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## **Juan Sebastián Morgado: El impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones 1939**

Juan Sebastián Morgado - El impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones 1939: Tomo 1 - cover

Our chairman writes:

From our Argentinian member Juan Sebastián Morgado we have received the announcement of his three-volume monograph on the Chess Olympiad 1939 in Buenos Aires: *El impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones 1939*. Although written in Spanish and therefore not so easily accessible for all lovers of chess history, it will be a most welcome additional source of information to the issue of [Karl, das kulturelle Schachmagazin](#) (3/2019) that recently was devoted to this famous tournament, and the single-volume tournament book the Australian author Justin Corfield wrote on the tournament, *Pawns in a greater game; The Buenos Aires Chess Olympiad August-September 1939* (Gentext Publications: Lara [Victoria] 2015).

Juan Morgado was as kind as to send us on our request a extensive synopsis of his work, which we publish here.

[Update 2020-02-18] The PDF that contains the complete text of volume 1 of Juan Morgado's monograph is available for members under [Lectures and Articles](#) [/Update]

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## **El Impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones 1939**

**[The Awesome 1939 Chess Tournament]**

by Juan Sebastián Morgado

### **General description**

- ISBN Complete work 978-987-47437-0-1
- Amazon (In Spanish), paper, format 21x28 cm, 2.500 illustrations
- Volume 1: The Politeama and the prolegomens of the event (1938) 533 pages

- Volume 2: Development, euphoria and drama of the Tournament of Nations (1939) 546 pages
- Volume 3: Immigrants enriched Argentine chess (1940-1943) 551 pages

This work is structured as a chronology of the 1939 Tournament of Nations in the socio-political context in which it was developed. The circumstance that this author administered a chess shop for 38 years (1981-2019) favored the progressive accumulation of historical and collectible materials: all Argentine chess magazines, very diverse scrapbooks, complete collections of newspapers such as *La Nación* and *Crítica*, important lots of foreign magazines (*Chess*, *British Chess Magazine*, *Xadrez Brasileiro*, *Deutsche Schachblätter*, *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, *Uruguayans*, *Chileans*, *Cubans*, etc.), official and personal documents of Grand Masters. The arrival of technology in the late 1990's facilitated the scanning, digitization and classification of the elements, but the final ordering took no less than 15 years.

The historical and cultural concepts that are inserted here are based on the profound ideas of the writer Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (1895-1964), mainly based on his works from the 30's and 40's. In *La Cabeza de Goliath*, Ezequiel referred extensively to the Tournament of Nations and the Argentine chess players. He discovered that, within the changing future, there are historical invariants, inert forces that remain from the colony, and are transmitted untold from generation to generation: fear, militarism (coups), *Trapalanda* –make castles in the air–, the social crack, the Creole liveliness, the contempt for the law, the *hybris*. This great event was the scene of several of those invariants.

In 1941 Guillermo Puiggrós and Ignacio De María published a small book, which contained some items and brief comments. In 1946 Milcíades Lachaga managed to recover the score-sheets of the games, which had been lost due to the bankruptcy of the FADA in 1941. He compiled them in a text that included the complete statistics. Only in the year 2000, Anthony J. Gillam published *Buenos Aires Chess Olympiad* (120 pages, *The Chess Player*, in English). Subsequently, an interesting work by José Antonio Copié was published, entitled *Remember 1939* (2009, edition of the author, 74 pages), which collects interesting data. Thanks to the management of Senator Carlos Alberto Reutemann and under the authorship of Sergio Ernesto Negri and Enrique Julio Arguñariz, *La Generación Pionera 1924-1939, Historia del ajedrez olímpico argentino* was launched, edited by the Senate of the Nation in 2012 (574 pages), which long describes the development of the event.

More recently, the work *Pawns in a Greater Game* (Gentext Publications, 2015, 382 pages, in English) by Justin Corfield, an Australian who traveled the world to write it and unveiled a remarkable amount of details of the contest that remained in the shadows.

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- [\\_ Tournament of Nations regulations, published in three languages](#)
- [\\_ Description of the Tournament of Nations in the program](#)

### **The Politeama and the prolegomens of the event**

The first volume highlights the enormous magnitude of the 1939 Chess Tournament, which was not reflected in an important work until very recently. Following the bankruptcy of the Argentine Chess Federation after the contest, the official book that was planned was not published. He was barely rescued by Guillermo Puiggrós and Ignacio Demaría in 1940, with a small twilight. Even the games were lost, until in 1946 they were rescued in a novel episode by Milcíades Lachaga, who edited a thick volume with all of them and statistics, but without information on their development.

