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A WINNER TAKES THOUGHT

It is sadly true in the world at large: nobody loves a loser. This truth, unpalatable as it is to the compassionate, the conscientious and the meek alike, applies acutely to players of computer games. It is not, gentle reader, that we have changed our editorial tack and ascribe human sentiments to the machines of our creation. We do not endow them with feelings of any sort, let alone with the depth of consciousness required to feel a sense of loss at their loss over a board of chess or checkers. Not so, these losers are as indifferent to us as they are to themselves.

Rather, it is that their human creators, when seeing their brainchild suffer defeat, are apt to provoke less than love by their articulate moaning and groaning. They are irksome and piteously repetitive: "Had it not been for the machine bombing out at the 32nd move, we were sure of a win ...". And the patience of any unlikely listener is endlessly abused by a tale of woe, about that glitch being irreproducible or that software bug being as deeply hidden as any Egyptian mystery. In brief, losers are unlovesome and unreliable to boot: when they explain their misfortune, one suspects them of a great deal of whitewashing. A loser is the unfairest analyst of his loss.

There is every reason to hope that the lovable winner will be a fitter analyst of his success. Unfortunately, the official history of tournaments never records the winner's sentiments. The games played and the credits garnered enter the records, but the analysis of the winning ways is firmly relegated to the near-gossip which is known in French as the *petite histoire*. This is a great pity and your Editors hold that Ed Schröder, the new World-Champion program's author, is entitled to have some of his introspection published.

Here goes. As recently as 1981 Ed was rebuffed: his proposed entry for the first Dutch Championship was rejected as being too weak to compete. Jan Louwman, who had the unenviable task of assaying the entries and who could not certify Ed's work to be a fit candidate, wheeled round as completely as ever did Saul on the way to Damascus: from a severe judge he became an ardent advocate of Ed's work. Many happy years followed, Ed refining his handiwork and Jan sponsoring it with a will. The results are now open for all our readers to inspect. But how does Ed account for his deserved success? He is too modest to publish, in essence because he feels he has not been innovative. One way to state Ed's own feeling is that he has explored all of the conceptual space of machine chess and has a cartographer's familiarity with all its nooks and crannies, but without any discoveries to his name. "All I did", he claims, "is to tread well-known paths, just possibly more scrupulously than others and certainly with some intuition about how these byways best combine into a grand tour."

"Chess has come a long way and programs now adequately master even the advanced middle game. Therefore I reasoned that any edge I might have can only be tellingly trenchant when I hone my endgame strength. So this is what I did and I am still doing it. To succeed in chess, you need a second wind to carry you through the race all the way to the endgame or even a third wind for the final spurt in the endgame. And of course, the path must be made more harmonious as it grows longer." So far our new Champion, so human that on receiving our congratulations he spontaneously exclaimed: "Do you still recall that I have been rejected once upon a time because I was too weak?".

Your Editors find much food for thought in Ed Schröder's victory and the reasons behind it. We read it as a victory of the spirit, achieved on a computer without excessive brawn. In many ways it recalls Richard Greenblatt's experience of a quarter of a century ago, which he describes – fairly as we believe – as a triumph of a fresh, pragmatic approach over desiccated academics and sterile formalists. We note the similarity, but for all that, we feel there has been true progress: Greenblatt gained the upper hand over Dreyfus by running a good middle game; it now takes superb management of an endgame to achieve distinction.

Of course, one championship is just one battle and winning a battle is a far cry from winning a war. So, we expect turn and turn about: there will be some future occasion on which the advocates of brawn will win and having won will ascribe their victory to 'all matter, never mind'. Until such times your Editors will reflect, they hope, the feelings of the computer-chess world as it contemplates the philosophies of the contending schools of thought. Going by the present rate, their watchful heads will soon have to zigzag with the speed required in a table-tennis umpire.

Bob Herschberg
Jaap van den Herik

Richard D. Greenblatt was Guest of Honour at the 7th World Computer-Chess Championship and its attendant manifestations in Madrid. In this capacity, he continues a tradition of many years' standing. Triennially, the ICCA takes pleasure in inviting workers who have been at the core of computer-chess development in times past:

Linz, 1980	: Claude E. Shannon
New York, 1983	: Mikhail M. Botvinnik and Hans J. Berliner
Cologne, 1986	: Adrian D. de Groot
Edmonton, 1989	: John McCarthy, Donald Michie and Claude E. Shannon
In Madrid, 1992	: Richard D. Greenblatt was a worthy successor.