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**Batgirl**



Joined: 06 Dec 2003  
Posts: 165  
Location: North Carolina

■ Posted: Tue Mar 16, 2004 7:23 pm    Post subject: France - Deschapelles



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After the death of **Philidor** in 1795 there was a period of silence in the chess world. In 1775 four men had gotten together and wrote a book called *Traité Théorique et Pratique du Jeu des échecs par une Societé d' Amateurs* or simply *Traité des Amateurs*. It wasn't a great book but it did earn a certain amount of popularity, enough to have been reprinted several times and translated into German. These four men were **Verdoni, Bernard, Carlier** and **Leger**. Although they didn't even approach Philidor's level, they were considered the best in the world in the years following his death. Verdoni, in fact,

replaced Philidor at Parsloe's in London until he also died in 1804. Bernard and Carlier led the crowd at the Café de la Régence in Paris.

English chess was weak but organized, French chess was strong but chaotic. Eventually strength grew from organization and weakness from chaos, but at the turn of the century, France was still the place to play chess.

Around 1798 a French player worthy of Philidor's crown appeared almost out of nowhere. His sudden emergence was compounded by his nearly mythical claims and deeds. He was **Alexandre Louis Honoré Lebreton Deschapelles** who claimed to have learned all he needed to know about chess in just four days.

According to **George Walker**, Deschapelles noted:

*"I acquired chess, in four days! I learned the moves, played with Bernard, who had succeeded Philidor as the sovereign of the board; lost the first day, the second, the third, and beat him even-handed on the fourth; since which time I have never advanced or receded. Chess to me has been, and is, a single idea, which, once acquired, cannot be displaced from its throne, while the intellect remains unimpaired by sickness or age."*

It's true that Deschapelles had a facility for games and excelled, not only at chess, but at billiards, Polish draughts, trictrac, and whist despite the fact that he had lost his right hand in a battle during his youth. In that same battle he received a sabre cut that opened his skull diagonally from his forehead to his chin, disfiguring him and inspiring the believe that such a wound actually freed his brain, empowering his mind.

His father and brothers had been in the service of Louis XVI. During the French Revolution, they fled France. Deschapelles, himself, was a revolutionary and received his wounds fighting for **Napoleon** but when Napoleon crowned himself Emperor, he

turned against him and tore off the **Cross of Honor** (of which he received one of the first ever issued) he had received from the army.

Taking up chess in 1798, Deschapelles quickly took up residence at, and figuratively ruled, the **Café de la Régence**.

In 1806, after the battle of Jenna, the army to which Deschapelles was attached entered Berlin. There Deschapelles challenged the best chess players of Germany and won, giving them rook's odds.

In 1812, Deschapelles was making a good living as a superintendant of the tobacco monopoly, a post granted to him by **Marshall Ney**, Napoleon's enthusiastic, if not particularly bright, aide.

In 1815, after Waterloo, Deschapelles formed a band of partisans which named him their general. It didn't last long.

In 1820, Deschapelles took on **Bourdonnais** as a student.

In April 1821, **John Cochrane**, then 23, visited France. He, Deschapelles and Bourdonnais played a triangular contest - each one playing the others. First, Deschapelles played Bourdonnais and Cochrane giving them each the odds of a *pawn and 2*. He beat Cochrane 6-1 but lost all 7 of his games to Bourdonnais. Deschapelles then played Cochrane even but requiring himself to win 2/3 of the games as a form of odds. Cochrane won that match. That's the only recorded instance of anyone beating Deschapelles even, but then, again, Deschapelles almost never played even.

Also in 1821, **Willian Lewis** came to Paris expressly to play Deschapelles. Lewis won the 3 game match receiving odds of pawn and the move bu drawing two and winning one.

Deschapelles then challenged Lewis to an extended match of 21 games at odds of pawn and 2 at much greater stakes but Lewis

declined.

In 1822, Deschappelles gave up chess, most likely because Bourdonnais by now was the better player. He took up whist and quickly mastered the game winning more money at this game than he ever had at chess. With his new found wealth, he and his bride rented a villa near Paris with orchards, pheasants, pumpkins and melons. His melons and pumpkins even won prizes and were highly valued, leading **George Perigal** (an English player who, incidentally, took part in the first telegraph game in England in 1845 as well as being on the London team in the correspondence matches against Edinburgh in 1824 and Paris in 1834) to write, "*M. Deschappelles is the greatest chess player in France; M. Deschappelles is the greatest whist player in France; M. Deschappelles is the greatest billiards player in France; M. Deschappelles is the greatest pumpkin-grower in France; M. Deschappelles is the greatest liar in France.*"

Deschappelles resumed playing chess in 1836 when, after 14 years of non-play, he drew a 3 game match (+1 =1 -1) against **Saint-Amant** giving odds of *pawn and 2*. He won a 5 game match (+2 =2 -1) against **Wilhelm Schulten** of Germany in 1842 at odds of *pawn and 2*. He then played Saint-Amant a 5 games match winning +3 -2.

