

2024-10-01

## The pre-war Olympiads



Matthias Johansson and Frank Hoffmeister

The second lecture of the CH&LS General Meeting was given by Matthias Johansson on the subject of the Chess Olympiads before the Second World War. As we can see, these Olympiads were strongly influenced by the political events of this troubled period in history.

Here is an extract from the presentation text for the General Meeting on 13 and 14 September 2024.

In the following presentation, the Swede Matthias Johansson reported very interesting details on the pre-war Olympiads with a special focus on Stockholm 1937. He showed that the amateur character of the tournament was abolished when the United Kingdom accepted to allow professional players as participants. Generally speaking, Hungary dominated the competition with victories from 1926-1928 while the United States conquered three consecutive titles from 1931-1935. In 1936, Nazi Germany organised a team competition in Munich, which was not recognised as a FIDE Olympiad. However, FIDE had allowed its members to participate voluntarily since the German Federation had suspended the Aryan paragraph (which excluded Jewish players in Germany) for the tournament.

In 2022, a photo book by Ferenc Chalupetzky, who was part of the Hungarian delegation in the Munich 1936 Chess Olympiad was published in Hungary. The Hungarian chess historian László Jakobetz turned this valuable testimony into a beautiful book, which was published on the occasion of the 2024 Olympiad. Among other things, it shows the friendly relations between the Hungarians and the Greater German Chess Federation. Hungary won the tournament despite the enormous efforts of the National Socialists, who would have liked to win the gold medal and for this reason had the tournament played on eight boards. Two years later, the Greater German Chess Federation was accepted into FIDE.

# Pre-war Olympiads

## Tournament of Nations

- Hamilton-Russel Cup
- Only amateurs in Paris Olympiad 1924
- Mattison was declared amateur World Champion
- FIDE congresses every year from 1924 to 1939
- "Little Olympiad" with only four countries in Budapest 1926



Organise Olympiads FIDE's main task for the first decades

Few members of FIDE

Travel more difficult in those days

No clear demarkation between amateurs and professionals in chess

Pre-war Olympiads only 1 reserve

Match wins count

Hamilton-Russel donated the trophy for the first olympiad in london 1927

Kazic "discover new stars"

Budapest 1926 – Hungary 9, Yugoslavia 8, Romania 5, Germany 2. four boards per team

## 1st London July 1927

- Hungary 40, Denmark 38,5,  
England 36,5
- 16 teams

Reti	9	5	1	11,5	15	76,7%
Maroczy	6	6		9	12	75,0%
Grunfeld	6	7		9,5	13	73,1%
Euwe	7	7	1	10,5	15	70,0%
Atkins	3	8	1	7	12	58,3%
Johner	5	6	3	8	14	57,1%
Kostic	5	7	3	8,5	15	56,7%
Tarrasch	4	9	2	8,5	15	56,7%
Nilsson	6	5	4	8,5	15	56,7%
Koltanowski	4	9	2	8,5	15	56,7%



Alekhine world champion

First Hamilton Russel Trophy

First women's world champion

Expenses paid for four players per team

Olympiad welcomed both professionals and amateurs

No particular board order

Denmark second without Nimzowitsch

No Poland

Denmark and Hungary equal before the last round

## 2nd The Hague August 1928

- Hungary 44,  
USA 39,5,  
Poland 37
- 17 teams

Kashdan	12	2 1	13	15	86,7%
Nagy	9	5 2	11,5	16	71,9%
Rivier	5	5 1	7,5	11	68,2%
Hönliger	8	4 3	10	15	66,7%



Same time as the olympics in amsterdam

Only later tacitly accepted as fide event

Several professionals abstained as BCF had argued in 1927 congress to only have amateurs

No BCF team as they thought the US team was professional.

UK-US frictions

Robinow proposed at the congress not to make a distinction between non-/professionals

Wahltuch BCF agreed

No Russel hamilton cup

This for next olympiad

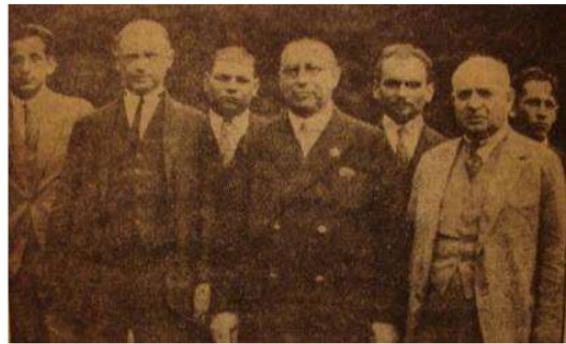
Individual tournament too: euwe 13, przepiorka 12, mattison 10

Excellent debut by poland and usa

## 3rd Hamburg July 1930

- Poland 48,5, Hungary 47,  
Germany 44,5
- 18 teams

Rubinstein	13	4		15	17	88,2%
Flohr	14	1	2	14,5	17	85,3%
Kashdan	12	4	1	14	17	82,4%
Maroczy	6	4	2	8	12	66,7%
Sultan Khan	9	4	4	11	17	64,7%
Weenink	7	6	3	10	16	62,5%
Alekhine	9			9	9	100,0%



- The Polish gold medalists:
- Frydman, Tartakower (1st and 2nd from the left), Rubinstein (centre), Makarczyk, and Przepiórka (2nd and 3rd from the right).

