

# Koltanowski

## Edward Winter

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George Koltanowski

The public will always love George Koltanowski, believing him to be one of Them who has stayed one of Us. The 'International Wizard of Blindfold Chess' has delighted by his regular displays, knight tours and indiscretions about the masters. Avuncular and impish, he has apparently understood that the world will forgive an Accessible Character almost anything.

There is indeed much for which forgiveness is required, but is Koltanowski aware of the damage his having a good time has caused? To speak only of his writings, he leaves behind a trail of howlers that even John Graham might envy. Anyone suspecting this to be an exaggeration should read the piece on Klaus Junge on page 89 of the February 1976 *Chess Life & Review*, together with its wholesale demolition by Paul Schmidt on pages 212-213 of the April 1976 issue. This concluded, 'About the only correct reference to Klaus Junge in Mr Koltanowski's article is to his chess genius ...' Among Sunny Kolti's errors was a claim that Junge was 'stabbed to death in a chess club fight in 1942!' He actually died in combat in April 1945, at the very end of the Second World War.

'Everywhere, it seems, adventure and anecdote awaited me', he writes on page 37 of *Adventures of a Chess Master* neglecting to add that some of the anecdotes lurked in contradictory forms. An example is the 'First Flohr' yarn

reported by him in a *CHESS Explorations* book *With the Chess Masters* Publishers, 1972) he relates that Flohr himself was the speaker. The Koltanowski touch is equally at home with trivia and tragedy.

article (see C.N. 887, on page 121 of *Chess*) as having been told to him by Lilienthal. But on page 45 of his (Falcon Publishers, 1972) he relates that Flohr himself was the speaker. The Koltanowski touch is equally at home with trivia and tragedy.

A (relatively brief) selection of examples of general carelessness in *With the Chess Masters*: Page 9: 'Mizowitch' at London, 1922?? Page 10: 'Giuco ... Pianissimo'. Pages 15-16: The best part of two pages are devoted to a story of how L. Steiner cheated against Colle at 'the Budapest International, 1928'. Neither player was there. Page 48: 'Twice Tarrasch mounted a campaign to take the world title from Lasker – and twice Lasker beat him badly.' When was the second time? Page 49: 'My first encounter with Dr Tarrasch was in 1924 at the International Chess Tournament in Merano, Italy. I was in my early teens.' Yet he was born in 1903. Page 54: He appears to believe Scotland is in England. Pages 67-68: Another cheating anecdote, according to which Dyckhoff pretended only to have drawn against John at Hanover, 1902, so that his close rival Bernstein would not go for a win against Kagan. Yet Dyckhoff and John did only draw. Page 80 and page 81: 'R.F. Mitchell'. Presumably R.P. Michell. Page 90: 'James Cross'. Rupert Cross would be correct. Page 92: for (Emanuel) Sapiro read Sapira. Page 100: 'Marotzy' (twice). Page 101: 'Bekker' (twice). Page 101: Flohr did not play at Carlsbad, 1929. Page 101: '... ahead of Reifir, Spielman, Astalosh and the younger Widmar'. Read: a) Rejfiř, b) Spielmann, c) Asztalos, d) Vidmar. Page 101: Alekhine and Euwe did not play at Moscow, 1935 (it is even said that there Menchik 'beat Euwe twice!'). Page 141: Rejfiř has a wrong year of birth. And so on ...

She played in many men's tournaments and did very well. Among her best results were her second-place tie with Rubinstein at Ramsgate; second place in London in 1932; third in Maribor in 1934 ahead of Reifir, Spielman, Astalosh and the younger Widmar; and third in Yarmouth in 1935. In 1935 Vera Menchik went to Moscow where she met such top flight players as World Champion Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe and Botvinnik—and beat Euwe twice!

Koltanowski on Vera Menchik, from page 101 of *With the Chess Masters*

Chess Enterprises have just re-issued *Adventures of a Chess Master*, under the title *In the Dark*, a fair description of Koltanowski's historical scholarship. (The earlier book [page 10] gave the wrong year of birth for Blackburne, and Koltanowski has learned nothing since 1955 to make him change it.) Apart from very minor textual alterations and two new chapters, *In the Dark* is little more than an algebraic version of *Adventures ...*, and even the 1955 Foreword with its opening words 'I first began to plan this book twenty-five years ago' has, misleadingly, been left untouched.

Finally in this catalogue of censure, one may mention Koltanowski's insistence (notably in chapter eleven of *In the Dark*) on publishing unprintworthy games, his reference (page 189) to Morphy's famous opera game against the 'Duke of Brunswick and the Count de Mongrédien' and his deliverance of such divine prose as (page 179): 'By playing sharp I felt that I would get a great number of games over with before any tired feeling would overtake me.'

Note: This article was written in 1986 (C.N. 1234) and appeared on pages 159-160 of *Chess Explorations*. In 1999 an attempt to defend Koltanowski (regarding a single matter – Lasker v Tarrasch) was made by [Eric Schiller](#), on the basis of a memorable piece of mendacity.

Further examples of the way Koltanowski treated facts are given in our feature article '[Fun](#)'. See also the references to him in our [Factfinder](#).

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