

GIDEON STÅHLBERG

AN EPOCH IN SWEDISH CHESS

VOLUME I

The Musketeer Years 1908–1939

Peter Holmgren



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Introduction

The title of this book is *Gideon Ståhlberg, An Epoch in Swedish Chess*. So, what other epochs constitute Swedish chess history?

Gentlemen's clubs or shady pubs

Until the turn of the 20th century, chess was played by upper-class men in exclusive gentlemen's clubs and by less fortunate individuals spending their time in dark and smoky bars and cafés. If there were any tournaments, their results never left the inner circles. This changed when the two brothers, Ludvig and Gustaf Collijn, entered the scene in the late 1890s. With financial support from their mother and later at their own expense, they were able to invite international top players and began to organize the chess community into clubs, districts and a national federation. Their goal was to foster players capable of competing with the world's elite, but also to spread chess to all social groups. They used their international network to help some promising players participate in European tournaments and visit grandmasters for training. One early example is Gustaf Nyholm, the first Swedish champion. His talent was undisputed, but his results suffered from a lack of stamina. The breakthrough came with Gösta Stoltz in the early 1930s, and when he was joined by Gideon Ståhlberg and Erik Lundin, Collijns' dream came true.

Gideon Ståhlberg

No one has left his mark on Swedish chess like Gideon Ståhlberg. It is fair to say that he constitutes an epoch by himself. His competitive achievements, prolific writing, engagement in Swedish chess organization, strong personality, and witty and ironic, sometimes sarcastic, humor may have been surpassed by someone in each separate case, but never as a whole. He was twice a candidate for the World Championship, took an active part in the Swedish congress discussions, "owned the room" he entered and made many appreciated speeches and lectures. He toured Sweden and the neighboring countries, spent nine years in South America, wrote textbooks on chess, a series of tournament books and served as arbiter in six world championship matches. Ståhlberg also edited weekly columns in several newspapers throughout his entire career and often reported daily during tournament play and arbitration work. After dominating the South American chess scene together with Miguel Najdorf during the war and up to his departure in 1948, Ståhlberg remained popular in Latin America for the rest of his life. Few Western grandmasters reached the level of respect he did in the Soviet Union.

Ulf Andersson

After Ståhlberg's death in 1967, it took only a couple of years until Ulf Andersson presented himself by winning the Swedish Championship in 1969. He quickly climbed the ladder and qualified for the grandmaster title in 1972. Throughout the 1980s, he participated in the international top tournaments with excellent results. If it hadn't been for his extreme unwillingness to lose and avoidance of risks, he could have been closer to the world championship than he actually was. His achievements and

importance, inspiring a whole generation of Swedish grandmasters, must also be considered an epoch in its own right.

If Ståhlberg ranks higher than Ulf Andersson, that will always be the question, but without a doubt, Ståhlberg's influence on Swedish chess cannot be overestimated. This work attempts to provide a factual basis for readers to form their own opinions.

Ståhlberg had, and still has, a reputation for being a “connoisseur of wine and spirits” and as a rather cursory writer about chess. There are too many testimonies about the former to be totally dismissed. However, referring to the period covered in this volume, it is simply not true. He was, in fact, a very fit person, probably exercising his athletic interests in table tennis and other sports quite frequently. It is true that Ståhlberg's annotations in the press after coming home from South America often are quite brief and fit into the same mold, but during the 1930s, his game notes were extensive, sometimes using military vocabulary, and it is evident from the games by him and his compatriots that they engaged in advanced opening preparations.

The early career of Gideon Ståhlberg, covered in this first volume subtitled “*The Musketeer Years*”, coincided with a period of Swedish chess during which several of its masters developed into world-class players. Had all of them performed at their highest level at the same time, the national team could very well have been the strongest in the world.

When Ståhlberg, 27 years old, entered the playing hall for the sixth chess Olympiad in Warsaw 1935, he was highly motivated and in top form. After a very busy year, coming directly from two months of touring in Finland and an incidental journey, he wanted to show the chess world how strong a team Sweden had become. But before going into these details, let's take it from the beginning.

