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# **The English School of Chess: A Nation on Display, 1834-1904**

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**This thesis is submitted for the degree of MA by Research in the  
department of History at Durham University**

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## The English School of Chess: A Nation on Display, 1834-1904

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## Introduction:

The social history that emerged in the 1970s brought with it a new interest in the history of leisure and sport. Since then, historians have used contemporary sports and leisure activities as historical tools to understand the wider social and cultural milieu of Victorian life.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, however, the history of chess remains in its infancy. As historians have focused on major sports such as football, cricket, rugby and athletics, the writing of chess history has fallen on the amateur historian. These histories have focused on games, players, clubs and tournaments, and have largely failed to link their findings to the wider historiographical debates.<sup>2</sup> More recently, however, academic historians have begun to fill the void. For example, Timothy Harding's works on correspondence chess, nineteenth-century chess players, chess columns, and Irish national identity have elucidated the growth of nineteenth-century chess, touching on debates around rational recreation, identity, and commercial sport.<sup>3</sup> While these works are extremely useful for the historian in understanding the game's growth, the works of Adrian Harvey and John Sharples have proven to be more useful in placing the game in its wider social and cultural context. Harvey's work, for example, has placed the professional growth of the game in the

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Trainter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Modern Britain, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 1-3

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Kiernan, "A History of International Master Chess, 1851-1914" (Washington, 1957), p. 3; William Hartson, *The Kings of Chess* (London, 1985); Hans Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games* (McFarland, 2016); David Lawson, *Morphy: The Pride and Sorrow of Chess* (Louisiana, 2010); Philip Sergeant, *A Century of British Chess* (Hutchinson, 1934); Keene & R. N. Coles, *Howard Staunton: the English World Chess Champion* (1974); John Hilbert & Urcan Olimpiu, *W. H. K. Pollock: A Chess Biography with 423 Games* (McFarland, 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Harding, "Kings and Queens at Home: A Short History of the Chess Column in Nineteenth-Century English Periodicals", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 4 (2009), (pp. 359-391); *Correspondence Chess in Britain and Ireland, 1824-1987* (North Carolina, 2011); "Chess in Lancashire and the Preston Guardian Chess Column, 1879-83" in ed. Roger Spalding and Alyson Brown, *Entertainment, Leisure and Identities* (Cambridge, 2007), (pp. 50-62) p. 50; *Eminent Victorian Chess Players: Ten Biographies* (North Carolina, 2012); "A Fenian Pastime"? Early Irish Board Games and their Identification with Chess", *Irish Historical Studies* 37 (2015), (pp. 1-22)

wider context of commercial sport, while John Sharples has begun to elucidate the disputed image of the chess player and its complicated relationship with respectability.<sup>4</sup>

From this scholarship, we now know that chess transformed from an elite game in the early half of the nineteenth-century into a prosperous leisure activity for the wider middling and lower classes. While in 1820 there were four chess clubs, by 1880 there were as many as 670.<sup>5</sup> This growth brought with it the gradual codification of the game's rules, the practicing of chess as a profession, and the institutionalization of chess on a regional and national footing.<sup>6</sup> While Harding, Harvey, and Sharples have begun to uncover the growth of the professional game and the disputed image of the chess player, much of the game's historical importance remains to be uncovered. Chess' role as a rational recreation, its relationship to class and gender, and the national implications of international master chess remain unjustly neglected topics. It is here where the historian must continue the work of Harvey, Sharples, and Harding in understanding the game's growth in its wider social and cultural context.

That historians have not given chess the same scholarly attention as other nineteenth-century games and sports is surprising, given that the focus in the 1970s was on the ideology of rational recreation, an ideal chess embodied.<sup>7</sup> This new focus on rational recreation was born out of a

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian Harvey, "You May Say What You Like to the Professional and Dismiss Them When You Want': The Rise and Fall of Professional Chess Players in Victorian Britain", *Sport in History* 3, (pp. 402-421); John Sharples, "I am a Chess-player: Respectability in Literary and Urban Space, 1840-1851", *Sport in History* 35 (2015), (pp. 296-321); *A Cultural History of Chess-Players: Minds, Machines, and Monsters* (Manchester, 2017)

<sup>5</sup> Harvey, "You May Say What You Like to the Professional and Dismiss Them When You Want", p. 404

<sup>6</sup> Harvey, "You May Say What You Like to the Professionals and Dismiss Them When You Want", p.402-404; John Hilbert & Urcan Olimpiu, *W. H. K. Pollock: A Chess Biography with 423 Games*, p. 15

<sup>7</sup> Harding, "Kings and Queens at Home", p. 359

new interest in working class life and culture, led by ground breaking social histories such as E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). One of the implicit research questions of the social history that emerged in this period was why there was no revolution as Marx had suggested, given that Britain had the first industrial proletariat. One influential theory was the idea of social control, developed by historians such as A. P. Donajgrodzki (Ed) in *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1977). This theory asserted that those who held power and authority used their influence to devise methods of social control to condition and manipulate the lower orders "into accepting and operating the...behaviour necessary to sustain the social order of an industrial society".<sup>8</sup> One of the many strands of social control envisaged by historians was that of leisure, which from the 1840s onwards had become an area of relative freedom for all classes. The middle class feared these new freedoms and developed schemes for rational recreation in order to steer the working-class away from the potentially corrupting forms of leisure towards more respectable pursuits.<sup>9</sup> The creators of these schemes hoped, therefore, that they would not just put an end to the existing forms of corrupting leisure, but also simultaneously stimulate and improve the mind of the working-man.<sup>10</sup> While critiques from historians such as F. M. L. Thompson ultimately put an end to the theory of social control, the idea of rational recreation has continued to shape the history of leisure.<sup>11</sup> The general picture

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<sup>8</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, "Social Control in Victorian Britain", *The Economic History Review* 2 (1981), (pp. 189-208) pp. 189-190.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London, 1978), p. 5; Ross McKibbin, "Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?" *The English Historical Review* 99 (1984), (pp. 297-331), p. 328.

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, pp. 35-37, Mark Billinge, "A Time and Place for Everything: An Essay on Recreation, Re-Creation and the Victorians", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22, 4 (1996), (pp. 443-459) pp. 443-444.

<sup>11</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, "Class Expression versus Social Control? A Critique of Recent Trends in the Social History of 'Leisure'", *History Workshop* 4 (Autumn, 1977), (pp. 162-170); F. M. L. Thompson, "Social Control in Victorian Britain", *The Economic History Review* 34 (1981), (pp. 189-208)

painted by these schemes of rational recreation is one of failure, with the working class largely resisting these attempts or taking them and making them their own. For example, while the new athleticism and Working Men's Clubs were both initially promoted by middle-class activists, they were largely accepted and developed along working class lines.<sup>12</sup>

It was in this context that the history of sport began its ascension onto the scholarly scene.<sup>13</sup>

While the study of rational recreation schemes has also shaped the history of sport, this has been part of an attempt to understand its wider growth and evolution. The underpinning dichotomy that shaped the evolution of sport during the nineteenth-century was the ideologies of amateurism and professionalism. While the terms would go on to distinguish between those who did and did not play for pay, matters of class and respectability shaped their initial construction. Amateurism, stemming from the public school, centred on the idea of fair play.<sup>14</sup>

Broadly speaking, this ideology believed in playing the game for the game's sake, not for personal or material gain. This ideology was largely opposed to the playing of sport for money, as contemporaries feared that the commercialization of sport would bring with it both the corrupting necessity to win and the problems associated with the spectator sport. While the desire to win went against the principle of fair play, the spectator sport brought with it the dangers of gambling and violence. Contemporaries viewed the construction of an amateur

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<sup>12</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, pp. 80-124; Adrian Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Holt, "Historians and the History of Sport", *Sport in History* (2013), (p. 1-33), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford, 1992), p. 98



ethos as making an important contribution to the creation of a “less threatening, more orderly, constructive and efficient use of leisure.”<sup>15</sup>

The main driver in constructing an amateur ethos for most nineteenth-century sports was class.<sup>16</sup> For example, football, cricket, rowing, and athletics all witnessed the construction of the middle-class gentleman “amateur” against the image of the working-class “professional”.

Against their working-class counterparts, for whom winning was all important, the middle-class gentleman’s allegiance to amateurism allowed him to play the game in a more “civilized” way.

This was most apparent with football, with there being a strong divide between the public school gentleman amateurs and the working class players that would go on to shape the game.<sup>17</sup> Athletics and rowing also witnessed this strong class divide, with “professional” manual labourers excluded due to their physical advantage over other opponents.<sup>18</sup> The public school legislators of rugby also looked to use the amateur ethos to exclude working class players through refusing to countenance “broken-time” payments.<sup>19</sup> While matters of class shaped the growth of cricket, the barriers between amateur and professional were not so divisive. Despite there being a clear division between the “gentleman” and “player”, “amateur” and “professional”, the unique cooperation and participation between the two made cricket

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<sup>15</sup> Norman Baker, “Whose Hegemony? The Origins of the Amateur Ethos in Nineteenth Century English Society”, *Sport in History* 24 (2009), (pp. 1-16), pp. 1-2; Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850*, pp. 204-207

<sup>16</sup> Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain*, p. 204-205

<sup>17</sup> James Walvin, *The People’s Game: The History of Football Revisited* (Edinburgh, 1994) pp. 52-53; Peter Swain, “Cultural Continuity and Football in Nineteenth-century Lancashire”, *Sport in History* 4 (2008), (pp. 566-582), p. 579.

<sup>18</sup> Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, pp. 131-140; Eric Halladay, “Of Pride and Prejudice: The Amateur Question in English Nineteenth-century Rowing”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (2007), (pp. 39-55), pp. 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 105

universal.<sup>20</sup> Cricket went on to become a truly national game, embodying the English spirit and bringing together the classes in a “uniquely English way”.<sup>21</sup> Overall, despite the construction of an amateur ethos, the growth of professional sport won out, as the workers ignored the initiatives from above and “made their own culture rather than having their play organised for them”.<sup>22</sup>

In the major sports of the period, class remained the underlying factor in the shaping of opposition to professionalism and the creation of an amateur ethos. This, however, as shown by the work of Harvey, was not the case with chess. Instead, xenophobia and a dislike for the playing of chess for money shaped opposition to professionalism and the construction of an amateur ethos.<sup>23</sup> The fact that contemporaries constructed the distinctions between amateur and professional along national rather than class lines is not surprising. Firstly, professional chess was, and remained throughout the period, an elite activity. The best chess players from the late eighteenth-century onwards were merchants, musicians, politicians, writers, and men of high standing.<sup>24</sup> This trend would continue to the end of the century, with professional chess players largely drawn from the upper and middling classes. Secondly, chess was the first truly international sport. While international competition in other sports would not become regular until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, leading chess players from Europe and

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<sup>20</sup> Keith Sandiford, “Amateurs and Professionals in Victorian County Cricket”, *A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 15 (1983), (pp. 32-51); Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 107

<sup>21</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 262-265; Keith Sandiford, “Cricket and the Victorians: A Historiographical Essay”, *Historical Reflections* 3 (1982), (pp. 421-436), p. 430. Despite cooperation, there were cases of workers being banned from the bourgeois and aristocratic teams.

<sup>22</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 135

<sup>23</sup> Harvey, “You May Say What You Like to the Professional and Dismiss Them When You Want”, p. 402

<sup>24</sup> William Lay, *Paul Morphy: The Chess Champion* (London, 1859), p. 48.

America began to compete in regular matches and tournaments from the 1840s onwards, bringing with it the residing of European players in England who looked to make a living from the game. Unlike any other Victorian sport, chess was universal.

The international nature of chess, therefore, makes it an anomaly. While the works of Kiernan, Harvey, and Harding have touched on the resulting tensions from this, the wider national implications remain obscured from the historical record. Harvey's work, while showing how xenophobia shaped the general attitudes towards professional chess, has failed to show how contemporaries conceptualised international master chess and shaped an amateur ethos along national lines. Furthermore, Kiernan's work on international master chess, while providing a useful chronology of its growth, has also failed to illuminate its national importance in the minds of contemporaries. While our understanding remains limited, the presence of these national tensions makes chess a unique case in the historian's search for the formation of national identity through sport.

The wider search for English national identity has left historians of sport largely empty handed. While historians have successfully used sport in their search for Scottish, Irish and Welsh identity, the focus on English sport has mainly been its imperial role. In the case of football, the fans and players were too self-absorbed in the strong divide between north and south to invest any real effort into the national team.<sup>25</sup> However, historians have had more success in their search for national identity in regard to cricket. While class divisions hindered the other major

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<sup>25</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 272-273

sports of the period, cricket went on to become the national sport of the English. Supporters, particularly the southern middle-class teams, viewed the game as innately “English”, embodying the English spirit.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, cricketing heroes became national figures and were celebrated for their quintessentially English characteristics.<sup>27</sup>

The absence of any meaningful assertions of English identity through sport has led to little overlap with the wider historiography on identity in the largest of the four nations. That the literature is in a somewhat muddled state has not helped matters. Historians from various periods have used contrasting theories and definitions to assert the emergence of English identity at different points in time. Historians such as Clanchy and Wormald have looked back as far as the tenth century in their assignment of a distinctly “English” identity, while others such as Greenfield, Stoye and Kohn have seen its emergence in the sixteenth and seventeenth.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding the construction of national identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the most influential scholars are Kumar, Colley, and Newman. Kumar argues that up until the latter end of the nineteenth century, contemporaries constructed English identity around their role as

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<sup>26</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 263-265.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Holt, “Cricket and Englishness: The Batsman as Hero”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 13 (2007), (pp. 48-70), pp. 48-50; W. F. Mandle, “W. C. Grace as a Victorian Hero”, *Historical Studies* 19 (2008), (pp. 353-368), pp. 353.

