

# **Chess Warrior**

## **The Life & Games of Géza Maróczy**

**László Jakobetz**

**Foreword by Lajos Portisch**



2024

Russell Enterprises, LLC  
Portsmouth, NH USA

Chess Warrior  
The Life & Games of Géza Maróczy

by László Jakobetz

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ISBN: 978-1-949859-93-5 (print)

ISBN: 978-1-949859-94-2 (eBook)

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Published by:

Russell Enterprises, LLC

PO Box 332

Portsmouth, NH 03802 USA

<http://www.russell-enterprises.com>

[info@russell-enterprises.com](mailto:info@russell-enterprises.com)

Cover design by Fierce Ponies

Cover image by Sofia Polgar

Printed in the United States of America



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## Author's Preface

It would be easy to think that the life of Hungary's most significant chessplayer in the half-century after 1890 – figuratively speaking – is an open chess book. After all, numerous writings, newspaper articles, and volumes have been published about Géza Maróczy's achievements and his almost countless social engagements, and a significant portion of these were written by Maróczy himself. From a century-long perspective, it seems impossible to say anything new about him, but among the news of the contemporary press, we find several things that make the memory of the grandmaster even more exciting. It is worth exploring and getting to know those events which have not yet appeared in chess literature.

In this book, I present this data in two chapters, as Géza Maróczy's life also had two parts: besides family and work, there was room for chess playing worldwide, albeit with smaller or larger conflicts. No one is alive today who personally knew Grandmaster Maróczy, but his life's path can still be traced.

During my work spanning more than two years, I reviewed tens of thousands of newspaper articles and references, as well as hundreds of (family) photos. I tried to remain objective, proceed as cautiously as possible, and verify the information from as many (even foreign) sources as possible. Nevertheless, there may be inaccuracies, debatable information, mostly stemming from the sensationalism of the newspaper writers of that time, despite Maróczy occasionally warning them in a friendly manner not to write "a lot of nonsense." (If the dear reader finds any glaring errors or can provide substantive additions regarding the life of Géza Maróczy and his family, I kindly ask you to let me know.)

I have included many quotations in my work, most of the time trying to preserve the original writing style, even if it cannot be considered impeccable from a stylistic point of view, but it reflects the language of that era well.

I also emphasized the social and political reality of the 19th and 20th centuries. Central Europe and, within it, the history of Hungary (with two lost world wars) present a special picture that cannot be separated from the chess life of that era either. I endeavored to present the human side of one of the most famous Hungarian chessplayers realistically, even if this meant dismantling a few legends.

Grandmaster Maróczy has more than a thousand recorded games. In my work, I have attempted to include many of the unpublished ones (meaning those missing from databases and chess magazines). Of course, even so, there may still be a few hiding in the English-language newspaper archives (containing 900 million pages), the Austrian and Hungarian archives (with 50 million pages each), and the Dutch newspaper archives (with 15 million pages).

Since Maróczy did not focus on a sea of variations in his game analyses, I followed suit. Instead, I highlighted strategic observations and tried to shed light on the psychological turning points of the games using the concrete findings of computer chess programs. (This led to the correction of frequently misunderstood computer moves.) But I did not just present the often incomprehensible computer moves; I also included variations that are easier for the human mind to grasp. In addition, I tried to provide a brief glimpse into chess history regarding the opponents and the "evolution" of the openings.

Please, with all this in mind, read the most comprehensive Maróczy biography to date, and I wish you a pleasant reading experience and enjoyable browsing of the corrected crosstables!

László Jakobetz  
Budapest  
April 2024

## Foreword



Lajos Portisch

During my life and career, I have always felt a profound sense of longing because I never had the opportunity to personally meet Géza Maróczy. In 1950, when he regularly attended the Candidates Tournament in Budapest, I was just a little-known chessplaying boy from Zalaegerszeg. Not to mention the travel difficulties of that time, which kept my hometown and the capital city apart.

However, my first chess books, *Theory of Openings* and *World Championships at the Top*, were written by Grandmaster Maróczy. I borrowed them from my esteemed instructor, Antal Csuti, whom I fondly remember, and they greatly contributed to my development.

Maróczy's positional chess philosophy strongly influenced my game, and like him, one of my favorite weapons against 1.e4 was the French Defense. With the exception of the final years of my competitive career, it was an integral part of my repertoire. The famous Maróczy Bind brought me numerous successes with White for a long time (including victories over the likes of Larsen during his prime), although in my games it typically arose from the English Opening.

