

Carlsen: The Chess Prince of Excess

In the last major tournament of 2024, The World Blitz Championship, Ian Nepomniachtchi and Magnus Carlsen faced each other in the finals. Finishing the round with a tied score of 2-2 began a “sudden death” tiebreak phase. After three tiebreakers ended in a draw, Carlsen proposed to Nepo: a shared first place. An event unheard of in chess, but not a never-done phenomenon in the highest levels of competition (High Jump final, 2024 Tokyo Olympics).

FIDE started discussions with players, officials, and finally, President Arkady Dvorkovich agreed to the proposal. Not surprisingly, this enraged fans and chess personalities, players and influencers, in the community.

Magnus should just tweet at the end of every year who the classical, rapid, blitz and Fischer-Random World champions are (or groups of champions). No need to organize events and waste precious resources.

- Antonio Radić, Professional Chess Player

The chess world is officially a joke. I can't believe that the official body of chess is being controlled by a singular player for the second time this week!

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This is cause for an investigation by the FIDE Ethics committee. I can't believe that two players who maliciously accused me and tried to ruin my career are openly breaking the rules. The irony simply can't get any worse.

- Hans Niemann, Professional Chess Player

If only I had known that the rules were flexible, I'd have lobbied for all 10 players who tied for first to be included in the knockout. Or, if we can have two co-champions, why not 10?!

- Daniel Narodistky, Professional Chess Player

Ignoring the personal motives of each personality, Niemann and Carlsen's clash about cheating accusations, the shared first place follows the “Jeans Gambit”. A few days prior, Carlsen had quit the World Rapid Championships 2024, after a dispute over the dress code. A pair of jeans, an inadvertent implication of the morning rush. He agreed to pay the fine, and since only a round was left, suggested the clothing change tomorrow. But the arbiter wanted immediate action, Carlsen denied the request, leading him to be disqualified from the final round that day. Shortly, he pulled out of the entire tournament.

Additionally, the 2022 announcement, his decision to withdraw from the World Chess Championship 2023, effectively relegating the classical championship to a competition for, at most, the title of the second-best player in the world. Although not as scrutinized as the Shared Gambit, it set an implicit sentiment about Carlsen's lack of respect for the game's highest title.

Historically, this isn't a singular occurrence. Garry Kasparov and Bobby Fischer, the other contenders for the consensus Greatest of All Time position, had their clashes with FIDE. Kasparov, alongside Nigel Short, formed the Professional Chess Association (PCA) and played a World Chess Championship Match (1993), separate from the official FIDE-backed match. However, the nature of the disagreement is different from Fischer and Carlsen, Kasparov and Short accused President Florencio Campomanes of breaking the rules for venue bidding, instead of directly announcing the venue as Manchester.

After winning his sole World Classical Championship Title in 1972, Bobby Fischer proposed non-negotiable demands for his 1975 title defense.

1. The match continues until one player wins 10 games, draws not counting.
2. No limit to the total number of games played.
3. In case of a 9–9 score, the champion (Fischer) retains the title, and the prize fund is split equally

His idea predicated on the following observation: a person could take an early lead, continue to trade pieces, and draw the following games, winning the entire series. A method he utilized in the 1972 championship. Fischer found the emergent condition for this possibility deplorable, owing to the structure of the series. To move away from Fischer specifics, the act stands against chess played for the sake of winning a championship, rather than for the sake of chess itself: a determination of the strongest player. Thereby, the first act of an affirmative excess by Fischer, as interpreted. A move towards chess expressing power for chess-itself, as opposed to a validatory exercise to win championships.

In the documentary *Me and Bobby Fischer* (2009), close friend Saemundur Palsson recorded conversations with Fischer. In it, he shows appreciation for Paul Morphy and José Raúl Capablanca, citing their dominance in an era before theory. He claims the current chess, and his own, as ruined by excessive theory, thereby the game reliant on prearrangement and memorization rather than creativity. Owing to this concern, he introduced a chess variant in 1996, Fischer Random. A variant where all pieces in the back rank (all non-pawn pieces) are randomly organized, eliminating the effectiveness of opening theory. Now, the second act of affirmative excess, the creation of a different, perhaps not too far as to claim newness, but an act to allow expression of capacities, instead of regurgitations, stored and recited verbatim through books and databases.

