Steinitz—Chigorin, Havana 1889
A World Championship Match or Not?

Anders Thulin, Malmö
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Abstract

A close reading of contemporary press records suggests that the Steinitz-Chigorin match in Havana, 1899 was not for the World Championship title as usually claimed.

Introduction

> "In the early part of 1888 Mr. Steinitz visited Havana, in consequence of an invitation from the hospitable Chess Club of that city to give some Chess exhibitions and to play matches and off-hand games against the Cuban Champion, Judge Golmayo; the Mexican Champion, Senor Vasquez, Consul General of Mexico; Senores Carvajal, Ponce and other prominent players. The members of the Havana Chess Club, who are most enthusiastic and liberal patrons of the game, made on this occasion the offer to Mr. Steinitz to provide the stakes and to defray all the expenses of a match for the championship of the world to be held under the auspices of that society against any opponent whom the visitor would accept. Mr. Steinitz accepted the handsome offer on condition that the contest should consist of a limited number of games, [...]. He selected for his opponent the Russian master, Mr. Tschigorin with whom he had played on two previous occasions."
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> —Steinitz: *Modern Chess Instructor,* p. 162.

This quotation is taken from Steinitz' introduction to the analyses of the games of the match, and is probably where claim of world championship status for the match originates. The preface of the *Modern Chess Instructor* is dated May, 1889, *i.e.* within a few months of the match, and as Steinitz writes about a recent event that he was closely involved with, there is no obvious reason to suspect that it may be wrong in any important respect.

However, when Steinitz' earlier writings are examined, some inconsistencies with this account need to be considered.

The Match with Chigorin

> "The idea to arrange this affair was already suggested in the early part [of 1888] during the visit of Mr. Steinitz to Havana. A similar contest was then proposed between him and Captain Mackenzie, who was also a guest of the Havana Chess Club at the time, but the latter gentleman absolutely declined the offers made to him for that purpose. The members of the Havana Chess Club, with their usual generosity, thereupon proposed to make arrangements for a combat during the next winter season against any first-class player whom Mr. Steinitz would select, and the latter having chosen Mr. Tschigorin, it was agreed by the Havana Chess Club to authorize an invitation to the Russian master, on the distinct condition that it should not be regarded as a challenge on the part of Mr. Steinitz."
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> —*International Chess Magazine,* vol. ii, p. 356 (Dec. 1888)

The full account is given on p. 355–357 in the same volume (with an earlier mention on p. 334–335). There is also a brief note from Steinitz' visit to Havana in February-March the same year (p. 44–45 and 81–82), in which the plan for a match with Mackenzie is mentioned.

In none of these pages is there any suggestion that the planned match with Chigorin would be for the world championship title as the already quoted passage from *Modern Chess Instructor* says.

There is a suggestion that Steinitz may have regarded the contest as of somewhat less importance than the match against Zukertort:

> "The contest will otherwise [apart from the stakes] be regulated by the same conditions as the last championship match between Steinitz and Zukertort. It should, however, be remembered that a limited number of games cannot be considered such a sure test as a match, if only for the reason that either party who happens to be considerably ahead in the score may systematically play for draws and this is great odds in the hands of a fine player. Yet even such a limited direct trial of skill, if consisting of a large number of games as on the present occasion, is in our opinion a more accurate measure of relative skill than a tournament [...]"
>
> —*International Chess Magazine,* vol. ii, p. 356 (Dec. 1888)

Though these points cannot, on their own, be taken as proof of non-championship status for the match, they raise the question why this 'contest' should have been different, and in particular, arranged to a lower standard than that of the match against Zukertort. There seems to be no information given on this particular point: perhaps it was for economical reasons.

(It may be also of some interest to note that Steinitz avoids using the term 'match' both here and elsewhere: it seems he preferred to use that term for contests for a set number of wins, rather than a set number of games.)

The Chess-Monthly mentions the match:

> "From information received from Mr. A. Moliner, of Havannah, we learn that a match, or series of twenty games, will be played at the Havannah Chess Club between Steinitz, and Tchigorin of St. Petersburg, in January next, whilst Capt. Mackenzie is engaged to play matches with Golmayo, Vasquez, and Carvajal, in December."
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> —*The Chess-Monthly,* vol. x, p. 103 (Dec. 1889)

In *Deutsche Schachzeitung* vol. 43, p. 374 (Dec. 1888), there is only a brief mention that Steinitz and Chigorin would play a match in January or February 1889.