1930 – Apprentice in the Chess World

Instead of competing for the Gothenburg City Championship, Ståhlberg characterized the participants in some detail in *Ny Tid* of January 12. He assigned the best chances to Eric Jonsson but noted that the experienced Ernst Lundin, the eventual winner, often finished among the prize winners. Jonsson took second place and debuting Gunnar Skarp, who received a special heads up from Ståhlberg, finished third.¹ For his club *Majorna*, Ståhlberg gave lessons in chess theory, the first one on February 24.²

What must have been Ståhlberg's first simultaneous tour was arranged in February. He made seven displays in the vicinity of Gothenburg, starting in Lysekil and ending up in Falkenberg.

Match against Bogoljubow

April 4 – April 8

When a match with Efim Bogoljubow looked like a reality, Ståhlberg prepared himself by theoretical studies and a couple of training sessions. Three players of master or first category strength from *Majorna* lined up

as sparring partners by playing standard time games, with predetermined openings, simultaneously against Ståhlberg in the club room in Allécaféet. It is not known who played or what openings were used, but the first occasion on March 24 was won 3–0 by Ståhlberg after three hours. How the second meeting on March 31 ended was never reported in the press.³

Bogoljubow came from Triberg to Gothenburg on February 28. There he gave two simultaneous displays before he embarked on his second major tour through Sweden, including visits to Kiruna in the very north, Visby on the Baltic island of Gotland and Karlskrona in south east. Bogoljubow turned out to be far from unwilling when a match with Ståhlberg was suggested during his days in Gothenburg. A generous attitude considering he had nothing to gain by defeating Ståhlberg. When passing Stockholm, a preliminary agreement was reached, provided that the financing of SEK 300 could be guaranteed. Approaching the end of his exhausting journey around Sweden, the match with Ståhlberg was secured, thanks to a cunning move by Knut Robertson. When this opportunity to see Ståhlberg testing his strength against top notch opposition was turned down both by the Swedish and the

Simultaneous displays in February/March 1930								
Date	Place	Premises	Notes	#	+	=	-	%
9.2.1930	Lysekil			19	12	4	3	74%
13.2.1930	Borås	Café Orion	7:30 pm, 5h	21	18	2	1	90%
14.2.1930	Tråvad			25	15	9	1	78%
	Tollered			?				
	Munkedal			?				
	Varberg			?				
2.3.1930	Falkenberg	Stadshotellet	11:30 am, 5h	35	23	6	6	74%
TOTAL				100	68	21	11	79%

Gothenburg chess federations, *Majorna* promised to handle the organization provided that Ståhlberg annotated the games, now reduced from six to four, without compensation. With this in hand, Robertson sold the publication rights “exclusively” to *Ny Tid*, *Stockholms-Tidningen* and *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* for SEK 100 each! Entrance fees of SEK 1 per game or SEK 2 for all four games contributed with another SEK 100, giving Ståhlberg coverage for coffee and bus tickets roundtrip Surte–Gothenburg. As a souvenir, Restaurant AB Vara donated a silver cup to each player.

With no words from Bogoljubow during the first days of April, the match organizers feared that he had left Sweden without keeping his commitment. This turned out to be incorrect and he showed up at the train station the night before the match, simply having been too busy to even keep a record of his own results.

Play began in Allécaféet at 5.30 pm on April 4. While the audience sat down in the actual café, following the games on a demonstration board, the players had a quiet place in *Majorna*’s room. The match unmercifully revealed that Ståhlberg wasn’t yet ready for the international arena. His opening repertoire didn’t meet the modern requirements and gave Bogoljubow two easy victories to begin with. Ståhlberg learned



The match opponents, ready for the first game.

a lesson and in the third game his Queen’s Gambit resulted in a tough fight. In the last game Bogoljubow had to fight for a draw, a pawn down in the endgame. It should be remembered that Bogoljubow at this point was close to his peak as a player. After his major successes in Moscow 1925 and in Bad Kissingen 1928 he had challenged Alekhine for the World Championship in 1929 and was still considered a title contender.

