

Nathan Divinsky 1925-2012

by John Donaldson



Nathan Divinsky at the 1st Kórník Conference in 2002 (Photo received from Tomasz Lissowski)

Nathan Joseph Harry "Tuzie" Divinsky died in Vancouver, on June 17, 2012, of cancer after an illness of several weeks. He was 86.

One of the giants of Canadian chess, Divinsky was a man of considerable and varied accomplishments as an author, journalist, player, politician and promoter of the royal game. He played twice for the Canadian national team (Amsterdam 1954 and Havana 1966), but represented his nation in many more Olympiads as its FIDE Delegate. A man of principle, who didn't mind speaking his mind in the devil's den of FIDE politics, his stentorian voice could be heard at many FIDE Congresses.

Divinsky will likely be best remembered by the chess world for his literary output, which included:

Around the Chess World in 80 Years, Vols 1 and 2 - 1961 and 1965 BCM Quarterlies

The Batsford Encyclopedia of Chess - 1990

Life Maps of the Great Chess Masters -1994

Warriors of the Mind: A Quest for the Supreme Genius of the Chess Board (with Raymond Keene) 1989, 2002

Dr. Divinsky edited the column "Chess Charivari" from October 31, 1953 to June 19, 1954 in the *Winnipeg Tribune*. His column of February 20, 1954, included a nice victory over Sammy Reshevsky in a simul in Winnipeg which is reproduced below.

Divinsky served for 15 years, from 1959-1974, as editor of the magazine *Canadian Chess Chat*. This was

the only Canadian magazine for much of this time, and played an invaluable role in promoting chess in Canada.

A man with a strong interest in chess history, Divinsky was fascinated by the German chess master, historian and diplomat Tassilo von Heydebrand und der Lasa. His article "The Mighty Baron", which appeared in the June 1985 issue of the *British Chess Magazine* (pp. 226-232), was one of the first serious looks at Lasa's career and was well-received, prompting Divinsky to dig deeper. The past two decades he spent a great deal of time delving into all aspects of the Baron's life, in what promised be his magnum opus.

One example of the extent of his research is that, while *Mega DataBase 2012* has 279 of Lasa's games, Divinsky had dug up close to 500. This included the game against Heinemann played at the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco in late 1887/early 1888.

Divinsky received a setback when his collaborator Peter Stockhausen dropped out of the Lasa project, but he continued on, and one can only hope that his work will be published one day.

Divinsky grew up in Winnipeg at the same time as the Yanofsky brothers, Abe and Harry, in what was the golden age for Manitoba chess. He won the Championship of this province in both 1946 and 1952, and finished runner-up in 1945. While he never devoted himself fully to tournament play, Divinsky did play in several Canadian championships, finishing tied for 3rd-4th in 1945.

A man of many interests, Divinsky was a master at bridge as well as chess. He was very active in politics in the 1970s and 1980s, serving on the Vancouver School Board from 1974-80, and as an alderman of Vancouver's city council from 1981-82.

Divinsky earned a PhD from the University of Chicago in Mathematics in 1950, and served as a mathematics professor at the University of British Columbia, where he spent the entirety of his professional career. Among his students were future Grandmasters Duncan Suttles and Peter Biyiasas.

He is survived by his wife Marilyn Goldstone, and daughters Judy Kornfeld and Pamela Divinsky.

Those wishing to learn more about this remarkable man may wish to consult International Master Anthony Saidy's tribute entitled "Chess Godfather of the North", which appeared in *Chess Life* in December 2010 (pp. 17-19).

Chess Charivari

One great untapped resource for those wishing to research chess events from the past are chess columns in local newspapers. Today you will not find many in North America but 100 years ago there were a great number (easily over 60) appearing throughout the continent and even 50 years ago there were quite a few. More and more newspapers are posting their archives online and have search capabilities that spare the hunt in the dark pouring over blurry microfilm that was the only way to get things done in the past. Also very useful in the quest is Ken Whyld's massive *Chess Columns: A List*, a 587 page book that makes a very good stab at trying to record as much information about as many columns as possible. As Whyld wrote in his introduction, in a work of this kind there were bound to be many errors and omissions, but it is still quite impressive.

One column you will not find listed in *Chess Columns: A List* ran in the *Winnipeg Tribune* from October 31,

1953 to June 19, 1954. The 33 columns that appeared focused primarily on international news, but national and local events were also covered. A typical column featured a chess problem, news and one or two annotated games - often in great depth. Books reviews and the occasional photo rounded things out. Chess Charivari, as Dr. Nathan Divinsky called his column, was meaty and well written but that didn't stop it from being dropped in the summer of 1954. The *Winnipeg Tribune* gave the case as low readership - in a poll commissioned by the paper out of 120 readers there were only three regular and six occasional readers of Chess Charivari! Divinsky received a total of \$160 for his work on his column that deserved a better fate.

The following excerpt gives a small taste of the good stuff to be found in Chess Charivari.

Chess Charivari - February 20, 1954

by Dr. Nathan Divinsky

Reshevsky Simultaneous

This event proved to be a highlight in Winnipeg chess. The most enjoyable chess evening fans have had for many years. Dr. W. W. Wright, president of the Manitoba Chess Association introduced the grandmaster. For the first 15 minutes Reshevsky answered questions from the floor, explaining that he would very much like to get Botvinnik ALONE in a match for the world's championship! Then the play began.