Hamburg chess club 100 years - robinow

Many grandmasters participated who will participate in several Olympiads of the 1930s

Poland favourites won the important match against Hungary 3,5-0,5 – first round  
Poland and hungary lost both holland and czechoslovakia

Rubinstein best 1 board player and took 15 points and played in every round

Alekhine won all his 9 games, including the game against Ståhlberg which won the prize for best game.

Alekhine palyed simultaneous exhibitions the during the Olympiad

BCF did no more insist on excluding professionals – every country sent their best players

Sultan Khan played for England

US proposed to organise the 1933 olympiad in chicago as part of the city's 100 years anniversary

## 4th Prague 1931

- USA 48, Poland 47,  
Czechoslovakia 46,5
- 19 teams

Alekhine	10	7	1	13,5	18	75,0%
Bogoljubow	9	7	1	12,5	17	73,5%
Kashdan	8	8	1	12	17	70,6%
Sultan Khan	8	7	2	11,5	17	67,6%
Stählerberg	7	9	2	11,5	18	63,9%
Flohr	8	6	4	11	18	61,1%
Grunfeld	5	8	2	9	15	60,0%
Rubinstein	6	7	3	9,5	16	59,4%
Mikenas	7	6	5	10	18	55,6%
Vidmar	5	7	4	8,5	16	53,1%



President Masaryk sponsored  
Czech chess federation 50 years

No capablanca or euwe as they were preparing for their match

No new countries

First time with fixed board orders

Young US team won with stamina – but 4/5 after 16 rounds and then won the last rounds

The planned olympiad for 1932 in spain was called off

## 5th Folkestone 1933

- USA 39, Czechoslovakia 37,5,  
Sweden Poland Hungary 34
- 15 teams

Alekhine	8	3	1	9,5	12	79,2%
Kashdan	7	6	1	10	14	71,4%
Flohr	6	6	2	9	14	64,3%
Tartakower	6	6	2	9	14	64,3%
Mikenas	5	6	3	8	14	57,1%



US did not come back on chicago  
England then offered  
Scotland joined  
Germany did not participate  
Mexico applied too late  
Estonia did not show up – all matches were registered as 0-4  
Alekhine best 1 board player again

## 6th Warsaw 16-31 August 1935

- USA 54, Sweden 52,5, Poland 52
- 20 teams

Flohr	9	8	13	17	76,5%
Alekhine	7	10	12	17	70,6%
Ståhlberg	9	7	2	12,5	69,4%
Tartakower	6	11		11,5	67,6%
Keres	11	3	5	12,5	65,8%
Boök	6	10	2	11	61,1%
Vidmar	4	9	1	8,5	60,7%
L'Steiner	7	7	4	10,5	58,3%
Petros	7	7	5	10,5	55,3%
Fine	5	8	4	9	52,9%



Flohr best 1 board player

Dake, born Dakowski, did not play the US match against Poland

Keres first appearance

The Netherlands did not participate

Organisers invited soviet union but to no avail

Sweden led until 15th round



## Munich 1936

- Hungary 110,5
- Poland 108,
- Germany 106,5
- 21 teams



21 teams with 8 players plus 2 reserves each

1680 games played

Hungary won all matches

Czechoslovakia, Latvia and Estonia best on top boards

Germany best on lower boards

Initially planned for Berlin

Munich chess club 100 years

Given that parts of the German Chess Federation's statutes were anti-Semitic, FIDE could have no involvement in the Munich Olympiad. However, since Germany had agreed, for that event, to drop its ban on Jews, FIDE's General Assembly voted to leave Federations free to decide whether or not to participate.

At the 1935 FIDE Congress, the US representative, Wahrburg, demanded that no FIDE member should be allowed to participate in the Munich Olympiad in 1936, owing to Germany's anti-Semitism. This, reports Marmorosh, "led to a heated discussion", with "Dr Alekhine and others" advocating "working together with Germany". Eventually there was a "compromise solution" whereby (as noted in your article on the 1936 Munich Chess Olympiad) FIDE would not be officially involved but would allow individual teams freedom of choice.'

This compromise, which from the outset was strongly supported by France (whose representative was Alekhine), Romania, Yugoslavia, Sweden and Switzerland as the

only correct solution, was eventually accepted by ten votes to three. Great Britain, Ireland, Czechoslovakia and Austria abstained. A surprising and amusing point, the Schweizerische Schachzeitung added, was that Wahrburg withdrew his motion after it had been so clearly rejected. The magazine considered that the FIDE delegates had averted serious danger by finding a sensible solution to a difficult issue.

