



# Max Euwe

5th World Chess Champion  
by Isaak and Vladimir Linder

Foreword by Andy Soltis  
Game Annotations by Karsten Müller



**The World Chess Champion Series**

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2017

Russell Enterprises, Inc.  
Milford, CT USA

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by Isaak and Vladimir Linder

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Russell Enterprises, Inc.

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# Max Euwe: Fifth World Chess Champion

## Foreword

Imagine, for a minute, that Max Euwe had never won the world championship. How would he be remembered?

Certainly he'd be seen as one of the great players of the 20th century, someone who had amassed career plus-scores against world class opponents such as Yefim Bogoljubow, Salo Flohr and Rudolf Spielmann, as well as even scores with players such as Mikhail Botvinnik and Miguel Najdorf. His career was also remarkably long: Euwe played what he called the game of his life at Zürich 1953, when he was past 50.

And Euwe would be remembered as a pioneering theoretician with dozens of opening innovations to his credit. He helped popularize the Sicilian Defense and King's Indian Defense when 1.e4 e5 and 1.d4 d5 games predominated. He remained an authority after his playing days; in the 1960s, Euwe's publication, *Chess Archives*, was required reading for aspiring amateurs. In those pre-tech days, it had a unique format. The latest analysis of, say, the Poisoned Pawn Variation or Modern Benoni would come on separate pages with punch holes so they could be fitted into your Archives ring binder.

If Euwe had never become champion, he would also be known as one of the two or three finest chess writers for the average player. While world champions like Alexander Alekhine and Botvinnik specialized in tournament books and game collections for the stronger player, Euwe had the broader audience in mind. Among his best-known books are *Judgment and Planning in Chess*, *Meet the Masters*, *Chess Master versus Chess Amateur*, *A Guide to Chess Endings*, to name just a few of his classics.

And Euwe would be remembered as one of few world-class players to become a respected arbiter and the only one to serve as world chess federation president. Before Euwe, FIDE presidents tended to be bland, invisible figures who seemed to play a minor role, more ceremonial than activist. The real decisions governing the chess world were made at FIDE General Assemblies and other convocations. Euwe reinvented his position.

Today – after the FIDE-Kasparov break in the 1990s, for example, or in the wake of the near-disaster of the Topalov-Kramnik reunification match of 2006 – we know how crucial the presidency is. It's hard to imagine the Fischer-Spassky match of 1972 being played at all without Euwe. This book also has a tantalizing revelation about the 1974 candidates finals match, a *de facto* world championship since Fischer did not defend his title in 1975. The Linders say that Soviet authorities tried to change the rules at the very end when Anatoly Karpov's victory was in doubt. But Euwe stopped them.

## Foreword

There are other ways we would consider Euwe one of the greatest figures in chess history even if he had not beaten Alexander Alekhine. But, of course, he did beat Alekhine. And the unfortunate result of that is many players today can only evaluate Euwe by comparing him with a Fischer, a Lasker or a Kasparov. When they hear the name “Max Euwe,” they conclude he was one of the weakest world champions.

The numbers seem to support that view – but only because Euwe is shortchanged by statistics and the shortness of his reign. Arpad Elo’s research (of peak 5-year periods) placed Euwe only 17th among the greats. Chessmetrics.com put him much lower, at 46th place, in a similar calculation.

This view of Euwe is unfair. Although, typically, his ruthless honesty and candor helped contribute to it. “During my chess career, I have made quite a few oversights,” he said on a BBC broadcast, according to *Chess Treasury of the Air*. “In fact, I have probably made more silly blunders than any other world champion.” Perhaps he did. But few of his mistakes were memorable or costly. They certainly weren’t as embarrassing as the case of one of his recent successors, who allowed a mate in one in a big-bucks match against a computer. Or that of another recent champion who resigned to a machine in a drawn position.