<sup>28</sup> M.T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers, 1066-1272: foreign lordship and national identity* (London, 1983); Patrick Wormald, “Enga Land: The Making of An Allegiance”, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), pp. 1-24; Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); John Brewer, “Book Review: The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830”, *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1989) pp. 1270-1272; Margot Finn, “An Elect Nation? Nation, State, and Class in Modern British History”, *Journal of British Studies* (1989) (pp. 181-191), p. 182; Hans Kohn, “The Genesis and Character of English Nationalism”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1940), (pp. 69-94), pp. 69-70.

a civilizing empire builder. This construction of “imperial” or “civilizing” nationalism, as Kumar labels it, was framed along British lines. While contemporaries viewed England as distinct from Britain, they thought it politically expedient not to beat the nationalist drum and therefore stressed the British origins of Empire.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, Colley and Newman have argued that British identity was constructed in opposition to their neighbours in the eighteenth century. While Newman argues national identity was defined against French “political and cultural hegemony” in Europe, Colley places it against the wider conglomeration of catholic continental Europe.<sup>30</sup> Contemporaries, Colley argues, united around their common Protestantism in the faces of a series of wars between 1689 and 1815. Like Kumar, Newman and Colley stress the emergence of a British, rather than a distinct English national identity.<sup>31</sup> Historians, however, have challenged this distinction. Langland, for example, has shown how contemporaries perceived what much of Colley labels British as English.<sup>32</sup> The works of Varouxakis and Barczewski has further reinforced this view, showing how contemporaries constructed myths and legends in reference to England, rather than Britain.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. x-xi.

<sup>30</sup> John Brewer, “Book Review: The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830”, pp. 1270-1272; Gerald Newman, “Anti-French Propaganda and British Liberal Nationalism in the Early Nineteenth Century: Suggestions toward a General Interpretation”, *Victorian Studies* 18 (1975), (pp. 385-418), pp. 385-387.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument”, *Journal of British Studies* 31 (October 1992), (pp.309-329), pp. 311-316.

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Langlands, “Britishness or Englishness? The Historical Problem of National Identity in Britain”, *Nations and Nationalism* 5, (1999), (pp. 53-66), p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> Stephanie Barczewski, “Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of Robin Hood and King Arthur” (Oxford, 2000)

While the two historiographies of sport and national identity have followed two largely independent lines, the works of Kumar, Newman and Colley suggest conformity. Newman and Colley's emphasis on identity formation against a foreign "other", for example, explains the presence of Welsh, Irish and Scottish identity. The Welsh, Irish and Scottish all used sport as an opportunity to assert their own independence from a Britain that was largely English in its origin.<sup>34</sup> This also explains the lack English identity through sport. While English contemporaries did not invest the same enthusiasm as the home countries in competition, English sport on the international stage was bereft of a foreign "other".<sup>35</sup> While cricket had the ashes from 1882 onwards, football's first international fixture with a foreign team was not until 1901.<sup>36</sup> Given the local and regional focus of English sports, therefore, it is hardly surprising that historians have not been able to find any meaningful cases of English national identity.

The one English sport that experienced the displaying of a foreign "other", however, has evaded the attention of historians in their search for national identity. Chess, the first truly universal sport, experienced unique national tensions, as the regularity of international master chess and the presence of foreign professionals in England brought matters of nationality into sharp focus. In continuing the historian's search for English national identity, this thesis will explore the growth of nineteenth-century chess to examine the implications of these national tensions. It will concentrate on the growth and conceptualization of international master chess,

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<sup>34</sup> Adrian Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850*, p. 208.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football* (Routledge, 2013) p. 47.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Beck, *Scoring for Britain: International Football and International Politics, 1900-1939* (London, 1999), pp. 52-53; Dave Russell, "'Ashes that leave no regrets': Anglo-Australian cricket and English society, c 1880-1939", *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 8, (pp. 1038-1054) p. 1048.

as well as the wider growth of the professional and amateur game. It will consist of four chapters, and will cover an 80-year period, starting in 1834, the year of the first contest between England and France, and ending in 1904, the creation of British Chess Federation. While these dates are convenient, largely mirroring the Victorian period, they mark the beginning and end in the formation of English chess.

The sources used will be contemporary chess columns, newspapers, handbooks, books, periodicals, magazines, and club papers. The nature of these sources, therefore, makes any study of English chess a top down portrayal. Attempts, however, will be made wherever possible to assess the wider diffusion and accuracy of the sentiments expressed in these works. This will be mostly done through analysis of chess gatherings and events. The scarcity of these types of sources, however, has made the task difficult.

Of all the sources used, Howard Staunton's column in the *Illustrated London News* and his editorship of *The Chess Player's Chronicle* requires a few remarks. These sources have required close reading due to the Englishman's recorded tendency to manipulate and abuse his role as editor through fabricated letters from "correspondents" signed "Cantab", "Oxeonsis", and "An Amateur".<sup>37</sup> While used in the first two chapters, I have read and used these sources with caution. Unless directly stated, I have ignored these correspondence letters in favour of articles and notes penned by other leading players and writers.

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<sup>37</sup> Bernard Kiernan, *A History of International Master Chess, 1851-1914*, p. 28

The overarching means for projecting national sentiments onto the game was through the construction of the English School of Chess. During the period, it was both a representative body of English ability on the international stage, as well as a national spirit of play; an international competitor as well as a distinct national school of thought. The two distinct aspects to its construction allowed contemporaries to use it as both a symbol of national superiority, and a platform for the imagining of an “English” way of playing the game. The former tied in with the conceptualising of international master chess, as writers and players constructed it as a tester of national prestige, while the latter tied into the wider anxieties surrounding the respectability of play that defined the period. The latter followed the same lines as the construction of an amateur ethos in other sports, but was framed and envisaged, against the image of the foreign professional, as innately “English”. Its meaning changed over time, as contemporaries imagined the two aspects to its conception with contrasting significance across the period. The one constant factor was the underlying desire to use its meaning to imagine England as a special, distinct, and superior nation.

A few notes must also be made on the current study of the English School. While contemporaries imagined the English School as a summation of English talent and literature, it also brought with it strategic and tactical innovations which influenced the theoretical spread of the game. As a result, chess enthusiasts have sought to understand and document the strategic and tactical foundations of its approach as well as to uncover the influence of English players in



its formation.<sup>38</sup> The focus of this thesis will not be on the arcane strategy of such a style.

Instead, I will focus on the English School's contemporary symbolic and pedagogical meaning.

While some of the narratives surrounding its construction filtered out into the wider culture, the outreach of the English School was limited to what I have broadly labelled as "the chess world". This phrase is intended to broadly cover both active and passive chess enthusiasts: writers, leading players, active members of chess clubs and associations, as well as armchair enthusiasts who followed the game through columns, periodicals and magazines. I do not wish to assert that the chess world played a direct role in the formation of English national identity. Rather, this was just one of the many forms in which identity was displayed and constructed throughout the period. The chess world, therefore, has been treated as its own "imagined community".<sup>39</sup>

While this thesis will argue the imagining of English, rather than British identity, I also do not look to stress a significant distinction between the two in the minds of contemporaries. While contemporaries constructed the English School in Anglo-centric terms, there was some overlap with the terms English and British. This was especially the case in the first half of the century when English victories were placed in the context of Empire. While this tendency to view the English School through the prism of Empire declined throughout the period, the terms English

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<sup>38</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 71

<sup>39</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Spread and Origins of Nationalism* (London, 1991)

and British were still often used synonymously, suggesting that contemporary anxieties surrounding the terms were not significant.

The first chapter will explore the early growth of international master chess from 1834 to 1851. Here I will explore the reporting of three major events in the chess world during the period. The first two were contests between the leading players from England and France, while the third was the first international chess tournament held in England. It will show how the English School was born out of a conception of international master chess as a symbol for national prestige, as leading writers and players celebrated English victories as symptomatic of English supremacy. As the chess world celebrated the superiority of English chess, they constructed the idea of the English School, a summation of both English ability and literature. The chess world viewed England's status in both to assert the special and superior status of England above other nations.

The second chapter will explore the period from 1851 up until 1874. Here I will explore contemporary attitudes to professionalism and foreign players, the conceptualization of international master chess, as well as attempts at the game's institutionalization. While the first period was one of supremacy, the failures of English players on the international stage saw the notion of decline shape the English School's construction. During this period, two competing visions for English chess divided the chess world. The first looked to aid the professional and universal growth of the game, while the second looked to construct an amateur ethos in opposition to foreign professionalism. In opposition to the image of the foreign professional,

the construction of an amateur ethos saw contemporaries stress the innately “English” nature of its approach. This view argued this ethic, which was both innately English and superior, should form the basis for English chess and the English School. While attitudes to professionalism and foreign involvement divided the two camps, the one thing that united them both was the desire to restore the supremacy of the English School.

The third chapter will examine the period from 1874 up until 1904. Again, I will analyse contemporary attitudes to professionalism and foreign players, the further construction of an amateur ethos and attempts at the game’s institutionalization, as well as the experiences of the leading professionals. While the previous period saw the chess world divided into two opposing camps regarding the future vision for English chess, by 1904, it was largely united by the belief in an amateur ethos. While shaped by leading writers and figures, this view filtered down to the wider chess playing public, with further attempts at aiding the growth of the professional game ending in failure, as chess remained an amateur’s game. As a result, the idea of a nation’s chess ability representing national prestige began to wane. Instead, contemporaries viewed it as a symbol of a nation’s immoral play ethic, as the new bastion of English superiority stemmed from their more civilized approach to the game.

# Chapter 1: The Age of Supremacy, 1834-1851

The first half of the nineteenth-century witnessed three significant events that shaped the early growth of international master chess. The first two events came in 1834 and 1843, both witnessing the leading players from England and France play a set of games with the French player claiming victory in the first, and the English player the second.<sup>40</sup> The third event came in 1851 when London hosted the first international chess tournament.<sup>41</sup> This chapter will explore these three events and examine how contemporaries viewed international master chess and constructed the idea of The English Chess School. The first section will examine the contest between McDonnell and La Bourdonnais in 1834. While contemporaries viewed it with little interest at the time, writers began to impose increasingly nationalistic interpretations on the match at the advent of chess' growing popularity. The second section will analyse the contest between Staunton and St. Amant in 1843. While the chess playing public celebrated Staunton's victory in patriotic and nationalistic terms, leading writers and players framed England's new position at the top of the chess world as symbolic of England's more intellectual and advanced civilization. It was in this context that contemporaries constructed the English School. It was a summation of both English chess playing ability and chess literature, and the chess world celebrated England's leading position in both as symptomatic of English supremacy. The third section will explore the first international chess tournament in 1851. While the organizers framed the contest as a test for the supremacy of the English school, their aims were also internationalist. Here the organizers and writers envisaged the tournament as an opportunity

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<sup>40</sup> William Hartson, *The Kings of Chess* (London, 1985), pp. 25-29

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33

to both foster cordial relations between chess playing countries and promote the spread of the game for the good of the world. In this context, organizers viewed their organizing of the tournament and international master chess as a form of “civilizing nationalism”.<sup>42</sup>

These three events solidified international master chess as the first truly international sport and allowed contemporaries to project national sentiments onto the game. The chess world celebrated English victories with national pride and subsequently constructed the idea of The English School, a summation of English ability and output of chess literature. England’s position in both saw contemporaries assert the supremacy of the English School in the context of Empire, viewing it as symbolic of England’s intellectual superiority. While contemporaries initially viewed international master chess as a tester of national prestige, it would also go on to be viewed as a means for fostering peaceful relations between nations in the wake of the tournament of 1851.

### **A National Awakening: McDonnell vs La Bourdonnais, 1834**

The first match between the leading players of England and France was in 1834 between Alexander McDonnell and La Bourdonnais. They played 85 games, with the Frenchman claiming victory 45 wins to McDonnell’s 27.<sup>43</sup> At the time, writers failed to view the match with national importance, and instead celebrated both players as the founders of modern chess. Reports on the match continued along these lines up until 1843 and portrayed international master chess

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<sup>42</sup> Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, pp. x-xi

<sup>43</sup> Hartson, *The Kings of Chess*, p. 25

as inconsequential to national prestige. There were, however, signs of a growing awareness as to the national implications of competitive chess on the international stage.

The interest generated at the time of the match's inception was limited. While the metropolitan chess scene eagerly anticipated La Bourdonnais' visit, the reporting of the games was limited to the only chess column in the country at the time, *Bell's Life*.<sup>44</sup> The reports in *Bell's Life* focused largely on the games themselves, offering up little or no contextualisation as to the national element or the relative powers of England and France.<sup>45</sup> That the contest failed to generate contemporary interest is not surprising given that the popularity of the game was still in its infancy. While the number of clubs had grown significantly from 10 chess clubs in 1830 to 49 by 1839, interest in the game was still modest, with the first chess periodical not materialising until 1841.<sup>46</sup> At the time, *Bell's Life* reported the game at face value. The column framed it not as a national battle, but rather a set of interesting games.

While writers did not view the contest as a test of national prestige, the death of McDonnell in 1835 saw the recognition of his role as the head of English chess. For example, *The Belfast* and *Bell's Life* both gave hagiographic obituaries celebrating his abilities as matters of national pride.<sup>47</sup> George Walker also suggested a publication of McDonnell's best games in order to

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<sup>44</sup> *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* (July 10, 1834); Hartson, *The Kings of Chess*, p.25

<sup>45</sup> *Bell's Life* (March 1, 1835)

<sup>46</sup> Harvey, "You May Say What You Like to the Professional and Dismiss Them When You Want", p. 404; Harding, "Kings and Queens at Home: A Short History of the Chess Column in Nineteenth-Century English Periodicals", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 42 (2009), (pp. 359-391), p. 364

<sup>47</sup> *Belfast* (Oct 2, 1835), *Bell's Life* (Sept 27, 1835)

celebrate the memory of England's first player.<sup>48</sup> Published in 1836, Walker claimed it to have both placed the fame of England's first player on "certain grounds", and been a "better monument than a tablet in Westminster Abbey".<sup>49</sup> While the contest was not one for national prestige, the symbolism of a tablet in Westminster Abbey shows the recognition of McDonnell as a national representative.<sup>50</sup>

The French portrayal of the contest and reaction to La Bourdonnais' victory, however, was strikingly different. The most influential piece of literature that came out of France in reaction to the contest was the poem, "The Revenge of Waterloo", which was reviewed in *Bell's Life* and published in *The Chronicle* in 1843. The first stanza starts by using the imagery of war in its description of the contest, framing it as a battle of national importance. The writer then makes the nationalistic proclamation that France is "not declining", with the "days of the Back prince" and "Duguesclin" still delighting "the maritime coast". This reference to Duguesclin, the French military commander in the Hundred Years' War, draws on historic legend to reinforce their claims to national strength and hegemony. The remainder of the poem chronicles their champion's victory in a patriotic and nationalistic tone, containing similar historical references and warlike imagery. For example, La Bourdonnais was seen not to have "shivered under the English bombs", and McDonnell's fall induced London to yell "the Greek Palamede was

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<sup>48</sup> *Bell's Life* (Nov 15, 1835)

<sup>49</sup> *Bell's Life* (Dec 18, 1835); (January 17, 1836)

<sup>50</sup> While McDonnell was born in Ireland, he spent most of his life in England and was referred to by writers as England's first player. *Bell's Life* (April 24, 1836); (Nov 1, 1835); (Sept 27, 1835); *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 369 & 371; (1845), pp. 116-117; (1848), p. 8; *Leicester Chronicle* (Oct 24, 1835), *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* (June 16, 1836)

[brought] back to life”.<sup>51</sup> The poem is a patriotic celebration of French victory and offers up a nationalistic defence of French international strength. In this view, the contest was a means for the testing of national prestige.

