



SKITTLES ROOM

From the Archives

Hosted by Mark Donlan



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From the Archives...

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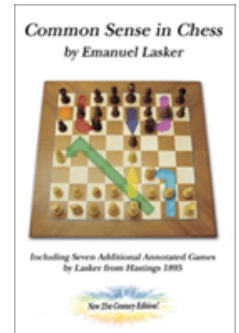
This year marks the 100th anniversary of the second Lasker-Steinitz World Championship match. Let us take a look back to see how contemporary sources reported Steinitz’ attempt to wrest his title back from Emanuel Lasker, who had defeated the elder Austrian two years before...

Championship Match: Steinitz v. Lasker, Moscow 1896-97

From the British Chess Magazine, February 1897

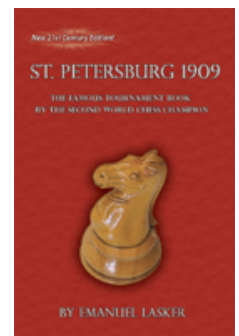
The return match between Messrs. Lasker and Steinitz, at Moscow, to decide finally the question of the world’s championship of chess, came to an end on January 14th, by Lasker’s winning the seventeenth game. This is perhaps the best game, and certainly we think the most interesting of the whole series, especially towards the end, where the winner obtained a mating position just in time to prevent his opponent’s passed Pawn become a Queen. The *Standard* so tersely and admirably gives the history of the match, that we cannot do better than quote its account. “In 1894, Lasker played a match with Steinitz for the championship of the world, and won it. Steinitz claimed a return match within a limited period, and Lasker being unable to unwilling to bind himself to a fixed date, Steinitz, upon his own authority, declared Lasker’s right to the title void, and re-appropriated it to himself. After the St. Petersburg Tournament, the Hastings and St. Leonards Club made the two players an offer to play a return match at Hastings, but Moscow having made a similar proposal with more alluring terms, the latter proposal was accepted. In the meantime the Nuremberg International Tourney was held, in which Steinitz showed a deteriorated form compared with that of St. Petersburg; but the Moscow players having settled the terms for a match between Lasker and Steinitz, had to adhere to the agreement, and the present encounter took places. The first match was played at New York, Philadelphia and Montreal. Of 19 games Lasker won 10, Steinitz 5 and 4 were drawn. The present match shows that Lasker has improved, while Steinitz has deteriorated, or at any rate remained stationary, the result being Lasker 10, Steinitz 2, drawn 5.”

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Wilhelm Steinitz

We agree with the *Standard* chess editor, that in the only two games won by Steinitz, Lasker “somewhat relaxed his rigidly sound style,” but there was only one game besides that Steinitz had a chance of winning, namely the fifth, and that chance he missed; as well as the chance of drawing one other, a Giuoco Piano. In addition to the two matches, Lasker has beaten Steinitz at Hastings, at St. Petersburg, and again at Nuremburg, so that, in our opinion, the question of present superiority ought now to be considered sufficiently decided. What would have been the result if Steinitz had met Lasker in the plenitude of his former powers, and if he had not given himself away by an obstinate adherence to untenable crotchets, we must leave an open question. We cannot, however, but admire the pluck of the veteran in coming forth as he has done to defend his title, and to show the courage of his convictions, notwithstanding frequent defeat; and as far as that defeat was caused by the natural infirmity of increasing years, we cannot but deeply sympathize with an ex-champion who is obliged to yield up to a younger man his pristine pride of place.

Herr Lasker on himself – In connection with the two games won by Mr. Steinitz, the following extract, published in a London evening paper from a letter by Herr Lasker, strikes us as being excessively humorous: “Today the match stands 7-0. Steinitz, to his credit be it recorded, takes the defeat so far like a man. His conduct leaves nothing to be desired, although I have no doubt that he expected a different result at the start, or at any rate ‘to make a hard fight.’ The net advantage derived by the theory of the game from this match is that I have proved the worthlessness of Steinitz’s sacrifice of the Bishop in the Giuoco Piano, the 3...B-B4 in the Ruy Lopez, as well as the 3...P-Q3, followed by Kt-K2. I venture to say that I have finally settled this question. I also believe that my treatment of the Queen’s Gambit Declined, since the fifth game, which was previously quite unknown, will prove of lasting value. The opening of the lines QP x P, followed by P-QB4, as demonstrated in my last game, has proved valid. ‘Last but not least,’ 3...P-QR3, in the Ruy Lopez, seems to be again discredited by the tenth game.” It would be a pity to spoil the rich humor of this paragraph by any comment. – *Hereford Times*



Emanuel Lasker

In the *Daily News* Mr. Gunsberg says: “Mr. Lasker could not have acted with his usual forethought and consideration when he penned a letter wherein he claims to have annihilated all his opponent’s theories, and generally assumes the tone of a victor. But the letter has also its entertaining points, and has carried its own Nemesis along with it. The opening which the champion particularly claimed to have demolished was the P-QR3 defense to the Ruy Lopez, but lo and behold, by the very next post, comes the game in which Steinitz achieves his first victory with this very P-QR3 defense condemned by Lasker.”

