

Unveiling the Victory
HOW SPASSKY WON.
The Third World Junior Chess Championship Antwerp 1955
Henri Serruys

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Author: Henri Serruys

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Preface

A relatively blind spot of chess history relates to the World Junior Chess Championships. Conceived 1951 in Birmingham, the competition between players who are not yet 20 years old, gradually established itself as an important part of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) calendar.

The first world class player to win the tournament was Boris Spassky in 1955. In the same year he already qualified at the Interzonal Tournament in Gothenburg for the Candidates Tournament in 1956. He went on to become world champion in 1969, but famously lost his title to Bobby Fischer in 1972 in the match of the century in Reykjavík.

In this book, the Belgian chess historian Henri Serruys traces back how Spassky became the first Soviet World Junior Chess Champion in Antwerp 1955. Endowed with recently discovered original material from the tournament organizer, the Belgian youth chess leader Hendrik Baelen, he paints a very colorful picture of this sparkling event. How to finance the event from private donors? Where to accommodate the players (and their seconds, mostly from Eastern European countries)? Would the favorites come through the preliminary rounds? Moreover, Serruys digs into contemporary sources and contacted all the participants, in so far as they are still alive. By combining these three main sources (papers from Baelen, contemporary journals and testimony of participants), Henri creates an authentic account of this milestone for both FIDE and the development of international youth chess. Moreover, he presents the key games of the tournament and unearthed a couple of hitherto unknown games of Spassky. Finally, he pays a well-deserved tribute to Hendrik Baelen and thus puts him on the map of chess history!

In my view, the original research conducted for this book contributes greatly to the history of FIDE and Belgian chess alike. I hope the reader will enjoy this time-travel back into the post-war period as much as I did. Let us lift the Curtain for Spassky at the age of 18 years ...!

Prof. Dr. Frank Hoffmeister

President of the Chess History and Literature Society

Introduction

The eldest of Hendrik Baelen's grandsons, Robert (Rob) Baelen and the author of this book are friends and members of a same chess club. Rob, after selling and emptying his parents' house in Edegem near Antwerp, found a photo album and a godforsaken red-cover map. It turned out that this map contained his grandfather's notes about the organization of the 1955 Junior World Championship in Antwerp, while the photo album contained many photos of this tournament, among other things. When Rob showed me the map and photo album, I resolved to write a book on this Junior World Championship based on such a wealth of unknown data.

I am extremely grateful to Rob for allowing me to use this information fully and without time limitations. Initially, the corona pandemic prevented me from consulting in libraries another important source of information, namely the newspapers and magazines of that time. As my research progressed, it became more and more clear to me what an enormous role Mr. Hendrik Baelen - in addition to the organization of this World Championship - has played in the development of youth chess in Belgium. That is why this book, in addition to a rather atypical tournament book, also aspires to be a posthumous tribute to this tireless organizer, the kind of people who often remain under the radar screen in every sport.



To be clear: I did not use artificial intelligence (AI) at all. The book, which is mainly based on hitherto unknown and non-digitized sources, would have benefited very little from it. However, AI does oblige us, even more than before, to be very vigilant against inaccuracies because the proliferation in open cyber-space of inaccurate data can or will ultimately lead to the confirmation of "alternative facts" as true. Therefore, my book is not just a story, but also a report that is as detailed as possible about how a tournament came about, progressed and ended. Details that have become available



have not been omitted, because it is delicate to judge whether a piece of information, no matter how small, turns out to be important to someone.

My friend Guy Van Habberney translated the manuscript from Dutch into neat English. He was my first reader and encouraged me to finish the book. Gradually, he also started to do research and submit content. Initially, he managed to

close some loose ends, such as – was there a Russian consulate in Antwerp in 1955? – or – how did Mednis get to Antwerp with a helicopter? – but then he also made interesting suggestions, for example to broaden the concept of the book to a wider readership, to all people who not only love chess but have also become interested in the history of their sport. I am extremely grateful to Guy for all of this.

