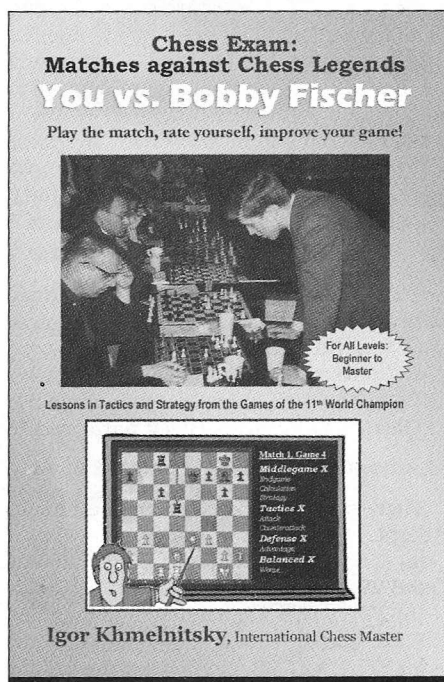


Lessons from the Long-Departed

A review of IM Igor Khmel'nitsky's *You vs. Bobby Fischer: Play the match, rate yourself, improve your game!*

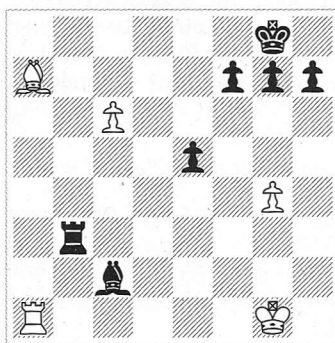
By Al Lawrence



Recalling that Victor Korchnoi challenged Géza Maroczy in 1985, even though the Hungarian champion had been dead for more than 30 years, made me wonder if someone would at last find a way to play Robert Fischer. Perhaps Bobby has time on his hands, I reasoned, with Capa spending eternities on the tennis court and Smyslov singing endless arias. Depending on his comfort-level in the Great Beyond, Fischer may welcome some distraction. True, Maroczy "played" Korchnoi through Swiss medium Robert Rollans, and the game took the better part of eight years. (Evidently, there is no need for chess clocks in heaven.) Maroczy finally resigned when he discovered that Korchnoi's black pawn on c3 was the real soul of chess.

Although reactions to this mystical matchup varied—was it proof of life after death or just another complex fraud?—one thing's for sure: well-respected coach and trainer IM Igor Khmel'nitsky's latest new book, *You vs. Bobby Fischer*, is no hoax. It offers down-to-earth, real-life chess lessons we can use against flesh-and-blood opponents. It does employ a great hook that makes it fun, and brings to mind Korchnoi's 1985 "Soul Mate" game: the reader plays five "matches" against Fischer, each match consisting of a dozen critical positions from actual Fischer games. Each position is diagrammed and labeled "You" versus "Fischer." Then Khmel'nitsky asks us, in multiple-choice format, to evaluate each position and to find the best move.

Take a look at Match 1, Game 5, a position from Fischer-Korchnoi, Curacao, 1962, with "You" on the black side.



After 31. g4

How do you evaluate this position?

- A. White is significantly better/winning;
- B. Nearly equal;
- C. Black is better;
- D. Black is significantly better/winning.

How do you respond? Why?

A. 31. ... Bc2-e4; B. 31. ... Rb3-g3+; C. 31. ... Rb3-c3; D. 31. ... h7-h5.

Seat-of-the-pants intuition suggests that all those connected black pawns should eventually prevail against Fischer's advanced singleton. With some analysis, we find that White, if on move, could play 32. c7 Rc3 33. Bd4, simultaneously threatening back-rank mate and Black's rook. So we can eliminate the weakest choice, 31. ... Rc3??. based on the same idea, 32. Bd4!. But the other three options require boggling calculations—the point here, as the author explains: "Even in wild positions, strategic thinking often helps when calculation is too complex." When we reason that Fischer played 31. g4 to stop ... Bf5, and that winning White's restricting g-pawn will permit us to give up our bishop for the ambitious c-pawn, leaving us with four connected pawns and rook against rook and bishop, we find 31. ... Rb3-g3+!. So our answer is "D" to the first question and "B" to the second. Flipping the page, we learn we've earned a full point in the match. We also find out that 42% of those challenged got the right answers, while 10% chose hari-kari with 31. ... Rc3.

Khmel'nitsky inserts a 20-position warm-up before you get down to the business of defeating Bobby and, between the work of each 12-position match, gives us a break—interesting snippets of Fischer history, grandmaster quotes about Fischer, plus unusual positions Bobby handled against his earthly peers.

An important feature of the book is its comprehensive and diagnostic rating system. First of all, we can get an "Interim Report," giving us an estimated rating after each of the six matches. But after completing all six matches, we can calculate our overall rating, as well as how we scored in 13 distinct categories (endgame, calculation, strategy, tactics, attack, defense, when we stand better or worse, etc.), helping us pinpoint our strengths and weaknesses.

You vs. Bobby Fischer—paperback, 190 pages, FAN, \$21.95: Highly recommended. Includes playing and training tips, a game index and compilation of all 60 complete, unannotated games used in the matches. Khmel'nitsky's third book in his popular chess exam series is entertaining and involving, and the skill with which he chooses positions and explains them should net you wins and a deeper appreciation of the game. See Khmel'nitsky's website, iamcoach.com, for free chess tips and more information on his books. ■

Igor Khmel'nitsky, *You vs. Bobby Fischer*, 2009, iamCoach Press, 192 pp., \$21.95 from uscfsales.com (catalog number B0003KH)