Thirty three Winnipeg stalwarts opposed the grandmaster. Having participated ourselves, we can assure our readers that his opening play was faultless, that his speed was phenomenal, and after an hour, a half dozen players had already suffered defeat. The middle game was played at a more reasonable rate. It is here that the grandmaster is at a disadvantage - he does not have sufficient time to consider all the combinations, whereas the individual player has a bit more time and peace. Several players obtained an advantage, some in position and a few in material. However as more and more fell away, and the ranks were thinned to ten, Reshevsky seemed to be coming around at breakneck speed - and one MUST move when he comes! The difficult part was over, and after only 3 hours of play, 31 had gone down to defeat. Only your editor and Mr. Abe Kussim obtained draws. We expect to hear more of Mr. Kussim in Winnipeg chess.

Though Winnipeg's result compares with Calgary (33 losses and 1 draw) and Vancouver (33 losses and 4 draws), we feel that a much stronger group of players could have participated. With players like Mogle, Blinder, A. Dreman, B. Deitchman, H. Frank and M. Desser in the line-up we are convinced that several wins would have been scored, to say nothing of I. J. Dreman and H. Yanofsky. Not only would they themselves have had good chances, but they would have helped slow up Reshevsky and given all the others more time to think. We sincerely hope that the next generation of A players will take a more sincere interest and give all chess enthusiasts pleasure and enjoyment. We were happy to see many young and talented players in the line-up.

There were a great number of spectators (close to 100) and they all seemed to be having a wonderful time.

Besides your editor and Mr. Kussim, the following players participated:

E. Budnitsky, C. F. Ashmore, A. Boxer, P. H. Buhr, T. F. Carter, S. F. Cooper, S. Choslovsky, A. D. Divinsky, J. Enns, B. Fortier, J. Filkow, N. Garfinkle, L. Guberman, P. Hildebrandt, K. Knapheus, N. Klassen, P. Katz, W. Krawitz, G. Love, W. R. Mitchell, H. R. MacKean, J. L. Matynia, R. Newbury, J. J. Promislow, S. Pedlar, B. Richman, J. Steigerwald, P. Sidney, J. Shebaylo, A. Vincent, Dr. W. W. Wright.

Reshevsky - Divinsky
Winnipeg (simul) 1954

Notes by Divinsky

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6

I was all set to play the 1...e5, the Budapest Defense, hoping that the complications of the pawn sacrifice would give me some sort of a chance, but D.A. Yanofsky convinced me that playing solidly was the only hope.

3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nf3 0-0 6.Be2 Nbd7 7.0-0 e5 8.Re1 c6 9.Bf1 Ne8 10.Bg5 f6 11.Be3 Nb6 12.Qd2 Be6 13.b3 f5 14.Ng5 Bd7 15.exf5?

Up to this point the game has followed a reasonable pattern. The text is an oversight, which I must admit I was very happy to see.

15...exd4! 16.fxg6

Now if 16.Bxd4 Bxd4 17.Qxd4 Qxg5 and Black is a piece up.

16...dxc3?

There was no hurry to take the piece. Simply 16...hxg6 and White's game is hopeless. Now White gets compensation for the piece.

17.gxh7+ Kh8 18.Qe2 Nf6 19.h3 Qe8 20.Qd3 Qe5 21.f4 Qa5 22.Bd4 Bf5 23.Qxc3 Qxc3 24.Bxc3 Nxh7 25.Bxg7+ Kxg7 26.Re7+ Kg8 27.Rd1 Nxg5 28.fxg5 Rab8 29.g4!

Not 29.Rxd6 because of 29...Nc8 winning the exchange.

29...Bc2 30.Rd2 Bb1 31.Re1 Bh7 32.Rxd6 Rbd8 33.Rh6 Bc2 34.c5 Nd5 35.Bc4 Kg7 36.Re2 Bb1 37.Kh2 Rde8 38.Rxe8 Rxe8 39.Bxd5 cxd5 40.Rd6 Re7

At this point things were moving very quickly and I didn't want to gamble on 40...Be4 41.Rd7+ Kg6 42.Rxb7 Rd8 43.c6 d4 44.Rd7!

41.Rxd5 Bxa2 42.Rd3 a5 43.Kg3 Rc7 44.h4 Kg8

If 44...Rxc5 45.Rd7+; but 44...Kf8 would have saved some time.

45.Kf4 Kf8 46.h5 Rxc5 47.Rd8+ Ke7 48.Rb8 Rc7?

Much stronger is 48...Rb5.

49.h6 Bb1

These pawns seem to be growing in size!

50.Rg8 Rc6 51.h7 Bxh7 52.Rg7+ Kf8 53.Rxh7 Rb6 54.Rh3 Kg7 55.Kf5

Here I refused an offer of a draw.

55...Rb5+ 56.Kf4 Rb4+ 57.Kf5 b5 58.Rc3 a4 59.Rc7+ Kg8 60.Kg6 Kf8 61.bxa4 bxa4 Draw

If there are any winning chances, White has them now. An exciting struggle.

A Sam Loyd problem, Geller-Flohr and Petrosian-Smyslov from the 19th USSR Championship (the first without notes and the second heavily annotated) and a review of R. N. Coles *The Chess-Player's Weekend Book* completed this column.