Gothenburg 1930	4.4	6.4	7.4	8.4	Tot
Ståhlberg, Gideon	0	0	0	½	½
Bogoljubow, Efim	1	1	1	½	3½

Time limit: 30 moves/2h, 15 moves/h

Schedule: game 1: 5.30 pm, 2 pm next day

game 2: 12 am–4 pm, 5 pm

game 3: 4 pm–8 pm, 8.30 pm

game 4: 4 pm–8 pm, 8.30 pm

Gideon Ståhlberg

Efim Bogoljubow [C30]

m Gothenburg (1), April 4, 1930

Annotations by Efim Bogoljubow and Gideon Ståhlberg

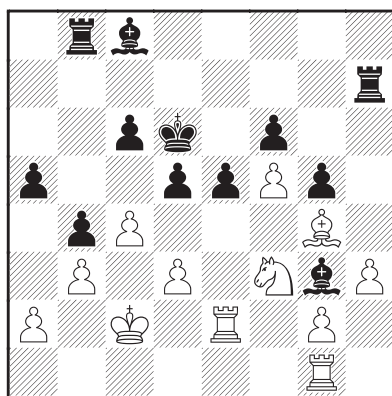
1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Nc6 3.d3 Nf6 4.Nc3 Bc5 5.f4? With this move White transfers to a variation of the King’s Gambit Declined, something that really isn’t anything to strive for. (EB) **5...d6 6.Nf3 a6** I consider this move the strongest. After 6...Bg4 White can exchange the well placed bishop on c5 with 7.Na4. 6...Be6 is best met by 7.Bb5 with some counter chances. (EB) **7.f5** Theory recommends 7.fxe5 dxe5 8.Bg5 h6 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.Rf1 with equality. I consider, however, that Black still has an advantage, for example 10...Qd6 11.Qd2 Be6 12.Bxe6 fxe6! 13.0–0–0 0–0–0 etc. (EB) **7...Nd4!** (GS) **8.Bg5** The attacking attempt 8.Ng5 0–0 9.Nd5 is repulsed by 9...Nxd5 10.Bxd5 h6 followed by c6 and d5. (GS) **8...c6 9.Nxd4 Bxd4 10.Qd2 h6** Forcing the exchange of the bishop, since 11.Bh4? is met by Nxe4 etc. and if 11.Be3 then 11...d5. (EB) After 10...Bxc3 11.Qxc3 Nxe4 follows



Bogoljubow

12.Bxf7+. (GS) 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Bb3 Bd7 13.Nd1 0-0-0 14.c3 Ba7 15.Ne3 After 15.Nf2 would have followed 15...g6!, e.g. 16.fxc6 Qxc6 17.0-0? Bh3! (GS) 15...Qg5 16.Nc4 Kc7 17.Qxg5 hxg5 18.Nd2 f6 19.Bd1 The resulting endgame offers equal chances. Black has the open h-file and the bishop pair, but its effectiveness is essentially reduced. (GS) 19... d5 20.Bg4 Better prospects

for the defense were offered by 20.Bf3 dxe4 21.dxe4 etc. (EB) White tries to achieve the idea of breaking on the h-file. From a practical point of view it would, however, have been better to secure the position for breaking attempts. After 20.Bf3 Rh4 21.g3 (not 21.h3 Rdh8 22.Ke2 in view of 22...g6! 23.fxc6? g4!) 21...Rh6 22.h3 Rdh8 23.Bg2 the position is just drawish. (GS) 20...g6! 21.Ke2 Rh4! 22.h3 gxf5 23.exf5 Now Black of course obtains a strong pawn center. 23.Bxf5 is, however, even less appropriate in view of 23...Bxf5 24.exf5 Rb8! (threatening g4) 25.Nf3 Rf4 26.g4 e4 etc. (EB) Consistently played but the beginning of great difficulties for White. Also after 23.Bxf5 Black obtains strong pressure on the white position. (GS) 23...Rh7 24.Rae1 b5! Of course White has no defense against this attack. 25.Kd1 a5 26.Kc2 Rb8 27.b3 Kd6 28.Nf3 Bc8 29.Rd1 The freeing attempt 29.h4 is still premature. After 29...gxh4 30.Nxh4 follows 30... Rg7 31.Ng6? (or 31.Bf3 Bf2) 31...Rxc6 and also after 30.Rxh4 Rg7! 31.Rf1 White is superior. (GS) 29... b4 30.c4 Bf2 31.Rdf1 Be3 32.Re1 Bf4 33.Rhg1 Bg3 34.Re2