There are many ironies in Euwe’s long life. His books are testaments to classical chess thinking, with their stress on general principles and logic. Bent Larsen thought they were too classical, and by setting down rules, as if from Mount Sinai, Euwe was limiting his readers’ ability to grow and find the illogical exceptions. “Dogmatic teachers like Tarrasch and Euwe can make C-players into B-players but then these players have trouble going any further because of their dogmatic rules,” he said. Yet, as this book shows, Euwe was a rule-breaker *par excellence*. He was skilled at finding the correct but unlikely looking move. And as for classicism, he was also a Hypermodern in spirit and, during the 1920s at least, in style.

Another irony: Euwe first became famous for *losing* matches. The games of the short 1920 match he lost to Richard Réti made a stunning impression. (Compare them with the typical mini-match of the recent FIDE knockouts.) And then there were Euwe’s match losses to Alekhine in 1926, to Bogoljubow (twice) in 1928 and to Capablanca in 1931. In each case, he was credited with performing surprising well against a better known opponent. In fact, he missed two wins in his 4-6 loss to Capa. It was these matches, not his tournament results that raised him to the top of the list of world championship challengers.

It’s easy to discount Euwe’s greatest achievement by saying that Alekhine simply didn’t take him seriously because he lacked match experience. Actually, Euwe had played an astonishing 22 matches before 1935 – while Alekhine played in



## Max Euwe: Fifth World Chess Champion

26 in his entire life. Nevertheless, the Dutchman was regarded as the underdog, perhaps because he never won a super-tournament. “In the 1935 encounter Euwe won when everyone expected him to lose,” wrote Reuben Fine. “In 1937, when everybody thought he would win, he lost.”

Today’s readers may be surprised to learn as they read these pages that Euwe intended to retire in 1933 because he had reached his peak. They may be amused that the 1935 championship match came about after Alekhine floated the fanciful notion of playing a 10-game friendly match – aboard a steamship headed from the Netherlands to Indonesia. And readers may be stunned to learn that there was no money prize at stake in 1935. The only cash handed out was Alekhine’s honorarium. “I played just for the title,” Euwe said. And to help finance the match, the players were each required to sign up to 50 autographs a day, this book reports.

These pages are rich in detail, and not just about Euwe. There are extensive mini-biographies of Alekhine, Botvinnik, Bogoljubow, Spielmann, Capablanca, Paul Keres, Géza Maróczy, Flohr, Vera Menchik and Réti – as well as less known players such as Edgard Colle, Jan Hein Donner and Salo Landau. The photos and drawings – and those caricatures – are also remarkable.

Even a chess fan who is familiar with all these names may be surprised to learn about the FIDE Championship of 1928 and the Mikhail Tal-Euwe telephone game of 1960. Or that when the Soviet Union stripped Viktor Kortschnoi of his citizenship after he defected, Euwe wanted to grant him citizenship under the flag of the sovereign state of FIDE.

Diplomat. Author. Arbiter. Innovator. Analyst. And, yes, world champion, too – at a time when the world champ was clearly the best player in the world. That was Max Euwe.

Andy Soltis  
New York  
October 2012

run, e.g., 29.g5 a5 30.gxf6+ ♖xf6  
 31.♖d2 d3 32.♗xe5 ♖xe5 33.♗xe5+  
 ♖xe5 34.♗xd3 ♖d8 35.♖e2+-.  
**29.♗d5 ♖ac8 30.♗e4 ♖c7**  
**31.♗e1 ♖ec8 32.♗d3 ♗e7**  
**33.♖xc7 ♖xc7 34.♖f1 34.♗xe5+-**  
**34...♖c4 35.♗xb7 ♖xa4 36.♖c1**  
**g5 37.f3 ♖a2 38.♗e1 a5 39.♗d2**  
**f5 40.gxf5 a4 41.♖e1 a3 42.b4**  
**♖f6 43.♗a6 g4 44.♗c4?! 44.fxg4!?**  
 e4 45.♗c4 is even easier. **44...♖xd2**  
**45.♖xd2 gxf3 46.♗c5 ♖xf5**  
 46...♗xc5 47.bxc5 e4 48.♖a1+-  
**47.♗xf7 ♗d8 48.♗e6+ ♖f6**  
**49.♗g4 ♗d5 50.♗xf3 ♗xb4**  
**51.♗e4 ♗e7 52.♗d3 ♗a2**  
**53.♖c6+ ♖g5 54.♖g6+ ♖h4**  
**55.♗xe5 ♗c3 56.♖d3 1-0**

