

Hobbies

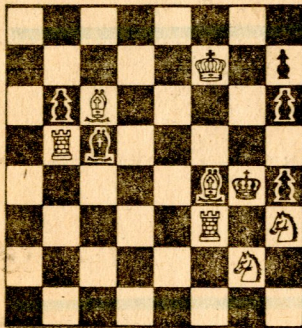
CHESS

A Profile of Bobby Fischer

PROBLEM

By A. Siveri, Italy

BLACK: 6



WHITE: 7

White to play and mate in two moves. Solution below.

By **GEORGE KOLTANOWSKI**
International Chess Master

THE MEN AT THE TOP:

Robert Fischer

As a youngster, I remember watching an Easter Week procession at Les Halles, Belgium. A group of marchers, dressed in friars' garb, walked through the

streets, each carrying a wooden cross over his shoulder. It was a form of penance. What impressed me most was that they moved two steps forward, then one step back.

Chess aficionados, watching the progress of Bobby Fischer, find a parallel. His march to the top of the chess world has been constantly stopped and set back by his own actions.

Robert James Fischer was born in Chicago in 1943. His father was a physicist and his mother a registered nurse. His parents were divorced when he was a baby, and his sister and he were brought up by his mother, a talented woman who spoke six languages and took an active interest in world affairs. The Fischer family moved from Chicago to California to Arizona before settling down in Brooklyn.

Bobby was introduced to chess by his sister when she was 11 and he was 6. They both learned how to play on their own. Bobby's genius for the game was evident almost from the start. He started playing at the Brooklyn Chess Club and quickly established himself as a

Wunderkind. At 14, he won the U.S. Junior Championship, the U.S. Open and the U.S. Championship. Since then, he has won this latter tournament whenever he played in it.

Bobby's presence in the chess world has been a stormy one. He has fought with the press, denigrated the play of other great masters past and present, accused the Russians of cheating by ganging up on their opposition. He has been enraged by the comparatively petty cash rewards that ace chess players, especially Bobby Fischer, have received. He has sometimes refused to play at all without a starter's fee. Grandmaster Hans Kmoch, an Austrian who emigrated to the U.S., remarked sadly: "Finally the U.S. produces its greatest chess genius — and he turns out to be a stubborn boy."

What has never been explained is the steps backward Fischer has made by avoiding playing in the finals of Candidates' matches. (These are the matches that lead up to the World Championship.) He qualified easily and could have

had a crack at the world title years ago. Was it fear? Fear of what? Bobby has been proclaiming for years that he is the world's best player.

He probably is. When he is moving forward, he tramples over everybody. Virtually nothing matters to him except chess. He reads everything there is to be read about the game, studies it, absorbs or discards what he has read. His opening skill is unique, and his retentive memory for all the games he has played is absolutely fantastic. The only possible criticism one might make on his play is that his endings are not always perfect. Yet no one will continue battling so fiercely and so long as Bobby in positions that look hopelessly drawn. Often he wins these. Some masters have said that he is just lucky. Nonsense! As the great German Grandmaster Siegbert Tarrasch has said: "The good player is always lucky."

What happened recently to make Bobby take virtually all his steps forward on his way to estab-

lishing that he is the "real" champion of the world?

Much of the credit must go to a man who decided to make it his business to see that Fischer's path was smoothed. Bobby has always made specific demands: Lighting must be so good that no shadows of the pieces fall on the board. Quiet must prevail. He has to be paid and paid well by chess standards. When his terms weren't met, he usually didn't play.

Lt. Col. Edmund Edmondson (USAF, ret.), business manager of the U.S. Chess Federation, placed himself at Fischer's side. He saw to it that the young genius got his Coke, his orangeade, his milk, his sandwich — often before Bobby knew he wanted it. He looked over playing sites months before a match in order to be sure they met Bobby's exacting standards. He sought out the quietest and most comfortable hotel rooms. (Fischer tends to work all night on chess positions, going to sleep about 6 a.m.) It was Edmondson who made the transportation arrange-

ments and who dickered on financial terms.

In 1970, Edmondson spent four months with Fischer as the latter slashed through the barriers between his and World Champion Boris Spassky. In Vancouver, B.C., he waxed Mark Taimonov 6-0; in Denver, against Bert Larsen, it was again 6-0. Finally, in Buenos Aires, the last barrier, former World Champion Tigran Petrosian, fell 6½-2½.

But relationships with Bobby Fischer tend to be short-lived. As of this writing, he has decided to sever himself from Edmondson. What this may mean in terms of the World Championship match starting this weekend in Reykjavik, no one can tell. It could very well make the difference between the chess crown coming to the U.S. or remaining in its long home, Russia.

Solution to the problem above: Key move is R-B2. If 1... P-R4; 2.B-Q7 mate; or 1... BxR; 2.B-Q7 mate; or 1... K-R4; 2.B-B3 mate; or 1... K-B4; 2.N-K3 mate, etc.



Chess contender Bobby Fischer