

## CHESS AND FENCING – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

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### Abstract:

In the introduction this paper points out, that before chess and fencing became sport disciplines they had a long and rich history. In the second part fencing is being presented, as a modern, versatile and highly athletic sport, but it charm and advantages similarly to chess also come from the romantic tradition of the past, large educational and molding value. The article contains a comparing characteristic of chosen similarities and differences between chess and fencing as well as development of final conclusions concerning the issues of the examined phenomenon.

### CHOSEN SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES, BETWEEN CHESS AND FENCING

Chess (formerly called czaturaga, czatrang, szitrandz<sup>1</sup>) as well as fencing had a long and rich history before becoming a sport discipline. Although seemingly it could be assumed that these two disciplines had nothing in common in the past Robert Bubczyk in his book *“Games on the chess board in court and knight culture of medieval England against European background”* proves, that: *“A game of chess... plays in the knight culture... of medieval Latin Europe countries an exceptional role, namely as a key ingredient of the spiritual knighthood and court culture”*<sup>2</sup>. As it can be assumed, a knight fighting with cold arms in numerous war campaigns was invigorated by the spiritual culture, an ingredient of which were among other chess.

“Fencing is chess played with lightning speed”. Combat situations on the strip are incomparably more complex and surprising than move of pieces on a 64 square chess board. The similarity of fencing to chess is abortive, because fencers must decide in a friction of a second, hence the enormous meaning of accuracy and speed of perceiving<sup>3</sup>.

Fencing as a sport is a Olympic discipline and one of four sport disciplines next to gymnastics, athletics and swimming present on every modern Olympic Games, starting from Athens in 1896 and carried out on individual as well as team tournaments<sup>4</sup>. Chess was introduced to the Olympic Games thanks to the initiative of chess activists with Pierre Vincent at the forefront and the help of later world champion dr. Aleksander Alechin. It was first played during the VIII Olympics in Paris on 12-20th of July in 1924 and was not officially part of the Games, but the chess players subordinate to the Games regulations<sup>5</sup>. Under the name of chess Olympics one should understand the international team chess tournament organized by the International Chess Federation (fr. Fédération Internationale des

<sup>1</sup> J. Giżycki, *Z szachami przez wieki i kraje*, Warszawa 1984, s. 11.

<sup>2</sup> R. Bubczyk, *Gry na szachownicy w kulturze dworskiej i rycerskiej średniowiecznej Anglii na tle europejskim*, Lublin 2009, s. 221-223.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Czajkowski, *Szachy, szermierka i piłka ręczna, nr 5-6*, Warszawa 1991, s. 125.

<sup>4</sup> M. Łuczak, *Szermierka sportowa w świetle współczesnych badań naukowych*, Poznań 2013, s. 192.

<sup>5</sup> S. Gawlikowski, *Olimpiady szachowe 1924-1974*, Warszawa 1978, s. 9.

Échecs, which has a motto *Gens una sumus* (lat. We are one family)) in a two year cycle from 1927. National representatives take part in the tournament, nominated by the national chess unions affiliated to FIDE. Women and men play separately in four player teams with one reserve on four chess boards. In chess for winning a game the team receives one point, for a draw  $\frac{1}{2}$  a point and for losing zero points. For winning a match the team receives two points, meaning in this case when it gathers  $2\frac{1}{2}$  points in four chess games, for a draw 2:2 – one point and for gathering  $1\frac{1}{2}$  or less – zero points. In the case of gathering the same number of points by two teams, the order is decided by the points gained in particular games. In the royal game on the chess Olympics besides giving medals to the teams, which obtained the first three places and their coaches, there are also five individual medals for chess players, who obtained the best results in particular games. In individual fencing tournaments bouts are carried out one on one, similarly as in team tournament except that a team consists of three fencers contested against every one of the three opponents from the other fencing team, which gives nine bouts fought to five hits and the sum of forty five hits ends the fencing match.

In chess similarly as in fencing a thought is contested by a thought, will against will, technique against technique, speed against speed – especially in fast chess, but also in situations when both opponents have little time left on their chess clocks and although it seems improbable endurance against endurance. To illustrate this, that in a duel on sixty four squares chess players are fully involved both physically and mentally the description from Andrzej Filipowicz is brought forth – referee i.a. of the match for world championship at Braingames between Garrim Kasparow and Vladimir Kramnik in 2000 in London and match for Magnus Carlsen championship – Viswanathan Anand in Soczi 2014: “... *Vladimir Kramnik in the decisive game of the match for world championship played against Peter Leko in Brissago in the year 2004... I refereed that match and after the game in walked Kramnik to his room... He was incredibly tired, he was not able to say a word, he could not find his jacket. He did not know what was happening, because all his strength was invested in playing this game*”<sup>6</sup>.