While the British press failed to invest the same national symbolism to the contest, English responses to such declarations of French supremacy were bitter and defensive. *Bell's Life*, upon its hearing of the provocative title, stated its hope for the poem to include how “complacently” La Bourdonnais passed the first twenty-one games due to McDonnell’s nervousness.<sup>52</sup> Once the editorship had time to review the contents of the poem, however, they praised the author for having the “taste to avoid anything like ill nature or unpardonable boasting”. There still, however, appears to have been some uneasiness regarding the title of the poem and the reference to Waterloo. Waterloo, Walker argued, was an “awkward subject to jest with”, and warned the author to be aware of “playing with edge tools”.<sup>53</sup> Walker again vocalized his uneasiness to overt French proclamations of supremacy later that year following La Bourdonnais’ claim in *Le Palamede* that he gave odds to McDonnell. Again, this was dealt with defensively and bitterly in *Bell's Life*, where Walker claimed La Bourdonnais was “poking his fun” at the English chess community. While acknowledging the Frenchman’s position as the best player in Europe, this “absurd delusion” led Walker to assert that he was “not the most

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<sup>51</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1843), p. 318 (translated into English by Pauline Chadourne)

<sup>52</sup> *Bell's Life* (April 17, 1836)

<sup>53</sup> *Bell's Life* (April 24, 1836)



modest man”.<sup>54</sup> The defensive reactions from *Bell's Life* to French proclamations of supremacy show a growing awareness of international chess' symbolic powers.

While English reports of the match failed to view it as a symbolic national contest, both the framing of McDonnell as an English representative and the defensive reactions to proclamations of French supremacy shows a growing awareness of the game's national significance. The English press, however, when not provoked into defence, were happy to concede La Bourdonnais' superiority.<sup>55</sup> For example, newspaper reports celebrated the Frenchman's genius up until his death in 1841, eulogizing both his skill and contribution to the game.<sup>56</sup> Columns excitedly outlined the “king of caissa's” scheduled visits to London, and Walker published successful collections of his games.<sup>57</sup> The *CPC* also printed their games on a weekly basis from 1841 onwards, eulogizing the ingenuity and skill displayed by both players.<sup>58</sup> Up until 1843, English writers remembered the players as two pioneering geniuses who had shaped modern chess. For the English, while proud of their champion, they were also proud of La Bourdonnais, “for her green turf covers his ashes.”<sup>59</sup> The *CPC* even reported in its pages a story of an amateur's visit to the graves of the two players in order to pay homage to the “two

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<sup>54</sup> *Bell's Life* (May 8, 1836)

<sup>55</sup> William Greenwood Walker, *A Selection of Games at Chess* (London, 1836), p. vi; *Bell's Life* (April 17, 1836)

<sup>56</sup> *The Penny Satirist* (April 4, 1840); *Newcastle Courant* (Dec 11, 1840); *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* (July 10, 1834); *Cleave's London Satirist and Gazette of Variety* (Feb 6, 1841)

<sup>57</sup> *Newcastle Courant* (Dec 11, 1840); *Liverpool Mercury* (March 16, 1838); *Morning Post* (Oct 10, 1834)

<sup>58</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1841), p. 38

<sup>59</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 369

lamented sons of Caissa”.<sup>60</sup> This form of remembrance followed into the early 1840s in both the annual dinners of chess clubs and in the pages of the *CPC*.<sup>61</sup>

Why, then, did the English look to put forward a more pacific view of international chess while the French celebrated their victory as a symbol of national prestige? Pre-existing ideas of French supremacy certainly played a factor in their interpretation of the contest.<sup>62</sup> In regards to the English reaction, firstly, the limited popularity of chess played a factor. Secondly, that McDonnell was on the losing side seems to have confined perceptions of the match. While the French were able to beat the nationalist drum, the English, in defeat, interpreted the contest as one for the advancement of chess. While English contemporaries did not frame the match as a national spectacle at the time of its inception, the uneasiness in accepting French proclamations of supremacy suggest an awareness and growing interest in the national implications of international master chess.

However, writers challenged this internationalist interpretation in 1844 following a renewed interest in the contest. While articles in the *CPC* from 1841 to 1843 were compendious and sparse, the new articles offered revisionist reflections on the match itself, rather than pure analysis of the games. The underlying narrative was the unwillingness to accept the maxim of French supremacy. One of the key features of this renewed interest in the match was the inclination to look for ways to highlight the disadvantages faced by McDonnell. By outlining

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<sup>60</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1843), p. 11

<sup>61</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1842), p. 223; (1846), p. 98

<sup>62</sup> Hartson, *The Kings of Chess*, p. 25

McDonnell's disadvantages and offering up alternative interpretations regarding the player's relative merits, English reflections on the match looked to excuse their champion's loss and vilify La Bourdonnais' victory. While the Frenchman's superior ability was still recognised, the new interpretations framed McDonnell as the more naturally gifted of the two who was never able to reach his full potential because of a weakened and lacklustre metropolitan chess scene. That writers constructed these excuses along questionable lines highlights the growing national importance bestowed to international master chess.

One of the lengthier new reflections on the contest came from George Walker in the pages of the *CPC* in 1844. Walker looked to excuse and contextualise the Englishman's defeat in a number of ways. Walker's first point was that, unlike La Bourdonnais, McDonnell's training and chess education was carried out against a depleted English rank.<sup>63</sup> While Walker framed the Frenchman's victory as a product of greater education rather than natural talent, he also offered up his explanation as to the causation of England's depleted rank. This, Walker argued, was not because of a lack of talent and intellect. Rather, the "strong band of players" that once made up The English School had "dispersed" due to the demands of professional engagements.<sup>64</sup> In highlighting his perceived reasons for England's weakened pool, Walker suggested that France's second rank, although more advanced, were not as naturally gifted. Both of these narratives were unwilling to accept the natural superiority of their French adversaries, as Walker presented their victory and success as a product of application, study,

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<sup>63</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 371 & p. 379

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*

and regular competition. While naturally superior, the English players, through a lack of study and game time, were unable to compete against the Frenchmen's discipline and rigour.

Walker again stressed this through his counterfactual analysis of the two players' abilities. Here he made the claim that had the two played a second 85 games, La Bourdonnais would have won by a considerably smaller margin, and had they played another 500, then McDonnell would have evened the score.<sup>65</sup> This idea was revisited and taken even further in the pages of the *CPC* in 1848, as a writer suggested that had McDonnell lived longer he would have surpassed the Frenchman. The reasons cited for this bold claim were that, firstly, the latter games between the two that suggest that McDonnell had not yet achieved full growth, and secondly, the English champion could "afford to give larger odds to all comers".<sup>66</sup> Although contemporaries accepted the Frenchman's victory, it alone was not enough to assess the relative merits of the two players. Through contextualising the advantages faced by the Frenchman, narratives espoused a belief in the superior natural brilliance and genius of England's champion.

The second excuse Walker gave in his account of the match regarded McDonnell's sensitivity to the crowding around of spectators. While McDonnell "especially suffered" from the crowding around of spectators, La Bourdonnais was "comparatively indifferent."<sup>67</sup> The *CPC* too reinforced

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 379

<sup>66</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1848), p. 8

<sup>67</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 373

this idea, sharing a letter from McDonnell outlining his sensitivity and nervousness when playing around crowds. This, argued Walker and the *CPC*, was “fatal” to the success of the Englishman.<sup>68</sup> While the previous claims surrounding McDonnell’s limited chess education carry some weight, the light nature of this excuse illustrates the extent of the growing uneasiness in accepting the legitimacy of previous French victories.

While the contemporary newspaper accounts and reflections up until 1844 took on a more neutral interpretation of the contest, the following years saw chess writers become increasingly unwilling to conform to the traditional view of French supremacy. The excuses in which contemporaries conjured in order to buttress the status of their champion highlights both the importance in which many contemporaries viewed England’s standing within the chess world, and illustrates the lengths in which they were willing to go in order to restore the reputation of English chess. Although the new reports and reflections on the match still accepted La Bourdonnais’ victory, they placed the Frenchman’s victory in the context of McDonnell’s disadvantages. The result of the match alone was not enough to assess the talent of the two players, as reflections contextualised the two player’s contrasting education and experience, portraying McDonnell as the more naturally gifted player of the two, whose superior genius was stifled by a weakened English School. The year 1844, therefore, marks the start of a revisionist approach by chess writers, who, looking back on the battle between the two chess playing nations, looked to reassert England’s historic reputation amongst the chess world.

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<sup>68</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1846), pp. 250-251

The timing of this change in approach by contemporaries is hardly surprising. Following Staunton's victory against St. Amant in 1843 and the outpouring of nationalistic fervour, it was only natural for leading figures and writers to look back on the previous decade and impart their new found hegemonic sentiments onto the historical record. That there were new desires to reinterpret England's historical standing is evident not only through examining the new reflections in the *CPC* but also by calls from contemporaries at the annual dinners of chess clubs to "take down the tone of superiority in which [the] French press and other journals spoke of La Bourdonnais and other French players."<sup>69</sup> England's ascension to the top of the chess world following Staunton's victory, therefore, saw contemporaries look back on the contest of 1834 with new eyes, as they offered up alternative interpretations more in line with their new held beliefs.

At the time, contemporaries did not envisage the contest between McDonnell and La Bourdonnais in overtly national terms. Up until 1843, reports of the match remembered the two competitors as the founders of modern chess. While conceptions of international master chess were passive, contemporaries nonetheless recognised McDonnell as the head of English chess and a national representative on the international stage. This, alongside uneasy reactions to French proclamations of supremacy suggests an awareness of the symbolic national implications of international master chess. In the wake of Staunton's victory in 1843, the subject of the next section, the revisionist reflections on the contest imparted a new view of international master chess onto the match.

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<sup>69</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 69

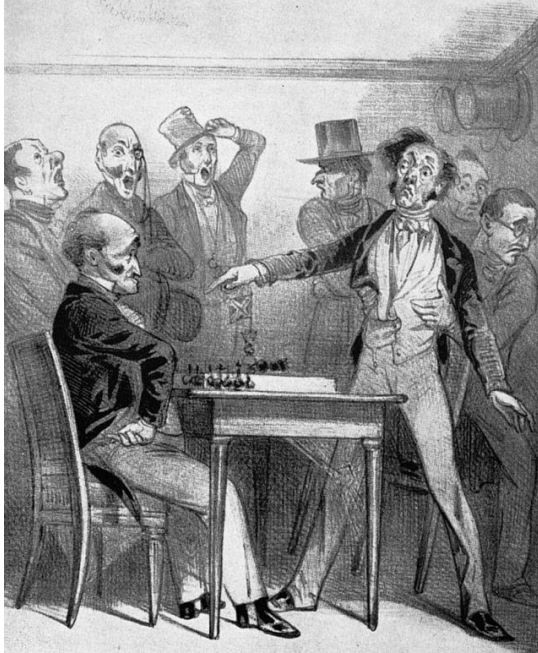
### **A National Hero: Howard Staunton vs St Amant, 1843**

The next significant contest in the international chess world came in 1843 when England's first player, Howard Staunton, faced the first player of France, Pierre Charles Fournier de Saint-Amant. While St. Amant claimed victory in a short set of friendly matches three months before the contest, the match at Paris saw Staunton claim victory eleven wins to six.<sup>70</sup> While contemporary writers did not imagine the contest of 1834 as one of national importance, the chess press put forward Staunton as the representative of the "English chess school" in the "battle" between "England and France".<sup>71</sup> Through exploring the reaction of the chess community to Staunton's victory, this section will demonstrate how the chess world celebrated it in patriotic and nationalistic terms. As Staunton became a national hero, leading writers and figures constructed the notion of The English Chess School. Contemporaries first envisaged The English School around ability, with Staunton's new role as world's first player an affirmation of its supremacy.