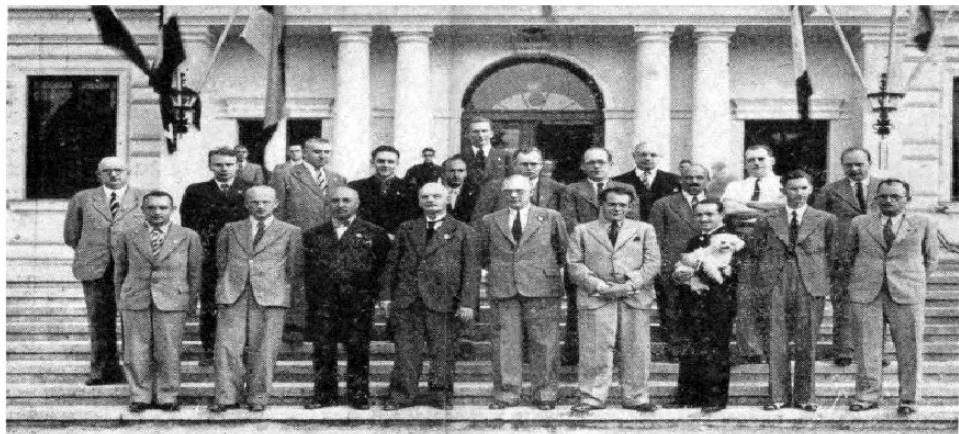
USA and Great Britain did not participate for political reasons  
Rhineland just remilitarised  
Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia hesitated  
Anti-semitic laws temporarily suspended  
Nottingham tournament at the same time with Botvinnik, Capablanca, Euwe, Fine, Reshevsky, Flohr, Lasker, Vidmar, Bogoljubow and Tartakower

Hungary (first). Front (from left to right): E. Steiner, G. Maróczy, N.N., S. Abonyi, G. Barcza, I. Koródy  
Behind: L. Steiner, A. Vajda, N.N., N.N., N.N., L. Szabó, A. Havasi, J. Balogh.



Poland (second). Left to right: H. Pogoreły, F. Sulik, K. Makarczyk, P. Frydman, T. Regedziński, A. Wojciechowski, M. Najdorf, J. Jagielski, L. Kremer, H. Friedmann.

## Kemeri 1937



Resort before World War I

Shared first prize: Reshevsky, Flohr, Petrovs

Reshevsky was in the lead before the last round but lost to Böök

Tartakower "never treated so well before"

Kmoch was tournament director

Tartakower told stories about Capablanca and Alekhine, without know that Alekhine was listening

Ståhlberg heard Alekhine walking to the bar

Mikenas-Alekhine

Morphy 100 year on 22 June

Mieses attended as a journalist

Kemeri, 1937. Front row from left to right: V. Petrovs, F. Apscheneek, A.

Melnbārdis, K. Bētiņš, H. Kmoch, S. Landau, S. Flohr, P. Keres, E. Steiner.

Behind: J. Kalniņš, E. Giese, P. Keirans, V. Mikenas, M. Feigins, K. Ozols, L.

Rellstab, E. Böök, S. Tartakower, A. Kanenbergs, A. Alekhine, G. Ståhlberg.

## 7th Stockholm August 1937

- USA 54,5, Hungary 48,5, Poland Argentina 47
- 19 teams

Flohr	9	7	12,5	16	78,1%
Keres	9	4	2	11	73,3%
Euwe	8	3	2	9,5	73,1%
Lilienthal	9	6	2	12	70,6%
Mikenas	7	8	3	11	61,1%
Ståhlberg	7	4	4	9	60,0%
Reshevsky	6	7	3	9,5	59,4%
Petrovs	5	10	3	10	55,6%



19 teams

No French or Austria team

The Netherlands participated

US won again – in the lead all along

Followed by Hungary and Poland

Stoltz military service postponed by government decision

Disappointment for Sweden who came second in Warsaw 1935

Started with a loss against Argentina with 3-1. In Warsaw 1935 Sweden beat Argentina by 3½-½.

US beat Czechoslovakia and Poland in rounds 10 and 11 by 3 and 3,5 and then went on to win







Germany rejoining FIDE. Nordics and Hungary suggested exploring this.  
Uruguay joined FIDE

## 8th Buenos Aires 1939

- Qualifying rounds 22-30 august
- Final to start on 1 september
- Germany 36, Poland 35,5, Estonia 33,5
- 26 teams

Alekhine	9	7	12,5	16	78,1%
Keres	12	5	14,5	19	76,3%
Capablanca	7	9	11,5	16	71,9%
Petros	8	11	13,5	19	71,1%
Ståhlberg	7	8	11	16	68,8%
Eliskases	7	5	9,5	14	67,9%
Rojahn	8	4	10	15	66,7%

Pirapolis left Antwerp 27 July 1939

15 European countries

4 groups with 7 and 6

No USA, Yugoslav or Hungary

US due to financial

GSB sent a team, including with Eliskases

Czecho-Moravian team came sixth

Capablanca participated

yanofsky

English team left after the start of the war on 1 September and did not participate in the finals

France, Poland and Palestine refused to play against Germany and those matches were drawn without play

Germany lead by one point over poland and were scheduled to meet in the last round. Ie Germany won the tournament.

The german and polish teams stayed in argentina

Najdorf had 320 dollars after the Olympiad

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[The presentation as PDF file:](#)

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