Dr. Frank Hoffmeister, the chairman of the international association Chess History & Literature Society, himself an experienced chess historian and author, was a critical reader of my draft text. He suggested corrections and made helpful suggestions, including regarding the overall structure of the book. This has undoubtedly improved the quality of the final product.

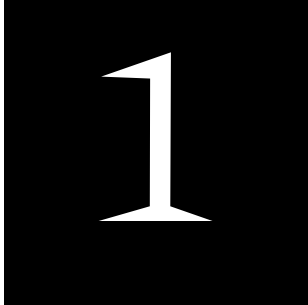
I also owe a big thank to Hendrik Lindberg, who sent me scans of relevant letters by FIDE president Folke Rogard and secretary Hugo Björk. His book on Rogard will also be published by Thinkers Publishing.

Finally, I am also proud to be able to offer the work to Hans Brodén, Ralf Jørgensen (now Ralf Vagn) and Margaret Déiseach, kind people who without hesitation have helped and encouraged me each in their own way.

And of course, I would also like to thank Rob Baelen and his family.



Hendrik Baelen



Chess competitions for youth players

Before World War II, there was very little interest in junior chess, certainly not in Western Europe. Chess clubs were almost exclusively-all-male establishments playing in smoky halls or bars. Games often continued late into the night. Not exactly favorable playing conditions for children and youngsters. Furthermore, chess was often considered as being detrimental to school results.

Nevertheless, there were pioneers who wanted to teach chess to this age group in a suitable environment. One of these pioneers was William Ritson Morry (°5-9-1910 †8-1-1994)¹. In 1930, he had set up the Birmingham Youth Chess League and can be considered the spiritual father of the World Junior (U-20) Chess competitions.



William Ritson Morry

Ritson-Morry was not alone, though. In Great Britain national championships for boys and girls as well as team matches were already organized in the 1930s in the country. The United Kingdom thus became a frontrunner for chess for young players.

¹ An interesting biographical article on Morry written by John Upham can be found at www.britishchessnews.com. In chess circles, he was better known as Ritson, hence his 'double name' Ritson-Morry.



Baelen accompanied Coosemans and Boey to Birmingham 1948.

William Ritson-Morry was not only a strong chess player, but first and foremost a gifted organizer. Every year at Easter, he organized the Birmingham Chess Congress. In that same city, but as a separate event, Ritson-Morry also organized in November 1948 for the first time an international youth tournament. Three foreigners participated, namely the Belgians Boey (8th), Coosemans (10th and last) as well as the Dutchman Bouwmeester, who won the tournament².

Hans Bouwmeester (°16-9-1929) will become International Master (IM) in 1954 and is best known as a chess book author. Jef Boey (°16-5-1934 †28-2-2016) will win the Belgian chess championship four times between 1959 and 1971, become an IM in 1973 and vice-world champion in correspondence chess, after Yakov Estrin, in the seventh championship 1972-76³. Billy Coosemans will remain an amateur chess player all his life and passed away June 20, 2002, 69 years old.

² See *Chess* vol.14 No 159 (Dec. 1949), p.49; No 160 (Jan 1960) p.78 and *B.C.M.* 1949, p.4.

³ Jozef (not Josef) "Jef" Boey. See also Hoffmeister, Fr. (2020), *100 jaar Belgische Schaakgeschiedenis*, Thinkers Publishing, pp.40-41.

In 1950, the annual Easter tournament was followed by a second and larger international youth tournament⁴. This time twenty youngsters from the UK and 7 other countries participated. Among them four Belgians: Jef Boey (15), W. de Waele, G. van Bastelaere en I. Sieben. It was an 11-round Swiss system tournament, eventually won by the 19-year-old Swede Björn Häggqvist (°5-5-1930). The future International Grandmaster (IGM) and FIDE-president Fridrik Olafsson later probably gained the most notoriety. He finished fourth. Jef Boey, who was 4 months younger than Olafsson finished sixth.

4 *Birmingham Junior International Tournament*, April 3 till April 15, See *British Chess Magazine (B.C.M.)* 1950, p.182 and also Gillam, A.J. (2014), *First International Junior 1950. First World Junior Championship Birmingham 1951*, Nottingham. Gillam based himself on the text that appeared in the *B.C.M.* 1950 p. 182, which was wrong, since an international junior tournament had already taken place in Birmingham in November 1948.