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<sup>70</sup> Hartson, *The Kings of Chess*, p. 29

<sup>71</sup> *John Bull* (May 6, 1844); *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1845) p. 11; R. D. Keene & R. N. Coles, *Howard Staunton: The English World Chess Champion* (London, 1974), p. 10; *Bell's Life* (Nov 19, 1843)



The reaction from the press to Staunton's victory in 1843 was one of national pride. For example, *The Brighton Guardian's* jingoistic report of the contest framed Staunton as the national hero who had successfully planted "the English battle flag...in the salon of the Café de la Regence".<sup>72</sup> The use of battle imagery, the English flag and historical references in contextualising the match was a common feature in reports of the match in both *Bell's Life* and the

*CPC*.<sup>73</sup> *Bell's Life*, for example, likened the opening banquet Staunton received in Paris to the battle of Fontenoy where the French and English officers "saluted hat in hand", offering their opponents the "compliment of first fire."<sup>74</sup> The use of such imagery had the effect of framing the contest as a historic battle between England and France, and viewed Staunton's victory as a matter of national importance. The contemporary English cartoon to the left lucidly represents this view. Staunton (left) sits calmly as the Englishmen behind him sing "God Save the Queen".<sup>75</sup>

The outreach of the contest, however, was limited. Although covered in mainstream papers, the reporting of the match was compendious in nature.<sup>76</sup> The outreach of these nationalistic sentiments in the press, therefore, was limited to the followers of the column in *Bell's Life* and

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<sup>72</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 96

<sup>73</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1846), p. 177; *Bell's Life* (Dec 24, 1843)

<sup>74</sup> *Bell's Life* (Nov 19, 1843)

<sup>75</sup> Hartson, *The Kings of Chess*, p. 29

<sup>76</sup> *The Spectator* (Dec 23, 1843); *The Era* (Dec 10, 1843); *Freeman's Journal* (Dec 6, 1843)



*The Chronicle*. Staunton, nonetheless, became a national figure in the chess world. The firm Jacques launched a new chess set in 1849 using the Staunton name as a brand. This remains one of the earliest examples of product endorsement by sports stars of the period, with the set running successfully up into the end of the period.<sup>77</sup> Later writers went on to proclaim it to have generated the most interest and excitement than any other chess event of the century.<sup>78</sup>

While writers celebrated Staunton's victory in print, the annual dinners of chess clubs also viewed the victory in national terms. This is not surprising given the patriotic sentiments expressed at these types of chess gatherings. Toasts to the Queen and the Royal family were a common way to kick off the proceedings, often followed by remarks and reflections on chess' historic and symbolic relationship with England and the monarchy.<sup>79</sup> For example, the meeting of the Yorkshire Chess Association in 1844 saw a toast to the queen state that the game "called forth" many qualities, but "none more conspicuously than loyalty and devotion to the Sovereign."<sup>80</sup> A further toast echoed similar national sentiments later on in the meeting, as a member put forward an analogy between the Constitution of England and the chessboard.<sup>81</sup>

Following Staunton's victory, the tone of its celebration at the annual meetings and dinners of chess clubs was one of national pride. While toasts eulogized Staunton, speakers framed his victory as one for the whole of England. For example, a toast made by the Chairman at the

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<sup>77</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 52; *Observer* (Nov 11, 1849)

<sup>78</sup> *British Chess Magazine* (1887), p. 151

<sup>79</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (Vol 8 – 1847); p. 160 & p. 176; J. Burt, *The Bristol Chess Club* (Bristol, 1883); *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1842), p. 221

<sup>80</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 57

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61

annual dinner of the Bristol Chess Club, after synthesising the preceding decades of French domination, proclaimed that “the empire” was now on “this side of the channel.”<sup>82</sup> This interpretation of England triumphing over the French and claiming supremacy pervaded the meetings and annual dinners. The meeting of the Yorkshire Chess Association also offered up the same heroic interpretation of Staunton’s victory. For example, Mr W. L. Robinson’s speech outlined the historic dominance of Spain and France in the preceding two centuries, before declaring: “The Chess Champion is at last an Englishman”.<sup>83</sup> With Staunton now seen as the “head of the Chess World”<sup>84</sup>, England now stood at the apogee of international chess.

While this view dominated the press and the annual dinners of clubs, Staunton’s own interpretation of his victory also suggests an awareness of its national significance. While it is safe to assume that like most professional sportsmen personal accomplishment was the most influential motivator in his desire for victory, his acknowledgements of the national implications at the Yorkshire Chess Association highlights the growing national symbolism of international master chess. For example, Staunton, in his speech to the members, stated his desires to add to the “glorious chain of British successes which now well night girdles the globe.”<sup>85</sup> In contextualising his victory with Empire, he further played up the national implications of victory.

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<sup>82</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1846), p. 124

<sup>83</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer* (May 17, 1845)

<sup>84</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer* (May 17, 1845); *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1846), p. 177

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 179

*Bell's Life*, the *CPC*, and the members of chess clubs all celebrated Staunton's victory as one for the whole of England. They viewed the victory as one over the whole of France, ultimately benefiting English national prestige. It was in this context that the idea of The English Chess School was born. In the years leading up to 1850, the idea of England standing above all nations as the headquarters of the chess world was crystallised in both the pages of the *CPC* and at the annual dinners of chess clubs.<sup>86</sup> Contemporaries imagined the supremacy of the English School on both ability and output of chess literature. Contemporaries framed and viewed the supremacy of The English School in the context of empire, and viewed it as symptomatic of English superiority.

A jingoistic article in the *CPC* in 1848 lucidly outlines this view:

“England is now acknowledged to be the headquarters of the chess world. The unvanquished prowess of her champion, and the splendid array of genius, talent, and proficiency displayed in her huge phalanx of amateurs, proclaim the fact that England stands unrivalled in this, as in every other noble pursuit. What they do not invent, Englishmen are sure to improve upon; and this humble repository of ours, wherein the efforts of the logical heads, patient thought, and indomitable perseverance of our countrymen are recorded, will afford sufficient proof of our premises.”<sup>87</sup>

In this passage, the writer portrayed dominance in chess as an inevitable outcome of superior English genius, “patience” and “indomitable perseverance”.<sup>88</sup> While hegemony deserted them in the previous decades, the writer framed the newfound dominance to have brought England

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<sup>86</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1844), p. 29 & p. 62

<sup>87</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1848), p. 122

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*

up to their rightful position of world leader that they claimed in “every other noble pursuit.”

The tying in of the supremacy of The English School with wider English dominance was a regular feature of analysis. For example, a lecture at the Athenaeum in Worcester by Edgar Sheppard in 1849 asserted that England laid claim to both “the empire of the Chess-board, as well as the empire of the seas.”<sup>89</sup> The parallels drawn here to Empire highlight the growing significance of international chess as a vehicle for national prestige. Similar to England’s dominance over seas, figures in the chess world imagined the supremacy of the English School as representative of England position as a superior, special nation.

Writers also buttressed the supremacy of The English School through reflections on England’s contributions to the growing body of literature. During this period, writers asserted the belief in a prosperous chess literature reflecting the “healthy state and progress of civilization”, and England’s position at the top of the pile was viewed as indicative of their position above all other nations.<sup>90</sup> Toasts at the London Chess Club and articles in the *CPC* eulogized English output, and proclaimed to hold the most influential voice in the growing body of work. For example, an article in 1845, following a brief synthesise of the dominance of Germany, Spain and Italy in the publication of chess theory, saw the assertion that “France and England” had, since that period, “changed the order of the march!”<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to note here that the

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<sup>89</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1849), p. 156

<sup>90</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1847), p. 176

This view can be further reinforced through exploring the intentions of new periodicals in other European countries. For example, a new German work on chess in 1846 stated in its introduction “that the most important Treatises upon the subject have been issued from England and France.” While England and France were seen as the leading players, the article then declared a desire and expectation for a successful German periodical to join the English and French ranks. *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1846), p. 225

<sup>91</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1845), p. 354; (1847), p. 176

author is happy to accept dual claim with France. The French, however, were certainly the more prolific of the two in the production of chess literature.<sup>92</sup> The acceptance of dual influence, therefore, is an overestimation of English contributions, rather than a sign of wavering belief in the superiority of English chess.

By 1850, contemporaries envisaged England as the headquarters of the chess world due to The English School's ownership of the world's best player, and their production of chess literature. Chess writers and members of clubs celebrated the supremacy of The English School in patriotic and nationalistic terms, viewed it in the wider context of Empire, and saw it as an affirmation of English superiority. With the construction of the English School based on supremacy, contemporaries imagined international master chess as a form of intellectual warfare, a tester of national prestige.

While the English chess world celebrated the supremacy of The English School, French contemporaries disagreed. The two camps fought the second contest in the pages of the countries' two rival chess periodicals, as French writers and players challenged English proclamations of supremacy.<sup>93</sup> By exploring these interactions, I will show the importance in which contemporaries viewed international master chess. While the French were unwilling to concede intellectual subordination to their English counterparts, English writers framed the

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<sup>92</sup> France had two periodicals and the longer running *Le Palamede* by five years. Murray, *The History of Chess*, p. 882

<sup>93</sup> At the Annual Dinner of the Liverpool Chess Club in 1846, the Chairman lucidly outlined that while England's chess supremacy was accepted at home, it was still disputed abroad. *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1846), p. 58

French as petty and deceitful. It was against these depictions of the foreign “other” that contemporaries further asserted English supremacy and affirmed the status and superiority of their champion.

One of the more detailed reports of the French reaction to the contest came from George Walker in *The Chronicle* in 1845. One of the main subjects of Walker’s criticism is French portrayals of Staunton, particularly Mr. Delannoy’s statement that the Englishman’s play, while possessing the “solidity of iron and steel”, wanted “the brilliancy of gold, the lustre of the diamond”. Criticizing the foundation of these claims, Walker turned Delannoy’s comments on their head in order to celebrate the Englishman’s prowess. Staunton’s blade of “Sheffield steel”, he stated, was unrivalled and preferred by “every soldier” on the day of battle to “the sword of gold with its diamond hilt”.<sup>94</sup> Walker followed these celebratory remarks with the assertion that the openings of the games “left little room” for Staunton’s brilliance. In questioning French challenges to the contest, Walker affirmed the status of England’s champion.

The French press also offered up contrasting interpretations of the match in their attempts to quash the claims of English supremacy. One of the more controversial claims put forward was by Mr. Lecrivain. The Frenchman argued that, with both parties claiming a match each, the contest was now even. This claim refers to the five “friendly” games the two played some months before, to which the Frenchman came out the victor three games to two. Walker, citing the “friendly” and brief nature of the match, looked to refute this assertion, before adding that

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 93

Staunton preferred “to play” and not “to talk”.<sup>95</sup> While this French claim was dismissed as desperate and spurious, Staunton, in opposition to St. Amant (who refused to come to England to claim his “revanche”), was portrayed as a chivalrous and noble competitor.

Walker challenged further French claims regarding St. Amant’s defeat, presenting them as equally spurious and farfetched. For example, *The Nationale’s* claim that the first six games never count in a match was seen by Walker to be “too weak, as well as silly, to do more than raise a smile”. Another reason cited by the French press was that Staunton took longer over his moves. Walker describes this as a “thumper”, going on to state that had Staunton played slower, “he would assuredly have won two of the games he lost.”<sup>96</sup> Harry Wilson also reinforced this critical depiction of the French press in the pages of the *CPC*, penning a similar article with the sole purpose of analysing the French conduct in defeat. In questioning whether French comments were undertaken to “deteriorate Old England’s victory”, Wilson followed with the quip: “the battle of Waterloo was never lost, it was only Grouchy’s blunder!”<sup>97</sup> The comparison here to Waterloo both highlights the parallels contemporaries drew between international master chess and national prestige and also presents the French as bitter and jealous in defeat.

After celebrating La Bourdonnais’ victory and postulating international master chess as a vehicle for national prestige, the French, in defeat, were unwilling to concede their crown. The

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 93-94

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 95

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 58

second war fought in the pages of the two countries' magazines highlights the anxieties contemporaries experienced in conceding intellectual subordination, and the strength of the beliefs in the symbolic powers of international master chess. While the French challenged the contest and the subsequent English proclamations of supremacy, the English chess press portrayed this conduct as bitter, jealous, and deceitful, and used it to reaffirm the status of The English School and its champion.

The bitter nature between the two camps continued into the public negotiations for a rematch in 1844. The outcome of these negotiations was failure. With St. Amant refusing to travel to England, Staunton travelled to Paris, despite neither side agreeing terms, only to return after two months without playing a game due to ill health.<sup>98</sup> The failed public negotiations between the two centred around issues of etiquette and fair play, with both sides disagreeing on the location, stake, and projected number of games. The reporting of these negotiations in the English chess press framed Staunton as a noble and gallant representative of England against the weak and unchivalrous French "other". This served to crystallise international master chess as a matter of national importance in the minds of contemporaries.

The first contention barring the agreement of a rematch was the matter of the stake. St. Amant's problems securing his side of the stake was criticised by the English press, who argued that the French community should back their "Paladin" the 2,500 francs required "for the glory of La Belle France". The cost, the *CPC* suggested, was but a mere "flea-bite" compared to those

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<sup>98</sup> Hartson, *The Kings of Chess*, p. 32



spent in the recent French hostilities with Morocco.<sup>99</sup> The portrayal of the players as national representatives was a common feature in the reporting of the rematch.<sup>100</sup> This, alongside the reference to Morocco, serves to highlight the growing belief in international master chess as a matter of national importance.

The second point of disagreement between the two parties was the location. While Staunton proposed for the match to be played in London, St. Amant proposed Paris. The English press, in response to the St. Amant's demand, framed it as a breach of etiquette and fair play. For example, Harry Wilson asserted that the request for another match on French sole was merely a ploy to evade a rematch. The Frenchman's claims to be willing of rematch, the Englishman argued, was "so at variance" with his spirit of "cavil and evasion" that it could be given "no credence".<sup>101</sup> Staunton further strengthened this image in the pages of the *CPC*, where he stated that the Frenchman had no desire to play another match, and his unreasonable demands were just a ploy to "evade a repetition" of the "accidental drubbing" he experienced in Paris.<sup>102</sup> Both assessments portrayed the Frenchman's demands as unfair breaches of etiquette and fair play, and indications of unwillingness to engage in another contest.

Against these depictions of the French "other", the English chess community constructed an image of Staunton as the noble and model competitor. Opposed to his French counterpart,

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<sup>99</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1845), p. 216

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125

<sup>101</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1845), p. 125

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 191-192

contemporaries celebrated Staunton for having gallantly travelled at his own personal cost for the good of England.<sup>103</sup> The Chairman of the Liverpool Chess Club, for example, stated that, like “Decius Curtius” he was ready to “throw himself into the gulf for the sake of his country.”<sup>104</sup>

However, there were those who opposed the negative depictions of St. Amant. Worrell’s article in *The Standard*, for example, was critical of Harry Wilson’s comments in the *CPC*. In questioning Wilson’s portrayal of the Frenchman, Worrell argued his conduct had been “beyond all praise”.<sup>105</sup> Although this critique refers to St. Amant’s match play conduct as opposed to the negotiations to which Wilson criticised, Worrell’s comments highlight that some were uneasy in accepting such harsh criticism of the Frenchman. Staunton’s role as editor of the *CPC* certainly influenced the framing of St. Amant in such negative light. However, while some opposed the harsh depictions of the Frenchman in the *CPC*, the supportive toasts at annual dinners of chess clubs, as well as the general mirroring of the periodical’s sentiments, suggests that the chess world was sympathetic to its message.<sup>106</sup>

Overall, the contest of 1843 crystallised international master chess as a matter of national importance and allowed contemporaries to project national sentiments onto the game. The chess world patriotically celebrated Staunton’s victory as a matter of national pride and asserted the supremacy of English chess. These assertions resulted in the construction of The

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 216

<sup>104</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1846), p. 56

<sup>105</sup> *The Standard* (Oct 30, 1844)

<sup>106</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1846), p. 99; (1842), p. 223; (1853), p. 115

English Chess School, which represented both a summation of English chess playing ability and their output of chess literature. Up until 1850, the chess world continued to celebrate both Staunton's victory and the supremacy of the English School. Contemporaries did this in context of empire, and supremacy at chess as symptomatic of England's status as a special and superior nation. The initial view of international master chess, therefore, was as a tester for national prestige. Chess playing ability, above all, represented a nation's intellectual superiority.