Alekhine recognized Menchik’s ability, saying that she “is undoubtedly an exceptional phenomenon. She possesses an enormous chess talent.” She played a total of 487 games in men’s tournaments and achieved an excellent score (+147 -193 =147). Among her best results: Ramsgate (1929) – 2nd-3rd places (tied with Rubinstein), Maribor (1934), Great Yarmouth (1935), and Montevideo (1939) – 3rd place. In 1942, Menchik won a match against the 77-year-old grandmaster Mieses, 6½-3½ (+4 -1 =5). It was one of her last performances. Two years later, at the age of 38, she was killed in a London bombing.

In recognition of Vera Menchik’s contribution to chess, a number of international memorial tournaments were held in Bognor Regis, England (1954-1989). The winners included such well-known chessplayers as O’Kelly, Gligoriæ, Karaklajic, Darga, and Padevsky, among others.

### 1934-1935

This tournament became the international debut for the Soviet chessplayer Mikhail Botvinnik. Euwe had met him at the tournament in Leningrad, where their game had ended in a draw, and Botvinnik finished first. As Botvinnik recalled, at the final banquet, Euwe congratulated him and promised to invite him to the Hastings tournament. Euwe never forgot his promises. At Hastings, the roles were reversed: Euwe tied for first with Flohr and Thomas, and Botvinnik tied for 5th-6th.

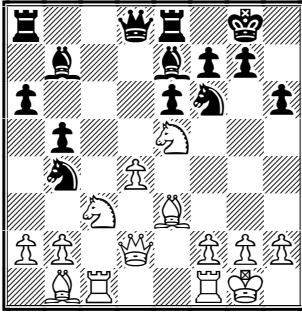
Alexander Koblents, a master from Riga making his journalistic debut, described the scene of the tournament, which “was held in a large basement room of the one of the dance halls on the beach. The games took place in the morning under electric lights. The side tournament participants played at the long tables in the middle of the room, and participating in the main tournament grandmasters and masters played at individual tables along a small stage. The judges and the press were on the stage.” He clearly found that “[t]he center of attention was the legendary world champion Vera Menchik, a stout woman with raised eyebrows that made her appear permanently surprised. Unlike other participants, she often was late. Upon entering the playing hall, Menchik would take off her coat, throw it on the floor by her table (Englishmen, incidentally, did the same with their hats), sat down and did not get up until the end of the game.”

### (4) Botvinnik – Euwe

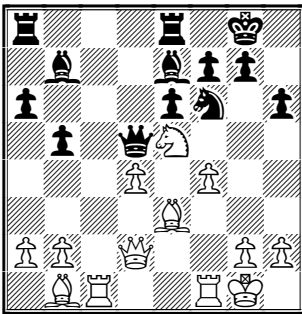
Hastings 1934

Queen’s Gambit Accepted [D27]

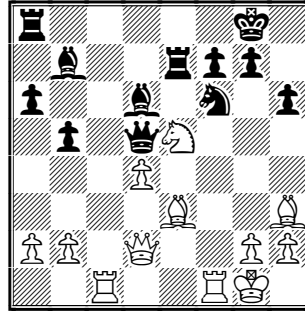
1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.d4  
 5.f3 6.c3 d6 7.g5 e6 8.f3  
 dxc4 9.Qxc4 Qe7 10.0-0 0-0  
 11.Rc1 a6 12.Qd3 h6 13.Qe3  
 14.Qh4 is the main line. 15...Qb4  
 16.Qb1 b5 17.Qe5 Qb7 18.Qd2  
 Re8 (D)



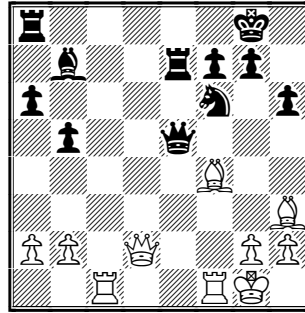
16.f4? “A favorite plan of the young Botvinnik, but as Tarrasch joked, “This move is always premature”” (Kasparov). The overly aggressive 16.Qxh6? is also wrong and refuted by 16...gxf6 17.Qxf6 Qf8; 16.a4 is a more positionally sound way to use White’s initiative. 16...Qbd5 17.Qxd5 Qxd5 (D)