World Junior Championships

First tournament: Birmingham, June 11-23, 1951

In the wake of the successful 1950 international youth tournament, Ritson-Morry determined to organize an under-twenty (U-20) world championship the following year. His idea was approved by FIDE, the international chess federation.⁵ Each affiliated country federation could send one junior, but the UK was allowed to send an extra player, allegedly in order 'to avoid a bye' if there was an uneven number of participants. Seventeen countries agreed to send players, and thus the UK could align a second player. Again, Ritson-Morry opted for one group and an 11-round Swiss. This time, three non-European countries also participated: Argentina, Australia and Canada.

In Belgium, the provincial champions from Antwerp (Billy Coosemans), Brabant (Gustaaf Somers) and East Flanders (Paul Mauquoy) played a 3-way tournament (in Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels) to determine who could go to Birmingham. Somers lost against both Coosemans and Mauquoy, who drew their game. Coosemans, who was 18 at the time, won the final against Mauquoy.^[1] The Belgian Education Ministry allowed him as Belgian Youth Champion to do his final exams earlier, so that he could travel to the UK from June 11 till June 23, in the middle of the traditional Belgian sec-

⁵ 21st FIDE General Assembly, Copenhagen, July 10-17, 1950. See *B.C.M. 1950*, p.247.

ondary school exams. It is remarkable that the English chess magazine *Chess* in May 1951 mentioned that Paul Mauquoy was confirmed as Belgian participant.

The first World Junior Championship partly overlapped with the Staunton Centenary Tournament (May 26 till June 23) which was organized in Cheltenham (rounds 1-6), Leamington Spa (rounds 7-9) and finally Birmingham (rounds 10-15). This Staunton Memorial tournament was won by the Yugoslav player Svetozar Gligoric, who became FIDE International Grandmaster that very same year.

The Junior World Championship started on Monday, June 11, and finished on June 23⁶. The first two rounds were played in Sibree Hall, Coventry, and the following rounds in the same building as the Staunton Memorial tournament, viz. in Mason College, Birmingham University.

The 17-year-old Boris Ivkov, a compatriot of Gligoric and a future IGM, won this first Junior World Championship convincingly. The English players also performed excellently, with Malcolm Baker – who had disappointed the year before – now taking second place. The other English player, Peter Harris, finished fourth with a same score as the 16-year-old Bent Larsen (ranked 5th), who was to become one of the world's top players. Fridrik Olafsson participated again, but disappointed with a shared 11th spot (ranked 12th). Billy Coosemans finished in last place (18th rank), with 2.5 points out of 11. A sort of consolation for him was perhaps that he could play against Bent Larsen in the penultimate round. Hendrik Baelen, the main protagonist of this book, was mild for his pupil: “the tournament was exceptionally strong, and there is no reason to blame our youngster!”^[2]

Thus, the seeds were planted for the world junior chess championships, which were initially organized every two years. From 1973 onwards, the World U-20 championships are organized annually. The first World Girls U-20 championship was organized in 1982. Until now, no less than four world champions have also obtained the junior world championship title: Spassky (more on him later), Karpov, Kasparov and Anand. Others, such as Fischer and Carlsen already were world class players at a very young age and never took part in the world junior championships.

6 The 15th and final round started on June 22, 1951.

Second Tournament: Copenhagen, July 3-21, 1953

The second World Junior Championship was held in Copenhagen⁷, as was decided by the annual FIDE congress in 1952 in Saltsjöbaden, Sweden. The participating countries had to pay for the travel costs of their players, while the organizing country was responsible for the accommodation of the players at guest families. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that at this 1952 FIDE Congress, the Belgian Edmond Lancel (°3-7-1888 †15-4-1959) obtained the International Judge title. Lancel was a Belgian chess player and publicist⁸. He published and edited a number of chess-works, including *Opposition et Cases Conjuguées* (1932) by Duchamp and Halberstadt, but also *Chéron's Traité Complet* (1927). His foremost contribution was the founding and the editing of the periodical *L'Échiquier* (1925-1939), undoubtedly one of the better chess magazines ever published⁹.

