

2014-10-03

Sinquefield Cup 2014



Again a "Fabulous Fabiano"!

Visit of an Absolute Super Tournament in St. Louis - the Second Sinquefield Cup, August 27 to September 7

This year's Sinquefield Cup had been announced as the "strongest tournament of all time". Michael Negele and Robert van de Velde were on the spot and also met there 5 other KWF&A members – the "Magnificent Seven" were completed by Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam (the third member from Europe) and the 4 US members John Donaldson, Larry List, Tony Rich and Michael Utt.

- A short addendum (29-10-2014) - see [Addendum!](#)

The following report is based on Michael Negele's text in the article "Spirit of Saint Louis" by Dr. Michael Negele [text], Raj Tischbierek, Dirk Poldauf [games], published in the German magazine *Schach* 10/14, p. 5-25.



[Gateway Arch](#) – famous monument of St. Louis symbolizing the westward expansion of the United States

We had covered the 300 miles from Chicago O'Hare southwestwards by a rental car – the *Dodge*, the condition of the *Interstate 55* and particularly a veritable thunder cell (fearing a tornado) had worried us a little, so we were happy to reach – after passing the Mississippi – the luxury *Chase Park Plaza Hotel* where the six tournament participants had also found accommodation.

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The World

[Chess Hall of Fame](#) – a kind of "collectors' institution". Rex Sinquefield's dedication made the move of the WCHOF to St. Louis possible. You can find here memorabilia of Paul Morphy and Bobby Fischer.



Yours truly at

the largest chess king on earth.



[Two Dutch](#)

members: Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam and Bob van de Velde



[The Chess Club](#)

[& Scholastic Center of Saint Louis](#) - venue of the super tournament

After a fitful sleep (due to a considerable jet lag) we found in the morning that the venue, the Chess Club & Scholastic Center (CC&SC) in the Central West End of St. Louis, was indeed within walking distance. At 9 o'clock we were received by Brian Jerauld, communications specialist at the CC&SC, and Emily Allred, assistant curator of the World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF). The handing-over of our press cards gave us free admission to nearly all premises – we had arrived in the "land of the unlimited opportunities"!



Brian Jerauld

and Bob van de Velde. Brian is the "press officer" who showed us the club and ministered the meeting with Rex Sinquefield.



Emily Allred

and John Donaldson, Emily gave us a tour of the collection. John Donaldson, our deputy chairman, is the director of the oldest US chess club in San Francisco and also captain of the US national team. Moreover he has considerably contributed to the current Bobby Fischer exhibition in the WCHOF.

Especially impressive was *The War Room*, the IT command center in the basement where the webcast including the internet comments of the trio Jennifer Shahade – Yasser Seirawan – Maurice Ashley, the video transmissions from the analysis rooms and the outside interviews were perfectly operated.



A view of the War Room

There was only little time left to have a detailed look on the first two rounds of the tournament, with Caruana's two wins and Carlsen's restrained start. Everyone expected that the world champion would do his utmost in his today's game against Caruana to rectify the situation. But before the start of that game I met a special challenge: I had the privilege to interview "King Rex" – Rex A. Sinquefield, billionaire, sponsor and eponym of the tournament. You will find the SCHACH questions and answers in the a.m. magazine on p. 64ff. Shortly before noon the audience was finished and also time had become quite short to visit the current exhibitions in the WCHOF.

