

Lesson 29: Chess History—World Champions

The Champions

The very best chess players are awarded a special title: Grandmaster. It takes years of hard work and practice to become a Grandmaster. Only a select few Grandmasters have achieved the ultimate title: World Champion.

There's a lot to be learned by studying the games of the World Champions, through reading books and internet articles, or even by watching online videos. The CSC Team has chosen three of their favourite champions below. Do you agree with our choice? Who would you have chosen instead?

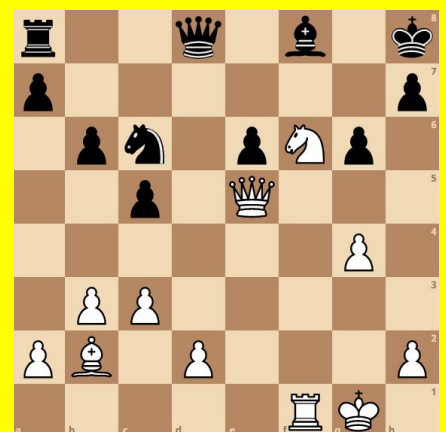
Magnus Carlsen

Our selection wouldn't be complete without the current World Champion, Magnus Carlsen. Having become a Grandmaster aged just 13, the Norwegian went on to win the top title by defeating Vishy Anand in 2013 and has since defended his crown in 2014, 2016, and 2018. Along the way Carlsen achieved the highest rating in chess history: 2882!

Carlsen is a great all-rounder, equally comfortable playing complicated midgames or technical endgames. He's well-known for his stamina and fighting spirit, often waiting until the sixth or seventh hour of the game to pounce on a tiring opponent's mistake. In this game he spotted a spectacular way to win yet another game against his great rival Anand:

1. Ne8+ Kg8 (1...Nxe5 loses to 2. Rxf8#).
2. Qh8+ Kxh8
3. Rxf8#

The next World Championship match is in 2021. Can Carlsen continue his march towards becoming the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time)? Only time will tell.



Grandmaster Test—Lesson 28

Answer: Black draws with 1...Kf7 and then shuffles between f7 and f8 forever. The White king cannot escape and if they play the pawn to h7 they'll be in stalemate!

Chess Ratings

When you play competitive chess you are given a rating. Win a game and the rating goes up; lose and it goes down! A rating tells you how good a player is: 800 (beginner), 1600 (club player), 2500 (Grandmaster), 2800+ (World Champion).



Vera Menchik

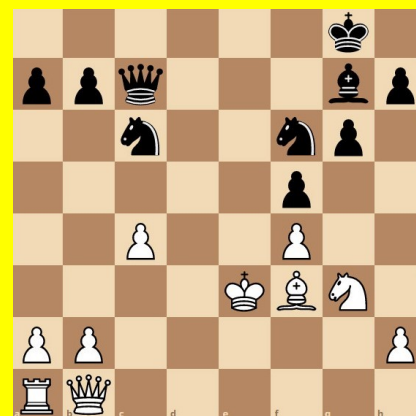
Vera Menchik is remembered as a pioneer of women's chess: the first woman to play in the British Championship and the first female competitor in a master tournament. She became the first Women's World Champion in 1927 and held that title longer than anyone else, 17 years. Her incredible record in world championship games may never be beaten: 78 wins, four draws, and only one defeat!

Born in Russia, Vera Menchik learned chess at the age of nine. She moved to England as a teenager and quickly rose through the chess ranks, scoring many wins thanks to her logical play and expertise in the endgame. The diagram above is from one of her games against her main world championship rival, Sonja Graf. Playing White, Menchik won neatly with 1. Rd7 Qxd7 2. Qxh5. This threatens checkmate with the queen on h7 or h8 and can only be prevented by 2...gxh5. This in turn allows 3. Bh7#. A great finish!

Vera Menchik is the only Briton to become an adult World Chess Champion.

Bobby Fischer

Perhaps the most famous chess player of all time, Bobby Fischer played a match for the World Championship in 1972 which became headline news around the globe. Losing the first game due to a bad mistake, Fischer refused to turn up for the second round, losing that one by default. He was eventually persuaded to return to the board in Game 3, scored a famous victory, and went on to convincingly defeat his great opponent Boris Spassky. He then vanished from chess completely, only returning to beat Spassky in a second match in 1992. What an enigma!



From the diagram, Fischer won with an amazing queen sacrifice: 1...Qxf4+. After 2. Kxf4 Bh6 is checkmate! This game and many others were immortalised in Fischer's classic book, *My 60 Memorable Games*. Well worth a read.

We hope you like our choice of champions. There are so many others to choose from. Great attackers like Alekhine, Kasparov, Polgar; amazing strategists like Petrosian; end-game experts like Capablanca and Karpov. We'd love to hear your own favourites.