18.f5? Principled but again too aggressive. White’s e5-knight, and with it the whole position, now looks shaky. 18.Qe2 limits the damage. 18...Qd6! 19.fxe6 Rxe6 20.Qf5 Re7 21.Qh3 (D)



21...Qxe5 Euwe takes the offered pawn. 21...Qe4? 22.Qc2 Re8 is the alternative way to strive to activate the whole army. 22.dxe5 Qxe5 23.Qf4 (D)

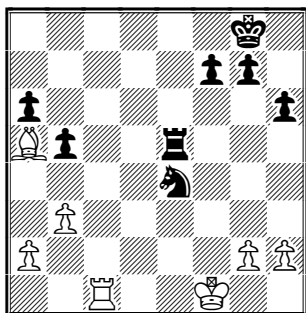


23...Qd5 Without queens, White’s bishops will not be easy to beat. 23...Qh5!? is objectively better but also more difficult to play, e.g., 24.Rce1 Qe4 25.Qd1 Qg6 26.Qg4 Re8 with strong pressure. 24.Qxd5 Qxd5 25.Qd2 Re8 26.b3 Re2 27.Rf2 Qf6 28.Qa5 Rxf2 29.Qxf2 Qe4+ 30.Qf1 Qg5 31.Qd7 Re7 32.Qf5 Re5 33.Qb1? Allowing Euwe to have the bishop pair. 33.g4 g6 34.Qc8 is better because 34...Qxc8+ Qh7 36.Qc3+- . 33...Qe4! 34.Qxe4 Qxe4 (D)

35.Rc6?! More tenacious are Euwe’s 35.Rc8+ Qh7 36.Qe1 and Kasparov’s suggestion 35.Qe2. 35...Rf5+

*Hastings 1934/35*

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	T
1	Euwe	x	1	=	=	=	1	1	=	=	1	6½
2	Thomas	0	x	=	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6½
3	Flohr	=	=	x	=	=	=	1	1	1	1	6½
4	Capablanca	=	0	=	x	0	=	1	1	1	1	5½
5	Lilienthal	=	0	=	1	x	=	1	0	=	=	5
6	Botvinnik	0	0	=	=	=	x	=	1	1	1	5
7	Mitchell	0	1	0	0	0	=	x	=	1	1	4
8	Menchik	=	0	0	0	=	0	=	x	=	1	3
9	Norman	=	0	0	0	=	0	0	=	x	0	1½
10	Milner-Barry	0	0	0	0	=	0	0	0	1	x	1½



36. ♖e1? Abandoning the kingside leaves White's king in the middle of nowhere. 36. ♖g1 was forced. 36... ♜f2 37. a4 ♜xg2 38. ♜xa6 bxa4 39. bxa4 ♜xh2 40. ♜a8+ ♖h7 41. ♙b6 ♜a2 42. a5 h5 43. a6 h4 44. a7 h3 45. ♙g1 ♟f6 46. ♖d1 ♟g4 47. ♜e8 h2 and Botvinnik resigned because Black's pawns should win. 47... ♟f2+ is even better: 48. ♖e1 ♟d3+ 49. ♖f1 (49. ♖d1 ♜xa7 50. ♙xa7 h2++) 49... ♜a1+ 50. ♖e2 ♜e1++ . 48. ♙xh2 ♜xa7 49. ♙f4 ♖g6++ 0-1

Max Euwe played carefully, without mistakes, as if he were doing calligraphy. He was preparing for the world championship match with Alekhine and

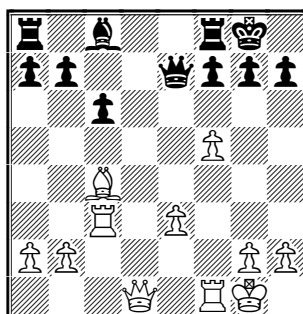
was testing his opening novelties. Euwe finished the tournament with four wins, five draws, and no losses. His game with Sir George Thomas made headlines in the world chess press.