In none of these further accounts is there any indication that these games actually were played for the title of the world chess championship. This is another unusual point: what reason could there be for not advertising such a match as widely as possible?

One answer might be that there was no need for the contestants to advertise it, as the Havana Chess Club already had agreed to pay for the match. This is not entirely satisfactory: surely the players would want to draw public attention to the event. It also seems unlikely that the arrangers would not try to recoup at least some of the costs in form of admittance to the match, for which even limited advertising would be beneficial.

A second possibility could be that the match was not originally planned to be for the World Championship title, but evolved into one so late that it was not mentioned in the cited sources.

The Havana Chess Club started a short-lived chess periodical to cover the match: *La Revista de Ajedrez* (9 issues, 40 pages, January 1–February 27, 1889). Once the match was over, the publication was closed, although it was resurrected as a monthly journal later the same year. In this publication, the following statement can be found:

> "Las condiciones aceptadas por los Sres. Steinitz y Tchigorin, para venir á esta ciudad con el objeto de jugar la serie de partidas, que ha de discernir al vencedor, si no de derecho (por no haberse extipulado así de un modo expreso) al menos de hecho, el rango de campeón del mundo ajedrecista, son las siguientes: [...]"
>
> —*Revista de Ajedrez,* vol. i, p. 8 (Jan. 3, 1889)

which may be translated as:

> "The conditions accepted by Mr. Steinitz and Tchigorin, in coming to this city with the purpose of playing a match to decide the winner of the rank of world chess champion, if not formally (by not having stipulated it expressly), at least informally, are as follows: [...]"

This passage seems to say that the match was *not* formally for the title. (I have not been able to find a retraction or correction of this statement), and so indicates that there were no last-minute modifications of the programme.

But as we have already seen, Steinitz, just a few months later, clearly indicates that it *was* a title match.

Before any attempt is made to reconcile these apparently contradictory statements, it should be noted that a closer study of other material from the time seems to support the Havana Chess Club: at the time of the match with Chigorin the World Champion title was no longer in Steinitz' hands, and so could not easily be put up for contest.

The Sixth American Chess Congress, New York 1889

More than a year before Steinitz' visit to Havana in 1888, when the first plans for what would become the match against Chigorin were made, the next chess world championship had already been planned. The official programme for the sixth American congress says:

> "It is the purpose of the Committee to make the Tournament a contest for the real championship of the world, thus avoiding the controversies and disputes that have so often arisen at the end of tournaments, which, owing to the absence of a regulation providing for a match, have rendered them fallacious tests of superiority.
>
> In addition to the First Prize which will be $1,000, minimum, a trophy representing such championship will be provided and held, subject to challenge under fair and equitable conditions, thus combining the advantages of a tournament and a championship match, to consist of at least seven games up, forming part of the tournament, and to be incorporated in the Book of the Congress."
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> —*International Chess Magazine,* vol. iii, p. 3 (Jan. 1887)

The programme was signed by the Corresponding Committee of the congress: W.W. Ellsworth, C. Schubert and W. Steinitz. (The programme is also reprinted in the tournament book.)

In the same issue of *ICM,* Steinitz gives his personal comments:

> "[...] I know I am not fit to be the champion, and I am not likely to bear that title for ever. Therefore let us select a better one, and whoever it may be, I shall cheerfully say to him, like the old soldier:
>
> *'Mein Sohn, hier hast du meinen Speer,*
> *Meinem Arm wird er zu schwer.'*
>
> (My son, here you have my spear, it becomes too heavy for my arm.) [...]"
>
> —*International Chess Magazine,* vol. iii, p. 23 (Jan. 1887)

This leaves little doubt that Steinitz decided to allow the 6th Congress to include a contest for the title of world chess champion.

The Chess-Monthly also reprinted the programme (vol. xiii, p. 165 (Feb., 1887)), but viewed the proposal as unlikely to reach fulfilment, and so did not comment on details.