Géza Maróczy's analyses had a lasting impact not only on me but also, I believe, on my Hungarian contemporaries. We all tried to internalize his thoughts. In this regard, my advice to today's young chessplayers is to read old chess books rather than overly imitate computer play.

Chess used to be a sportsmanlike duel, and I do not think we could find anyone among the past world-class players who resorted to dishonorable means to win or gain an advantage. Lasker is known to have intentionally provoked his opponents with his unpleasant cigars, and there were occasions when Nimzowitsch pointed this out. The true gentleman Géza Maróczy might not have even objected to Lasker's foul cigars if their long-awaited title match had taken place. Let us not forget that smoking was allowed for a long time, even in the most prestigious tournaments.

At the Tilburg Interpolis tournaments, not only the players but even the arbiter smoked their smelly cigarettes! The Soviet grandmasters did not dare mention it (although Tal and Korchnoi, among their compatriots, were passionate smokers) for fear of not receiving any more invitations. Once, Polugaevsky came to me to complain about the unpleasant smoke cloud. At my request, the tournament director reluctantly extinguished his cigar. (This problem was not limited to tournament rooms; in Spain, for example, one could light up during theater performances.)

One irreparable loss for Hungarian and universal chess is that the encounter between Lasker and Maróczy never happened. Of course, the competition for world supremacy, both in the past and present, has not always taken place within the most acceptable and regulated framework. In our rapidly changing era and era of declining values, it is especially important to remember our great figures. Until now, very few books worthy of Géza Maróczy's influence and chess legacy have been published worldwide. Therefore, I am delighted that this comprehensive biography presents to chess-loving readers the exceptional personalities and chess events of past eras, along with many interesting lessons and insights for the present generation.

Lajos Portisch  
Budapest  
April 2024

**(61) Maróczy/Saulson – Köhler/Phillips**

New York (Manhattan Chess Club Consultation Game)

February 26, 1906

French Defense [C11]

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♖c3 ♗f6 4.e5 ♗fd7 5.f4 c5 6.dxc5**

Maróczy always opted for this move order, holding back his g1-knight.

**6...♗xc5 7.♖g4 g6!?**

A risky move that gives White a strong initiative, but with Black having good counterplay on the queenside. Normal here would have been 7...0-0 8.♗d3 f5 9.♖h3 ♗c6 10.♗f3, etc. (Maróczy)

**8.a3?! ♗c6 9.h4 ♗xg1!?**

9...♖b6 would have been much more unpleasant.

**10.♖xg1 ♖b6**

10...♖a5 11.♖b1 gives White a slight edge.

**11.♖h1 ♗c5?!?**

It would have been wiser to prevent White from pushing h4-h5!.

**12.h5**

It was worth considering 12.b4 h5 13.♖g3 (13.bxc5 ♖a5 14.♖f3 d4 15.♖h3 dxc3 16.♖xc3 ♖xc3+ 17.♖xc3+-) 13...♗e4 14.♗xe4 dxe4 15.♗e3 ♖c7 16.♗c5, when Black cannot castle.

**12...♗d7 13.♖h3 0-0-0**

Black has wisely averted danger, and now threatens to open a file: 13...d4! 14.hxg6! fxg6 (14...dxc3 15.gxf7+ ♖xf7 16.♖h5+ ♖f8 17.b4 ♗d4 18.♖h6+ ♖e8 19.♖g7 ♖f8 20.♖xh7 ♗a4 21.♗e3+-) 15.b4 dxc3 16.bxc5 ♖c7 17.♖xc3 ♗e7 18.♖b1 and Black's wish to castle long is not a real option anymore.

**14.b4**

After 14.♖e2!, b2-b4 would have been a more powerful threat.

**14...♗e4?**

This was the last chance to play 14...d4. The move played leads to a losing position.

**15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♗e3! ♖c7 17.♗c5 ♗xe5**

The best option, even if it is dubious.

**18.fxe5 ♖xe5 19.c3 f5 20.♖g5 ♖hg8 21.♗xa7! ♗c6 22.♗d4 ♖d5 23.hxg6 hxg6!?**

The rook capture was better.

**24.♖f6 g5 25.♖h6**

25.b5! ♗xb5 26.♗xb5 ♖xb5 27.♖xe6+ was a straightforward win.

