

CORRESPONDENCE

The last issue of the Journal has activated many ICCA members, resulting in internal discussions, correspondence with the USCF Board and letters as well as carbon copies to the Editor. It is impossible to publish all letters in full; they would saturate the Journal to overflowing. Moreover, some letters have been written with more haste than polish and have not always made it clear whether they were intended for publication. Future correspondents are invited to provide clarity in this matter.

Below we publish extracts by topic and invite further correspondence, provided writers accept to be published in relevant excerpts or submit an article.

1. The 15th ACM NACCC Anatomized, by Boris Baczynskyj (Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 194-203).

Jonathan Schaeffer: "There is an error in Boris Baczynskyj's article on the NACCC in the recent Journal [p. 203, Ed.]. In the last round he describes a bet made between David Levy and myself. Mike Valvo actually made the bet. I was just the observer."

2. Master Chess by Belle, by Jonathan Schaeffer (Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 191-193).

Danny Kopec: "First of all, it was only a casual 5-minute game and this was nowhere mentioned in elaborate notes. Nowhere do I see published the previous two games in which I believe I unexpectedly defeated BELLE. Since BELLE is "busy" most of the day during the ACM tournament, only the very late, wee hours are left to play it some very casual games. It does not suffer from the slight tiredness which tends to afflict most humans at these hours. Nonetheless, BELLE did play a beautiful game,"

Jonathan Schaeffer: "Tony [Marsland] has by now written you. I have nothing to say on the matter except that I think you should include an erratum in the next ICCA Journal to say that "speed" should have been included in the article. I think Danny is upset needlessly. I do not believe the article does him any harm (indeed the gist of the article is that Belle was lucky!), nor was there any fault on the part of the ICCA editors."

Tony Marsland (to Danny Kopec): "Regarding the article. I think you have a valid complaint and deserve a full explanation of how this oversight occurred. Earlier this year I asked Jonathan to write an analysis of a rather nice Belle-Kopec speed game for inclusion in an article I was writing (.....). Not wishing to waste those good words, I added a short introduction to the front and sent it by electronic mail to Jaap [van den Herik]."

[...; having thereupon produced a second version of the article:]

"A scrutiny of these two [versions] reveals that only in the second case was the game clearly identified as a speed game. Also, one would have to be present at an ACM tournament to know that a "quiet moment" only occurs in the middle of the night! (.....).

I am sure you appreciate how easy it is to make an oversight of this type and hope you will accept our simple apology in the next ICCA issue."

[The Editor is happy formally to apologize for his oversight.]

Samuel H. Sloan: "This article contains annotations of a game in which the Belle program by Ken Thompson [and Joe Condon, Ed.] defeated International Chess Master Danny Kopec. This is a beautiful game. Unfortunately, it is completely misannotated.

Starting on 6. Nbl-a3, the annotator states, "A typical computer move. The knight is not well placed on a3." Actually, Na3 is a typical move in the c3 Sicilian, which the Belle computer always plays, because the knight can later go to c2, where it will support the pawn on d4. The reply was 6. ... c5xd4, a blunder by Mr. Kopec. Batsford's Chess Openings, page 233 note 17, recommends 6. ... Qd8; 7. Nc2 Nf6; 8. Bd3, with a slight advantage for White.

Next, after Black's move 7, the annotator states, "Perhaps Bf8-d6 is best." Actually, that move loses instantly. White plays 8. Bc4!, attacking the queen. If the queen takes the bishop with Qxc4, then 9. Nxd6 check forks the king and the queen. If instead 8. ... Qc5, then 9. c3xd4 attacks the queen again and White eventually picks up the bishop on d6 with check. If 8. ... Qe4 check, then 9. Be3 and if d4xe3 then White again wins the queen with 10. Nxd6 check.

(.....)

Actually, this is all wrong. The game Belle played was obviously all book, from the beginning until nearly the end. I only wish that International Chess Masters could be beaten so easily, by blundering pieces and somehow accidentally arriving at a won position. After playing a bad sixth move, Mr. Kopec did the best he could to hang on in a nearly hopeless position. However, Belle played with ruthless accuracy.

(.....)

Finally, anyone who looks at the specifications of the Belle computer will see that it relies primarily on a huge data base of openings, which far exceeds that of any other computer known to man. I knew even before I played over the game on the board that Belle could not possibly have blundered a piece as early as the tenth move in the c3 Sicilian, a variation which it knows everything about. I am reminded of the fact that, after Bobby Fischer won the "Game of the Century" against Donald Byrne when he was still only thirteen years old and had a low USCF rating, there were those who seriously maintained that Fischer was really a weak player who had overlooked that he had left a piece hanging against Byrne, and had won the game by luck."

[The Editorial Board has requested comments from prominent persons who knew the matter. We received several reactions among which the one of David Welsh, chairman of the USCF Computer Chess Committee, is probably formulated best.]