Deutsche Schachzeitung reported on the plans (in vol. 42, p. 91-2 (March, 1887)), but does not appear to have made any further comments.

Further information about the match was printed in "Report of the Sixth American Chess Congress."

> "The Committee will issue a detailed *preliminary* programme on the lines of the London Tournament of 1883, as soon as the total amount [for the tournament book] is subscribed. But in view of the fact that the 'championship match', which is a new feature in connection with tournaments, has met with general approval, the Committee deem it proper to say a few words in regard to the main regulations that may be adopted to govern this contest.

1. The winner of the Tournament shall not be *bound* to play for stakes, but he may insist upon a maximum of $500 a side.

2. The winner of the Tournament shall receive at least $250 whether he wins or loses the match. Special prizes may also be awarded if the funds allow.

3. The match must begin within a month after the chief prize of the Tournament has been decided.

4. If the winner of the Tournament be a resident and the challenger a foreign player, the Jury may decide when the match shall begin; not conflicting with Rule 3.

5. If the winner of the Tournament be a foreign player, he shall have the option of fixing the time to any period within a month.

6. The match shall be for the first 7 games up, draws not counting, but after 10 draws each draw shall count ½ for each player.

7. The right of challenge shall belong to the prize winners in the order of their score.

8. Any player winning less than 3rd prize, non-prize-winners and non-contestants shall be allowed to challenge only for Fellow-championship.

9. If less than 4 European players enter the Tournament, the match contest shall not involve the championship of the world, but only that of the 6th American Chess Congress.

10. If a non-contestant desires to challenge for the Fellow-championship he shall notify the Committee before the commencement of the Tournament and shall deposit the maximum stakes as per rule 2.

A Committee of 12 gentlemen will be selected before the Tournament and constitute a Jury, which shall have power to overrule the right of any challenger (providing there be more than one) by a ¾-vote at a full meeting, the vote to be taken by Ayes and Noes. The Jury shall also decide other points of controversy that may arise during the Tournament or the match, by majority vote, and its transaction shall be placed on record and published in the Book of the Congress. Votes may be by proxy, but at least 8 members must be present."

—*International Chess Magazine,* vol. iii (supplement Nov. 1887),

The following month, Steinitz comments in the 'Personal and General' column of *ICM:*

"The Sixth American Chess Congress is progressing steadily and surely, and it is significant that from first to last the opposition has rested on pure, or, better speaking, impure personal grounds, which are even cynically admitted. But we notice with gratification that, so far, no fault has been found with any single action or provision of the Committee, and even the enemies of the Congress cannot help admitting, tacitly, at least, the spirit of fairness which prevails the rules, published in the Supplement to our last number, in reference to the novel Institution of a Championship Match in connection with an International Tournament. We specially call attention to the last rules, commencing with Rule 8, which obviously have the tendency to place obstacles in the way of the acquirement of the champion title for any player who has not competed in the Tournament, or has not, at least, gained the third prize. Perhaps I may be allowed to state that I was the prime mover in making those propositions, which, I may explain, are in no way contradictory to the views I have hitherto held in reference to the Champion title. For up to the present no Congress Committee has even made the attempt of framing regulations for a final match, involving the acquisition of the International Champion title in connection with a general Tournament contest. In the absence of any such arrangement I held, and still hold, that the time-honored and quite equitable usage by which the title was assigned to successful match players like Labourdonnais, Staunton and Morphy should be regarded as law. But feeling sure that the efforts of the Committee of the forthcoming Congress, for the purpose of inaugurating a true champion test, are based on perfectly fair conditions, I certainly think that a great deal of preference is due to actual competitors in the Tournament. The spirit of the rules throughout is to show the greatest consideration to competitors from abroad, and to hold the balance of equity, in the interest of fair play only, between the competitors and the subscribers. It is especially noteworthy in that respect that for the

first time the concession will be made of issuing a preliminary programme, which will only be rendered final after being left open to public discussion for a reasonable time.