The Field says: “Steinitz has had his day; he was in the proud position of being the most successful match player for a longer period than any other player before, or during his time, and he must submit to the inevitable fate of yielding the scepter to younger hands, as Anderssen and others were compelled to do in the height of their ascendancy. Taking all the encounters between the two players, Lasker has beaten Steinitz in the proportion of three to one, as the following shows:

- First match, United States, 1894: Lasker 10; Steinitz 5; drawn 4
- Quadrangular Tournament, St. Petersburg, 1895: Lasker 3; Steinitz 1; drawn 2
- Masters’ Tournament, Hastings 1895: Lasker 1; Steinitz 0; drawn 0
- Masters’ Tournament, Nuremburg, 1896: Lasker 1; Steinitz 0; drawn 0
- Present match, Moscow: Lasker 10; Steinitz 2; drawn 5
- Totals: Lasker 25; Steinitz 8; drawn 11

Lasker has been reproached with the monotony of the repertoire. But why should he have discarded the Ruy Lopez so long as he was successful with it? He expected Steinitz to adopt persistently his own defenses, and for these he was thoroughly prepared. It was Steinitz’s duty to change the openings. Having no faith in the defenses other masters adopt, why accept the Lopez at all? There are plenty of other defenses, the Center Counter Gambit, the French and Sicilian defenses, etc. Surely he could not have fared worse with these than with his own Ruy Lopez defense. As first player he has abandoned the ill-fated Giuoco Piano variation, and drawn several of the Queen’s Gambits; but even in these he gave Lasker the advantage of letting him know beforehand that he must be prepared for one and the same variation only – an advantage, we consider, at starting. The natural inference is that Steinitz felt he could not have fared better in any other opening against Lasker, for, in his former matches against other opponents, Blackburne and Zukertort for instance, he always changed the openings. He virtually admits, therefore, as indeed everybody else did before this match, Lasker’s supremacy.”

Steinitz-Lasker

Seventeenth Game, World Championship Match Moscow 1897
Queen’s Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e3 O-O 6 Qb3 Nbd7 7 Nf3 c6 8 Bd3 dc4 9 Bc4 b5



This weakens the Pawns, of course; but that is understood. And the real risk is next to nothing – all considered.

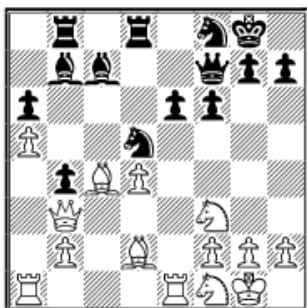
10 Be2 a6 11 a4 b4 12 Nb1 c5 13 Nbd2 Bb7 14 a5

To fix the advanced Knight Pawn. It would, however, be safer to Castle; so far as this particular game is concerned.

14...cd4 15 ed4 Nd5 16 Be3 Bd6 17 Nc4 Bc7 18 Bg5 f6! 19 Bd2 Qe7 20 Ne3

White just falls short of gaining the Pawn; and the attempt lands him in difficulties.

20...Rab8 21 Bc4 Rfd8! 22 O-O Nf8 23 Rfe1! Qf7 24 Nf1

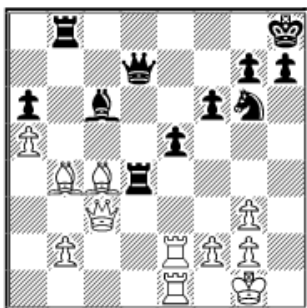


Exchanging would endanger his own Pawn; and still the adverse Pawn could not be taken, save indeed at the loss of a piece in return. The Knight is brought over to intercept the action of one of the Bishops, now seriously threatening the King's position.

24...Kh8 25 Ng3 Bg3 26 hg3 Ng6 27 Qd3 Rd6 28 Re2 Bc8 29 Ne1

The question now is as to White's Queen Pawn. It can hardly be defended, as it stands. Perhaps 30 f4 would do something in that direction, while at the same time strengthening g2.

29...Qd7 30 Nc2 e5! 31 Rae1 Bb7 32 Qb3 Bc6 33 Nb4 Nb4 34 Bb4 Rd4 35 Qc3

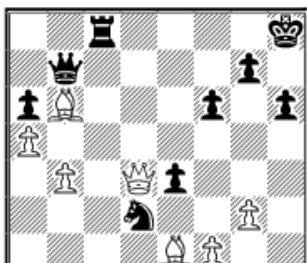


Decisive loss of force follows. The Bishop is taken next move to avoid 35... Qh3. At this juncture there seems to be no remedy.

35...Bg2! 36 Kg2 Qc6 37 Re4? Re4 38 Re4 Qe4 39 Kg1 Qb7 40 Bc5 Rd8

Preserving his Queen Rook Pawn – and going on with the attack. If the White Rook Pawn were free, in conjunction with the Bishops, it would be very formidable. For the rest, Black has an easy victory.

41 Be2 e4 42 b4 Ne5 43 Be3 Nd3 44 Bb6 Rc8 45 Qd4 h6!



46 Kh2 Ne5 47 Qd1 Rc3 48 Qd6 Nf3 49 Kg2 Qf7 50 g4 Qa2 51 Bf1 Nh4 52 Kg1 Rc1 53 Be3 Nf3 54 Kg2 Rf1! 55 Qa6 Rg1 56 Kh3 Qd5 57 Qc8 Kh7 58 a6 Rh1 59 Kg2 Nh4! 0-1

If 60 Kh1 Qd1 61 Kh2 Qf3 62 Qf5 Nf5



63 gf and Black can advance his Rook Pawn [permitting White to Queen], winning.

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