**25...♖d6 26.♖h8 ♖xh8 27.♖xh8+ ♖d8 28.♖e5 f4 29.b5!?**

White aims to exchange everything, hence he sacrifices a pawn. Much more solid was 29.♖xd5, then pushing the a-, b- and c-pawns. It shows that not merely having a pawn majority but preserving the two bishops is best for White. Total simplification only

works if it leads to a winning endgame for White, otherwise it is better to keep the pieces on the board. This is the case here, too. (Maróczy)

**29...♗xb5 30.♗xb5 ♖xe5 31.♗xe5 ♖d5**

Maróczy did not think the endgame was winning for White. Then he realized that the key is the rook exchange. Now, White should have tried to force that, since it is a basic principle to exchange pieces and not pawns when ahead in material!

**32.♗xf4 gxf4 33.a4 ♖c7 34.♖e2!?**

After 34.♖d1!, if Black avoids the exchange, White's rook will become active.

**34...♖g5 35.♖f1 ♖d6 36.♖d1+ ♖d5?**

36...♖e5 was the most persistent.

**37.♖e2!?**

37.♖xd5+ exd5 38.g3! f3 39.♖f2 ♖e5 40.♖e3 is a way to win, since the bishop holds Black's fixed pawns from the single diagonal.

**37...♖e5**

37...f3+ 38.gxf3 exf3+ 39.♖e1 f2+ 40.♖e2 f1 ♖+ 41.♖xf1 is much less simplifying than the game continuation.

**38.♖h1! b6**

As previously noted, 38...♖d8 is the most tenacious.

**39.♖h5+ ♖d6 40.♖h4!? ♖f5 41.♖h7!?**

After 41.g3! fxg3 42.♖xe4, sooner or later Black's isolated pawns will fall, while White will be able to keep at least one.

**41...♖f8 42.♖b7 ♖c5 43.♖c7+**

Without the exchange of rooks it is difficult to win, although Black only has one pawn for the bishop. However, the corner color is good for white.

**43...♖d5 44.♗c4+ ♖d6 45.♖b7 ♖g8 46.♖xb6+!?**

46.♖f2 ♖g3 47.♗b3 ♖c6 48.♖e7 ♖xc3 49.♖xe6+ ♖c5 50.♗d1 ♖c4 51.♖f6 f3 52.gxf3 exf3 53.♖xf3 is considered winning, as Black cannot exchange pawns.

**46...♖c5 47.♗xe6?**

47.♖b4 ♖xg2+ 48.♖f1 ♖c2 49.♗a6! ♖xc3 (49...♖d5 50.♗b7+-) 50.♖xe4 was the path to victory.

**47...♖xg2+ 48.♖f1 ♖c2 49.♖b5+**

After 49.♖b4, Black would have had to find 49...♖c1+! 50.♖e2 f3+ 51.♖f2 ♖c2+ 52.♖g3 ♖g2+ 53.♖f4 f2 54.♖b5+ ♖d6 55.♗c4 ♖g1 56.a5 (56.♖xe4 ♖g4+=) 56...f1 ♖+ 57.♗xf1 ♖xf1+ 58.♖xe4, with a theoretical draw.

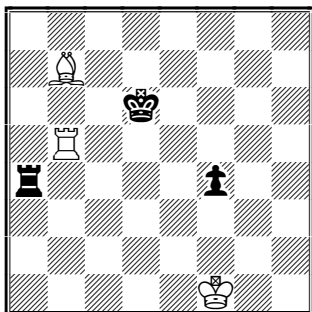
**49...♖d6 50.♗f5 ♖xc3?**

Surprising, but this is still losing; instead, 50...♖c1+! 51.♖g2 (51.♖e2 ♖xc3 52.♖b4 f3+ 53.♖f2 ♖c2+ 54.♖e3 ♖e2+ 55.♖d4 f2 56.♗h3 e3 57.♖b6+ ♖c7 58.♖e6 ♖e1 59.♖xe3 f1 ♖ 60.♗xf1 ♖xf1=) 51...♖c2+ 52.♖h3 ♖xc3+ 53.♖g4 f3 54.♗xe4 f2 55.♗g2 ♖c4+ was the way to victory.

**51.♗xe4?**

Letting his last chance slip: 51.♖b4! ♜c1+ (51...♖f3+ 52.♖g2 ♖g3+ 53.♖h2 e3 54.♙d3! ♖g4 55.♖h3 ♖g3+ 56.♖h4+-) 52.♖f2! e3+ 53.♖e2 ♖a1 54.♙d3! and the black pawns will evaporate.

