had a fact-checker for chess. The very first *Checkmate* says Miguel Najdorf learned chess when he was 16 and won the Polish Championship that year. That sounds ridiculous – and it is. Najdorf became acquainted with the moves at age 10. He didn't play in his national championship until 15 years later (when he tied for second place). He never won it.

But you don't read Bobby Fischer for historical accuracy. You read him to see what was going on in that remarkable mind. As quirky as *Checkmate* was, these columns tell us a lot.

Andy Soltis
New York
September 2016

From the Publisher

American World Champion Bobby Fischer wrote a chess column for *Boys' Life* magazine, the official magazine of the Boy Scouts of America, from December 1966 until January 1970. Full columns appeared more or less every other month, with the solution to the “Puzzler” – usually a problem for the readers to solve – alternating in the “off” months.

There was no column in the January 1968 or January 1969 issues of *Boys' Life*. Occasionally, someone else would fill in for Bobby. The December 1967 column was by David Daniels, a master who did editorial work for *Chess Life*, and the December 1968 column was penned by Burt Hochberg, the editor of *Chess Life*.

The column started out using English descriptive notation, but quickly switched to algebraic notation, and then, curiously, reverted to English descriptive near the end of the run. We have presented all the games in algebraic notation.

The “Puzzler” solutions have been preserved in their original format, one which most readers will probably find rather strange and perhaps not that easy to follow. We present standard algebraic alternatives for easier understanding of these solutions. In two instances there appears to be an incorrect variation given. They have been noted. Throughout all the columns, readers will find inconsistencies. For example, Fischer sometimes uses the symbol “+” to indicate check, while other times the word “check” itself is used. We have preserved the original format, the way the columns actually appeared in *Boys' Life*.

The last full column by Fischer appeared in the December 1969 issue. The solution to that month’s “Puzzler” appeared in the January 1970 issue. After that, Al Horowitz and then Larry Evans continued the column, but Fischer would not write again for *Boys' Life*.

Finally, we have added some historical perspective by creating the occasional “Timeline,” i.e., letting the readers know what was going on in Fischer’s career around the time of publication of a particular column. The source for these items is *Bobby Fischer: The Career and Complete Games of the American World Champion* by Karsten Müller.

Checkmate by Bobby Fischer

April 1968

If you're going to checkmate that guy across the chessboard from you, you've got to outsmart him. Bobby Fischer, the best in chess, has some hot tips on how to sharpen your chess skill.

Carl Bowman of Millbrook, Ala., wrote in asking for some tips on playing winning chess, so I thought I'd call on my experience to give him and all of you readers a few that I think are useful:

Concentrate. Chess requires total concentration. For example, when I play I try to keep my mind completely on the game. I always try to put my best foot forward. This means I want to win. No one's interested in excuses if I lose. Many people who play chess are using only a fraction of their mind and the rest of their mind is off wandering somewhere.

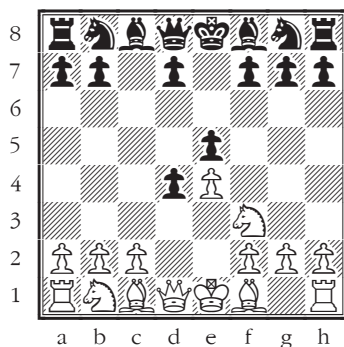
Think ahead. Don't go by your first instinct in making a move. Try to look ahead, to picture how your opponent will reply. Remember, it's absolutely essential for your development as a chessplayer that you play touch move – if you touch a piece you must move it. So if you feel you lack self-control, you might try sitting on your hands as ex-world champion Smyslov of Russia used to do. Here's a simple sample of a typical blunder.

1.e4 c5 2.d4 c:d4 3.Nf3

White sacrifices a pawn temporarily for development – sure he can pick up one pawn later on.

3...e5

Checkmate



1. After black's third move.

White is now sure that black has made a blunder by moving his e-pawn in “take” and snaps up the bait. But look at the blunder white’s made because after 4.N:e5 Qa5+ followed by 5...Q:e5, white’s finished. White could have easily seen through this trap if he’d only “thought” about it.

Study. Study the recent games of masters in books and magazines and combine this study with actual play, against strong players. With your young, fresh mind you should soon be beating your elders easily. And of course spend as much time at the game as you possibly can.

Learn from your losses. Record your serious games in algebraic notation (as we show here) or descriptive notation (i.e. 1.P-K4 P-QB4 etc.) and then later you can go over your games and try to find out where you made your mistakes – if you don’t already know. That way you aren’t likely to lose a game the same way twice. The Cuban world chess champion, Capablanca, once said that he liked to lose more than he liked to win because he learned more from his losses than from his wins!

Last month a reader asked about 16-year-old Julio Kaplan. Here’s an excellent game he played against Timman of Holland at the World Junior Championship in Jerusalem in 1967. Julio definitely is an up-and-coming player. In this game, Timman uses the French Defense.

White: Kaplan Black: Timman

1.e4 e6

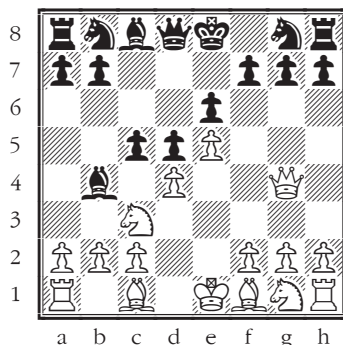
Bobby Fischer's *Boys' Life* Columns

Preparing to challenge the white center pawn on e4 with ...d5.

2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4

Threatening 4...d:e4 winning a clear pawn.

4.e5 c5 5.Qg4?



2. After white's fifth move.

Don't develop the Queen too early, because it can be battered all around by the minor pieces, often resulting in a quick capitulation. The best move is 5.a3! to break the pin.

5...Ne7

A clever defense for the g-pawn. If queen takes g7??, then rook g8, Q:h7, cd, a3, Qa5!, Rb1 dc, ab, Qa2 and wins. But a horrible mistake for black here is instead of 5...Ne7, 5...cd?? 6.Q:g7 dc (hoping for 7.Q:h8?? cb+ and 8...ba = queen) 7.b3! winning easily since black's rook is trapped.

6.d:c5 Nbc6

If black moves 6...d4 immediately, 7.a3! saves white's knight because on Ba5 8.b4, or 7...Qa5?, 8.Q:d4.

7.Bd2 Nf5

Castling looks more promising for black. Then when white plays 8.Nf3 f6! and black gets rid of white's strong center pawn.