

I Chose Chess

Aleksandar Matanović ("Politika", May 22, 2023)

In later years it is better to remember what was than to predict what would be. I'm going back to my youth. Mother, Janko and Marko choose my life path amid bombs dropping from airplanes. After the bombardment of Belgrade we fled to the village of Ostružnica. It was summer. We would gather on the beach on the banks of the river Sava. We would play chess. I was better than the others. It encouraged me to compete with my peers after the war. I won the championship tournaments in Belgrade, Serbia and Yugoslavia. The die was cast. And what if I had been the best at stones throwing overhand in Ostružnica?

Championship in Zagreb. One evening in the hotel premises, parents and their daughter sat at the neighbouring table. The music started and Gligorić wasted no time, he asked the daughter to dance. Gligoric danced with the girl, but I wedded her. We are now 183 years old together.

Tournament in Mar del Plata, Argentina. At the closing ceremony, Miss Mar del Plata presented the awards. After the ceremony ended - the music started. Gligorić suddenly got on his feet and asked the girl to dance. As in Zagreb - it ended with her marriage to Bora Ivkov. Gligorić is not only a great chess player but also a gifted matchmaker. I and Boro, we are both indebted to him.

After our team's victory at the Olympics in Dubrovnik chess gained wings. Like mushrooms after the rain, chess tournaments, team competitions, clubs were springing up everywhere; invitations were pouring in to our chess players from all over the world. Years passed. I travelled from tournament to tournament. From Beijing to Moscow and London, from Indonesia to Congo...

I played with almost all the prominent chess players of the time. And met them in person. I would single out two Mikhails, one from the world, the other one from our country - Botvinnik and Marković. Botvinnik has an honorable place in chess history; in his apartment in Moscow I saw our flag; in Israel they bowed down to him; in Belgrade he did not feel like a foreigner. Marković, chess master, academician; refused the offer to be president of the Republic of Serbia; he

followed closely what was happening in chess until the end of his life.

Flipping through Russian, English, German chess magazines I could see that in each country, they use their own language to comment and annotate the games. Why is chess not like mathematics and music, with its universal language understandable to all? Why not a chess language? We have printed millions of "Chess Informants" and other books written in chess language. In the mid-70s, our famous economist announced in a newspaper: "Two products that we export the most are berries and Chess Informant".

On one occasion, we did not pay the monthly business rates on time; our client had delayed his payment to us. The bank manager called me. Reclining in his armchair he scolded me severely, threatening that he would no longer tolerate it ... while I was standing humbly in front of his desk. That moment and that picture remained in my memory forever.

Corona - life in a cage. We did not go anywhere, only our son and grandchildren came occasionally. My only pastime was going to the supermarket and throwing out the garbage. A long day, and only newspapers and television. I remembered that we had published a book entitled "2345". Milan Velimirović and Marjan Kovačević chose 2,345 chess problems. Checkmate in two, three, four, five moves. I went through them again and was amazed at what the authors of the problems have come up with. Chess is a miracle.

Chess is a game. Through the game, values of various factors in the dispute are determined. Not just man against man. The chess player is one side, the chess is the other. When a chess player discovers all chess secrets, and that is on course, chess will lose. When a violinist completely masters his instrument, or when a doctor discovers what causes a disease - they will win. The game is a conflict. Conflict, in anything, leads to progress. The happenings on the chess board today are different from those of the previous era - they are on a higher level.

When you set out on a journey of no return, who and what you are depends on what you leave behind. When my time comes, I will leave behind my wife, son, three grandchildren, three daughters-in-law, four great-grandchildren, the chess language, countless games played...

In the hope that everything that was shaping our lives will be better than it was.