This volume contains, among other topics, a semblance of the Teatro Politeama, details of the social and political scene of Argentina and the world, the columns of Alekhine and Capablanca in the newspapers, documents about the negotiations of the Argentine Federation with the world champion, international repercussions of the tournament, and the reproduction of the astonishing notebook of an unusual collector, Dino Ruggieri, a country man, who built what we called *the magic notebook*.

The history of the Teatro Politeama, home of the Tournament of Nations, deserves to be known, as it was one of the main musical and theater halls of Buenos Aires, since 1870. Among others, were there Eleonora Duse, Rosina Sarah Bernhardt, Giacomo Puccini, Otto Nordenskjold, Carlos Gardel, Discépolo, Eva Duarte.

The government at the time came to power through electoral fraud, and its ministers were divided: some were "allied" and others were "Germanophiles." In society you could see a great increase in Nazi activities: the president of the Stock Exchange was decorated with the cross, and a great act was held at Luna Park.

During the course of the contest and until almost three months later, frantic negotiations took place between Alekhine and Capablanca to play the rematch. On several occasions it seemed that the arrangements were successful and the long-awaited encounter was going to be played. Other times, there was an inconvenience that would return everything to zero. Finally, the efforts ended in a scandal: FADA President Dr. Carlos Querencio challenged Alekhine to duel. The water did not reach the river, but Alekhine left for France and there was no revenge.

- - \_ Part of the rules for the possible re-match drafted by Alekhine for FADA
- - \_ Alekhine's letter to FADA written in ink on air mail paper

One of the chapters reproduces the important journalistic notes that Capablanca and Alekhine wrote in *Crítica* and *El Mundo* newspapers, respectively. On several occasions they were attacking each other in a sibilin form.

On April 26, *La Prensa* gives the "bomb news: the Tournament of Nations is canceled!":

For lack of funds, the TN will not be performed. Failure will have a very unfavourable impact. The TN is at serious risk of failure. Economic reasons have hampered its realization; moreover, to put FADA in the afflicting situation of communicating to FIDE and the associations, which in number of forty were ready to attend, the impossibility of the tournament being played in Buenos Aires. In an extensive communication, FADA details the procedures taken to achieve the consent of FIDE, a management that came to be crowned by the success because of the commitment made by the delegates who attended the 1937 Congress, to whom they took the promise of President Agustín P. Justo to help the organization. This was true, because in the previous year's expenditure budget, a \$150,000 item was included to help cover a portion of the expenses, amounting to \$360.000, that will be required by the organization of the contest. The remaining balance of \$210,000 was to be achieved by FADA.

In a totally unwarranted and shameful way, Minister Jorge Coll decided that he will not “disburse the subsidy approved by Congress, because there are other priorities”. This arrangement fell like a bucket of cold water between the organizers, who had already confirmed almost 45 teams. At first the leaders of the FADA thought about cancelling the contest, but then, stimulated by Roberto Grau, decided to move on. To raise the necessary funds, they resorted to a national donation campaign. He himself offered to travel from the north to the south of the country, offering simultaneous exhibitions and conferences for the benefit of the Organizing Commission. Numerous groups were formed throughout the country, which were called "Commissions of Honor", which were responsible for gathering contributions and then turning them to the FADA accounts. In this way somewhat heroic could be relaunched the contest, although on the way 18 of the 45 representatives were lost.

## **Development, euphoria and drama of the Tournament of Nations**

The second volume contains a scrupulous report on the development, day by day, of the Tournament of Nations, the Women's World Championship and the FIDE Congress. The most important chronicles of the newspapers and magazines of the time have been selected, which serve both as illustrations.

- - \_ Chronicle of the newspaper *La Prensa* of the opening of the tournament
- - \_ Alexander Rueb's speech at the opening (*Caras y Caretas Magazine*)
- - \_ Argentina's victory over Iceland on the opening date, *La Prensa* newspaper

The Argentine Chess Federation must have sworn in the non-payment of the subsidy agreed by the government, resolving the problem mainly through the grueling work of Roberto Grau. The final drama that the organizers had to face because of the declaration of World War II is widely described. The impact of the outbreak has been documented by reproductions of the newspapers of the time, which showed the dramatic panorama of war events. The British team's abrupt withdrawal shocked the organization of the contest. Then, the sporting struggle between Germany and Poland in the final group was seriously affected by the beastly military actions, and other nations were also dragged into that contest: France, Palestine, Bohemia and Moravia. The great tournament was in serious danger of being cancelled, and only the strenuous task of the organizers led by Augusto de Muro and Roberto Grau could save him from rough waters and lead him to port, not without some injuries. He expressed about Germany's triumph:

There may be some unfair outcome, the public's hope can often be breached, but throughout a championship the chance is leveled and victory reward the most capable. The TN couldn't escape that rule. At the start of the event I pointed out the likely contenders to the win, and placed on a questionnaire, which was the basis of the division of the preliminary series to the following five teams: Germany, Poland, Argentina, Estonia and Sweden. That was also the order in which I placed them in the table, and the only difference is that ours, instead of the third place, obtained the fifth, but only at one point from Estonia, which was ranked third.