As the subject of my entering the Tournament has already been a matter of discussion, I beg to state that I do not desire to compete if I can possibly help it; in the first place on the ground that I wish to have no direct personal interest in the coming Tournament, and also because my duties to this Magazine and the preparation for the issue of the Book of the Congress will impose an extraordinary tax on my time and energies, which would make it unwise for me to attempt such a heavy additional ordeal as the participation in the Tournament. Anyhow, I may positively state that if I do not take part in the main contest I shall not challenge the winner, provided that the second or third prize-holder issues a challenge for the final match. On no account, however, shall I accept any office in the Congress—such, for instance, as that of a judge or juryman—which would make it part of my duty to decide disputes between players, or would otherwise involve judicial functions affecting important interests of the competitors."

—*International Chess Magazine*, vol. iii, p. 370–1 (Dec. 1887)

Ten months later, in October 1888, Steinitz returns to the subject. Although the early parts of the quote below are only indirectly relevant to the question of the status of the Steinitz–Chigorin match, I quote it in full because it adds light on Steinitz' intentions and plans for the congress.

"The September number of the London *Chess Monthly* after giving some fair quotations from the last circular of the Sixth American Chess Congress singles out for its *special criticism* the passage which provides that an 'extra remuneration of $250 will be guaranteed to the winner of the tournament, if in consequence of a challenge he should play a match to which a prize of a trophy of the minimum value of $250 will be attached.' Our London contemporary appends to this the following comments: 'We fear this vaguely worded offer of an "*extra remuneration*" will prove the stumbling block to the entry of the majority of intending competitors. It is generally supposed that the winner will be required to play a match with Mr. Steinitz after the tournament. This would be grossly unfair. We should hardly think that the organizers of the tournament and Mr. Steinitz would wish to handicap an opponent so severely as to compel him after a severe mental struggle of some weeks' duration to play with Mr. Steinitz a match, when he would be quite fresh and would have prepared himself for the match by studying the games of his physically and mentally exhausted opponent. This opinion is shared universally by all the players we had the opportunity of meeting, and our remarks are made upon the request of several competitors of the Bradford Congress. Captain Mackenzie, on his return to America is authorised to make representation to that effect in proper quarters.'

The *Chess Monthly* introduces these remarks with a slight fling about 'protective measures,' which it assumes are to be adopted; but altogether I notice with gratification as it enables me to tune down myself, that the comments of that journal are of a much milder description and even very encouraging in comparison to the sort of criticism which was launched against us in their columns in the early part of last year. But it must be still more gratifying to the members of the Congress Committee that though only the bare outlines of their rules are published, the critics of their measures have to fall back as heretofore on personal and entirely suppositious grounds. We might fairly answer the Chess Monthly as well as those for whom our London contemporary professes to plead, that a preliminary programme will be issued with the very object of inviting objections and criticism before issuing the final programme, and it would have been more proper to wait for the publication of the former before giving expression to the 'generally supposed' personal insinuations. It would have been also more advisable for those critics of the 'generally supposed' Congress intentions to read more attentively and intelligently in the meanwhile the proposed

rules of the Congress as published in the Committee-report of November last, (see Supplement to our November number of 1887), as well as what I said on the subject as far as I was personally concerned, in our December number, 1887, p. 371.

It is no doubt some comfort that the objectors do not oppose the Champion match on principle, but merely on the 'generally supposed' assumption that I, myself, might challenge for such a contest without having entered the tournament. But just in reference to such assumption I already said distinctly in December last that: 'Anyhow, I may positively state that if I do not take part in the main contest I do not intend to challenge the winner, provided that the second or third prize-holder issues a challenge for the final match.' This I think is plain enough, and practically I am disqualified from the Champion match, for it is most unlikely that the second or third prize-holder will not challenge, more especially as in all probability further money prizes for the winner and the loser will be offered for this contest. (This of course cannot be positively promised at present.) But in order to meet beforehand all further 'general suppositions,' I may call attention to rule 7 of the November report of the Congress Committee which provides that 'the right of challenge belongs to the prize winners in the order of their scores,' and to rule 10 which only empowers a *selected jury* of 12 gentlemen picked from the body of the Committee whose integrity is already guaranteed through the process of gradual election by unanimous ballot, to overrule the right of any challenge *by a three-fourths majority vote at a full meeting*. These are 'restrictions' enough against any personal objects of my own and can hardly be called 'protective measures.' If I were mean and deceptive enough for an attempt to evade my public declaration, I think there are sufficient safeguards in those provisions. However, I could not go further in my own personal promise unless our critics wish me to propose a rule that Mr. Steinitz shall be altogether disqualified from the Champion contest, unless he plays in the tournament on the ground that he will be 'quite fresh and would prepare himself for the match by studying the games of his physically and mentally exhausted opponents.' If, however, our critics think that such a rule is likely to be passed in Committee, they are welcome to suggest it to that august body and I shall promise to vote for it.

