

"CHESS IN THE WILD WEST": SHOCKS IN THE U.S.A. "OPEN"

By I. König

In spite of the shocks, we have carefully avoided the heading, "Wild Chess in the West." Chess, like so much else, is booming on the "West Coast," but it does so without the turbulent and fevered accompaniments of the old gold-rush days. Yet, the word "gold" is not entirely out of context in our present story!

The great event of the year, the U.S. Open Chess Tournament, was held between August 8th to 20th at Long Beach, California. There was a not unusual entry of 156, comprising many of the top players of the country. The élite of the players travelled 3,000 miles from New York, and as is customary in the U.S., many came by car, including Reshevsky, who gained much publicity recently on account of his victory over Botvinnik. *Life* magazine published a picture of him surrounded by the beaming Bulganin and Krushev.

The Open this year was really a second gold-rush, as the first prize was an alluring Buick car, worth about \$3,500. It began quietly with the able Orlo M. Rolo chosen as tournament director and I as referee. The pairing was made by us according to the new Harkness System, by which players were matched according to their U.S. ratings in the first round and thereafter by the alteration of their rating resulting by each round of play. This procedure required the employment of a statistician as well as a typist and some voluntary help. One would think that this arrangement would satisfy the most temperamental chess-player. Yet as the tournament went on the tension rose. Those who had no chance of gaining prizes felt bitter about losing points in rating, and only with some difficulty were we able to explain that rating changes applied to the tournament alone. The leaders were urged on by the high stakes and the disparity of the prizes (the second being a "meager" \$1,000!). All this added to the tenseness of the competition. The complicated rating and matching of the players seemed to work well except for the allotment of colours. In the early rounds there was little criticism and I, as referee, began to feel happy, little suspecting that the storm was still to come. The last day fell on a Friday, on which Reshevsky was allowed to play in the morning and he, following a precedent in the "Candidates Tournament," requested that his competitors be required to play ahead of schedule, otherwise he would be placed at a disadvantage because the others would know the result of his game. I was told that he had pressed this request through at Zürich

in spite of Najdorf's protest, who went so far as to ask for the intervention of his Legation. Here, however, his request was turned down, and when the last round arrived he, Rossolimo, and Evans had equal points, with the last two matched together. Now a feverish activity arose behind the scenes. The players eagerly canvassed the tie-breaking points. This was the "Median" System in which the scores of the two top and the two bottom opponents are disregarded and only the rest are considered. These points favoured both Rossolimo and Evans. So when Reshevsky won his game in the last round and departed the interest was concentrated on the contest between Evans-Rossolimo. It was a protracted struggle which arrived at a drawish position. If they drew, Reshevsky would win with 10 points to $9\frac{1}{2}$ each to Rossolimo and Evans. The situation became even more tense as these top players had not only to be concerned with their own game, but also with the games of what they called their "horses," the players whose wins might be added to their tie-breaking points. At last Evans lost his patience and forced the issue, avoiding the draw in the old Janowski manner—by losing the game.

All things come to an end, and all of us were relieved when we could see Rossolimo's beaming face—the happy owner of a Buick car. Then came the anticlimax. A young man with the directness of gaze of a fanatic walked up to Rossolimo and spoke a few words to him. Rossolimo's face fell. He could only utter a few words, "First they say my car—now they say no my car." This young fanatic, an ardent follower of Reshevsky, discovered that one game, which was recorded as forfeit, was actually played and won by a player named Bolton. After Bolton had won the game, he was told by the spectators that in his absence his opponent had taken back a move. This so enraged him that he demanded the tournament director to forfeit the game to him instead of scoring it as a regular win—yet he had won it over-the-board. This strange demand actually reduced his points as a "horse," which he was willing to allow merely to obtain justice. But did he realize that he was spoiling Reshevsky's tie-breaking points to whom Morteon lost? This seemed to be a good cause for a hot dispute, but the tournament director, supported by an official of the U.S. Chess Federation, upheld his first decision and Rossolimo became the owner of a Buick car, for twenty-four hours—he was forced to sell as he is returning to France for good. When all the tumult had died down, the twelve rounds of the "Swiss" showed this final result—

Rossolimo tied with Reshevsky with 10 points out of 12, but was reckoned first on Median points; so the U.S.A. grandmaster had to content himself with the second prize of \$1,000. (This may be chicken-feed to Reshevsky, but it compares quite favourably with the first prize in the British Championship which at the present rate of exchange is rather less than \$95!—Games Editor.)

Donald Byrne was a good third with $9\frac{1}{2}$, and but for a costly loss against Evans in Round 11, he might well have been first. Equal fourth and fifth with 9 points were Evans and Turner; sixth to tenth were Saily, Romanenko, Sherwin, Rivise, and Seidman with $8\frac{1}{2}$ points, and equal eleventh to nineteenth were Dake, Steinmeyer, Sandrin, Berliner, Martin, Steiner, Zalys, Suchobeck, and Remlinger with 8 points.

Neither Rossolimo nor Reshevsky lost a game. Rossolimo's draws were with Byrne, Lapiken, Reshevsky, and Saily, and he beat Evans in the last round. Reshevsky drew with Lapiken, Byrne, Rossolimo, and Evans.

Immediately after this tournament the San Diego Open Tournament started in which fifty-two players took part. It was a Swiss System, but this time an interesting innovation was made. In the eight-round Swiss a second four-round Swiss was incorporated for the players who previously declared their intention to play in the short tournament. This was won by L. Evans with $3\frac{1}{2}$ points. He had a hard struggle with the Yugoslav Radoicic, who obtained a winning game and lost by transposing a move. The result of the eight-round tournament was (1-3) Sherwin, Lombardy, and Turner 4½; (4-5) Radoicic, Saily 5½. The tournament was sponsored by J. Alexander, of San Diego, who put up the \$1,900 prize money.

The growth of chess in this area, and all over the U.S.A., is amazing. I was told that chess books in the public libraries are always in use. I, who thought that I was unknown in the land, was surprised when I was approached during the tournament by dozens of people inquiring whether there would be a sequel to my book *Chess from Morphy to Botwinnik*. This question often comes from my English friends, too, who regularly write to me and have not forgotten me after three years' absence. To all these I express my thanks and best wishes.