The inability of many of the participants to return to their countries due to the possible action of submarines in the Atlantic caused great additional difficulties: the government had not yet paid a substantial portion of the subsidy. *La Nación* said on 25 September 1939:

A delegation of chess players headed by the president of FIDE and FADA, Don Augusto De Muro, and which included former world champion José Raúl Capablanca, Dr. Savielly Tartakower, and Argentine chess players Luis Palau, Roberto Grau and Luis Piazzini, met with the President of Argentina, Roberto M. Ortiz, to express his greetings and gratitude for the cooperation provided during the contest. In addition, he was informed that the ship where players must return will depart from our port next Friday, and that this forces to resort to the balance of the subsidy voted in 1938 by the Congress, since that money is the only one counted on for the payment of the passages of return and the hotels where foreign teams live. The first magistrate listened sympathetically to the request, and congratulated the players and managers on the happy success achieved in the competition.

\_ Triumph of Germany, *La Prensa* release

## **Immigrants enriched argentine chess**

The third volume analyses the social and political circumstances that occurred in Argentina and the world after the war was declared, and the influence that more than thirty strong chess players who remained in the country exerted on the structure of national chess. The Argentine Federation itself, official institutions, provinces, municipalities, companies, the “Círculo”, embassies, groups or community clubs, tried to contain immigrants, and they did so in the vast majority of cases. They participated in countless activities, which gave them a minimum income to survive: tournaments, simultaneous, conferences, classes, academies, journalistic columns, book publishing, or even work in companies. One exception was the sad case of Ilmar Raud, who died in distressing circumstances, which we will discuss at the end of this volume.

The stateless Sonja Graf was also a protagonist in 1939, and was able to survive eight years in Argentina mostly for her chess activities and having written two books, which today are highly sought after relics. His trip to Cordoba in 1942 is extensively documented with information from cordobean newspapers.

Ariel Magnus's novel, *El que mueve las piezas*, based in the magnificent tournament, already reviewed in the pages of ChessBase, is included with the addition of surprising new data contributed by its author.

<https://es.chessbase.com/post/el-que-mueve-las-piezas-ariel-magnus>

By courtesy of Swedish leaders represented by Peter Holmgren, at the close of this work, we are able to add an important scoop: nine games, unknown until today, of the Argentine team that participated in the 1937 Stockholm Tournament of Nations.

For reasons of space it has not been possible to include in this work all the games of the tournaments 1938-1943. Readers who wish to have them in ChessBase format can download them free of charge from the website of GM Fernando Braga, <https://ajedrezconmaestros.com/>

Chess magazine stated:

Hospitality over the last week shook in the extreme. It was said that this happened because of Germany's triumph, which could not have been more unpopular. But if we take into account that the organizers had to organize the fair transport of 26 teams of five or six members from each of the world, and host them for a month, it is absolutely unfair to criticize them.

The mystery of Aristide Gromer's letter to Piazzini, which had already been exhibited at ChessBase, is discussed <https://es.chessbase.com/post/aristide-gromer-y-getulio-vargas-una-historia-increible-por-juan-morgado>.

A hypothesis is established about the religious reasons that might have led Gromer to return to occupied France.

## Downloads

- [Separata: El impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones 1939, Tomo 1 \(657.8 KiB\)](#)
  - [Separata: El impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones 1939, Tomo 2 \(8.5 MiB\)](#)
  - [Separata: El impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones 1939, Tomo 3 \(5.8 MiB\)](#)
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See for more information:

- Ajedrez con Maestros: [Crónica del impresionante “Torneo de las Naciones 1939” Tomo 1](#)
- Ajedrez con Maestros: [Crónica del impresionante “Torneo de las Naciones 1939” Tomo 2](#)
- ChessBase: [Revisiting the 8th Olympiad in Buenos Aires](#)

Morgado’s monograph is available through [Amazon](#).

At the same time its author informed us about some of his other recent publications (only one of them about chess). As far as I know they are rather unknown to us until yet:

- [Sociología del ajedrez postal; Historia de CAPA; Exequias de una idea](#)
- [Martínez Estrada, Borges y el Viejo Vizcacha; La grieta y los invariantes argentinos: de Rosas a Macri. Ensayo de explicación de la pobreza argentina. \(2da ed., corr. y ampl.\)](#)
- [La angustia existencial de Martínez Estrada: Una primera aproximación](#)