

# 8th American Open

by Carl L. Budd  
President, Santa Monica Bay Chess Club

The new American Open Champion for 1972 is Larry Remlinger of Long Beach, California.

But he is not the only champion that emerged from this tournament, for the American Open itself is the new champion of the world, inasmuch as it hosted the greatest number of players entered in a tournament conducted in a single section. There was an amazing total of 428 players who reported to play on Thanksgiving Day morning. This figure eclipsed the previous record of 402 players, held by the U.S. Open in Ventura, California in 1971.

Fortunately for the tournament organizers as well as for the players, the American Open this year was played in the largest ballroom available in the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica. It housed all of the players comfortably, with adequate table room for each of the games. Further, two additional rooms had been provided for analysis and skittles, so that every one in this vast number of players was happy with the facilities provided.

Many spectators were present throughout the tournament. They materialized largely because of the coverage by three television stations, who broadcast their material during news hours, and by three radio stations who obtained recordings and used them throughout the early rounds. Of course, the center of interest for the spectators was on the platform, where the first two boards were played and where the moves were shown on demonstration boards on each side of the stage.

One of these spectators was none other than the new World Champion, Bobby Fischer. He made his appearance without fanfare during the last round. However, he no sooner entered the room than he was enveloped in a swarm of autograph seekers and camera buffs. I'm sure that Bobby would have enjoyed chatting with some of his friends who were present, and to have watched and studied some of the games. But this was not to be. His appearance at a chess tournament has the same effect as the arrival of a great movie star at a Hollywood premiere. Such is the burden that accompanies fame! Bobby endured the accolades of his admirers for about twenty minutes and then departed.

We had another first in the American Open this year, although this one was pre-arranged. It was a wedding of two of the players entered in the tournament! This event, which coupled Marcie Grant and Danny Krystall, occurred prior to the third round. It was a beautiful wedding even though performed in unusual surroundings. The wedding march, accompanied by piano and flute,

consisted of flower girls, bridesmaids and of course the bride, while Danny and the best man awaited their arrival on the stage. A minister of the Universal Life church conducted the ceremony. If this wedding at a chess tournament was not a first, then surely the honeymoon was. For both bride and bridegroom played two scheduled games that day after the ceremony. And Marcie had the unusual distinction of starting the tournament with one name and finishing it with another.

At the opening ceremonies Mayor Anthony Dituri of Santa Monica, who was traveling that day, sent one of Santa Monica's most respected city councilmen, Arthur Rinck, to greet the players in behalf of the city. He was followed by International Grandmaster Isaac Kashdan, who remarked about the surprising size of the tournament, and then introduced the top players. As he stated, our usual Grandmasters were not present, since they were engaged in Church's International Tournament in San Antonio, Texas. However, this tournament was not devoid of talent. We had two senior masters present. They were Arthur Feuerstein of Brooklyn, N.Y. and Jim Tarjan of Sherman Oaks, California. Peter Biyiasas, Canadian Champion; Kim Commons, California State Champion; Carl Pilnick, American Open Champion last year; and Ray Martin, American Open Champion in 1969 were other top players entered. They were included in a group of 20 masters and 49 Experts, making the American Open this year the strongest ever.



The World Champion signing autographs at the American Open. Photo © N. Goldstein.

As is usual in large Swiss System tournaments, there were no casualties among the top players after three rounds, but in the fourth round Arthur Feuerstein could only draw against Richard Fauber of Carmichael, California and Jim Tarjan fared no better against Alex Suhobek of Monterey, California. Also, it was in this round that the eventual winner, Larry Remlinger blew his perfect score by drawing with young John Skratulia of Los Angeles.

Biyiasas and John Grefe of Berkeley, California were the only two players with perfect scores after six rounds. Included in a large group behind them with 5½ points were Remlinger, Tarjan, Ross Stoutenborough of Riverside, California and Frejsteinn Thorbergsson of Iceland. In the ending of the Biyiasas-Grege game, Grege playing White had a Rook and two pawns against a Rook and Knight, but Biyiasas managed to trade his Knight for White's two pawns to draw the game. Meanwhile, Remlinger continued his winning ways by defeating Feuerstein in a fine effort, while Tarjan and Stoutenborough graduated to the final round with high scores by winning their individual games.

Going into the last round there were five players with 6½ points. Any winner of this group was assured of at least a tie for first, but Remlinger, fortunately for him, was the only one to succeed. His game with Biyiasas was the first one concluded. So now the long wait was on, to determine whether he would be the sole winner or share top honors with others. Tarjan and Stoutenborough finally drew, so this left only Grefe with a crack at the championship. In his game with Dennis Fritzing of Berkeley, California, Grefe had three minor pieces and two pawns against a Queen and five pawns. But the Queen and pawns prevailed and Grefe was forced to resign, making Remlinger, with 7½ points, the undisputed American Open Champion.

Tied with 7 points were Tarjan, Stoutenborough, Fritzing. Larry Christiansen of Riverside, and expert Keykhosro Kahyai of Glendale. Kahyai forfeited his second game, but won all of those he played.



Actor Peter Falk (TV's Columbo) discusses a game at the post-mortem during a visit. The player is unidentified. Photo © N. Goldstein.