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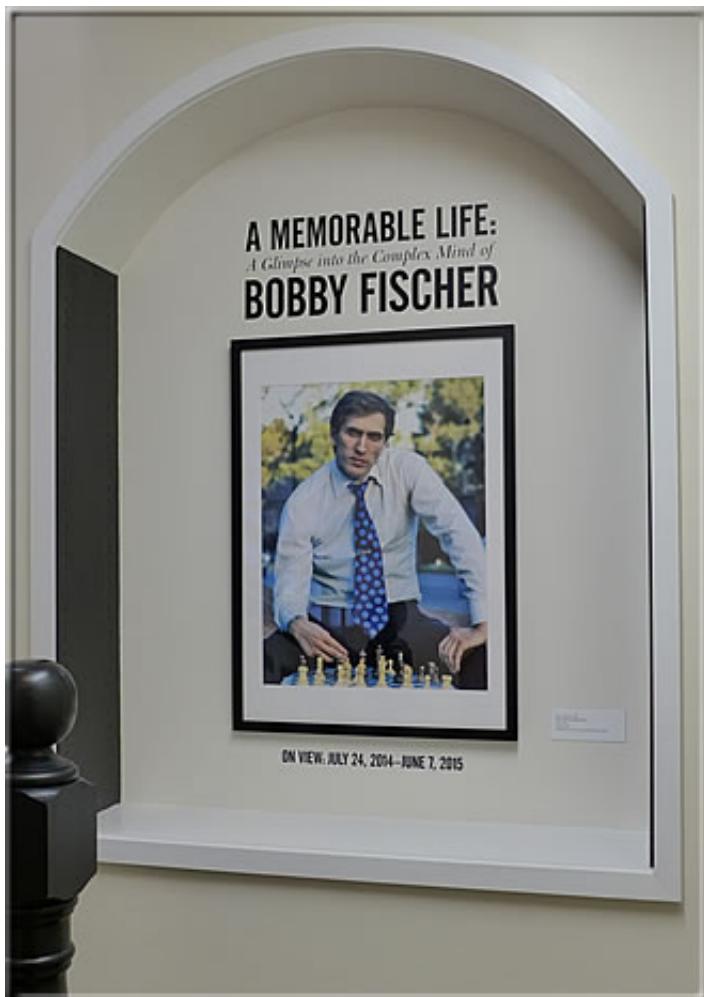
[Meeting Rex](#)

Sinquefield at the chess board



[Bob van de](#)

Velde, John Donaldson and Emily Allred



[A Memorable Life: A Glimpse into the Complex Mind of Bobby Fischer](#)



[Some Bobby Fischer memorabilia](#)



A chess board signed by Bobby Fischer and the Wildhagen "Red Book" on Boris Spassky (flipped open)



Bobby Fischer used to play on this furniture in his youth.



A sign warning of an artistic chess set (see below)



Learn to Win or You Will Take Losing for Granted, 2005

Glenn Kaino,



Please Play

Chess!

I am sitting at a completely modernized "John Cage chess board", by playing a game it electronically generates a piece of music.



John Cage's

classic Reunion performance (1968)

Links:

www.worldchesshof.org/exhibitions/exhibit/cage-kaino-pieces-and-performances/
www.worldchesshof.org/exhibitions/project/reunion



Jennifer Shahade, WCHOF

Director of the Board with her *Chess Bitch*

Naturally we didn't miss the start of the round at 2 pm, the course of the games was breathtaking – again and again *Mr. Stockfish* had to be consulted by the commentators. Anyway, the discipline of the spectators (mostly 25-30 and perhaps 50 at the weekend) was astounding in view of the "intimate" playing conditions.



room of the CC&SC

The playing



The tournament is up and running (photo of round 5). The spectators crowded 1 m to the right of the photo – it was a Sunday.



Fabiano Caruana signs autographs.

A happy boy -

The exciting games were intensely discussed in the two spacious commentators rooms: in the first cycle Ben Finegold and Alejandro Ramirez acted in *Lester's Bar* (directly adjacent to the CC&SC), and Varuzhan Akobian together with the Australian globetrotter Ian Rogers in the upper floor of the WCHOF. In both rooms the spectators could feast on soft drinks and snacks (covered by the admission fee of \$15) – according to the all-you-can-eat principle. And everywhere additional monitors had been installed to deliver the internet comments, a very effective PR measure.



"American way of chess" in Lester's Bar ...



commentators Ben Finegold and Alejandro Ramirez

GM



... as well as Varuzhan Akobian and Ian Rogers, in between Hikaru Nakamura.



Spectators in the commentators room.