The two-act examples are important, for a similar (somewhat arbitrary) extrapolation can be done for Carlsen: the only player after Fischer to forfeit the world championship. Thus, the first act. As mentioned in a podcast with friend Magnus Barstad, the reason behind the forfeit is the lack of a challenge, the classical variant being not as “fun/satisfying (as it was in the start)”. For him, the last moment of excitement was to battle with Alieraz Firouja, a chaotic creative player like Carlsen, a young on-the-rise chess prodigy, who unfortunately failed to win the Candidates.

What happened during the Grand Swiss in Riga, where Alireza Firouzja won and qualified for the Candidates Tournament... made it realistic that I can meet him next time. It can be something that motivates me properly. It already helped me with the motivation for the World Championship match now.

At last, the winner of the Candidates was Ian Neponmiatchi, who was dominantly defeated by Carlsen in the championship prior. If this is not an appropriate quasi-display of strength, as far as it is possible in the existent norms and structures, a champion choosing challengers merely out of excitement, eventually rejecting the qualified challenger, in a series where he would be a heavy favorite. He destroyed the primacy of the world champion as the strongest player just because he desired, for he could. Leading to the Kasparov comment, that the line of World Champions has ended with Carlsen.

The second act, recency helps selection, is the Shared Gambit. Certain comments online accuse Magnus, a fear of losing, ignoring the decisive 2-2 battle before the tiebreaks, the draws during, and the advantageous white piece next. Is it not more probable that the person with a wedding in a few weeks, with plans on New Year's even, a close friend of the opponent over the board, would rather just get it over with? Note that Neopnmiatchi has not won a World Title in his career. As Carlsen commented, to paraphrase, "it would be too cruel if one of us wins over the other".

A nonchalant attitude towards the title. Is it not an excess of the strong, who care nothing about the acquisition of an additional undisputed title? Carlsen's actions can't help but remind me of the aphorism 163 of the Gay Science.

After a great victory.- What is best about a great victory is that it liberates the victor from the fear of defeat. "Why not be defeated some time, too?., he says to himself; "Now I am rich enough for that."

As direct examples, forfeiting the world chess championship, and sharing the blitz titles. As indirect ones, include Fischer, attempting to rescue chess for its rote, repetitive nature. Although an attempt that is setting itself up for failure, given the very nature of the game.

Not to say that Fischer and Carlsen, in totality, are affirmative beings. We could evoke evidence against it. Carlsen's comments on being "starstruck by a Saudi Crown prince" and serial entrepreneurial ventures indicate otherwise. Fischer's racial and gender stereotypes aside, an explicit strong force of resentment is revealed, in his alleged comments, calling Kasparov an "idiot savant", and himself a "genius who chose chess".

"I object to being called a chess genius because I consider myself to be an all around genius who just happens to play chess, which is rather different. A piece of garbage like Kasparov might be called a chess genius, but he's like an idiot savant. Outside of chess he knows nothing"

- Note that these are alleged comments, with online consensus.

If we assume the quote to be true, citing online consensus and the fact that Fischer could've said this, empirically his comments would reflect the opposite. Kasparov was a university graduate, political activist, and a well-rounded person in contrast to the high school dropout, chess prodigy, Fischer. Perhaps there is truth to the statement despite this, nonetheless there is no Is to demonstrate that Perhaps.

Chess has been dead, or dying, since 1997 (Deep Blue). Computer scientists have conquered chess since and the aid of engines has produced an extreme regurgitation, opening moves until a certain n, a repeated maximal of preconfiguration. An occurrence that Carlsen is fighting again, what Fischer observed in his time. Even so, given time, the repetition and pre-configuration will take over Fischer Random, each random possibility thoroughly explored. In this sense, Carlsen and Fischer are prolongers of chess, slowing down its inevitable death.