**51...♖c4 52.♙b7 ♖x4**



The position is a theoretical draw, hence Maróczy thought it was not worthwhile to show the remaining moves. For the historical record, and to show Black's resourceful defense, we shall take a look:

**53.♖f2 ♖c4 54.♖f3 ♖c5 55.♖b4 ♖f5 56.♙e4 ♖f8 57.♖b5 ♖e6 58.♖g4 f3 59.♙x3 ♖g8+ 60.♖f4 ♖f8+ 61.♖e4 ♖d6 62.♖e3 ♖h8 63.♖d4 ♖h2 64.♖b6+ ♖c7 65.♖c6+ ♖d7 66.♖g6 ♖f2 67.♙d5 ♖d2+ 68.♖c5 ♖e2 69.♖g4 ♖e7 70.♖f4 ♖d7 71.♙c4 ♖e5+ 72.♖d4 ♖e1 73.♙d3 ♖e6 74.♙c2 ♖e2 75.♙b3+ ♖d7 76.♖f6 ♖d2+ 77.♖c5 ♖e2 78.♙c4 ♖e3 79.♖d5 ♖e1 80.♖f7+ ♖e8 81.♖a7 ♖f8 82.♖d6 ♖e7!**

From an intellectual point of view, these stalemate motifs are quite nice.

**83.♖a1 ♖b7 84.♖g1 ♖d7+! 85.♖e5 ♖g7 86.♖a1 ♖e7+ 87.♙e6 ♖b7 88.♖h1 ♖g7 89.♖d6 ♖b7 90.♖h8+ ♖g7 91.♖g8+ ♖f6 92.♖f8+ ♖g6 93.♖e5 ♖a7 94.♖f3 ♖a5+ 95.♙d5 ♖g7 96.♖g3+ ♖f8 97.♖d6 ♖a6+ 98.♖d7 ♖a7+ 99.♖d8 ♖d7+! ½-½**

The Hungarian grandmaster commented on the 50-move rule a few years later: "Every player has the right to demand the application of the 50-move rule to escape from their opponent's futile mating attempts."

We do not know if that game or some other was the inspiration, but the black duo's second player had published at that time in the *ACB* – dedicated to the world champions of chess – an ironic poem by Harold M. Phillips about Lasker: "Waiting for the Stakes." The first two parts are bantering about Janowski and Tarrasch, the third about Maróczy, accusing them of backing out of a world championship match. In the fourth verse, the poet assumes a friendly tone about

his compatriot Marshall, though... Let's take a look at the part that is about Maróczy:

*"At last they told me of Maróczy so bold,  
He'll certainly get the backing sure.  
He came over here, just to seek me out;  
Only a bluff your dollars to allure.  
He signed a contract he never meant to keep,  
And soon he sailed away to wife and home.  
And there I had some opening I was going to  
spring on him,  
Securely stowed within my upper dome.*

Chorus:

*There was I waiting for the stakes  
Waiting for the stakes,  
Waiting for the stakes,  
Then I knew the bunch of them were fakes  
Lord, how it did upset me.  
All along he never sent a note  
I guess I had his goat,  
At least he might have wrote –  
"Can't get away, at home I've got to stay,  
My wife won't let me."*

We can amusingly associate it with the fact that Maróczy escaped from America as quickly as his fellow Hungarian, Harry Houdini, escaped from the East River in handcuffs. At the same time, Phillips held numerous high positions in his country throughout his long life.

Since Maróczy's book only presents his victories against unknown masters (although many of his games with hasty analysis appeared in the *American Chess Bulletin* with overly complicated English descriptive notation), let's now look at his loss against Bampton, as well as his draws against Marshall and Finn, noting that these were not serious tournament games but rather exhibition games played in front of an audience.

**(62) Bampton – Maróczy**

Philadelphia

March 1906

Ruy Lopez [C61]

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♙b5 ♗d4**

The Bird Variation, named after master Henry Edward Bird, although his compatriot and Shakespeare-expert Staunton played it earlier. Maróczy only employed it in casual games.

**4.♗xd4 exd4 5.0-0 ♗e7?!**

A bit artificial, instead of the natural 5...♙c5.

**6.♙e2?!**



A short-sighted move; after 6.d3 c6 7.♙c4, White is better. According to erroneous databases, in 1925 Dr. Árpád Vajda defeated Alekhine with the text move in a friendly game in Budapest. The only problem is that the Slavic chess talent did not visit the Hungarian capital at that time. According to editor Árpád Földeák, the move was played in 1921 in their blindfold game, on the platform of the Budapest Keleti Railway Station, when Alekhine's train to Prague was delayed. It is certain that the Hungarian master won!