### **A Civilizing Nation, 1851**

Following the public make up between Staunton and St. Amant in 1847, the hostile nature between the two camps cooled down. While leading figures still maintained perceptions of English superiority, others put forward an additional conception of international master chess.<sup>107</sup> The new vision of international master chess posited it as a tool for peaceful and diplomatic relations, offering the game up as a form of intellectual warfare. Through exploring this vision and its influence in the organization of the first international chess tournament in 1851, I will show how leading figures of the game began to envisage international master chess as a form of "pacific internationalism".<sup>108</sup> This allowed contemporaries to continue notions of The English School's supremacy as well as place it in the wider context of England's civilizing mission.

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<sup>107</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1846), p. 99

<sup>108</sup> Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (London, 1999), p. 161

The new role of international master chess was crystallised at the meeting of the Yorkshire Chess Association in 1847. With both Staunton and St. Amant in attendance, both sides gave speeches looking to “lay aside” their differences in their hopes for the return of “fellowship and cordiality”. While Staunton acknowledged St. Amant’s “courage and endurance”, the Frenchman was quick to state the “delight” he always experienced travelling to England.<sup>109</sup> The first calls for peace with France, however, came at the annual dinner of the Liverpool Chess Club in 1846. The Chairman, Mr. Browne, after toasting the health of St. Amant and the Chess Club of Paris, expressed the hope for “no more deadly conflicts”, other than those across the chessboard.<sup>110</sup> Mr. Garvey echoed these sentiments at the meeting of the Yorkshire Chess Association in 1846, where he proclaimed the return of cordiality to be a “fortunate omen” for the “return to entente cordiale”. The conversation in the pages of *La Palamade* between St. Amant and the French King further expressed these sentiments. Here the King professed his support for the French champion, who was on duty at the Palais Royal as captain of the National Guard, praising his contribution in fostering the “most kindly and brotherly feeling between the two countries.” The King’s comments were welcomed and celebrated by those in attendance at the Yorkshire Association in 1847, with the chairman similarly praising chess’ honourable role in allowing players to “meet in all amity and good feeling.”<sup>111</sup> Contemporaries at the Yorkshire Chess Club, therefore, put forward the idea of international master chess not just as a form of intellectual warfare, but a vehicle for the fostering of cordial relations between nations.

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<sup>109</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1847), p. 162 & p. 176

<sup>110</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1848), p. 154

<sup>111</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1847), p. 160

Mr. Garvey's political speech at the Festival of the London Chess Club in 1847 further outlined this conception of international master chess. Garvey first outlined his perception of English goals on the international stage. England lust not for "political aggrandizement" or "European domination", he argued, for her mission was a "holier and happier one". Rather, England's mission was to ensure a "lasting peace" across the world for the "good of all." Garvey went on in his liberal epilogue, outlining peace's inevitable influence in abolishing slavery and fostering a flourishing art and science. While pushing for peace, he puts international master chess forward as form of "honorable rivalry" between England and France, a "perpetual conflict" over "Caissa's dominions". Garvey finished his speech by referring to the "gallant knights" of Staunton and St. Amant, outlining his hopes that the players would ratify a new "league of amity" through the commencement of a new campaign.<sup>112</sup> Similarly to the event in Yorkshire, Garvey envisaged international master chess as a form of intellectual warfare to aid the peaceful relations between nations.

These sentiments filtered down to the wider chess playing public, with a tongue-in-cheek article appearing in *Punch* labelled "chess, the cheap defence of nations". Here the writer joked that "General Staunton" should fight all of England's battles with foreign powers. Chess as an alternative form of warfare, stated the article, was a lot cheaper, yet just as "efficacious."<sup>113</sup> While contemporaries constructed The English School upon ideas of English supremacy, the

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<sup>112</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1847), p. 164

<sup>113</sup> *Punch* (December 14, 1849)

belief in international master chess as a diplomatic tool too entered the minds of some in the chess world.

Contemporaries carried forward the conception of international master chess as a tool for peaceful relations into the formation of the first international chess tournament in 1851, held in conjunction with the Great Exhibition of the same year. The traditional view of the Great Exhibition has been to see it as a symbol of Britain's position as the "most powerful and advanced" industrialized nation. More recently, however, the work of Auerbach has shown how the exhibition was used by Victorians to "define themselves as a nation".<sup>114</sup> While Auerbach has shown how "pacifist internationalism" influenced the organisers, who conceptualised the festival as a "symbol of international brotherhood", contemporaries interpreted the event in nationalistic terms, celebrating their shared British values and beliefs.<sup>115</sup> Through exploring the first international chess tournament in 1851, we are able to see that it followed similar lines. The motivations of the organisers were twofold. Firstly, a tournament would prove to test the relative merits of the various European chess masters, and secondly, a Congress served to reconstruct chess legislation and establish a universally codified set of laws. Through exploring the narratives behind these two goals, I will show how the organizers viewed the event in the wider context of England's civilizing mission, and a test for the supremacy of The English School.

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<sup>114</sup> Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, pp. 1-5

<sup>115</sup> Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851* pp. 159-161; pp. 187-188

Although the German Mr. Bledow first suggested the idea of an international tournament in 1843, it was not until 1849 that the idea gained momentum in the pages of the *CPC*.<sup>116</sup> The tournament itself was eventually held in May 1851 in conjunction with the beginning of the Great Exhibition. The most influential organizers were Staunton and the committee of the St. George's Chess Club. While the projected congress never took place, the tournament ultimately ended in defeat for Staunton, as the German Adolf Anderssen claimed victory.<sup>117</sup>

One of the main works to outline the events and discussions behind the organisation of the tournament was Staunton's book of 1851. One of the key messages of the book was the view of England as a world leader and a civilizing nation. The first indication of this was Staunton's assertion that the responsibility of leading European chess should naturally fall upon England.<sup>118</sup> Staunton viewed England's intimate role in organizing and hosting the event as a symbolic representative of English superiority.

However, it was in the specific organization of the projected congress that Staunton portrayed the event in the context of England's role as a civilizing nation. Rather than just a tournament, the committee planned for the event to assume a "higher and more useful character" and hoped to advance the state of chess in Europe, America, and India.<sup>119</sup> The members of the committee also put forward the congress as a civilizing mission. H. A. Kennedy, for example,

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<sup>116</sup> Kiernan, *A History of International Master Chess, 1851-1914*, p. 26; *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1849), p. 65

<sup>117</sup> Hartson, *The Kings of Chess*, p. 33

<sup>118</sup> Howard Staunton, *The Great Chess Tournament* (London, 1852), p. xi

<sup>119</sup> Staunton, *The Great Chess Tournament*, p. xlix & xviii

also saw the event as a unique opportunity to “advance the cause of chess”.<sup>120</sup> While convenience drove the choice of London as the destination for the first international chess tournament and congress, the leading organizers framed England’s role as symbolic.<sup>121</sup> They conceptualised England as a civilizing nation, who, in leading the nations of the world, were advancing the status and practice of chess for the benefit of all.

Similar to the Great Exhibition, the organizers were also influenced by “pacifist internationalism”.<sup>122</sup> For example, Staunton framed the event as a chance for long acquainted chess players who knew each other only by reputation to meet and get to know each other personally.<sup>123</sup> Staunton further expressed these sentiments when discussing the anomalies in the Italian rules of the game. The “ties of brotherhood” instilled through chess, argued Staunton, existed only “in vain” should the whole of Europe not unite in one “kindred art”.<sup>124</sup> The English mission, therefore, was not only to advance the status and practice of chess, but also to crystallize a harmonious and unified brotherhood of chess playing nations.

However, personal and national desires also drove the event. For example, in the build up to the event, Staunton portrayed the establishment of a chess tournament as a means of proving a “real rank of the most skilful and celebrated players”.<sup>125</sup> In this view, the tournament was a test, “by actual conflict”, of the “just value of rival styles of Chess strategy.” The tournament,

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<sup>120</sup> *Bell's Life* (Oct 26, 1850); *Illustrated London News* (Oct 26, 1850)

<sup>121</sup> *Blackburn Standard* (Dec 18, 1850) Kiernan, *A History of International Master Chess, 1851-1914*, p. 28

<sup>122</sup> Staunton, *The Great Chess Tournament*, p. xviii

<sup>123</sup> *Illustrated London News* (Feb 15, 1851)

<sup>124</sup> Staunton, *The Great Chess Tournament*, p. xii

<sup>125</sup> *Illustrated London News* (Oct 26, 1850); Staunton, *The Great Chess Tournament* p. x & p. li



therefore, was also as a test for the vitality of The English School against the rival nations of the world. While England claimed superiority over “all nations in sports of an athletic nature”, this was a chance to prove her proficiency in the intellectual.<sup>126</sup> The motivations for the event, therefore, were both national and internationalist.

The wider chess-playing public, however, were more interested in the event as a tester of English supremacy. This is highlighted by the reaction of the press to Staunton’s defeat. *The Leeds Intelligencer*, for example, reported the tournament to have ended “unfortunately for the British” following the failing of English players.<sup>127</sup> The reaction at the annual meetings of clubs was also one of disappointment. Alongside disappointment, contemporaries looked to excuse Staunton’s loss and reaffirm his status as world champion. The Chess Soiree at the Manchester Chess Club in 1852, for example, saw the chairman proclaim Staunton to still be the “first player of the world”. Even Wellington, he added, did not claim victory every time. The English champion had in this view, lost just on one occasion.<sup>128</sup> The Liverpool Chess Club and the Chess Soiree of the Halifax St. George’s Club also echoed this sentiment.<sup>129</sup> Mr. Cronhelm of the Halifax club dismissed the match as being too short to warrant it a reliable assessment of the players’ skill. Any rematch between Anderssen and the Englishman, Cronhelm asserted, would see the Prussian “restore the English wreath”, to which Staunton had the “honour of carrying anyway.”<sup>130</sup> The reaction to Staunton’s loss at the tournament, therefore, appears to have been

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<sup>126</sup> *Illustrated London News* (Feb 15, 1850)

<sup>127</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer* (July 26, 1851)

<sup>128</sup> *Illustrated London News* (June 19, 1852)

<sup>129</sup> *The Chess Player*, Volume 2 (1852), p. 83

<sup>130</sup> *Illustrated London News* (June 19, 1852)

one of disappointment and reflection, as contemporaries denied the implications of defeat and beat the nationalist drum in their continued proclamations of supremacy.

There were some, however, who opposed both Staunton and the event and did not express the same national sentiments. George Walker and members at the London Chess Club, for example, were against the conception of the tournament, referring to it as the “Mock National Chess Tournament” and the “Pretend National Tournament”.<sup>131</sup> The reason for this opposition stemmed from local disputes, with the greater influence of the St. George’s Chess Club in the formulation of the event being the issue of contention. With Staunton viewed as intimately responsible for this, criticism extended beyond the tournament and onto the Englishman. George Walker’s column in *Bell’s Life*, for example, stated that while many viewed him to be Alexander the Great, he was perhaps “Alexander the Coppersmith.”<sup>132</sup> The local issues for Walker and those at The London Chess Club, therefore, took precedent over the national.

To what extent, therefore, can the reaction at the Manchester and Halifax Soirees be considered representative of the feelings of the rest of Britain? Staunton, in his work on the tournament, reported the reaction from elsewhere in England, Ireland and Scotland to be supportive and full of zest.<sup>133</sup> Staunton’s declaration of universal support for the tournament is hardly surprising, given his intimate involvement with the event. However, the \$3235 subscribed by wealthy patrons and smaller subscribers across the country suggests that the

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<sup>131</sup> *Bell’s Life* (June 22, 1851), (Oct 12, 1851)

<sup>132</sup> *Bell’s Life* (Aug 30, 1851)

<sup>133</sup> Staunton, *The Great Chess Tournament*, p. I

British chess community met the event with support.<sup>134</sup> The interest in the event from the wider community, as before, was limited. The focus of mainstream newspapers was on the reporting of the games and brief summaries on the outcome of the tournament, with reflections on the national importance confined to the chess press and the attendees of chess clubs.<sup>135</sup>

While contemporaries, in constructing the English School, envisaged success through chess as symbolic of national prestige, others also posited it as a vehicle for diplomacy. In wishing for lasting peace with France, figures in the chess world put forward the game as a form of “honourable rivalry”, a respectable form of intellectual warfare. These pacific sentiments continued into the organizing of the first international tournament in London in 1851. The organizers envisaged the event as an opportunity to unite the chess world under the leadership of The English School. While viewing this in the wider context of England’s civilizing mission, the organizers and writers also viewed it as an opportunity for the showcasing of English superiority. Although unsuccessful in displaying the prowess of The English School, the chess community still maintained their perception of English supremacy. In the minds of many contemporaries, England was still a special and superior nation.

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<sup>134</sup> Kiernan, *A History of International Master Chess, 1851-1914*, p. 32

<sup>135</sup> *The Times* (July 26, 1851), *Leeds Intelligencer* (Dec 21, 1850), *Sheffield Intelligencer* (July 19, 1851)

## **Conclusion:**

The events leading up to 1851 crystallised master chess as the first truly international sport. The first two contests between England and France were games of national importance, while the third brought the game to an international audience. The conceptualisation of international master chess in the minds of leading players, writers, and members of chess clubs up until 1851 took on two forms. The first was the view of international master chess as a test for national prestige. While contemporaries did not envisage the first contest in 1834 as one of national importance, they nonetheless viewed McDonnell as a national representative on the international stage and were uneasy of French proclamations of supremacy. However, contemporaries envisaged the second contest in 1843 as a national battle with national implications. The chess world both celebrated Staunton's victory in patriotic terms and viewed it as one for national prestige. It was in this context that contemporaries constructed the idea of the English School of Chess. While to a small group of elite players it was a way of playing, more broadly the English School was both a summation of English chess playing ability on the international stage and English output of chess literature. With England viewed to have ruled supreme in both of these categories, contemporaries constructed the narrative of supremacy. This construction of supremacy tied closely in with ideas of Empire, and was too viewed as an inevitable outcome symptomatic of English intellectual superiority.

