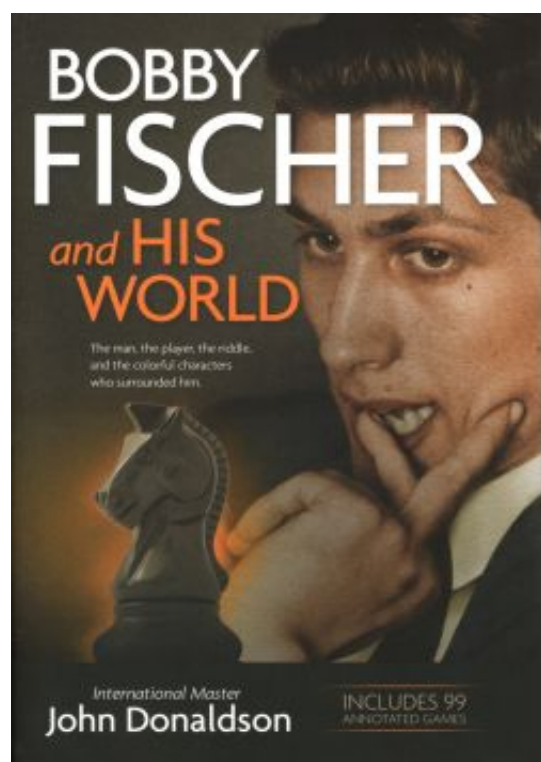


2020-12-28

John Donaldson - Bobby Fischer and his world



John Donaldson - Bobby Fischer and his world - frontcover

Our member and temporary deputy chairman John Donaldson has published his third book on Bobby Fischer:

Bobby Fischer and his world - The man, the player, the riddle, and the colorful characters who surrounded him.

Includes 99 annotated games

Los Angeles: Siles Press, © 2020; xx + 664 pp.

ISBN 9781890085193

This real magnum opus is John Donaldson's third book on Fischer after his *A Legend on the road: Bobby Fischer's 1964 simul tour* (1994) and, with co-author Eric Tangborn, *The unknown Bobby Fischer* (1999). So it is – in terms of soccer – also his hattrick on the 11th world champion.

Already at first glance we see that the work is the result of his chess life long preoccupation with all aspects of Fischer's chess life. At the same time, browsing the almost 700 pages is enough to understand that the author documents more or less 'en passant' important parts of the American chess history of the second part of the 20th century. I wouldn't be surprised if in the future the register of his book (pp. 633-644) will be also used by historians as a kind of encyclopedic reference work. If ever the 'definitive' biography of Bobby Fischer will be written, here the biographer finds an essential part of its foundation.

[Update 2020-12-30] John has sent us following reactions in response to some of our remarks regarding his book:

“Like many players of my generation I started playing as a result of the Fischer - Spassky World Championship match. While I never saw Fischer play or had the opportunity to meet him many of my friends did. Their stories of Bobby, often at odds with accounts of him in the main stream media, piqued my interest. Of course I was always interested in his games and what he wrote. My fascination with Bobby only increased after I wrote two small books on him roughly twenty years ago (A Legend on the Road and The Unknown Bobby Fischer).

When I started work on the book a dozen years ago I reread Frank Brady's two quite different editions of Profile of a Prodigy plus Endgame and over the years came back to them again and again. These are the canons for anyone interested in Fischer's life and were my starting point. I didn't want to go over ground that had already been well-covered, but instead wished to address questions Brady was unable to answer or at least shed new light on them. I was of course looking for new material as well".

And with respect to the most helpful sources he came across in his research for the book, he writes:

"I used many sources but here are a few of the most important ones besides the three previously mentioned books by Brady. Chess Life and Chess Review, both available at <https://new.uschess.org/chess-life-digital-archives>, were especially helpful for Bobby's early years and the latter has his column from 1963-64.

Edward Winter's Chess Notes - <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/index.html> was an invaluable resource as was <https://fischer-notes.blogspot.com/>. The latter has hundreds of articles about Fischer that appeared in newspapers throughout his life.

The works of David DeLucia and his daughter Allesandra (Bobby Fischer Uncensored and Bobby Fischer- Triumph and Despair) contain much information that can be found nowhere else and the Delucia's are to be commended for sharing their treasures.

Three of the brick and mortar institutions that were especially useful were the John G. White Collection of the Cleveland Public Library, the Lily Library at Indiana University which houses the papers of John Collins and the World Chess Hall of Fame in St. Louis. The latter has many unique Fischer items and is constantly adding to its collection. Many people who knew Bobby well were

generous in sharing their memories with me, particularly Frank Brady, William Lombardy and Bernard Zuckerman”.

So far John Donaldson. Asked for an excerpt of his book that may interest our members, he allowed us to publish on our website the paragraph on the question “Who was Bobby’s second?” (pp. 470-472), which will follow below.

Bob van de Velde

(click to enlarge images)



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beginning of the match the position was not filled as Lombardy wrote to Spies (1974):¹

There were nothing simple phrases even as Bobby's assistant looked at the chessboard every time he had doubt or was opening a conversation in English, and every evening one pronunciation about the chance of his appearing at the Championship. I received a message to phone Dr. Fischer (Fischer is the first of Bobby's and one of the two names of Robert Fischer). I passed the Fischer name to him and he said, and he was... the name in the telephone I tried to contact him to go on board, but he was not interested. "When about you?" he asked. I told him "I was interested in seeing the chess in 1974." "You haven't signed anything have you?" That was...

Lombardy would prove to be a wise choice. While he was no longer the world class player he had been from 1966–1968, when he was one of the top three players in the world, Lombardy was still a strong grandmaster with a deep understanding of the game.

The team in the past had had Lombardy's name to work chess and keep up an opening theory and in that respect, Kasparov would have been more helpful—although in truth Bobby never needed help with openings. In 1974 Kasparov's rating of 2670 was only slightly higher than Lombardy's 2520. However, Kasparov was a professional player who was improving quickly and by January 1974 he was number one in the world with a FIDE rating of 2625.

Still, Lombardy had plenty to offer. The role of a coach is not only to convey chess information. Often it is just to inspire or to make sure the player is feeling confident and at ease. Lombardy, who had known Fischer for close to twenty years and watched him climb the mountains in the World Championship match, knew Bobby and his needs well. He did nothing more than persuade Bobby to play games that Lombardy would have excellent prep and notes.

In the end, what it comes down to is William Lombardy was paid by the USCF just to keep hours of work with Fischer and should be considered Bobby's "coach" around the clock. Later Kasparov helped Fischer in many critical adjustments in the second half of the match and Garry Kasparov has a strong right to be called one of Fischer's coaches. Spies' question has since opened on the subject over a century of history as to how multiple or influence the best.

¹ William Lombardy, Spies (1974), 53. Spies, *Chessboard Images*, 2 January 11, 2016.

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Pages 470-472 as PDF file:

[John Donaldson - Bobby Fischer and his world - pages 470-472 \(80.5 KiB\)](#)

[/Update]

See also:

- [Siles Press](#)