In respect of combinations, as was said by Zoltan Ozoray-Schenker “*a fencer corresponds to a chess player*”<sup>7</sup>. However it needs to be elaborated, that a chess combination is a series of impressive and outstanding moves, ended usually in check mate for the opponent or gain a significant material advantage, guaranteeing prevailing in the game. The in the losing position can thanks to a combination bring the game to a draw by forcing a stalemate or dead draw.

Fencing similarly to chess is based on a bout between two and only two opponents according to established rules. Both of these sports develop orientation, the ability to concentrate, the ability to read the opponents intentions. They perfect composure, attention, motivation, binocular vision and the will to win. The positive outcome in combat depends on an early and proper read of the opponent’s intention and forcing the opponent to make a mistake by one’s moves and actions as a result of a utilizing an appropriate combat strategy. A fencing bout, in which modern, surprising and outstanding tactical ideas can be observed, similarly as in chess games, where a “tactical novelty” is utilized, a beautiful idea, a romantic combination, gains the elements of art, not losing the features of sport, can deeply move the interested spectators.

Both of these disciplines require from a competitor to perfect his technical, tactical and strategic abilities, choice of action and perceptiveness. A fencing master similarly to a coach or chess instructor concentrates on the correctness of moves with this difference, that the former under the notion of movement correctness understands – the motion of his pupil and the later as a move conducted by a young adept of the royal game with pieces in a given

<sup>6</sup> A. Filipowicz A. (2007), *Dzieje Polskiego Związku Szachowego do 1956 roku*, Warszawa 2007, s. 284-285.

<sup>7</sup> Z. Ozoray-Schenker (1962), *Szermierka na szable*, Warszawa 1962, s. 62.

position created on the chess board. The methodology of teaching these two sports is subordinate to seven rules, which show the general direction of teacher's educational work:

- Rule of conscious activity of students,
- Rule of hands-on lessons,
- Rule of accessibility,
- Rule of regularity,
- Rule of combining theory with practice,
- Rule of knowledge and skill durability,
- Rule of individualism and teamwork,

In chess and fencing a division in age and gender categories is utilized, however those are not identical divisions.

In fencing the listed below categories are compulsory:

1. Dwarfs – fencers at the age of 6-7,
2. Scouts – fencers at the age of 8-9,
3. Kids – fencers at the age of 10-11,
4. Youngsters – fencers at the age of 12-14,
5. Younger juniors (cadets) – fencers at the age of 15-17, Europe and World Championship,
6. Juniors – fencers at the age of 18-20, Europe and World Championship,
7. Youths – fencers at the age of 21-23, Europe and World Championship,
8. Seniors – fencers above the age of 23, Europe and World Championship,

In chess world championships for girls and boys are being held in the following age categories:

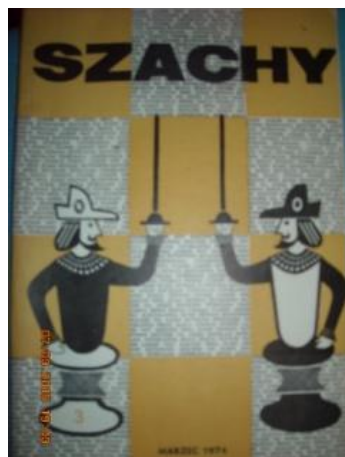
1. Junior world championship to the age of 8 in chess,
2. Junior world championship to the age of 10 in chess,
3. Junior world championship to the age of 12 in chess,
4. Junior world championship to the age of 14 in chess,
5. Junior world championship to the age of 16 in chess (and to the age of 17),
6. Junior world championship to the age of 18 in chess,
7. Junior world championship to the age of 20 in chess,

Tournaments in chess are also played divided into tiles, categories and chess ranks and OPEN tournaments, where the democratization of chess is fully emphasized, because a game can be played between a grand master and a contestant, who does not have a chess category holding the lowest possible rank "1000", a four year old girl and a ninety year old elderly man, a man handicapped and a physically fit opponent. The democratic role of chess shows also in all chess tournaments, because people from all social groups play against each other, representing all occupational groups, unemployed, poor and rich. In chess there is no language barrier. Two people hailing from two opposite sides of the world and not commanding even one common language can over a chess board carry on a discussion with fully mutual understanding.

The motive of chess and a chess board is very commonly used in art, where pieces are living human beings hold cold weapons. As an example of an artistic combination of chess and fencing the front page of the magazine *Chess* can be shown<sup>8</sup> :

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<sup>8</sup> W. Litmanowicz (red.), *Szachy*, marzec 1974, Warszawa 1974.



As it is shown on the above front page of *Chess magazine* from March 1974 edited by Władysław Litmanowicz it can be seen firsthand that there is an analogy between these two sport disciplines. Similarities can also be seen in the nomenclature of the described events, because rarely we use a description: match, contest and a more current term and most adequate description is: fencing tournament, chess tournament, similarly as in medieval times – knights tournament. The co-author – Jacek Gajewski knows from experience, when on numerous chess tournaments, e.g. on opening ceremonies unfamiliar celebrities officially talk about a “chess contest”, what immediately brings up a synonymous smirk on the faces of chess players. A known term in chess, however not so popular today and often quoted: “breaking lances on 64 squares”.