But now please to leave Mr. Steinitz and what he is 'generally supposed' to do out of the controversy, and let us only assure you that I have engagements on hand which will probably exhaust me 'physically and mentally' more than any tournament, and that there is therefore, very little chance of my entering for the general or the final match contest. However, the ultimate winner, provided that he fulfils all the conditions of the Committee shall have my most loyal support for his Champion title to which I shall lay no claim until perhaps, I may be able to recover it in another contest at a later period. In the meanwhile, we may perhaps assume that the Committee to which I have the honor to belong, as well as myself, have no other desire than to frame fair and honest rules, not alone to govern the coming Congress, but which shall also form a *guiding model for the organizers of future International tournaments.* Just for instance, like some of the rules of the London tournament of 1883, especially the one in reference to the counting of the draws ought in our opinion to be accepted in all International tournaments on a grand scale.

Let us further 'generally suppose' that not Mr. Steinitz, but for instance Mr. Gunsberg, who has undoubtedly the best recent match and tournament record combined, may be prevented from joining the tournament in time, say by an accidental delay of the steamer which carries him across the Atlantic. Or else, that he joins the tournament and does not win any prize, a contingency which is by no means so very improbable, considering that he came out 16th in the score-list of last year's tournament at Frankfort. Nor is such an assumption in any way derogatory to Mr. Gunsberg's reputation. For a slight indisposition or a want of form for a couple of days, if he happens to be paired against a chief rival just at that time, may easily throw him back with four points and, as already proved in the Hamburg tournament, one point or

half a game (a draw) may be sufficient to make the difference between obtaining the first or one of the next six prizes. Would it not be greatly unjust in either of the above mentioned cases to exclude absolutely Mr. Gunsberg, the best reputed active player, from all chance of fighting a match at least for the 'fellow championship' as provided in the rules? As for the 'physical' exhaustion of the winner of the tournament, it is already provided, that if he be a foreigner, he will have the option of postponing the commencement of the match for a month after the tournament. A clause can easily be added to the rules in the preliminary programme providing that in no case shall it be *compulsory* (though both parties might agree on the subject) to commence the match before a fortnight after the tournament and the winner will therefore have ample time to recuperate himself from his exertions in the contest. For many a time, matches have been arranged between competitors immediately after the tournament, for instance, between Anderssen and Paulsen, Dubois and Steinitz in London in 1862, between Neumann and Winawer in Paris, 1867; between Anderssen and Paulsen; Paulsen and Schwarz at different German meetings, and the parties to these contests agreed to play for prizes to the *winner* which as far as I recollect did not exceed $25 on any of those occasions, whereas, in the coming tournament, $250, or ten times the amount, is guaranteed to the chief prize-holder whether *he wins or loses,* and in addition, a champion trophy of the value of $250 and probably a further prize in case he wins the match, besides his having the privilege of insisting upon playing for a stake of $500.

As for the plea that a non-contestant may 'prepare himself by studying the games, etc.,' it is really too childish to be seriously entertained. If the studying of games would make a player, we would have thousands of first-rates. But it is well-known that a few weeks' practice with masters is worth years of study. Let us 'generally suppose' that Captain Mackenzie, one of the objectors according to the *Chess Monthly,* wins the first prize and Mr. Gunsberg who did not participate in the tournament for some reason, is selected by a *three-fourths majority vote of the jury,* after due challenge and deposit of $500, according to the rules for playing the final Champion match. The two players have no doubt known each other's play and style for years, and the difference between them as regards preparation for the contest, is only that Captain Mackenzie has played say 30 games more in hard contest against different first-class players under time limit over the board, whereas Mr. Gunsberg had the opportunity of studying those games at home. We should not hesitate to judge that after a slight rest the odds of better training would in such case be in favor of the Captain by at least a couple of games out of the first seven.

