

IVÁN BOTTLIK

Four Outstanding Hungarian Chess Masters

(born in 1892–1893):

János Balogh, Géza Nagy,
Gyula Breyer and György Négyesy

Well over a century ago, Fortune bestowed a particularly abundant gift on Hungarian chess: between 10th September 1892 and 10th May 1893, within the short span of nine months, four outstanding Hungarian masters were born who, with their excellent competitive results, their multifaceted understanding of the game, their wide-ranging general knowledge, and their superb qualities as human beings, left a much valued legacy to the chess tradition of this country.

Juxtaposing the four careers, those of Dr. János Balogh, Gyula Breyer, Dr. Géza Nagy and Dr. György Négyesy, with their many similar – plus a few divergent – features, might be a good way to survey the contribution of this remarkable quartet.

It should not be seen as overly pedantic when one points out that surnames such as Balogh and, even more, Nagy, are quite common in Hungary. It is enough to bring up names, such as the late Master Béla Balogh or the still active International Master Dr. Ervin Nagy, to show how the omission of given names could create confusion when attempting correctly to identify the person under discussion.

Balogh and Négyesy, both having sustained injuries in the First World War, were involved in the next global conflict as well, if only as prisoners of war; yet one of them lived to be eighty-eight, the other ninety-nine. Nagy was active as an army surgeon in World War I, dying at the age of 60. Breyer was not called up. In addition to gaining exemption as a university student, he had been diagnosed with a severe heart ailment, thus escaping the war's inferno. Ironically, of the four he was granted the shortest life span, dying at the tender age of 28.

All four were excellent chess writers. Unfortunately, only a small portion of the writings of Balogh and Négyesy was translated into world languages, while virtually nothing from the output of Nagy and Breyer is available in foreign editions.

Breyer did not live long enough to participate in the increasingly

popular international team competitions of the Twenties and Thirties. Négyesy took part with the Hungarian team in the 1926 Pre-Olympics, followed by other international contests. Nagy was a member of two gold winning Olympic teams (1927 and 1928), while Balogh played for Romania in the Pre-Olympics and in three subsequent Olympiads, but only managed to win a gold medal once he rejoined the Hungarian team, in 1936.

All four attended university, Balogh and Négyesy graduating with diplomas of jurisprudence, Nagy with a medical diploma, while Breyer gained an engineering degree. Since they made their living from, and dedicated themselves to the service of, their professions, it is not surprising that they remained amateur chess players. They were highly cultured men who could speak fluently at least one other language. All four were strong masters over the board, Breyer actually attaining world class level.

Négyesy was not only a strong correspondence player; his contribution as an organizer and leader in this field was even more significant. Nagy was one of the best Hungarian »long-distance« competitors, and Balogh was numbered among the world's best in this category. While not involved in correspondence chess, Breyer excelled in an altogether different sphere of the game: he was world record holder in blind simultaneous play.

I have been fortunate to have, one way or another, acquired a kind of personal knowledge of all of them. There are no other living players or writers today who would have, both by direct contact and by studying their writings and games, built up as intimate an acquaintance with Dr. Négyesy and Dr. Balogh as I have. I played a draw against both of them. In the case of the already aging Négyesy, during the course of a Hungarian team championship and against Balogh in the 1960-62 individual correspondence championship from which he emerged as champion, I as runner-up.

I was at one time acquainted with the daughter of Breyer, and still maintain contact with his two grandchildren. In addition, I happen to be the author of a book on the life and career of Gyula Breyer. Equally, I endeavour to keep in touch with Dr. Nagy's sons and with one grandchild.

Despite these personal links, the biographer's task is a daunting one as he attempts to discharge the responsibility of presenting, in greatly condensed form, an appreciation of the far-reaching accomplishments of these men that could (and should) fill volumes, confined as he is to the few pages of these brief articles; with the unavoidable chore of selection that is dictated by such limitation. ...