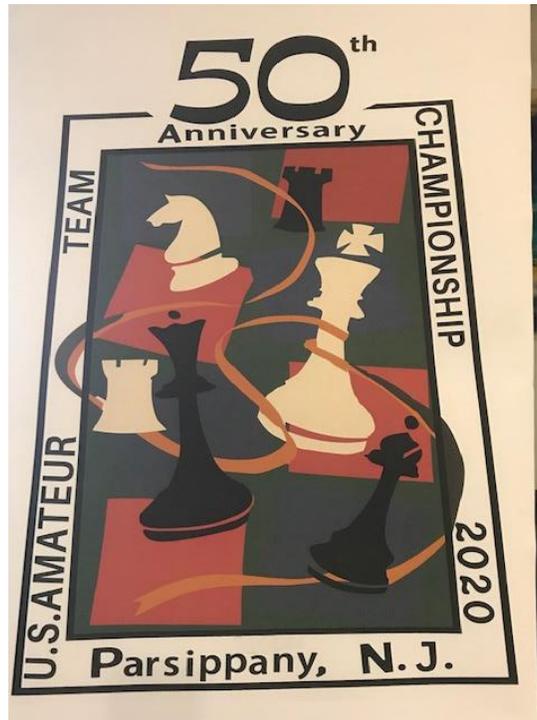


DRAWS AND THE ENDGAME

(U.S Amateur Chess Team Tournament - February 2020)



Eugene Salomon Rugarcía

*“Es el ajedrez sin par
Imagen fiel de la vida,
Desesperada partida
Contra el tiempo y el azar”*

That's the opening of a beautiful poem which my uncle, Dr. Casimiro Rugarcia, wrote in the early 1940's when on one hand he was teaching me how to play combinational chess and on the other he was the Physician of World Champion Alekhine during his stay in Gijon, Spain. Yes! Chess is like life itself, a long fight against time and uncertainty.

My longest chess game was a 117-move draw. It was at the National Open in April 1996, against expert Alexander Osipovich (2073). It was the year of my 68th birthday: A never ending game which curiously I had to claim a draw after 50 moves without moving a pawn or capturing a piece!

The last tournament game in my life (also a draw) was just a couple of weeks ago, when I was the Team Captain of the Toms River Chess Club "Oldest Team in Town", five friends with an average age of 71 and all five players sharing a 50-year chess passion!

My 84 years of memories which go from the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), to my leaving Madrid for Havana in 1947, and from there to New York in 1960, as well as my 60 years in the U.S intermingled with chess are well covered in the article published in the magazine "Chess" of London (www.chess.co.uk) under the title "Chess for Life" as well as in the article "Música, ajedrez y poesía", both of which you can find on my page at Javier Cordero's web site:

http://www.historiadelaajedrezspanol.es/articulos/salomon_eng.htm

On that page you can also find the auto-biographical notes from the book I wrote with Wayne Conover (a past member of the U.S Olympic correspondence chess team) and Steve Pozarek (a past New Jersey Open Champion): "40 Years of Friendship--100 Games of Chess".

So here we are, at age 91, when I decided to play for the last time in a tournament. Seventy-seven years ago, Madrid's newspaper, "El Alcázar", with typical journalistic love for anything sensational to grab attention to wrote about me: "Another Arturito Pomar-- he is 14 years old and has just defeated Spain's champion José Sanz". How time changes: in the 1940's, it was rare to see children in the chess scene.

Today, with the same spirit of sensational reporting, someone could write: "A former chess prodigy from 1943 wins a prize in a U.S Tournament in 2020, at age 91 in New Jersey!".

Perhaps my readers are wondering why did I play? I am not entirely sure, but I can think of several reasons.

It was the 50th Anniversary of a Tournament close to my heart in which I participated several times, most proudly 40 years ago when I was Captain of my family team: "King Salomon and his three Knights" (my three sons ages 17, 13, and 6). I guess there is some poetic pleasure in re-living the days when your children were so close to you!

It is the 56th year Anniversary of the birth of my club: Toms River Chess Club. I'm proud of a long life of playing in historical chess clubs' teams from the "Casino" of Gijon in 1943 to the Club Maudes in Madrid in 1946; the Capablanca Chess Club in Havana in 1952 and the Westfield Chess Club in the 1970's and 1980's; yet, I had never played in a team of the Toms River Chess Club. It was long overdue and I consider it an honor to have been the Captain of one of their teams!

When my friend Steve Doyle, the organizer of the Team tournament, introduced me to the audience at our club when they converted one of my chess lectures into a celebration for my 90th Birthday he challenged me to come back for another lecture in a couple of years so that I could tie the record of the oldest lecturer we had in the club's history, the legendary Koltanowsky, I thought to myself, "Well, Steve, what could be better than to play in "your" tournament and then give a lecture about the experience!".