The second conception of international master chess was its tool for peaceful and diplomatic relations. Figures in the chess world first constructed this conception following the cooling of relations between Staunton and St. Amant and carried it forward into the organizing of the first

international tournament in 1851. In the wider context of calls for peace, this view envisaged international master chess as a respectable form of intellectual warfare, a way to express “honourable rivalry” between nations. Again, subscribers of this view drew on ideas of empire and envisaged the tournament of 1851 as an example of England’s status as a civilizing nation.

## Chapter 2: The Age of Decline, 1851-1874

Following Staunton's effective retirement from serious play in 1853, the following decades saw a competitive void where no single player laid claim to the title of England's best player. With the fall of England's champion and the successes of Adolf Anderssen, the German School of Chess now ruled supreme. Alongside this was the slight decline in the growth of chess clubs. While the previous period was one of supremacy, in the minds of contemporary players and writers, these factors made the following period one of decline. Despite this decline, however, London became the new "Mecca of the chess world". In the wake of the tournament of 1851, London became the new hotbed for professional and international master chess as many foreign players moved to the capital in hopes of making a living from the game. Of the 37 players that made a living in England during the period, 18 of those were foreign.<sup>136</sup> Players managed to make a living from the game in a number of ways; one was through winning games and tournaments, the other was through editorship of columns and magazines. While some were able to make chess their sole income, other players used the game alongside other exploits. For example, Kling taught music, while Horwitz also painted miniatures.<sup>137</sup> Alongside the international and professional growth of the game, the following period witnessed the first attempts at the game's institutionalization. The Yorkshire Chess Association, established in 1840, spanned into The Northern and Midland Counties Chess Association (NMCA) in 1853, then going on to become the British Chess Association (BCA) in 1857.

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<sup>136</sup> Harvey, "You May Say What You Like to the Professionals and Dismiss Them When You Want", p. 407

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p. 410

This chapter will explore both the professional and institutional growth of the game to further examine the construction of international master chess, the English School, and notions of amateurism and professionalism. The first section will examine the leading chess magazines and periodicals of the period, while the second will explore the attempts at the institutionalization of chess through the NMCA and the BCA. By exploring these two subjects, this chapter will show how contemporaries put forward two competing visions of English chess during the period. The first, led by the three organisers of the BCA, Lowenthal, Medley, and Lyttleton, supported the professional growth of the game and made moves to encourage an international community of leading masters. The second, led by Staunton, in alliance with large support from the north and parts of the provinces and south, looked to oppose professionalism and the growing foreign involvement through promoting an amateur ethos. Like the notion of amateurism in other sports, this vision called for the playing of the game for the game's sake, valuing innovation, creativity and style. However, unlike other sports, matters of class were not the predominant factor in its construction. Rather, Staunton and his supporters, in response to English players' failures on the international stage, shaped the ideology of amateurism against the image of the foreign professional. As the universal nature of master chess brought national tensions into sharp focus, the "English" nature of amateurism was emphasised more than in any other sport. Against the image of the foreign professional, amateurism became an embodiment of the English spirit.

While professionalism divided the chess world, the one belief that united the two camps was the continuing belief in chess ability representing national prestige. While this belief saw both

sides look to restore the supremacy of the English School, the vision of English amateurism, however, began to move away from this view. Envisaging chess as merely a game, the English School became a way of playing, rather than a summation of English performance on the international stage. It was its more civilized play ethic, rather than its chess playing ability, which made England a more superior nation.

### **“Spurious Universalism” and English Amateurism, 1851-1870**

Although contemporaries would go on to consider the period one of decline, the first few years following Staunton’s defeat in 1851 witnessed the leading periodicals and magazines espouse the supremacy of the English School. For example, *The Chess Player*, edited by Kling and Horwitz, celebrated the quality and popularity of chess as a symbol of superior English national character. Just like in every other department of “ingenious or useful science”, when it came to chess, the powers of the English were seen to have ranked high. They lauded the past and present English players for their abilities and character, and celebrated the number of clubs and players as matters of “pride”.<sup>138</sup> Alongside the continuation of this narrative of superiority, they too looked back on Staunton’s defeat in 1851 and questioned both the legitimacy and symbolic meaning of the loss.<sup>139</sup> What is noticeable here is that the editors, Kling and Horwitz, both foreign professionals, asserted the superiority of the English School. As foreigners, they would have been anxious to distil any hostility towards them, and they most likely celebrated the superiority of the English School to get readers on their side. That they felt the need to beat the

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<sup>138</sup> *The Chess Player*, Volume 4 (1853), pp. 129-130

<sup>139</sup> *The Chess Player*, Volume 2 (1852), p. 84



nationalist drum represents the widespread belief in the supremacy of the English School in the minds of chess enthusiasts.

However, the period up until 1860 did see contemporaries begin to react to the undeniable decline in the reputation of the English School. For example, the *CPC*, under the editorship of Brien, launched several enquiries into the declining powers of English players' in relation to the continent. Brien attributed this decline not to a lack of good players but to the lack of regular play brought about by an "unhappy party spirit". It argued that those who talked too much about a certain match or a certain player were taking the game too seriously. Chess, which was not the "sole of life", should not encourage the pondering of these troubles, as players should just be concerned with sitting down and playing.<sup>140</sup> While not directly verbalising criticism against the target of "professionalism", the *CPC* envisaged the decline of the English School as brought about by the taking of the game too seriously.

The periodical also cited the previous generation's parochial focus on the rivalry between France and England as another reason for English decline. This focus, Brien argued, resulted in contemporaries ignoring the rise of the "transcendent ability" of the Prussian school of Chess.<sup>141</sup> The *CPC* further outlined this belief in 1859, stating that English players had rested "upon their laurels...satisfied with previous successes".<sup>142</sup> The *CPC* viewed this as symptomatic of other English pursuits, a matter of "national habit" and "carelessness". Chess writers

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<sup>140</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1855), p. 370

<sup>141</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1856), p. 125

<sup>142</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1859), p. 2

attributed the decline of the English School, therefore, to inaction – both a lack of regular play, and a tendency to relax and survive on past victories.

While aware of English decline, however, the *CPC* still maintained notions of English superiority through changing the criteria for its celebration. Rather than focus on competitive international chess as had been done in the previous period, the new symbols of national superiority were chess literature, the average standard of play, and the widespread popularity of the game. For example, the *CPC* portrayed the rise in third-rate talent as a matter of national pride, with the average standard of play being “decidedly superior” to any country on the continent.<sup>143</sup> The periodical also viewed the popularity of chess over morally deplorable leisure activities as a bastion of social progress, an area where England had “outstripped all European nations.” While England could not claim to hold the world’s best player, the *CPC* instead posited these new developments as representative of England being a “more extended civilization”.<sup>144</sup>

The reactions to the realization of the English School’s decline, therefore, were twofold. Firstly, writers began to use the game to assert national superiority in different ways, demonstrating their tendencies to view England as a special and distinct nation. Secondly, writers attributed decline as a symptom of inaction. This inaction was both a result of surviving on past victories and players taking the game too seriously. While this shows the early signs of the souring

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<sup>143</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1855), p. 370

<sup>144</sup> *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (1859), pp. 33-34

attitudes towards professional chess, writers did not voice these sentiments as coherent attacks against professionalism.

There were figures during the 1850s, however, who directly opposed its growth. For example, Staunton, who gave up serious chess for a career as a Shakespearian scholar, used his column in the *Illustrated London News* to speak out against the growing trend of professional chess. He frequently made it clear in his column that he himself was not a professional, and argued that the game was of a trivial nature compared to other professional matters.<sup>145</sup> He criticised the tradition of shilling play in divans and clubs, and called for its removal in order to end the rise of “professional players”.<sup>146</sup> Staunton voiced these attacks along increasingly xenophobic lines, viewing the growing trend of professional players with contempt. He stated the rising number of columns and magazines under foreign editorship to be “preposterous”, and expressed his delight at the returning of the column in the *Family Herald* to “English hands” in 1858.<sup>147</sup> The Englishman further elaborated his contempt for the serious undertaking of the game during his public negotiations with Paul Morphy in 1858. In failing to agree terms with the American player, he cited his professional engagements as the reason for his decline. “None but a madman”, he asserted, would “forfeit his engagements and imperil his professional

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<sup>145</sup> *Glasgow Herald* (25 June 1852); *Illustrated London News* (2 July 1853)

<sup>146</sup> *Illustrated London News* (5 November 1853); *Bell's Life* (5 April, 1840); Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 39. While Staunton criticised the playing for a shilling, players did traditionally do so as a means for winning money or encouraging gambling by third parties. Instead, it was seen as a way to “equalize the contest by giving and receiving proper odds” (odds being the removal of a certain number of pieces or an advantage of a certain number of moves at the beginning to level out the chances according to strength). This was not considered professionalism, but rather “connected with the behaviour and status of players” as a “tangible acknowledgement of defeat.”

<sup>147</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 82; Harvey, “You May Say What You Like About the Professional and Dismiss Them When You Want”, p. 410

reputation.”<sup>148</sup> The roots of opposition to professional chess therefore lay between analysis of English decline, and anxieties around the respectability of the game.

The continued failures of English players on the international stage made the decline of the English School more apparent in the years between 1860 and 1874, coinciding with the wider anxieties around England’s status in the world.<sup>149</sup> During these next fourteen years, there were four chess magazines in circulation: *The Chess Player’s Chronicle (CPC)*, *The Chess Player’s Magazine (CPM)*, *The Chess World (CW)*, and *The Westminster Club Papers (WP)*. By exploring these four magazines and their views towards English decline, we can see how writers further constructed notions of international master chess and the English School. The growing foreign and professional presence split contemporaries into two camps as they put forward two visions for English chess. The first, represented by the *CPC* and the *CPM*, took an accepting, and often-celebratory view of the cosmopolitan nature of the game, worrying little about professionalism. The second, led by Staunton’s *CW*, later followed by the *WCP*, opposed this universal vision of chess, framing an amateur ethos as the only basis for the English School. Against the image of the foreign professional, this vision envisaged an amateur ethos as an embodiment of the English spirit. While the two visions disagreed on the growing foreign and professional presence, one belief united the two camps: the need to “defend” English chess and restore the supremacy of the English School.

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<sup>148</sup> David Lawson, Paul Morphy: *The Pride and Sorrow of Chess* (Louisiana, 2010), p. 138

<sup>149</sup> Howard Fuller, *Empire, Technology, and Sea Power: Royal Naval Crisis in the Age of Palmerston* (Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-2.

While the chess world's reaction to English decline was separate and distinct from the wider reactions to the decline of England's economic, imperial, and naval strength, it followed similar lines to those outlined in the wider historiography of "declinism". This literature has generally placed emphasis on three distinct dates for the nexus of English decline. Cultural historian Martin Weiner has argued it was 1851, while historians of science have looked to the exhibition of 1867, and economic historians the early 1870s.<sup>150</sup> Regarding chess, the reaction to English decline strikes most relevantly with the work of Weiner. Weiner has argued that the growing middle classes were resistant to embrace industrial and capitalist values in favour of the traditional slow-changing "country" life.<sup>151</sup> The split between the two competing visions for chess mirrors this idea. The first camp's acceptance of cosmopolitanism was an embracing of the industrial spirit, while Staunton's vision of English amateurism looked to restore the old traditional values of "country" England. While these two camps largely split the chess world, as will be shown, the tides were turning in favour of a restoration to country England. The growth of chess, therefore, conforms to Weiner's theory of a widespread rejection of industrialization and capitalist ideals.

The first periodical of the period was the *CPC*, which ran from 1859 to 1861. Following the absence of a chess periodical for the previous two years, the editors framed the restoration of an English chess magazine as a matter of national urgency. While the Prussians, Americans, and

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<sup>150</sup> Martin Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge, 1981), p. xvi-6; Graeme Goody, "Lies, Damned Lies and Declinism: Lyon Playfair, the Paris 1867 Exhibition and the Contested Rhetorics of Scientific Education and Industrial Performance" in ed. Ian Inkster, Colin Griffin, Jeff Hill and Judith Rowbotham, *The Golden Age: Essays in British Social and Economic History, 1850-1870* (Routledge, 2017), (pp. 105-121), p. 106-108.

<sup>151</sup> Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, p. xvi-6

French all had their weekly magazines, the editors claimed their monthly magazine was essential for the vitality of the British School. While this defence of British chess, conceded the editors, would include notable games played by foreign celebrities, they asserted that the magazine would be devoted “chiefly to English Chess”.<sup>152</sup> The editors, therefore, framed the periodical in national terms, and viewed it as a vehicle for the improvement of English chess.

While framing itself as a magazine for the defence of British chess, however, it took a more accepting approach to the printing of foreign games and problems than clearly some of its readership would have liked. The need for the editors to defend their reporting of foreign players amid criticism from readers was a common occurrence. For example, one article suggested it was the fault of the leading clubs for encouraging foreign talent “in preference to native genius”.<sup>153</sup> Another defence came in response to the claim that too many chess publications were in the hands of foreigners. The periodical offered up a defence of the cosmopolitan nature of chess, citing the benefits individual foreigners and their native periodicals brought to strengthening and improving the English game.<sup>154</sup> While the *CPC* saw itself as a vehicle for the defence of British chess, it also included games played by foreigners, both at home and abroad, and accepted the growing universal nature of the English chess scene.

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<sup>152</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle*, (1859), p. 1

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35

The next magazine to emerge after the cancellation of the *CPC* in 1861 was the *CPM*, which ran from 1863 to 1867. While initially under the editorship of Harrwitz, Lowenthal took over in 1864. Like the *CPC*, the magazine framed its conception in national terms, citing the regularity and stability of magazines in Germany, France, and Holland as the reason for its necessity.<sup>155</sup> Lowenthal further played up this sentiment in the second volume specifically in reference to Germany. Being already ahead of Germany in commerce, finance, and political economy, when it came to matters of chess, Lowenthal asked, “shall we English be behind that country?”<sup>156</sup> Like the *CPC*, the *CPM* framed itself as a tool for national enhancement and the restoration of the English School’s supremacy.