For the last year and a half of his life, Deschappelles was confined to bed. He suffered delusions which he expressed by composing rambling constitutions for various countries. His final wishes were that he should die unannounced and unheralded, buried in a pauper's grave.

Two games of Deschappelles:

[Event "Casual"]

[Site "Paris"]

[Date "1821.??.?"]

[Result "1-0"]

[White "John Cochrane"]

[Black "Deschappelles"]

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4. Bc4 Bc5 5. Ng5 Ne5 6. Bxf7+  
Nxf7 7. Nxf7  
Bb4+ 8. c3 dxc3 9. bxc3 Bxc3+ 10. Nxc3 Kxf7 11. Qd5+ Kf8 12.  
Ba3+ d6 13. e5  
Qg5 14. exd6 Qxd5 15. dxc7+ Kf7 16. Nxd5 Bd7 17. O-O Rc8  
18. Bd6 Ke6 19.  
Bg3 Bc6 20. Rad1 Bxd5 21. Rfe1+ Kf6 22. Rxd5 Nh6 23. Ra5  
Nf5 24. Rc5 Nxc3  
25. hxg3 Kf7 26. Rd1 Rhe8 27. Rd6 Re7 28. Rf5+ Ke8 29. Rd8+  
Rxd8 30. Rf8+  
Kxf8 31. cxd8=Q+ 1-0

[Event "pawn and 2"]

[Site "St. Cloud"]

[Date "1821.???.??"]

[Result "0-1"]

[White "John Cochrane"]

[Black "Deschappelles"]

[SetUp "1"]

[FEN "r1bqkbnr/ppppp1pp/2n5/8/3PP3/8/PPP2PPP/RNBQKBNR w  
KQkq - 0 1"]

1. f4

{

black removes f7.

white makes the first 2 moves

1.e4..., 2.d4 Nc6

}

1... d5 2. e5 Bf5 3. c3 e6 4. Bd3 Nh6 5. Ne2 Qh4+ 6. g3 Qh3 7.  
Kd2 Bxd3 8.

Kxd3 Qf5+ 9. Kd2 Ng4 10. Ke1 Qe4 11. Rg1 Nxh2 12. Nd2 Qd3  
13. Kf2 Ng4+ 14.

Ke1 Qe3 15. Nf1 Qf2+ 16. Kd2 Qf3 17. Kc2 Nf2 18. Qd2 Qe4+  
 19. Kb3 Na5+ 20.  
 Ka4 Nc4 21. Qe1 Qc2+ 22. b3 Nd3 23. Ne3 Nxe3 24. Qd2 Nb2+  
 25. Kb5 c6+ 26.  
 Ka5 Nec4+ 27. bxc4 Qa4# 0-1

Read George Walker's account of *Deschapelles: The Chess-King* from **CHESS & CHESS-PLAYERS**, kindly transcribed and generously made available by Mark Weeks.

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~Batgirl

Last edited by Batgirl on Mon Apr 12, 2004 6:43 pm; edited 6 times in total

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**bluebikerider**



Joined: 26 Dec 2003  
 Posts: 70

Posted: Wed Mar 17, 2004 9:39 am Post subject:



Thank you Batgirl for that interesting profile of Deschapelles. He is another chessplaying character. I will have to check out his games later.

**Quote:**

It's true that Deschapelles had a facility for games and excelled, not only at chess, but at billiards, Polish draughts, trictrac, and whist despite the fact that he had lost his right hand in a battle during his youth. In that same battle he received a sabre cut that opened his skull diagonally from his forehead to his chin, disfiguring him and inspiring the believe that such a wound actually freed his brain, empowering his mind.

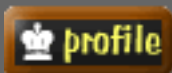
Oh my goodness..this guy has been through a lot. I wonder if, by his example, we could justify splitting open certain thick headed individuals heads with the kind hearted motive of freeing their respective brains and opening up their minds.....nah..

**Quote:**

For the last year and a half of his life, Deschapelles was confined to bed. He suffered delusions which he expressed by composing rambling constitutions for various countries.

I wonder if this has anything to do with chess or maybe his brain made its final break for the hills.

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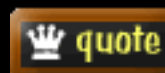
**bluebikerider**



Joined: 26 Dec 2003

Posts: 70

■ Posted: Wed Mar 17, 2004 3:59 pm    Post subject:



us news and world report

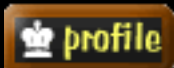
**Quote:**

A classic self-handicapper is the French chess champion Deschapelles, who lived during the 18th century. Deschapelles was a phenomenal player who quickly became champion of his region. But when competition grew tougher, he adopted a new condition for all matches: He would compete only if his opponent would remove one of Deschapelles's pawns and make the first move, increasing the odds that Deschapelles would lose. If he did lose, he could blame it on the other player's advantage and no one would know the true limits of his ability; but if he won against such odds, he would be all the more revered for his amazing talents. Psychologists now use the term ``Deschapelles coup'' to refer to acts of self-sabotage rampant in today's world.