This third round (on 29th of August) should give direction to the whole tournament. The ailing and indisposed Levon Aronian was outplayed by MVL (Maxime Vachier-Lagrave) – the start of a "long castling" 0-0-0 to be followed by draws only in the second cycle. Hikaru Nakamura missed a big chance to inflict the third defeat in a row on Veselin Topalov, and in the game of the day, Carlsen vs. Caruana, the world champ overlooked a rook check he had seen a few moves before, hence he had to give up some moves later.



Levon Aronian and his medicine ...



... Saline Nasal Mist



Hikaru

Nakamura: Without wings, but with butterflies in his stomach.



Still one move –

then Carlsen will accept his fate. Caruana had won his third game in a row ...

After a sightseeing together with John Donaldson we were again on site just in time for the fourth round. And once again all predictions were messed up: four games – four wins by Caruana! The audience was enchanted – Carlsen achieved only a lucky draw against Topalov and ranked 2 ½ points behind the leading "Mr. Perfect".



Executive

Director Tony Rich opens the game Caruana – Aronian.



Carlsen vs.

Topalov in round 4

The next morning a tour to the *Jefferson National Expansion Memorial* shortened the waiting time for us. Back in the tournament hall, the spectators gathered in rows of five – the following day was a holiday (*Labor Day*) – happy the man who can show a press card!



Many spectators



Alexander Beliavsky, trainer of MVL, liked it to mingle with the kibitzers – and is identified only by the fewest.

Before the rest day you could sense that the players felt obliged to step on it once more, but the until now disappointing Hikaru Nakamura (being on the lookout for a wife and therefore possibly distracted) fell victim to superstar Caruana – most likely this "storm" can only be compared with Topalov's initial $6\frac{1}{2}/7$ in the world championship tournament San Luis (Argentina) 2005. The good-humored Bulgarian reached 50% by a win against MVL, and Aronian suffered his third loss, helping Carlsen to achieve his first win.



Maxime Vachier-Lagrave had more bad than good days in his first absolute top tournament.



Veselin Topalov - final instructions from the arbiter Chris Bird.

As the only German guest I could give an interview that day, and therefore I also felt encouraged to bother Henrik Carlsen with some questions. Since 2012 Magnus Carlsen's father is solely devoted to the chess career of his son. He doesn't accompany his chess playing daughters Ingrid (20, studies dancing) and Ellen (25, studies medicine) to tournaments ("but I should think about it" he said); the youngest Carlsen sister (Signe, 17) doesn't play chess.



"The German" is interviewed for the webcast by Teryne Schaefer.



Interview with
Henrik Carlsen

The rest day for the players and organizers was a hard day for us as we started to inspect closely and to catalog the Lasker material. Bob van de Velde will provide a separate report on this subject.



[Michael Utt \(from Dallas/Fort Worth\) with Bob van de Velde](#)

In the early evening the **Burning Boards performance** followed, organized by Larry List together with the multimedia artist Glenn Kaino (Los Angeles). 16 chess players/artists (among them Rex Sinquefield and further members of the CC&SC) competed against 16 artists of all genres. Some photos will illustrate this great event – the result of a game was strongly dependent on the speed the candles burned down. Anyway, it was a lot of fun for the participants and the numerous spectators as well.

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Glenn Kaino at the mic, next to him Larry List



Fabiano Caruana
as onlooker: Jennifer Shahade and art professor Martin Brief at the board, in the background Larry List.



Glenn Kaino

playing candle chess



Larry List

against Veselin Topalov



John Donaldson

– game over, according to the rules you are not allowed to move burnt down (or extinguished) candles!



Tony Rich and

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave



Jennifer

Shahade, next to her Caruana and MVL.

Link: www.worldchesshof.org/exhibitions/project/the-burning-boards/

At the start of the second tournament cycle the only question was if somebody could stop Caruana. Obviously this was not possible. In the sixth round he defeated Topalov in 31 moves, extending his lead over Carlsen to 3 points! The latter couldn't exploit a nearly won position against MVL.



Again a "Fabulous

Fabiano"!



