

# Veteran chess champ still dazzles audiences today

By Art Gardner

At 80 years of age, George Koltanowski may not look like an international sports superstar, but in chess circles he is a renowned master.

He no longer plays in competitions, but he still dazzles audiences in impromptu demonstrations of mental recall with a chessboard and has a repertoire of stories about the game.

An international chess master, Koltanowski holds the world "blindfold" chess record for playing the most people simultaneously. The record was set in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1937.

Seated at a small table apart from his 34 opponents, he won 24 games and drew 10 in 13½ hours of play. Without using a chess board or other aids, Koltanowski remembered each player's moves and plotted his own.

A tournament official who relayed the player's moves was Koltanowski's only link to his opponents.

"I can remember where each move has been made and, since I'm familiar with every square on the board

backwards and forwards, I can beat most players blindfolded," he said.

Koltanowski began playing chess when he was 14 and by age 17 was the national champion in his native country, Belgium.

He was a seasoned chess veteran when he moved to the United States in 1940, only to find Americans did not share the European's fondness for the game.

Koltanowski, an adept linguist who has authored 25 chess books in eight languages, turned to the civic club lecture circuit to make a living with a one-man chess show. Chess was less popular then, and people would often walk out during his presentations.

His trademark "Knight's Tour" brought them back, however. The "Knight's Tour" is a mathematical maneuver that involves moving a knight around the board, making it land on each of the 64 squares only once.

He spices the act by asking people to write such things as

their names, social security numbers or addresses on scraps of paper and placing them on the board until each square is filled. He then remembers what is written on each paper while the knight makes its L-shaped moves, calling out each square's answer without looking at the board.

Koltanowski, who writes chess columns for his hometown newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle, and for 25 other newspapers, says chess is on the brink of gaining wide popularity.

The key to an upsurge in chess in this country, Koltanowski notes, is in the interest that young people are taking in the game. For many years he has found time to teach and demonstrate his chess skills to eager youngsters in schools and centers.

If *Senior Times* readers would like to meet George Koltanowski, he will be the guest of honor at the Koly Chess Club on December 13 at 8 p.m. at the Campbell



*'George Koltanowski, master chess player*

Community Center, Hall 80, 1 West Campbell Avenue. ●

*Art Gardner is a member of the Koly Chess Club and an ardent chess enthusiast.*

**Editors Note: San Francisco Mayor Diane Feinstein proclaimed September 18, 1983 as George Koltanowski Day in honor of his achievements and leadership in chess.**