**(5) Euwe – Thomas**

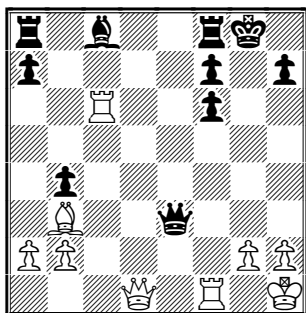
Hastings 1934

Queen's Gambit Declined [D69]

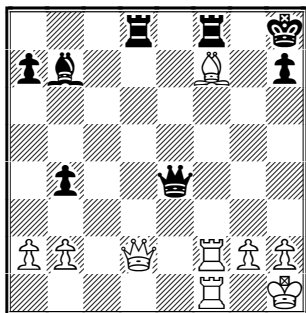
1. c4 e6 2. ♘c3 d5 3. d4 ♟f6 4. ♙g5 ♙e7 5. e3 0-0 6. ♟f3 ♟bd7 7. ♜c1 c6 8. ♙d3 dxc4 9. ♙xc4 ♟d5 10. ♙xe7 ♖xe7 11. 0-0 ♟xc3 12. ♜xc3 e5 13. ♟xe5 ♟xe5 14. dxe5 ♖xe5 15. f4 ♖e7 16. f5 (D)



16...b5? Too optimistic. Possible is 16...♜d8; the main lines are 16...♖e5!? and 16...♖f6. 17. ♙b3 b4 18. f6! gxf6 19. ♜xc6 ♖xe3+ 20. ♖h1 (D)



**20...♙b7?** White will now have an extra pawn, and the pressure against g2 does not compensate for this. So 20...♙e6 21.♙xe6 ♜xe6 22.♚g4+ ♚g5 23.♚xe6+ ♜h8 was a better practical chance. **21.♞cxf6 ♜e4 22.♚d2 ♜h8 23.♙xf7 23.♞xf7!?** **23...♞ac8 24.♞f2 ♞cd8?** This loses directly, but good advice is hard to give anyway. (D)



**25.♚g5!** 25.♙d5? ♞xf2 26.♚xf2 ♚xd5 27.♚f6+ ♜g8 28.♞f3 ♚d1+ 29.♞f1 ♚d5=; 25.♙g6?? ♚xg2+ 26.♞xg2 ♞xf1# **25...♞d6 26.♙d5!!** and Black resigned as 26...♞xf2! runs into 27.♚g8#. **1-0**

### 1938-1939

After a four-year hiatus, Euwe competed at Hastings again, this time as the ex-world champion. In nine matches he scored five wins, drew three games, and lost one. For the first time, he did not

win first prize, yielding it to the Hungarian chessplayer Laszlo Szabo (7½ points).

### 1945-1946

The Victory Tournament was dominated by the Homer of Chess, Savielly Tartakower. During the war, he had participated in the French Resistance and was known as Lieutenant Cartier. Tartakower scored 9½ points in 11 rounds, 2½ points ahead of the Dutch champion Euwe, the U.S. champion Denker, and Steiner. Ekström surprised everyone by finishing second (9 points).

### 1949-1950

Euwe placed third in his “farewell” tournament at Hastings (6½ points), behind Szabo (8 points out of 9) and Rossolimo (7½).

### Amsterdam Tournaments, 1920, 1936, 1950

In his hometown, the largest chess center in The Netherlands, Max Euwe participated in three international tournaments, seven club tournaments, seven quads (i.e., tournaments with 4 players), three tournaments with six players, and a collegiate tournament. The most significant were the international competitions.

Seven players participated in the tournament that took place on May 20-26, 1920. Among them were such great players as Réti, Maróczy, and Tartakower. Max Euwe celebrated his 19th birthday by taking fourth place after Réti (4½ points), Maróczy, and Tartakower (4 points). He beat three of his countrymen, lost to Réti and Maróczy, and drew against Tartakower.