Last, but not least this year of half century celebrations marks as well 50+ years of my chess life in the U.S as a player, a coach and a lecturer.

It is with a smile in my face that I remember my first serious tournament (Castille Championship Semi-Finals--Madrid 1945): I finished without losing a game and with two draws against National Master Bove and future G.M Arturito Pomar. Suddenly, an unknown youngster who had recently arrived from his town (Gijon) to Madrid was competing as one of the best ten players in the Capital...It is just curious that 75 years later I'm finishing my playing career also with two draws and no game lost!

Speaking of draws, I have good news for all the club players. We, amateurs, may enjoy our games even more than the professionals: A Grandmaster is probably unhappy when he draws. My life is full of happy draws! Just as an example, I had the pleasure of playing 5 tournament games against the late G.M. Arthur Bisguier and was able to draw 4 times...I'm sure I was happier than my friend Arthur was! I proudly remember some of those draws, particularly the one in Connecticut 1991 when I had a won ending but decided to offer Arthur a draw as my flag was ready to fall.

So here we are in Parsippany, New Jersey, ready to start a last chess adventure: twenty-two years without playing, since the days of my last tournaments such as: Linares (Spain) Open-1998 or the World Open in Philadelphia 1998.

My rating, which had reached an all-time high of 2289 FIDE once I retired from my high pressure business executive career to a more relaxed life as a business consultant (at age 64), had come down to 2154 by age 70 and will now become forever 2145.

This Tournament is probably the biggest one in the world: 329 teams, 1410 players from the youngest (6 years old) to the oldest (myself at age 91).

We, Toms River Chess Club, entered several teams:



A group from our different teams. At the center, in the last row (the one with the blue shirt) is the tournament organizer, Steve Doyle, who was for years President of the U.S Chess Federation as well as Vice-President of FIDE. I'm kneeling right in front, center and our Club's President, Steve Shoshin is also kneeling, third from the right.

First, my thanks to our club's President. His help was what made possible my assembling a team with friends from the old Westfield club of the 1970's and today's Toms River Club.

I should also thank those who helped me along the way. First, my angel, my wife of 58 years Bea who not only encouraged me but also shared my three long days at the Hotel. Also, my children who still have fond recollections of our traveling to tournaments when they were children. I'm sure they enjoyed playing chess, but above all they loved eating at McDonalds every day!

My father had used chess as part of his bonding with me after years of war's separation. I used it to give my three boys a new dimension of life, help them to practice the art of reasoning and at the same time create those invisible bonds of a shared passion. Unfortunately, in those days, chess was not a girls' game; as much as I loved my only daughter, she never showed an interest in learning how to play!

This last Christmas we had the blessing of gathering children and grandchildren from Texas, California, New Jersey and New York for a Christmas Eve dinner celebration. At the home of that Italian born in Brooklyn (Beatrice), the seven fish dinner is a tradition!

Thinking that if the tournament outcome was not a disaster, I may want to write about the experience, I took a picture with my best team mates ever-- My original 1980 U.S. Amateur Chess Team:



From left to right: Henry, 53, the author, 91, Robbie, 46 and Gene Jr., 57. I was proud of them 40 years ago and more so today!

The Tournament was three days at two games per day. I had promised family and friends alike that I would not lose more than 3 games. Therefore, as the team's Captain I arranged to play only one game per day, having the substitute play the other three.

Well, I played 3 games: two draws and one win. As frequently happens in chess, the one I won, should have been a draw and one of the draws, I should have won.

Before signing off, I want to thank my teammates for their support and their friendship.



From left to right, Gregory Coats the youngest member at 61, Edd Knowles 66, Dr. Richard Lewis 77, L.M. Gene Salomon 91 and F.M. Mark Pinto 63.

How the team was born: My friend of 50 years from the Westfield Chess Club days of Dennis Barry in the early 1970's, Dr. Richard Lewis, a retired Dentist has been a voluntary teacher for many years from schools in New Jersey to children with Aids in Africa. He helped me during the last conference I had at our Toms River club last October. Commenting about the 50th Team Tournament Anniversary I asked him if he would play should we organize an "old timers" team... The question was half-jokingly. The answer was an enthusiastic YES!

With Richard on board, I contacted Mark Pinto (FIDE master) who lives in California. Mark and our friend G.M John Fedorowicz were two of the most promising young players in the Westfield of the early 1970's. It must have been in 1971 when Mark, at age 14, starting to play tournaments, was paired against me. As he told me, I was his first draw against a Master. I remember it well: my young opponent defended so well that I felt I had the obligation to offer him a draw. Since that day, our chess friendship had an element of mutual respect. Thanks, Mark, for organizing a family vacation to join Richard and me in this chess' celebration.