David Welsh: "Mr. Sloan is correct that 6. Na3 is "book", yet fails to appreciate that Jonathan's comment "a typical computer move" is right on

target - the point is the tactical threat Nb5, which appears in the game. The Nc2 manoeuvre is something that BELLE would only follow if it's dictated by a book position. Jonathan's comment was not really a criticism of the move, anyway.

It's true that Kopec's 6. ... cxd4 is inferior to ... Qd8, but I am inclined to agree with Jonathan that after 7. ... Bd6 Black might not be so badly placed. After 8. Bc4 Qe4+ 9. Be3 Bb8, there seems to be nothing better than 10. Nbx4 or 10. cxd4, with perhaps a little more pull than White usually gets. It seems to me that 7. ... Bd6 is probably an improvement on the line in BELLE's opening book: 1. e4 c5 2. c3 d5 3. ed5 Qd5 4. d4 e6 5. Nf3 Nc6 6. Na3 cd4 7. Nb5 Qd8 8. Bf4! g5 9. Nc7 Ke7 10. Bg3! Rb8 11. Nd4+ (ECO B22.17, Note 76). Since Kopec varied on move 8, BELLE had to find its own moves starting with 9. Nxe5 - so much for the comment that "The game BELLE played was obviously all book from the beginning until nearly the end." Kopec's line also seems to be better than the ECO variation - remember that this was a 5 minute game!

(.....)

Mr. Sloan also comments "I knew even before I played over the game on the board that BELLE could not possibly have blundered a piece as early as the tenth move in the c3 Sicilian, a variation which it knows everything about." I think he underestimates the exponential explosion of possible variations, and greatly overestimates BELLE's opening book, which is basically ECO. BELLE does not "know everything" about openings, though it does know a lot.

My impression of the article was that Jonathan's annotations were excellent and well worthy of this spectacular miniature."

3. The US Open Computer-Chess Tournament, by the Editor and Ken Thompson (Results and Games) (Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 158-170).

[The Editorial Board has received conflicting reports on the matter of fixing the outcome (pp. 158-159). The extracts below highlight the controversy.]

Sidney Samole: "Mr. Kittinger alludes to a resignation in the third round by a Fidelity operator. The fact is, there was a loss on time since the operators were running from game to game with four units entered. There certainly was no choice of winner, as both units had identical point scores. His ridiculous statements of my admitting to having resigned on purpose is, of course, simply untrue.

It should be noted, however, that he did not mention how he somehow obtained all the Fidelity game scores that were not publicly available. It is a fact, by his own admission, that his team spent most of the last day programming a special opening for the championship game. Assuming the Novag team would use this ploy, we opted to play this final game to a win by only using the 3K built-in book openings.

Finally, Mr. Kittinger's remarks about entering the programs as unrated when they had already played in tournaments is almost amusing, since it appears he knows more about our programs than either I or the Spracklens.

This tournament, like all USCF tournaments, according to the USCF rules, required that manufacturers enter experimental computer programs only, unless the programs had previously been submitted to the rating agency. Fidelity observed this rule and entered only experimental, unrated programs."

David Kittinger: "Thank you for allowing me a chance to respond Mr. Samole's letter (.....).

Para 2) Fidelity had six operators for four machines (Sid Samole, his son, Terry Evert, Ron Nelson and 2 engineers or testers) - the Novag 'team' consisted of myself and K.K. Chan operating four machines.

Para 3) His assertion that "his team spent most of last day programming ..." refers to our selecting the Bird opening (1. f2-f4) for the last round game. We had won with this opening against a Fidelity machine in the first round.

Para 4) Each year at the ACM tournament Fidelity enters their program as unrated, as well as a tournament in Florida and a US Open. How he links the USCF requirement for 'experimental programs' with 'experimental unrated programs' is quite deft."

Samuel H. Sloan: "I was shocked and horrified to read your account of the 1985 U.S. Open Computer-Chess Championship. What is described is an outright case of cheating in a chess tournament, when one Fidelity computer "threw" a game to another Fidelity computer by resigning in a clearly won position, in order to give the other computer a chance to win the tournament.

(.....)

I really blame the director of the tournament as much as Fidelity. Your report fails to state the name of the director, but whoever he was, he clearly did not do his job. Had human players done what Fidelity did, they both would have been forfeited and kicked out of the tournament, and some directors would have barred them from all future competition.

(.....)

It is clear that the Fidelity Elite XC has no right to call itself the U.S. Open Computer-Chess Champion (.....). Because of the huge public interest involved, I am writing to the United States Chess Federation asking that this result be changed. A copy of my letter is enclosed. Normally, I would not be one to rock the boat, but I regard this matter as far too serious to be ignored."

[The Editorial Board is glad to have been informed so well on these matters from various sides. We hope that response to our call for data bases and their results is as successful as this tournament question. We are awaiting the official USCF point of view and also their decision on the tournament victory, which we intend to publish if permitted.]