After 34.Re2

34...a4! Black does not have to worry about the threat 35.Nd2 axb3+ 36.axb3 Ra7 37.Nf1 due to Bf2! (EB) A

carefully prepared advance, intending for the rooks to operate on the a-file. (GS) 35.Rb1 Ra7 36.Nd2 axb3+ 37.axb3 Ra2+ 38.Rb2 On 38.Kd1 follows 38...Rba8. (GS) 38...Ra1 39.Rb1 Rba8 40.Rxa1 Rxa1 41.Nb1 In severe time trouble White overlooks Black's neat response. Even after 41.Kb2, however, it is impossible to hold the game. (GS) 41...Bf2 42.Kc1 Bd4 43.g3 e4 44.dxe4 dxc4 45.bxc4 Ba6 46.Rh2 Here the game was adjourned. At resumption of the game, White immediately resigned. 0-1. Black forces the win by 46...Bxc4 47.Be2 Be3+ 48.Kc2 Ra2+ 49.Kd1 Bb3+ 50.Ke1 Rb2. (GS) *Tidskrift för Schack* 1930:5 pp98-99, author's translation (EB); *Ny Tid* April 6, 1930, author's translation (GS)

Efim Bogoljubow Gideon Ståhlberg [D15]

m Gothenburg (2), April 6, 1930

Annotations by Efim Bogoljubow and Gideon Ståhlberg

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 Bf5 (?) I have refuted this move in detail in my book *1.d2-d4!*. (EB) This continuation, often used before, is now considered inferior, since White obtains pressure against Black's weakened queen's flank. (GS) 5.cxd5! Nxd5 6.Qb3 Nxc3 After 6... Qb6 comes, as is well known, 7.Nxd5 Qxb3 8.Nc7+ Kd8 9.axb3 Kxc7 10.Bf4+ etc. with advantage for White. (EB) A novelty. (GS) 7.bxc3 If now 7.Qxb7 then 7... Nd5 8.Qxa8 Qc7 followed by Nb6 or if 8.e4 then 8... Bxe4 9.Qxa8 (9.Nd2 Nb6!) 9...Qb6! (not 9...Qc7 because of 10.Ba6) (GS) 7...Qb6 8.Nd2! White obtains a strong pawn center with this move – the consequence of Black's failed treatment of the opening. (EB) An emphatic refutation of Black's play. After 8.Bf4 Nd7 9.Nd2 Nf6 10.f3 Black would have obtained fully equal play by 10...Nd5. (GS) 8...Bg6 9.e4 Nd7 10.f4! Prevents the freeing move e7-e5. (EB) 10...f6 Relatively better was 10...e6. Black gets totally confined after the text move. (EB) 10...e6 offered somewhat better chances, but White's superiority in the center is distinct also in this case. (GS) 11.f5 Bf7 12.Bc4 Qxb3 13.axb3 Nb6 14.Be6! g6 Black now gets totally locked up. There is no adequate defense against White's play on the open files and threatened break d4-d5. (GS) 15.Nc4! (GS) 15... Nxc4 16.bxc4 Bg7 17.0-0 0-0 18.Bf4 Bxe6 19.fxe6 f5 20.e5 Rfd8 21.Rfb1 b6 22.Ra6 Rdb8 23.Kf2 h6 24.h4 Kh7 25.Ke3 Rb7 26.Kd3 Rab8 27.Kc2 Rc8 28.c5 Rcb8 29.cxb6 axb6 30.Rba1! White breaks through in the fastest possible way. (GS) 30...c5 31.Ra8 cxd4 32.cxd4 Rxa8 33.Rxa8 Rc7+ After 33...b5 34.d5! g5 White wins in an elegant way by 35.d6! (GS) 34.Kd3 See Diagram. The ending needs no further comments. 1-0. *Tidskrift för Schack* 1930:5 pp99-100, author's translation (EB); *Ny Tid* April 8, 1930, author's translation (GS)