As I had discussed with our President, Steve Shoshin, I wanted to have in our team representation of my 50 years of New Jersey chess (both Westfield and Toms River), so I approached Edd Knowles a past club champion with whom I have a good friendship and have played friendly games from time to time. Thanks for accepting the invitation, Edd.

A few weeks before the tournament, an evening at the club, while commenting with Steve that I still needed another real veteran for the team, our friend Greg was just leaving the club...Steve calls him and tells me : here you have your "veteran". I asked Greg: How many years have you been playing chess? With a broad smile he replied: "I learned to play when I was 11 years old"...You are hired!! Thank you, Greg, for accepting the invitation and for your friendship!



It was Saturday, February the 15th when we started this "chess adventure" at the Parsippany Hilton Hotel. It was great to see old friends and make new ones and amazing to witness hundreds of young kids playing a high-level chess.

As a team we finished with 3 and a half points out of 6, not too bad for our age. I played the second board, only three games and was surprised and happy of not losing (2 draws and 1 win).

I did not expect to have games worth publishing...and I did not! I had, however, an ending position which brought back fond memories of what possibly was the best game ending of my long career, and it may be worth of sharing with my readers. It was like still burning ashes of the old fire always in search of beauty in chess!

Following is the critical position from the end- game, so similar in nature to the 1996 endgame I won against I.M. John Watson.

Following are both positions with my brief comments.

Salomon, Gene - Giesshir, Isaiah (1848 rating)

February 15th 2020



Position after move 49

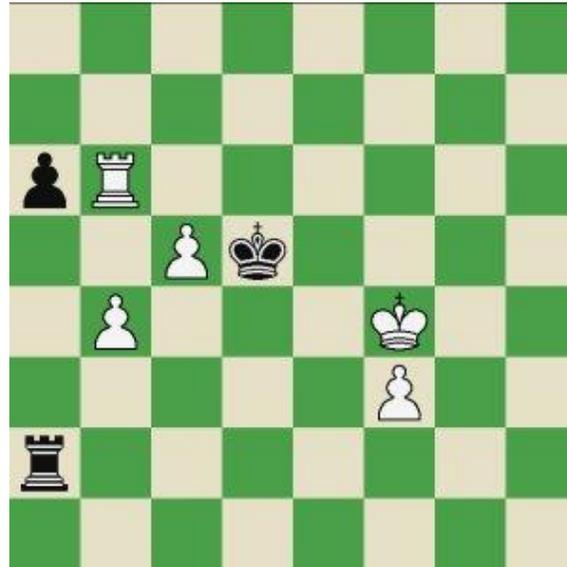
By move 47, I had purposely placed my rook in the square b4 to invite my opponent to "take my pawn, attacking my rook" :-)

After white's move 49.c4!?, my opponent continued 49...Ra3+; 50.Ke2, Rxh3; 51.c5+!? Could I be lucky and have my young opponent think routinely 51...bxc; 52.dxc+, Kxc5 (attacking the rook that white "will have to move")? Of course, if he would have played that way, after 52..Kxc5 white does not HAVE TO MOVE the rook....with 53. b6! he wins the game as the pawn will queen!

The game continued for a dozen more moves. I won thanks to a double miscalculation by my young opponent who obviously thought he had a win not realizing that there was an "intermediate and fatal check"...making my f4 pawn a real "poison".

The game continued: 51.c5+,Kc7; 52.Ra4,Rb3; 53.Ra7+,Kb8; 54.cxb6,Rxb5; 55.Rxh7,Rxb6; 56.Rh6, Rb2+; 57.Ke3,Rb3+; 58.Ke2,Kc7; 59.Rxg6,Kd7; 60.Rg7+,Ke8; 61.Ra7,Rf3? ; 62.g6!,Rxf4?? 63.Ra8+ Resigns

Now, just for comparison purposes, here is the position from my game (as white) against I.M John Watson at the 1996 World Open:



Position after 57.Kf4!

How the game continued: 57...a5; 58.Rd6+,Kc4; 59.c6,Kxb4; 60.Rd4+!,Kb5; 61.Rc4!,Rh2; 62.Rc1,Rh8; 63.c7,Rc8; 64.Ke5,a4; and 65. Kd6 Resigns.

My closing comment: It has been 24 years since this game (one of my best) against this great player and I still clearly remember that this final position after 65. Kd6 was exactly what I had visualized when I Played 57. Kf4! Long live chess!

Eugene Salomon Rugarcía

March, 19th 2020