Despite these national proclamations, however, Lowenthal too envisaged the magazine as an “organ of European chess”. Like the *CPC*, this universal approach saw readers criticise the magazine for not devoting enough attention to English chess. The second volume, in the face of such criticism, saw Lowenthal defend his attention on foreign players and games, where he argued that chess was “congenial to all civilized countries”, and that it was his duty to make the magazine an “emporium of chess through ought the world.”<sup>157</sup> The *CPM*, therefore, while desirous to restore the supremacy of the English School, looked to support the foreign and professional growth of the game.

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<sup>155</sup> *The Chess Player’s Magazine*, Volume 1 (1863, London), p. 1

<sup>156</sup> *The Chess Player’s Magazine*, Volume 2 (1864, London), p. 1

<sup>157</sup> *The Chess Player’s Magazine*, Volume 2 (1864), p. 3

In addition, the *CPM* did not invest as much interest in using the game as a vehicle for celebrating English superiority as the *CPC*. For example, while the *CPC* celebrated the growing number of clubs and columns as matters of national superiority, the *CPM* viewed this growth in wider European context, viewing it as a cause for European celebration.<sup>158</sup> Another example of this was Lowenthal's sobering analysis of English inferiority compared to the newly risen German School. The Hungarian himself conceded that he may have given the topic too much attention, and it appears many readers agreed.<sup>159</sup> In response to complaints, Lowenthal took two pages in the following issue to outline his innocent intentions. Here he claimed not to speak of the great masters of England in a "derogatory sense", but merely sought to offer up a comparison of the two nations.<sup>160</sup> Following the apology, Lowenthal stated his belief that England, following a "fresh impulse", would produce a "future English champion" capable of taking down the German champions.<sup>161</sup> The Hungarian's assessments highlight both the anxieties readers experienced in accepting proclamations of German supremacy, as well as Lowenthal's internationalist approach to the reporting of chess.

Both the *CPC* and *CPM* framed their publications in national terms, calling for the defence of English chess and the restoration of English supremacy. These calls, alongside the anxieties experienced by readers in the face of proclamations of German supremacy, highlight the continuing national importance of international master chess. Writers' supplemented the

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p. 346

<sup>159</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine* (1863), p. 100

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130



desire for the return of English supremacy, however, with an acceptance of the foreign and professional growth of the game. The *CPC* and *CPM*, therefore, both sought to strike a balance between defending the interests of English chess, and promoting an internationalist, universal vision of the game. The need for the editors to defend this position, however, suggests a wider discontent from the chess world, represented by the advent of the next magazine.

The next magazine of the period was *The Chess World (CW)*, edited by Staunton, running from 1865 to 1869. Like both the *CPC* and *CPM*, it framed its publication as one for the defence of English chess. This defence, however, was a rebuttal of the “cosmopolitan character” of the game in which the two preceding magazines supported. Its first issue, for example, saw Staunton proclaim that a magazine such as the *CW* that “faithfully” represented the “interests of English Chess” had “long been felt.”<sup>162</sup> In this view, the previous magazines’ acceptance of the foreign and professional growth of the game made them “unfaithful” representatives of English chess. While all three magazines looked to defend English chess and restore the supremacy of the English School, Staunton’s vision for English chess and his conceptualisation of the English School differed. This vision of English chess opposed the growth of professionalism, which it viewed as inherently foreign, and advocated the belief in an amateur ethos as the basis for English chess.

Central to the shaping of this message was the *CW*’s analysis of English decline. Although attributing the same causes of decline as the *CPM* and *CPC*, the *CW* portrayed these as

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<sup>162</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (London, 1865), p. 1.

stemming from the influence of foreign professionalism. For example, Staunton argued that the obsession with winning at all costs and the proneness to shy away from competition had been “imported by a few professional players”.<sup>163</sup> The magazine also opposed this alongside the foreign professional’s perceived adherence to the German School’s vision of chess as a science, which looked to grind out victories through the steady accumulation of small advantages. In opposing this style of “scientific play”, the magazine urged its amateurs to follow the “artistic spirit” of their previous champions and strive for originality and creativity.<sup>164</sup>

The other magazines of the period, however, were much more sympathetic and accepting of viewing chess as a science. The link between the two was made regularly by the *CPC*, *CPM* and other chess booklets, as articles appealed to arcane scientific and philosophical literature to substantiate chess among the sciences. For example, some referenced chess’ geometric qualities, and others discussed the game alongside John Stuart Mill’s *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*.<sup>165</sup> The reason for this contrasting desire to establish chess as a science lay in matters of respectability and class. The new freedoms brought about by leisure were met with anxiety by the middle-class. As shown by historians such as Bailey, the period from 1840s onwards remained a period of legitimation for leisure pursuits. The initial grounds upon which the respectability of games and hobbies were judged was by their moral character

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<sup>163</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), pp. 97-98

<sup>164</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), pp. 97-98. This depiction of German identity conforms to the mid-century view of the German “conservative agriculturalist”: dull and uncreative. William Bertolette, “British Identity and the German Other”, *Louisiana State University Doctoral Dissertations* (2012)

<sup>165</sup> *The British Chess Review*, Volume I (London, 1853), pp. 98-107 & 130-135; *The Chess Player’s Chronicle* (London, 1859), p. 130, *The Household Chess Magazine* No. 2 (Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1865), p. 18; *The Chess Player’s Magazine*, Volume I (London, 1863), p. 33.

and their ability to prepare the mind for work.<sup>166</sup> While the former was mainly a concern for the middle-class benefactors, the latter saw writers and players appeal to chess' position as an "exact science" to assert its improving and educational qualities for the working man.<sup>167</sup>

The two contrasting visions of English chess, therefore, mirror the reactions to the process of industrialisation as outlined by Weiner. While the view of English chess espoused by the *CPC* and *CPM* looked to embrace universalism and science, Staunton's vision was resistant to these powers in favour of a return to the golden age of chess.

This is also illustrated by the *CW*'s wider assessment of the English School's decline, which too envisaged an artistic approach to chess as traditionally English. The previous successes of England's champions, Staunton argued, stemmed from the game's national independence. When the game remained nationally independent, the likes of McDonnell, Lewis, Staunton, Walker, Cochrane, and Buckle were "second to none in originality, brilliance, and power". The reason for the English School's decline was the importing of foreign professionalism, its loss of national character, and its degeneration into "spurious universalism". This, Staunton argued, had all resulted in the "lamentable decay" of the "once-famous Chess School of England", and the only way to halt the decline of their "empire" was to restore its "separate and distinct nationality".<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Peter Bailey, "'A Mingled Mass of Perfectly Legitimate Pleasures': The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure", *Victorian Studies* 1 (1977), (pp. 7-28), p. 20.

<sup>167</sup> Ed Harrison, "Chess as a Rational Recreation, 1840-1880", *University of Manchester Thesis* (2012)

<sup>168</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), pp. 1-2.

As well as a desire for the restoration of the English School, the *CW*'s construction of this vision for chess also stemmed from the anxieties around respectability and fair play. For example, one of the magazine's articles argued that while the foreign "self seeking...spirit of professionalism" not only harmed the development of native talent, it removed the "chivalrous and dignifying characteristics" of the game.<sup>169</sup> The professional's necessity to win and preference for "vanity" led to the playing of the game in a way that was "unworthy" of an English Gentleman's character.<sup>170</sup>

The *CW*'s vision of chess, therefore, opposed foreign professionalism and called for the restoration of the traditional English qualities that had defined the golden age of the English School. This way of playing the game strove for originality and individuality, favouring the "artistic" over the "scientific". While Staunton did not label this approach as amateurism, its focus on originality, creativity, chivalry and fair play all conform to the wider amateur ethos that defined the period.<sup>171</sup> The magazine defined these qualities against the image of the foreign professional and the German School and put them forward as innately English. This, the magazine argued, should form the basis for English chess and the English School.

The magazine's use of playful fictionalised conversations between great chess players of the past highlights its commitment to this vision. Not content with direct articles addressing

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<sup>169</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), p. 131

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 321-323

<sup>171</sup> Norman Baker, "Whose Hegemony? The Origins of the Amateur Ethos in Nineteenth Century English Society", *Sport in History* 24 (2009), (pp. 1-16), pp. 1-2

professionalism and the spirit of play, it looked to use the authority of the great players of the past to inculcate their ideal of an amateur ethos to its readers. The first in the magazine's series of four fictional conversations was between Jacob Sarratt, a leading English player in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and Alexander McDonnell, the English champion discussed in the first chapter.<sup>172</sup> The conversation starts with McDonnell outlining his disappointment at the decay upon which the great English School of Chess had experienced. In discussing the causes of decline, the two agree that the main culprit in bringing about the demise was professionalism. McDonnell goes on to assert that he would have been ashamed had chess been the "business of his life", as Sarratt calls for amateurs to become "genuine artists" and "shun" the professionals at all costs.<sup>173</sup>

The second conversation is one between Mercury, the patron God of financial gain, commerce, trickery and thieves; Philidor, the French player and pianist from the late eighteenth-century; and La Bourdennais, the French champion discussed in the first chapter.<sup>174</sup> In the piece, the two French champions argue as to who was the superior player. The choice of Mercury as arbiter between the two is a symbolic choice given his authority on commerce and financial gain, and results in the bitter nature of the argument representing the deplorable aspects of the professional's character. The piece tackles the subject of professionalism at the end of the piece, as Mercury questions La Bourdennais' decision to devote his time solely to chess, and

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<sup>172</sup> David Hooper and Kenneth Whyld, *Oxford Companion to Chess* (Oxford, 1992) p. 354

<sup>173</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), p.p. 134-135

<sup>174</sup> Hooper and Whyld, *The Oxford Companion to Chess*, p. 303

criticises Philidor for becoming a chess player after failing as a “bad performer”, stating that men should not fall back on chess as a pursuit.<sup>175</sup>

The first two pieces, therefore, condemned professionalism for both its role in the decline of the English School and the way it affected one’s character. In doing so, they advocated an adherence to the amateur ethos and the shunning of professionalism as the only basis for the English School. This approach, it argued, would both restore the supremacy of the English School, and create a moral and chivalrous play ethic.

The third conversation is one between Alexandre Deschapelles, a leading French player in the early nineteenth century, and McDonnell. Here the editors’ target is English players’ acceptance of the professional ethos outlined in the first two conversations. While McDonnell again mourns the decay in English chess ability, the piece ends with Deschapelles confronting a cohort of Englishmen who have come to assert their brilliancy, foresight, and success.

Deschapelles asserts that their claims to brilliancy are shallow, with their victories have come against “forces without the least meaning”.<sup>176</sup> In highlighting the tendency for players to shy away from competition, the piece portrayed the English players as petty, arrogant, and ungentlemanly.

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<sup>175</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), pp. 193-197

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, p. 225

The fourth and final conversation was one between Leanordo, an Italian player from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and La Bourdonnais.<sup>177</sup> The piece further dismantled the decay of English chess, charting the influence of foreign professionalism and its effects on the traditional English spirit of play. Were it not for the professional influence and the loss of English nationality, La Bourdonnais argues, English chess would “have never decayed”. The decay of the English School was down to one thing, the introduction of foreign “charlatanism”. That La Bourdonnais, a foreign player to the English, is the one to make such a striking claim is symbolic. While the magazine portrays the vision of an amateur ethos as crucial for the vitality and health of the English School of Chess, the *CW* advocated the inherent nationality of chess. In praising the strong national spirit in Germany and France, it stated that the existence of distinct national schools was required for the success of all.<sup>178</sup> While contemporaries should strive for the success of all national schools, the place of the English School, of course, should have been at the top. The final two conversations, therefore, explored the decline of English chess and argued against its acceptance of the corrupting influence of foreign professionalism outlined in the first two pieces.

Overall, the *CW*'s vision for English chess opposed the internationalist approach of the *CPC* and *CPM*. While all called for the restoral of English supremacy, the *CW* differed in its opposition to the “spurious universalism” the previous magazines accepted. In contrast to their vision of English chess, Staunton called for the distinct and separate nationality of the English School.

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<sup>177</sup> Hooper and Whyld, *Oxford Companion to Chess*, p. 223

<sup>178</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), p. 132; Volume 3 (1867), pp. 6-7

The result was the construction of an amateur ethos in all but name. This approach called for chivalry, originality, individuality, fair play, and the favouring of the “artistic” over the “scientific”, the “country” over the cosmopolitan. While the magazine shaped the ethos around the restoration of the English School’s supremacy, it was also a reflection of the wider anxieties surrounding the respectability of leisure. Nonetheless, against the image of the foreign professional and the German vision of chess, the magazine imagined the amateur ethos as innately English.

The fourth and final magazine of the period was *The Westminster Club Papers (WP)*, edited by Thomas Hewitt (under the pseudonym Telemachus Brownsmith), running from 1868 to 1878. This magazine further strengthened the vision put forward by Staunton, as Hewitt, alongside the newly formed Westminster Chess Club, looked to defend the interests of British amateur players. While not framing the magazine as one for the defence of English chess like the *CW*, it was still nonetheless national in its make-up, focusing on English games, problems, and players. Like the *CW*, it also opposed the taking of the game too seriously. The magazine’s inclusion of Whist and other games is a striking example of this.<sup>179</sup> While the inclusion of chess with other games can partially be put down to its growing popularity which granted editors new opportunities to branch out, its allocation alongside other “games” fitted in with the editor’s vision of chess. The *WP* warned that an enthusiasm for chess often made many people “unfit

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<sup>179</sup> *Bell's Life* (April 21, 1869)



for serious occupation” and criticised the “jealousy” and desire for reputation that certain players strove.<sup>180</sup>

The magazine’s analysis of English failures against foreign opposition also highlights its view of chess as a secondary pursuit. The successes of foreign chess players, it argued, stemmed from English players having “far better things to do”. Staunton, for example, was a Shakespearian scholar, while Buckle was a historian. England, the *WP* argued, gave men of talent “more scope and opportunity” to “utilise their ability.”<sup>181</sup> Breaking away from the idea of chess ability representing a nation’s progress and superiority, the *WP* began to posit chess playing ability as a sign of a nation’s immoral play ethic. When other nations were to become as advanced as England, it argued, their top players would pursue careers that were more credible.

