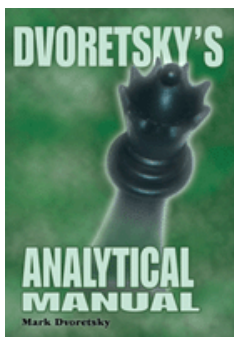




**BOOK REVIEWS**

*From the Archives*

Hosted by  
Mark Donlan



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From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

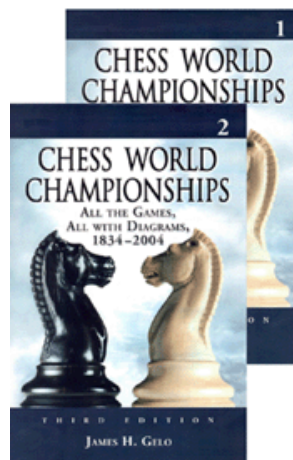
Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe.com](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

A World-class Collection

by Taylor Kingston

*Chess World Championships* (2nd edition), by James H. Gelo, 1999  
McFarland & Co., English algebraic notation, Softcover, 838pp., \$25.00

The premise of this book is to bring together under one cover all games ever played in official world championship events, or in other matches or tournaments that established a given player as the world’s best before the “World Champion” title officially existed. Starting with the 1834 de Labourdonnais-McDonnell matches and ending with the 1998 Karpov-Anand FIDE title match, it contains 1,375 games in all, an extension of 13 years and 211 games over the first edition (1988), which ended with the first Karpov-Kasparov match, 1984-85.



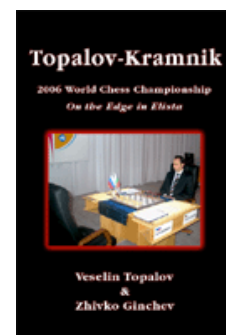
This is a thick, dense, austere book, compiled by a mathematician and apparently intended for use primarily as a scholarly reference. There are complete crosstables but almost no narration, and despite mention of “detailed analysis” in the publisher’s blurb, there is absolutely no annotation, not so much as a “!” or “?”. There is exactly one diagram per game. Therefore those seeking casual reading, guided instruction, or games with analysis and commentary are advised they may safely move on to other areas of the website. However, those drawbacks do not make this a bad book. For those still interested, we will continue.

For a book of this type the main considerations are thoroughness and accuracy. The first important question is: what games to include from the time before Steinitz became the first officially recognized world champion in 1886? Gelo’s stated goal here is to show the events “where

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the world's strongest player either acquired or maintained his reputation.” The author's choices here are generally in accord with accepted opinion and seem mostly well-based. Obvious requirements are de Labourdonnais-McDonnell (a set of six matches, 85 games, in 1834), Staunton Saint-Amant (two matches, 27 games, 1843), the London 1851 tournament (won by Anderssen over Wyvill, Williams, Staunton et al), Morphy-Anderssen 1858, and Steinitz-Anderssen 1866. It is widely accepted that each of these established the first-named player as the best of his time. Other reasonable selections include: Staunton-Horwitz and Staunton-Harrwitz, both in 1846; Morphy-Löwenthal and Morphy-Harrwitz, both 1858; the London 1862 tournament, won by Anderssen with Paulsen 2nd; and Steinitz's matches with Bird (1866), Zukertort (1872), and Blackburne (1876).

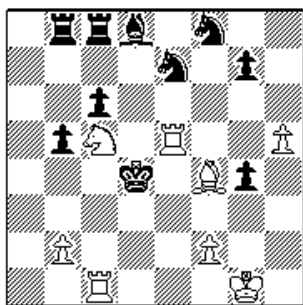
As far as pre-1834 players (e.g. Greco, Philidor, Deschappelles) the record of surviving games is too sketchy, or has too little resemblance to anything that might be even vaguely considered “world championship” play, to warrant including them. Morphy-Mongredien 1859 is a debatable inclusion: to consider Mongredien a world championship contender is to commit semanticide (he lost ½-7½; see example of his play below). A possible omission lies in Gelo's handling of the early post-Morphy years 1860-62. He gives the matches Anderssen-Kolisch 1861 and Anderssen-Paulsen 1862 in support of “Anderssen's reestablishment of his dominance after Morphy's retirement” but the situation is not so clear-cut. Louis Paulsen drew that match with Anderssen, and overall he appears to have had a record as good or better than Anderssen or anyone else until London 1862. On this basis some argument might be made for Paulsen as #1 from 1860 until mid-1862, and hence for inclusion of more Paulsen games from that time.

From 1886 through 1972 matters were clear-cut, the title became an established institution, and Gelo includes all the 26 official matches and one tournament (Hague-Moscow 1948) in which Steinitz, Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe, Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky and Fischer either gained, defended, or regained it. Gelo makes his one clearly wrong inclusion in this period: Lasker-Janowski 1909. It is known that this was not a title match (though their 1910 match was). Therefore it belongs no more than, say, Lasker's informal 1908 match with Abraham Speijer, and to include it perpetuates a common misperception.