**6...g6 7.d3 ♘g7 8.f4!?**

Developing the c1-bishop was an option.

**8...0-0**

After 8...d6, White's play would be slowed down.

**9.♘d2?!**

9.f5! really restricts Black's position.

**9...d5 10.♘f3**

After 10.e5, 10...♘f5 11.♘f3 f6 could follow, so White refrains from closing the center.

**10...b6 11.♖h1?!**

11.e5 would have been much more rational, since after 11...♘f5, 12.c3! is to White's advantage.

**11...c5 12.♖e1 ♘b7**

Thanks to his dominating bishop Black is already better, as the tension in the center can no longer be sustained.

**13.e5 ♘c6!?**

Maróczy was not satisfied with the middlegame after 13...♘f5 14.g4 ♘e3 15.♙xe3 dxe3 16.d4 f6 17.c3, so he goes in for complications.

**14.♙d2 f6 15.exf6**

15.e6 f5 (15...♙c8 16.f5!? gxf5 17.♘h4 ♙xe6 18.♘f5±) 16.g4 would have caused massive chaos, since 16...fxg4?! does not really work because of 17.♘g5 h5 18.♙xg4! hxg4 19.♖h4 ♖f5 20.♖h7+ ♖f8 21.e7+! ♙xe7 22.♖fe1! ♖f6 23.♖e6.

**15...♖xf6 16.♖g3 ♖ae8 17.♖ae1 ♘e7 18.♘h4! ♘f5?!**

18...♙c8 19.♙f3 ♖d6 would have avoided the later problems.

**19.♘xf5 ♖xf5 20.♙g4 ♖f7 21.♖h3 ♙c8**

Maróczy has been holding on tenaciously, the defense peaking at the 26th move.

**22.♖xe8**

22.♙xc8 ♖xc8 23.g4 would have generated more tension, but White preferred instead to trust his control of the open file.

**22...♖xe8 23.♖e1 ♙xg4 24.♖xg4 ♖f7 25.♖e6?! ♖xe6 26.♖xe6 ♖f7! 27.♖e2**

27.♖d6? is a mistake in view of 27...♖e8 28.♖xd5 ♖e2.

**27...h5 28.g3 ♖e8!?**

The grandmaster accepts the theoretical disadvantage of the kingside pawn majority because he understands that the position is otherwise a draw. But this choice will create its own problems...

**29.♖xe8 ♖xe8 30.♖g2 ♖d7 31.h3**

31.g4 hxg4 32.♖g3 would have led to the game continuation without additional twists and turns.

**31...♖e6 32.♖f3 b5 33.b3?!**

Only the immediate 33.g4 can prevent Black from getting a passed pawn.

**33...♙f6**

It is surprising, but after 33...b4! 34.g4 hxg4+ 35.♖xg4 ♙f6 36.♙e1 ♙e7, White cannot prevail in the pawn ending: 37.♙h4 ♙xh4 38.♖xh4 ♖f5 39.♖g3 c4! 40.♖f3 (40.dxc4?? dxc4 41.bxc4 d3! 42.cxd3 a5 43.♖f3 a4 44.♖e3 b3 45.axb3 a3+-) 40...c3! 41.♖g3 ♖f6 42.♖g4 a6! 43.h4 a5 44.f5 gxh5+ 45.♖f4 ♖g6 46.h5+ ♖xh5 47.♖x5 ♖h4 48.♖f4! and White has to hold the draw with the flank-opposition.

**34.g4**

After 34.b4 c4, there is no winning plan for White.

**34...hxg4+ 35.♖xg4**

After taking the pawn, there is no chance for White to penetrate with his king to Black's side of the board.

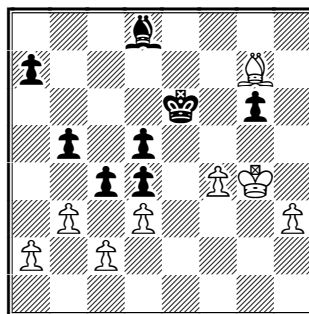
**35...♙e7 36.♙e1**

If 36.♙a5, then 36...b4 shuts down the white bishop.

**36...♙d8 37.♙h4 ♙c7**

We know already that after 37...♙xh4 38.♖xh4 (38.f5+ ♖f6 39.♖xh4 ♖xf5 40.♖g3=), 38...♖f5 39.♖g3 b4 40.h4 a5 should be an easy draw.