Magnus Carlsen

vs. Maxime Vachier-Lagrange is drawn!



Yasser Seirawan

and Silvio Danailov synchronize watches.

A similar picture in round 7: MVL imagined things in his game against Caruana and abstained from castling, so his king was at the mercy of the opposing forces. Caruana's phantastic score: 7/7!!

Nakamura's balance against Carlsen gradually becomes alarming, this time he confused the variations in the opening and he got a lost position after only 15 moves.



Magnus Carlsen, in the background

Veselin Topalov

Caruana was the clear tournament winner already three rounds before the end, and he drew his last three games, still with winning chances in two of them. So even a 9/9 score would have been realistic!

On the fringe of the event I could ask some questions to Caruana's trainer Vladimir Chuchelov who is a strong grandmaster himself and who has played in the German Bundesliga for many years (at Katernberg). In spite of massive computer use he doesn't consider classical chess as exhausted at all, and Caruana's "seven in one sweep" gives him every reason to that.



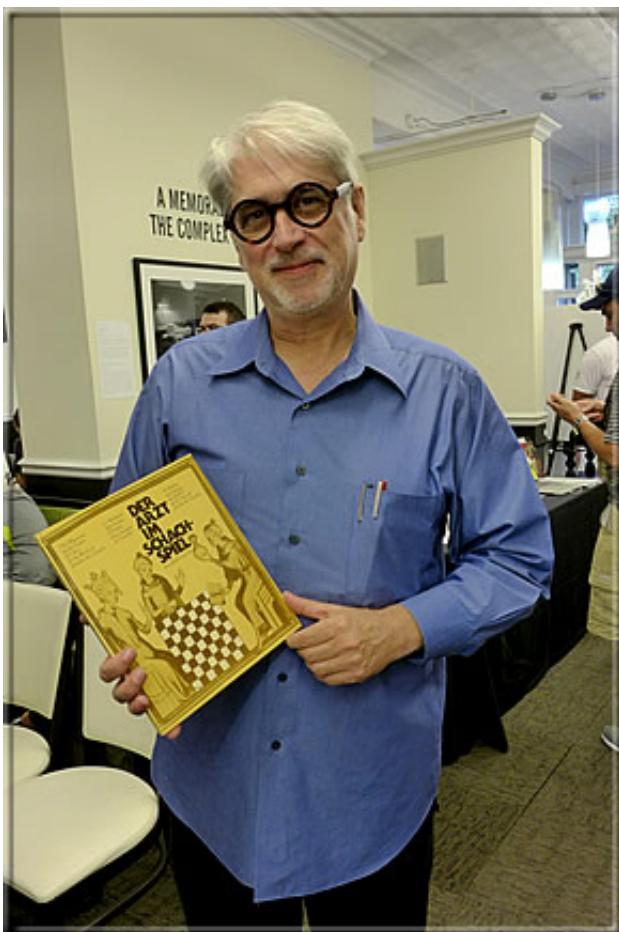
[Caruana's trainer Vladimir Chuchelov](#)

I had to leave St. Louis in the morning of the eighth round when Caruana's winning series found its end in the game against Carlsen.

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The German press photographer



Our friend from New York City, Larry List

As to the historical evaluation of this event, not all experts may agree to the rating "strongest tournament of all time", for instance you can cite the AVRO tournament 1938 or the final of St. Petersburg 1914 ... And Caruana's stunning result may be compared with Karpov's performance in Linares 1994. But Rex Sinquefield will remain true to himself, he now plans the 2015 Sinquefield Cup with eight top class players in a double round robin – all good things come in threes!



Unknown players outside ...

Addendum (29-10-2014):

I would like to add a snapshot of Henrik Carlsen and Megh Manseta ...



... the latter is an Indian investor from Mumbai and a chess friend who already visited the last WCh match in Chennai - Ulrich Stock has written an article about it - see ZEIT ONLINE [Nur aus Liebe zum Schach](#). So it was quasi a reunion in St. Louis after their first encounter in Chennai ...