With Fischer's 1975 abdication, Kasparov's 1993 split from FIDE, and FIDE's 1997 change in the championship format, the definition of “world championship event” again clouded somewhat. Gelo takes a broad view, and so in addition to the seven official FIDE matches before the split (two Karpov-Korchnoy and five Kasparov-Karpov), he includes the 1974 Karpov-Korchnoi Candidates Final, Fischer-Spassky 1992, and the matches of both Kasparov and Karpov for separate titles during 1993-1998. Gelo does draw the line (and who can blame him?) at the huge 1997 FIDE knock-out tournament which qualified Anand to challenge Karpov; those hundreds of games are not included.

Having established that the author has, on the whole, included the right games, the next question is, are the scores accurate? Considering that in the 1,375 games there are perhaps over 100,000 moves total, this is no small task. To ensure accuracy, Gelo has consulted an extensive bibliography, hundreds of books and periodicals ranging from Le Palamède of 1843 to the 1998 Inside Chess. I hope readers will not consider me remiss if I admit that I did not play over every move of every game. However, using various sources considered reliable, e.g. Pickard's Chess Games of Adolph Anderssen, Whyld's Collected Games of Emanuel Lasker, Skinner and Verhoeven's Alexander Alekhine's Chess Games, Winter's World Chess Champions and others, I did spot check several dozen, a sampling of the entire time span but more from the early years where error is more likely.

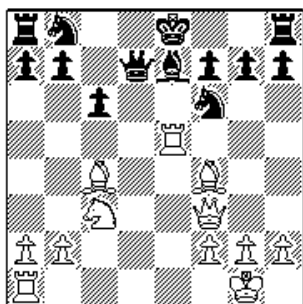
In these several dozen games, I found only four minor discrepancies. Gelo shows extra moves at the ends of the 64th McDonnell-Labourdonnais game and the first three games of the 1896-7 Lasker-Steinitz rematch.



For example, from the diagrammed position, Lasker-Steinitz, game 2, 1896, Whyld has Black resigning after 40 Re4 + Kd5 41 Rd1+, but Gelo adds 41... Kxc5 42 Be3 mate. Interestingly, the Russian-produced Chess Stars series gives a different, quicker mate: 40 Nb3+ Kd3 41 Re3. While I cannot say who is exactly right here, these discrepancies seem not very serious. The spot checking tests, though not conclusive, do

indicate a very high level of accuracy in Gelo's work.

As far as the quality of the games themselves, they are by definition played by the best players, the world champions and their challengers. The only exceptions are the two 19th-century tournaments: all games, not just the winner's, are given, and unlike Hague-Moscow 1948, the London tournaments of 1851 and 1862 were not limited to the world's best. Thus in the lower levels there is some decidedly less than world-class play, such as G. MacDonnell-Mongredien, London 1862: 1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 Nf3 d6 4 c3 dxc3 5 Nxc3 Bg4 6 Bc4 Qd7 7 0-0 c6 8 Bf4 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Nf6 10 e5 dxe5 11 Rfe1 Be7 12 Rxe5



12...Kf8 Black is already lost; if 12...0-0 13 Rd1 and the bishop goes. 13 Rd1 Qc8 14 Rxe7 Kxe7 15 Bd6+ Kd8 16 Bxb8+ and 1-0, 20.

However the overall quality of play is of course much higher, with many great games by most of the best players of all time, including some worthy challengers who do not always get their due, such as Paulsen and Gunsberg. As an historical reference the book has considerable value, but it can also be used also for leisurely pleasure. I am looking forward to spending some hours playing over selected games from different eras, a self-conducted tour of the development of chess style, so to speak, at its highest levels.

The book itself, like most McFarland products, is well made. Though a paperback, its binding is well-sewn, and though the pages are of necessity thin and the font small, the paper and printing are of good quality. As the old Dover editions used to say "This is a permanent book." Games are indexed by player, opening name, and ECO code.

It could be argued, with some merit, that computer databases make a book of this type superfluous or obsolete for some people. Unlike lesser events, most or even all world championship games, even as far back as 1834, are often included on even the cheaper databases. Therefore they can provide the same convenience as this book, i.e. all the world title games in one package, but with thousands of other games besides.

However the book provides some features the database may not, notably exact context and important details. If one cares only about the game score, the database may be adequate, but it may not tell you that a certain Steinitz-Chigorin game actually was from a world title match, or that a given Staunton Saint-Amant game was played 26 November 1843 and was the 8th of their second match, or that the 5th game between Korchnoi and Karpov in 1978 extended over 3 days. Also, while Gelo has gone to great lengths to ensure exclusion of spurious games, inclusion of all correct games, and the accuracy of game scores, some databases are a bit

lax in their quality control. One I checked listed too many games for certain matches, indicating either duplication or spurious inclusions. It also had spelling errors, such as calling Labourdonnais' opponent "MacDonnell"; as there was a player by that name (Rev. George MacDonnell rather than Alexander McDonnell) some confusion could result. Also databases may not include odds games, which would exclude much of the Staunton-Harrwitz match. And one last point, the book works without a computer.

I leave it to the reader to decide whether these factors in favor of *World Chess Championships* make it worth purchasing. At about 1.8 cents per game, it is still not a bad bargain. I for one am glad to own it. Serious chess history buffs will probably feel likewise; if you are not one, you probably did not read this far.

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**[Order](#) *Chess World Championships***

by James Gelo

(Third Edition, Two-volume Set, McFarland 2006)

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