**38.♙g5 c4 39.♙h6 ♙d8 40.♙g7**



**40...a5?**

Since losing the d4-pawn would not mean the end of the game, 40...♙b6? is therefore unnecessary: 41.♖g5 ♖f7 42.♙f6! a5 43.f5 gxh5 44.♖xh5 and Black can resign. 40...a6 was a good move, while after the text, Black's position becomes untenable since an additional pawn now finds itself on a black square.

**41.a4! bxa4 42.bxa4 cxd3 43.cxd3 ♙e7 44.♙e5!? g5**

In the event of 44...♙d8, 45.♙xd4 ♙e7 (45...♖d6 46.f5+-) 46.♙b6 ♙b4 47.♖g5 ♖f7 48.f5 ♙d2+ 49.♖g4 is a way to victory.



*Delmar-Maróczy New York (MCC), March 3, 1906.  
In the middle, Ettliger, the tournament director.*

45. ♖c7 gxf4 46. ♖xa5 1-0 Black resigned, since, as they say, two passed pawns are double pneumonia.

**(63) Finn – Maróczy**

New York (Manhattan Chess Club)

March 4, 1906

Four Knights Game [C48]

1.e4 e5 2. ♖f3 ♗c6 3. ♗c3 ♖f6 4. ♖b5 d6 5. d4 ♗d7?!

During his exhibition games, Maróczy frequently employed novelties to test his lines and opponents. This particular move did not attract many followers. In general, he had the following opinion about fine-tuning openings: “Experience teaches us that it is advisable to keep the opponent in the dark for as long as possible regarding the specifics of our development method, if for no other reason than to require the opponent to spend time considering the great number of possibilities. In timed games, a loss of one or two minutes has often led to defeat.”

6.0-0 ♖e7 7. ♗e2?! 0-0 8. ♗g3 ♗xd4

By transposition we enter a sub-variation, a favorite of Chigorin, in which Maróczy (at Vienna, 1898) played 8... ♖f6 9.c3 ♗db8?! 10.h3; he was worse but managed to draw anyhow.

9. ♗xd4 exd4 10. ♖xd4 ♖f6 11. ♖d1 ♗c5 12. c3 ♖e6 13. ♖e3 a6 14. ♖e2 ♖e8 15. ♖xc5!?

White gives up his bishop pair for a kingside pawn majority, but this does not yield a real advantage for him.

15... dxc5 16. ♖c2 ♖d6

16... g5! 17. ♗h5 ♖e5 would have created interesting complications, but Maróczy rarely went in for such lines.

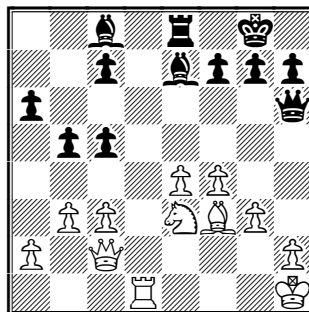
17.f4 ♖b6 18. ♖h1

18. ♗h5 or 18.e5 was a much more intense follow-up for White.

18... ♖h4 19. b3 ♖ad8 20. ♖ad1 ♖xd1 21. ♖xd1 ♖c8?!

If it was difficult to find any move more aggressive than 21...c4!

22. ♗f1 ♖h6 23. g3 ♖e7 24. ♗e3 b5 25. ♖f3



25... g5!?

Without this, White’s advantage would only increase.

26. ♗d5 ♖d8 27. f5 ♖b7 28. ♖g2?! ♖g7! 29. ♖h1 ♖e5

After 29...g4 30. ♖g2 h5, Black is in the driver’s seat.

30. c4

This should have been played earlier.

30... ♖e7 31. ♖c3 ♖xc3 32. ♗xc3 b4?!

32... ♖f6 33. ♗d5 ♖e5 promised a more substantial and slightly better endgame for Black, but perhaps Maróczy did not want to play for hours.

33. ♗d5 ♖xd5 34. ♖xd5 ♖d6 35. ♖g1 f6 36. ♖f2 ♖g7 37. ♖e3 a5 38. ♖d3 ♖h8 39. g4 ♖b8 40. h3 a4 ½-½ The players agreed to a draw, although it might have been better to see White’s move first.

**(64) Marshall – Maróczy**

New York (Manhattan Chess Club)

February 28, 1906

Queens Gambit Declined [D61]



*Hanham-Maróczy New York (MCC),  
March 3, 1906.*