Though neither the *Chess Monthly* nor those who apparently have instructed that journal seem to raise any objection against the final match on principle, but merely plead against the right of a non-contestant in the tournament to compete in the match contest, we think it proper to add a few words about this new Congress-feature in order to meet some opposition which we learn is entertained by at least one of the intending competitors against this measure on the ground, we understand, that some amateur might win the chief prize in the tournament who would be unable to devote further time to the match contest on account of more important business. But this 'want of time' or 'more important business' might be pleaded as an argument against the general contest as well, for no doubt there are many high talented amateurs who would, especially by continued practice, occupy high rank in tournaments if they could spare the leisure for entering and competing in such contests. But amateurs all over the world who are invited to contribute for a Chess Congress will expect that the best test shall be applied for determining the best players without much regard for any special 'important business' of any individual competitor. General tournaments are modern institutions, and up to 1851 no other than the match test was known, but even after the inauguration of tournaments the single handed contest was always regarded as the superior proof of skill.

The Sixth American Chess Congress will therefore for the first time in history (and

not merely in America as the *Chess Monthly* suggests) inaugurate an International Tournament for the real championship of the world by officially combining the match test with the all-round contest, and a wholesome effect of this new addition to the Congress will be that it will stop at least to a great extent, and for a long time, that real or manufactured discord among different claimants for the championship and their respective partisans which has sometimes manifested itself for years in succession since the first International London Tournament of 1851 much to the detriment of the progress and popularity of our noble pastime. The Committee of the Congress have repeatedly in their various circulars held out the institution of a final match as an additional feature of their programme, and several hundreds of subscribers who have approved of the idea by their contributions, have as much right to expect the games of the match to be scientifically treated in the book of the congress as a 'matière première' as the games of the tournament. In our opinion the subscribers would be entitled to the return of their money unless the Committee exhaust every reasonable effort in order to bring about such a final match context at the of the all-round affair."

—*International Chess Magazine,*
vol. iv p. 301–4 (Oct. 1888)

On the basis of this information, it seems reasonably clear that Steinitz has decided to give up his championship title, at least temporarily.

The final rules for the championship match can be found in *International Chess Magazine* vol. v, p. 70 (March, 1889). As only minor modifications were made, only the modified rules are shown here:

"1. The winner of the Tournament shall be bound to play the Championship Match if duly challenged. He shall not be obliged to play for stakes, but may insist upon a maximum of $500.00 a side.

To ensure compliance with this rule, one-fourth of the amount of the First Prize shall be held as forfeit until the Championship Match is completed or the time for challenge has expired.

[...]

4. If the winner of the Tournament be a resident and the challenger a foreign player, the Jury may decide when the match shall begin.

[...]

6. The match shall be for the first seven games up, draws not counting, but after ten draws each draw shall count for half for each player. The match shall be played at the rate of four games per week, at least. If at the end of four weeks the match is not finished, the Committee may, at the request of either player, decide that the score as it shall stand at that time shall be decisive, with the exception that the challenger must be at least one game ahead in order to be entitled to victory, while the winner of the Tournament shall be delcared the victor of the match if he has made even games.

[...]

9. If less than four European players enter the Tournament, the match contest shall not involve the championship of the world, but only that of the Sixth American Chess Congress.

10. If a non-contestant desires to challenge for the Fellow-championship, he shall notify the Committee before the commencement of the Tournament, and shall deposit the maximum stakes as per rule II [!]. The Jury shall have the power to overrule the right of any challenger (provided there may be more than one) by a three-fourths vote at a full meeting, the vote to be taken by ayes and noes. The Jury shall also decide other points of controversy that may arise during the Tournament or the match by majority vote, and its transactions shall be placed on record and published in the Book of the Congress."

The contrast with the Steinitz-Chigorin match is striking: the reader is not left in any doubt that the planned match would be for the title (provided that at least four European players entered). And there are no indication that Steinitz would have any particular privileges in such a contest: indeed by his own words, already quoted, he would not even challenge the

winner, unless the other prize-winners of the tournament refused to do so.