Bent Larsen was there again, and many considered him the top favorite, as he was playing on his home turf. Since there were 20 countries, there was no need for 'byes' and the Danish Chess Federation could therefore not enlist a second participant. The U.S., Israël, Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden participated for the first time. Australia did not participate for reasons that we will elaborate upon later. Iceland once more sent Fridrik Olafsson, while Jef Boey became the Belgian participant.

Earlier, Boey had won the Belgian qualifying tournament with 3.5 out of 4, in a competition against Hans Van den Broeck (Antwerp), Gustaaf Somers (Brabant), Michel Vanhoorne¹⁰ (West Flanders) and Jean-Pierre De Backere (East Flanders). Three quarters of his trip was paid for by the youth division of the Belgian Chess Association, which disposed of a significant budget at the time¹¹. The remaining quarter was paid for by his own club, the *Antwerpse Schaakkring*.^[3]

Departing from the 1951 tournament formula, the players were split up in two groups which each played a 9-round round-robin tournament, with the first four in each group playing the final, the other players playing in a separate ranking tournament for places 9 to 20.

Bent Larsen would later claim that this probably was the strongest World Junior Championship ever, and he probably was right: the players who qualified for the

7 Juniorverdensmesterskabet, København, July 3 till July 21, 1953.

8 See Hoffmeister, Fr. (2020) *100 jaar Belgische Schaakgeschiedenis*, Thinkers Publishing, pp. 18-21.

9 For a detailed bibliographic description of this magazine see Serruys & Van Habberney (2011). *Belgian Chess Publications*, pp. 116-122.

10 Vanhoorne's name is usually misspelled as Van Hoorne.

11 See Section 12.10

final were Oscar Panno (Argentina), Klaus Darga (Federal Republic of Germany), Bent Larsen (Denmark), the first Junior World Champion Borislav Ivkov (Yugoslavia), Jonathan Penrose (U.K.), Dieter Keller (Switzerland), John Sherwin (U.S.) and Fridrik Olafsson (Iceland). Dieter Keller qualified by the toss of a coin against Raaphi Persitz (°26-7-1934 †4-2-2009) (Israel), who had arrived too late for the start of the tournament and thus missed the first round in the qualification tourney.

Oscar Panno won the final. He had tied with Klaus Darga, but was declared the winner because of a better Sonneborn-Berger score. Dieter Keller - who had won his game against Panno - finished in 6th place, while Danish favorite Bent Larsen finished on a disappointing 8th and last place in the final. The remaining 12 players played a seven-round Swiss system tournament, which was won by the Italian Francesco Scafarelli (°23-10-1933 †3-12-2007, IM), before the Spaniard Miguel Farré, who just like Dieter Keller would also come to Antwerp in 1955.

The Belgian Jozef Boey finished 6th in his preliminary group, scoring 2,5 out of 4 against the four future finalists. In the consolation tourney he scored a disappointing 3 out of 7, finishing 17th out of 20.

The organization published daily bulletins, but without any additional comments. Bob Wade wrote up an excellent report in *The British Chess Magazine*^[4].



Assigning the Third Junior World Championship 1955 to Antwerp

In 1953, Belgium, Argentina and France had announced their candidacy to organize the third Junior World Championship in 1955. The 1954 FIDE congress in Amsterdam was to decide on the location. Argentina withdrew its candidacy well before the FIDE congress had started, while Canada announced that it too was prepared to organize the Junior World Championship.¹² France was designated as the organizer, but upon the condition that it would accept the said designation no later than November 15, 1954. If not, Belgium would be designated. Canada was promised the organization of the 1957 tournament.^[5]

The French allowed the date of November 15 to lapse. Only on December 29, 1954 it announced to renege on the organization of the 1955 tournament, preferring to

¹² Letter from the Canadian chess federation to FIDE-president Rogard of August 6, 1954 (See Appendix 2, D1)