Chess and fencing are connected in the aspect of strategy and tactics, rivalry in different age categories and with the division of genders and combating one on one with a limited time. The motto of the Olympic Games adopted by the International Olympic Committee in 1913 – faster, higher, stronger (lat. Citius, altius, fortius) only partially corresponds to these two sport contests. Namely the adverb “faster” is a necessary trump in fencing and chess, but only in specific situations (speed chess, fast chess and classic chess just before the end of the established time on the chess clocks), whereas in the case of the other adverbs “higher” and “stronger” it is hard to find and obvious correspondence to chess and fencing.

When it comes to differences between chess and fencing the main discrepancy is in the purpose of combat. In chess the main goal is to check mate the opponent’s king. What does that mean? It is necessary to attack with one piece according to rules of the game the square, on which the king of the opponent stands, that is giving a check. If the monarch of the opposite side cannot be covered from the attack, it cannot capture the checking piece and it cannot move to any other not attacked square, than a checkmate is given, that is the game ends. In the rivalry on sixty four squares it is without meaning how many figures and pawns are sacrificed to achieve the main goal. In theory and sometimes in practice on the lower strength levels of the game it is possible that the side possessing all the pieces can be defeated by a king and bishop. In fencing the determinants of action as it was previously quoted are different; the goal is to make as many conventional hits to the opponent as possible in the given time, trying in the same time to get hit as little as possible or not at all. The number of hits or rather material losses is insignificant in chess in the case when thanks to them giving a checkmate to the opponent is possible. This is a fundamental difference between these two types of duels. It is worth mentioning, that in fencing from the very beginning both opponents have the right to combat simultaneously, which equalizes the chances, whereas in chess the first move belongs to the white pieces making them a bit privileged, that is why the black pieces strive first to equalize the position and gain advantage in the later phase of the game. Despite of, that chess players are in the same place at the same time and play together a

common game, the moves cannot be conducted simultaneously, because it falls on one of the opponents and then on the other in turns. The world of chess is very orderly; it has the latitude to end the game in any moment of the duel. In chess only one good hit is enough, which can come right after the second move of the black pieces and end the rivalry, whereas in fencing a specific number of hits must be done. Although fencing is called “physical chess” it significantly drifts away from the rather calm battle on the chess board with its activity, dynamics, speed and precision of weapon movements. In fencing one point action ending with a hit does not influence the subsequent action, because it is begun from the start positions, while chess characterizes itself with an extraordinary sequence consistency, because every wrong move will result in the worsening of one’s position on the chess board, which limits the possibilities of making a good next move and results in a further deterioration of one’s position and so the spiral of unfavorable dependencies triggered by one error leads with large probability to the final defeat.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Although a common stereotype about chess, this royal game in many aspects connects with other sport disciplines. An acknowledgement of this thesis is this paper proving that even with such a dynamic Olympic sport as fencing, chess in many aspects finds similarities, analogies and even common elements. Surely these two sport disciplines are surrounded by a aura of knighthood by e.g. conducting tournaments, being part of the Olympic family, one on one combat – as well as in teams with division into genders and age categories, however in chess this is not a rule at all tournaments. Common elements are also, that in chess and fencing a thought confronts thought, will confronts will, technique confronts technique, speed confronts speed and endurance confronts endurance in a duel between two and only two opponents according to established rules. Both sports develop orientation, ability to concentrate and the ability to read the opponents intent. They perfect composure, concentration, attention, motivation, binocular vision and will to prevail. When it comes to winning a bout it is decisive to early and accurate read of the opponents intentions and forcing the opponent to make a mistake by your own moves and actions by utilizing a proper combat strategy. A fencing bout, in which modern, surprising and outstanding tactical ideas can be observed, similarly as in chess games, where a “tactical novelty” is utilized, a beautiful idea, a romantic combination, gains the elements of art, not losing the features of sport, can deeply move the interested spectators. Both of these disciplines require from a competitor to perfect his technical, tactical and strategic abilities, choice of action and perceptiveness. A fencing master similarly to a coach or chess instructor concentrates on the correctness of moves with this difference, that the former under the notion of movement correctness understands – the motion of his pupil and the later as a move conducted by a young adept of the royal game with pieces in a given position created on the chess board. The methodology of teaching these two sports is subordinate to seven rules, which show the general direction of teacher’s educational work. The motive of chess and a chess board is very commonly used in art, where pieces are living human beings hold cold weapons. As an example of an artistic combination of chess and fencing the front page of the magazine *Chess* was shown.

In this paper with certainty not all the similarities between such knightly sport disciplines, based on mutual combat like chess and fencing were shown. The main intent of the authors was to break the stereotype that no similarities exist, starting a discussion about the considered problem and encouraging to further examination of chess and fencing, because these two noble sport disciplines surely deserve it.

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