(It may be worth observing that no Jury transactions, as mentioned in rule 10, were published in the Congress book.)

• • •

The tournament ended in some disappointment for Steinitz and the arrangers. The official report is very brief on the matter:

> "At the end of the tournament there was a tie between M. Tschigorin, of St. Petersburg, and Herr Max Weiss, of Vienna. Both these masters expressed a desire not to be compelled to play a championship match, as provided by the rules, and as there was no other challenge for the title and the prizes offered for the purpose, the Committee decided that this contest should not take place."
>
> —*Sixth American Chess Congress,* 1891, p. xxiii

Steinitz expands a little on the subject:

> "In consequence of the division of the two chief prizes a match for the Championship could only have been arranged between the two first prize-holders, and as neither of the two masters was inclined for such a contest, the Committee decided that the contemplated Championship Match could not be arranged. It is much to be regretted that the loyal efforts of the Committee to combine in this Congress the supreme match test with the usual measure of cross-play in the Tournament, which combination would have settled any disputes about the Championship, have not be crowned with the success which they deserved. But under the circumstances their decision in the matter was obviously the only one they could have arrived at, and it is to be hoped that the scheme of arranging a Championship Match in connection with a Grand Tournament will be taken up again by the managers of a future Congress with a more decisive effect."
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> —*International Chess Magazine* vol. iv, p. 162 (June, 1889)

Summary

There seems to be no mention before or during the Steinitz-Chigorin match that it was in any way connected with the world championship. The arrangers of the match themselves say that it was not a *de jure* title match.

In the period from 1887 to May 1889, any contest for the world championship is mentioned only in conjunction with the match planned to follow the main tournament of the 6th American Congress.

Against these observations stands Steinitz' own statement in *Modern Chess Instructor* that the Havana match was indeed for the championship (as already quoted in the introduction). The preface is dated May, 1889, and so that statement was probably made after the failure of the championship match.

This contradiction needs to be resolved in one way or another.

The simplest hypothesis is to assume that *Modern Chess Instructor* is incorrect. This removes the main crux of the matter, but it requires some kind of explanation why Steinitz came to make the claim in the first place.

A more complex hypothesis is that the Havana match *was* for the championship, and that the *Revista* misstated the circumstances. This hypothesis requires an explanation of why the championship status of the match was kept quiet, as well as why Chigorin would compete *sub rosa* for a title which, if he won it, he would have to reclaim within a few months.

My own preference is for the first hypothesis: I suspect Steinitz misstated the facts in *Modern Chess Instructor.* This is mainly because I have not been able to find any similar statement in *International Chess Magazine*—if Steinitz intended the match to be for the title, I would expect to find a mention in more than one place. On the other hand, I have not found any retraction or correction of the claim of *MCI* either.

It does not seem at all impossible that the Havana Club actually did make an offer to host a match for the title. Steinitz would have been obliged to decline it, given that the plans for the 6th congress had already been made public, but the offer would certainly have been remembered.

But without any solid evidence to back this up,

it must remain a conjecture, particularly in the absence of any material dated before May 1889. Once *Modern Chess Instructor* is published, it is difficult to say if claims for championship status for the Havana match are based on the information in that book, or on independent information. For that reason, later claims have to be evaluated carefully.

Notes for future research

Periodicals & chess columns: Apart from *Revista de Ajedrez*, I have examined only the English and German chess periodicals mentioned below. There may be further information to find in other periodicals or perhaps also the chess columns of Steinitz and Chigorin.

There may also be more to find in *Revista*: my knowledge of Spanish is close to non-existent, and I have essentially only looked for appearances of the term 'campeon' or 'champion' for material. (An electronic faximile of the magazine for Acrobat Reader is available on request for anyone who wants to go deeper.)

Biographies: The biographical material published by Kurt Landsberger shed no light on this particular question.

Bachmann, interestingly enough, does not mention the world championship title at all in conjunction with the Chigorin match, but it does not seem safe to draw any firm conclusions from that.

I'm less well read on Chigorin, but all of the material available to me so far are game collections with little historical analysis.

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