

Thoroughness at Zurich

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Before he plays a match with a Westerner, Russia's World Chess Champion Mikhail Botvinnik goes into training with war-game thoroughness, e.g., his seconds blow clouds of cigar smoke in his face and turn up the radio to a blare. Last week at Zurich, in a smoke-filled (but quiet) room, nine Russian chess experts and six other challengers from abroad, including the U.S.'s five-time champion, little (5 ft. 2 in.) Samuel Reshevsky, met to challenge Russia's mighty Mikhail for the world title.

The visiting Russians showed further examples of Russian thoroughness. They had brought along their own doctor, interpreter, a full group of advisers, and a watchful, poker-faced man listed as a state supervisor. Outnumbered, but seldom outmaneuvered, Polish-born Sam Reshevsky put up a game fight. At the double round-robin tournament's halfway mark, he was in the No. 2 spot, behind Russia's Vassily Smyslov, a 32-year-old language student from Moscow.

It was all Sam could do to hold it. Perhaps the most telling tactic of the Russians was their teamwork. In tournament chess matches, it is illegal to prompt a player as he sits at the board, but when a game has been adjourned (e.g., overnight), it is perfectly proper to take counsel from "seconds" (other players, who help map further strategy). The Russians happily seconded one another at every opportunity; Reshevsky's second was his non-chess-playing wife. Sipping countless cups of tea, Reshevsky managed to wind up in a triple tie for second place with two Russians.

The winner, Vassily Smyslov, made generous acknowledgment of Reshevsky's skill: "He is the greatest player of the West—a tough little man full of brilliant ideas." Then Smyslov went back to Moscow, back into training for Champion Botvinnik, who no longer has to worry about radio blare and cigar smoke. In Russia, during chess matches, smoke and talk are forbidden.

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