WCN

**Quote:**

When a prospective opponent at La Regence said, "My religion forbids me to play for money," Deschapelles responded, "Mine forbids me to be absurd."

[Back to top](#)**Batgirl**

Joined: 06 Dec 2003  
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Posted: Wed Mar 17, 2004 5:12 pm    Post subject:

**Quote:**

A classic self-handicapper is the French chess champion Deschapelles, who lived during the 18th century. Deschapelles was a phenomenal player who quickly became champion of his region. But when competition grew tougher, he adopted a new condition for all matches: He would compete only if his opponent would remove one of Deschapelles's pawns and make the first move, increasing the odds that Deschapelles would lose. If he did lose, he could blame it on the other player's advantage and no one would know the true limits of his ability; but if he won against such odds, he would be all the more revered for his amazing talents. Psychologists now use the term "Deschapelles coup" to refer to acts of self-sabotage rampant in today's world.

Several things here:

The custom of giving odds was a common form of equalizing in the 18th and 19th century. First, there were far fewer players, so if a very good player didn't want to play the same 4 or 5 people all the time, he probably had to play down. Now, you have to remember also that chess in coffeehouses such as the Café de la Régence in Paris and Slaughter's in London were largely gambling houses. Like in Washington Square today, much of the chess there was played for money as were pre-arranged matches. So, no one would play a far better player for money without some sort of handicap. Players were even classified to some extent by the type of odds they required to play a master. A patzer was referred to as a *rook* player. This was the primary purpose of *odds* games.

As far as I know, Deschapelles rarely ever played even .. and not just when the competition got tough (which it really didn't



except for Bourdonnais. When Bourdonnais could beat Deschapelles, Deschapelle just quit altogether) I think the assumption that Descapelles was that cowardly would be hard, if not impossible, to prove.

However... there's always a however it seems ....

There's some truth to the idea that some players did precisely that. (though I don't believe Deschapelles was one of them). Jacob Henry Sarratt (1772-1819), the self-styled *Professor of Chess* and contemporary of Deschapelles, wrote some books and did some translations of Damiano, Ruy Lopez, Salvio, Gianutio and Gustavus Selenus. He considered himself a lot better than his extant games indicated him to have been. He learned chess from Verdoni and taught chess to Willian Lewis. At one point he refused to play anyone even, but his skill didn't indicate this. Here was a classic case of avoiding losing an even game at little risk.

Another consideration:

Morphy defeated Paulsen soundly at the 1st American Chess Congress of 1857. Paulsen dearly wanted a match with Morphy, but Morphy refused to play him except at *pawn odds*. Paulsen deliberated a long time and concluded that removing his "b" pawn gave Morphy an advantage rather than a disadvantage and refused to play such a match.

The *Deschapelles coup* is a famous move Deschapelles invented in the card game, Whist. It's been adapted to modern day Bridge. It involves the sacrifice of a high card to gain an advantage suitable in that game.

I've never heard the psychological reference before.

**Quote:**

When a prospective opponent at La Regence said, "My religion forbids me to play for money," Deschapelles responded, "Mine forbids me to be absurd."

I heard that story something like this:

Deschapelles was approached by a man who told him his friend sitting over there wish to play a game. Deschapelles told him to ask his friend what the stakes were to be. The man went to his friend and came back and told Deschapelles that his friend said his religion forbade him from playing for money, to which Deschapelles replied, "Tell your friend that *my* religion forbids me to be absurd!"

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~Batgirl

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**Batgirl**



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■ Posted: Wed Mar 17, 2004 5:34 pm    Post subject:



**Quote:**

For the last year and a half of his life, Deschapelles was confined to bed. He suffered delusions which he expressed by composing rambling constitutions for various countries.

**Quote:**

I wonder if this has anything to do with chess or maybe his brain made its final break for the hills.

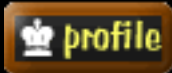
The impression I got from reading about Deschapelles was that he was obsessed with politics his whole life. He was very idealistic, revoluntary and actually quite global in his ideas. He admired England and it's constitutional monarchy, though he never had the opportunity to visit there. His life is recorded with sketchy documentation and mostly in regards to his chess and whyst playing. But the impression of his political interest shines

through and was possibly more than a side-interest to him. It's not mentioned anywhere whether he was on any drugs - I think both opium and heroine were available back then - while bedridden, but it's another possibility.

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~Batgirl

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