While this vision asserted the intrinsic virtues of the artistic and chivalrous approach of English amateurism, its construction was also an expedient reaction to English failure on the international stage. That the initial signs of rejecting the link between chess playing ability and national prestige came in the latter half of the 1860s after 15 years of English failure suggests that this was the case. The reactions to the wider problem of English economic, imperial, and naval decline also suggests that contemporaries were happy to concoct narratives that mitigated these realities. For example, the Exhibition of 1867 in Paris, which has been seen to have symbolised England’s industrial failures, was met by many with both scepticism and

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<sup>180</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 1 (London, 1868), ed. Telemachus Brownsmith, pp. 5 & 62

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15 & 38, & Harvey, “You May Say What You Like to the Professionals and Dismiss Them When You Want”, p. 411

outright denial.<sup>182</sup> Had English players continued to be successful on the international stage, the stressing of the superior English play ethic may not have been made so strongly.

The growing realisation of English decline, both in terms of its international failures and stunted growth, saw the leading magazines of the period push back in nationalistic terms, calling for the “defence” of English chess. What English chess was to be, however, was a disputed topic. While all four magazines looked to restore the dominance of the English School and promote the diffusion of the game, attitudes to foreigners and the spirit of play were split between xenophobia and acceptance. The *CPC* and *CPM* both accepted the growing foreign influence in the game and argued that it was beneficial to the development of the English School. The arrivals of Staunton’s *CW* and the *WP*, however, mark a shift in national sentiments. Deeply opposed to the growing foreign influence and their way of playing the game, their vision for English chess was the restoration of an amateur ethos as seen in the first half of the century. While initially framed as necessary for the revival of English supremacy, an amateur ethos was put forward as the only way for an English gentleman to play the game. The qualities that defined this approach, like the wider construction of an amateur ethos in other sports, were innovation, creativity, and chivalry.<sup>183</sup> This vision framed the ethos against the image of the foreign professional and the German view of chess as an exact science, and imagined its qualities as innately English.

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<sup>182</sup> Graeme Goody, “Lies, Damned Lies and Declinism: Lyon Playfair, the Paris 1867 Exhibition and the Contested Rhetorics of Scientific Education and Industrial Performance” in ed. Ian Inkster, Colin Griffin, Jeff Hill and Judith Rowbotham, *The Golden Age: Essays in British Social and Economic History, 1850-1870* (Routledge, 2017), (pp. 105-121), p. 106-108.

<sup>183</sup> Baker, “Whose Hegemony?”, pp. 1-2

While the desire for the restoration of the English School's supremacy united both camps, the vision of English amateurism challenged the view of a nation's chess playing ability representing progress and superiority. Rather than a symbol of a nation's progress and intellectual superiority, this view began to envisage international chess as a symbol of a nation's unethical play ethic. Rather than a form of intellectual warfare between nations, leading writers began to move towards viewing chess as just a game, a secondary to real pursuits, and not worthy of a gentleman's soul devotion. The way in which the English gentleman played the game was put forward as the new bastion of national pride. The English amateur: innovative, creative, and respectable, was a more civilized and gentlemanly competitor than his vain, scientific, foreign counterpart.

### **“Grasping Centralisation”: The British Chess Association**

The shaping of these visions for English chess also coincided with the beginnings of the game's institutionalization. The Yorkshire Chess Association, formed in 1840, spanned into The Northern and Midland Counties Chess Association (NMCA) in 1853, going on to become the British Chess Association (BCA) in 1857. The BCA held yearly meetings up until 1862, then experiencing a four-year silence before the body's next meeting in 1866. The meeting of 1866 saw the establishment of a Challenge Cup to determine England's first player, running up until the body's last meeting in 1872. While the body still existed in name, the meeting of 1872 was its last, as the body became defunct by 1874. By examining the growth and attitudes to the body, I will further elucidate the shaping of attitudes towards professionalism, international

master chess, and the future of English chess. The two contrasting visions of chess outlined in the previous section were the most influential in shaping the growth and successes of these bodies. The organizers of the BCA – Lowenthal, George Medley and Lord Lyttleton – led the first. Like the internationalist vision put forward by the *CPC* and the *CPM*, while framing the body as necessary for the restoration of English supremacy, they simultaneously encouraged the professional, commercial, and international growth of the game. The second vision of English chess, led by Staunton's the *CW*, further elucidated their vision of English amateurism in opposition to the body. However, opinions to the institutionalization of the game highlight the influence of the regional disputes and anti-metropolitan sentiments in the construction of an amateur ethos.

By exploring the motivations of the organizers of the NMCCA and the BCA, we can see that a number of factors influenced them. While the roots of the body lay in the NMCA's desire to unite amateur players from across the country, the BCA would go on to promote the internationalisation of chess through the acceptance and encouragement of foreign and professional participation at associations, congresses and clubs. The organizers, however, also looked to defend the interests of English chess by promoting the widespread diffusion of the game and improving the quality of English play. The organisers, therefore, looked to simultaneously encourage a cosmopolitan chess scene that was open to all, as well as restore the supremacy of the English School. The organizers of the BCA, therefore, conformed to the vision of chess put forward by the *CPC* and *CPM*.

One of the main goals of the creators of the NMCA in 1853 was the desire to improve both the quality and regularity of play within and between the provinces and capital. For example, the goals outlined by the NMCA at the meeting of 1856 saw the organisers prioritise the organisation of matches between clubs; matches between eminent British and foreign players; and tournaments between metropolitan and provincial amateurs.<sup>184</sup> While looking to encourage the general spread and unity of the game, the organizers also viewed these goals as a way to halt English decline. For example, the meeting of 1855 witnessed the chairman lament the “inferiority” of contemporary games compared to the days of McDonnell. This, he argued, was due to the new trend of “jealousy” that resulted in the adoption of a “less enterprising style”.<sup>185</sup> Like the periodicals of the period, the meetings of chess associations expressed the belief in the decline of chivalry. The organisers of the NMCA, therefore, viewed the body as a tool to encourage regular and quality play between provinces, as well as the north and south. While done to encourage the widespread diffusion of the game, the desire to halt English decline also influenced the organizers. Like the periodicals of the 1850s, the organisers condemned the irregularity and jealousy of play, but failed to envisage it as “professionalism”.

While the NMCA would evolve into the BCA in 1857, members of the body outlined the desire for a national body at the meeting of 1853. These initial calls for a national body were made as a means to “embrace amateurs of all counties”, as well as to create links between provincial

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<sup>184</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1856), p. 61

<sup>185</sup> J. Lowenthal, *The Chess Congress* (London, 1864), p. xxiv; *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1856), p. 30; (1855), pp. 261-262.

and metropolitan players.<sup>186</sup> The organizers of the NMCA successfully implemented these goals in 1857 through the creation of the BCA. The transition from the NMCA to the BCA was initially a smooth one, with successful meetings held in various parts of the country in 1857, 1858, 1860, 1861, and 1862. These early years conformed to the initial goals of the body, as these meetings acted as yearly meetings between the country's leading players and the chess playing public of the town or city in which it was being held. The initial creation of the NMCA and BCA, therefore, lay in desires to spread the game and unite players from across the country.

However, the body became more international from 1860 onwards, as the organisers invited and welcomed players from all over the world. The meetings up until 1862 saw a wealth of foreign players attend, with displays of blindfold chess and simultaneous games becoming a common feature.<sup>187</sup> The meeting of 1862, an international congress held in London, further displays this more international focus of the body. Lord Lyttleton, for example, celebrated its international focus and the fact that no "favour" was shown to either "foreigner or native".<sup>188</sup>

While the NMCA and BCA were initially set up to promote the diffusion and unity of the English game, the body became increasingly internationalist in its aim.

However, while looking to spread the international growth of the game, the organizers also viewed the event as a chance to improve English performances on the international stage.

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<sup>186</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1853), p. 58 & 126; (1854), p. 216

<sup>187</sup> *Cambridge Independent Press* (Sept 8, 1860) – Mr. Kolisch, Mr. Kling, Zytogorski; *Birmingham Daily Post* (Sept 13, 1861) – Paulsen carried out blindfold games at the 1861 meeting.

<sup>188</sup> J. Lowenthal, *The Chess Congress* (London, 1864), p. I & xliv & pp. xlv-xlviii.

Lyttleton, for example, expressed hopes that the array of international talent would encourage English players to go on to “someday wield the scepter of chess.” In this view, the Congress of 1862 was the “starting point” to encourage first rank talent.<sup>189</sup> While the organizers were desirous to aid the growth of international master chess, they too hoped that this would in turn encourage a future English champion.

The meeting of 1862 was followed by four years of absence until the next meeting of 1866. Like the meeting of 1862, the motivations of the organizers were both international and national. Firstly, the organizers hoped that the meeting would unite chess players from across the world and promote the growth of international master chess. Lowenthal, for example, asserted that the body’s meetings were a means for facilitating “friendly intercourse between players of different countries”, and establishing a “lasting fellowship amongst its professors.”<sup>190</sup> This, he argued, was more important than who would become the local or national champion. The organisers, therefore, continued to envisage the body as a tool to foster a good spirit between English and foreign players.

Again, however, the organizers also viewed the event as a means for encouraging the widespread diffusion of the game. While the early years of the NMCA expressed its desires for chess to spread as a leisure pursuit due to its role in improving and stimulating the mind, the promotion of chess to all classes took on an even more prominent and active role in the BCA’s

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, p. xcvi & pp. xlv-xlvi.

<sup>190</sup> *The Chess Player’s Magazine*, Volume 1 (London, 1865), p. 226

rhetoric.<sup>191</sup> For example, Medley, at the committee of 1866, extended the virtues of chess to all classes, and outlined the body's important role in disseminating the game for the good of society. "Social improvement", Medley asserted, "works from the higher to the lower classes", and in promoting chess into all regions of the country, the Association sought to bring the game to "Working Man's Clubs, the Barracks, and into the man-of-war". In doing so, Medley saw their promotion of the game as contributing, he "hoped", to their "advancing civilization."<sup>192</sup> Lord Lyttleton also echoed these sentiments at the meeting, where he embraced the body's duty in diffusing the game across "all class of the community".<sup>193</sup> This, Lyttleton asserted, was the body's "main object".<sup>194</sup> While looking to aid the international spread of the game, the body also followed the desires of the NMCA's initial conception for a national body and looked to spread the diffusion of the game. The organizers of the BCA, however, increasingly viewed this goal in matters of class and respectability.

Alongside the desire to encourage the widespread diffusion of the game, the organizers also looked to improve the performance of English players on the international stage. The means of doing this was through the creation of a national challenge cup in 1866. The first calls for such a cup surfaced in 1859, as the *CPC* made a plea for the creation of a "Championship of England". The magazine framed this call in national terms, outlining the embarrassment in not being able to know England's best representative on the international stage. While seen to have more

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<sup>191</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1855), p. 261

<sup>192</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine*, Volume 2 (1866), p. 71

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, p. 106

<sup>194</sup> *Transactions of the British Chess Association, 1866-1867* (London, 1868), ed. Jacob Lowenthal and George Medley, p. 7



than its share of great men in every other branch of life, it could not, like the Germans, French, Italians, or Spanish, claim to know its best player.<sup>195</sup> The desire for England to not fall behind their rival European powers, therefore, drove the initial calls for a national competition.

The topic's next discussion came in the pages of the *CPM* in 1864. This time, however, the calls came from readers, as two letters appeared in the magazine's pages in support of a national competition. The readers' hopes for a cup were similar to the calls made by the *CPC*. For example, one hoped that a yearly competition would allow players to test themselves and preserve their skill from rusting, in turn, inaugurating a "better state of things" for English chess.<sup>196</sup>

The first challenge cup came at the congress of 1866 under the auspices of the BCA. While a grand tournament was traditional for the meetings of the BCA, they were traditionally open to all comers. The challenge cup, however, was to be a competition just for British players only. Like the calls made in the *CPC* and *the CPM*, the organizers hoped the cup would stimulate and improve the play of aspiring and established players. The competition would "bring the best talent forward", and "dismiss all pretenders to ability to their natural position."<sup>197</sup> The organizers envisaged the new cup to be what the "classic games were to the athletes of ancient

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<sup>195</sup> *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (1859), p. 193

<sup>196</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine* (1865), pp. 179-180

<sup>197</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1867), p. 3

Greece".<sup>198</sup> The challenge cups, therefore, looked to provide players with regular competition, encourage "native talent", and improve the quality of English play.<sup>199</sup>

The first prize for the challenge cup was £50. The need for the organizers to defend the policy highlights the anxieties around the playing of the game for money. For example, Lowenthal, after praising the English love of sport over the German vision of chess as a science, spoke of the importance of keeping the prize fees from rising.<sup>200</sup> Despite the cup's acceptance of playing for money, there was very little opposition from Staunton and other figures who opposed the professional growth of the game. The only opposition to the cup stemmed from the desires for it to be held away from the capital on more "neutral ground".<sup>201</sup>

Why, then, given the wider contempt for the playing of sport for money, alongside the wider opposition to professional chess, did contemporaries accept the use of prizes for challenge cups? Firstly, that the competition was only open to British players seems to have silenced Staunton's camp on the issue. The one issue that united the two opposing visions of chess during the period was the desire for the restoration of English supremacy. That the organizers implemented the challenge cup in order to improve the quality of English play on the international stage made it hard to oppose. Secondly, the playing of chess for money did not automatically equate with professionalism in the minds of contemporaries. Those who

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<sup>198</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine* (1866), p. 226

<sup>199</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine* (1866), p. 162

<sup>200</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine* (1865), pp. 169-170

<sup>201</sup> *The Chess Player's Quarterly Chronicle*, Volume 1 (1868), pp. 219-220

competed in the challenge cup were not necessarily professionals. For example, Henry Bird and Amos Burn, two of England's leading players, were both amateurs and had successful careers outside of chess.<sup>202</sup> That contemporaries supported the challenge cup serves to highlight the desire for English supremacy, as well as the belief in professionalism as an approach to the game rather than merely the playing of the game for money.

Overall, the organisers' motivations for the establishment of the BCA were both internationalist and nationalist. While the roots of the body lay in the NMCA's desire to unite amateur players from across the country, the BCA would go on to promote the internationalisation of chess through the acceptance and encouragement of foreign and professional participation at associations, congresses and clubs. Here they looked to create an international community of masters that would form the bases for the commercialization of the game. The organizers, however, also looked to defend the interests of English chess by promoting the widespread diffusion of the game and improving the quality of English play. While the organizers viewed the former in the context of class and respectability, the latter looked to restore English triumphs on the international stage. The organisers, therefore, looked to simultaneously encourage a cosmopolitan chess scene that was open to all, as well as restore the supremacy of the English School. While the organisers did not use or help define the terms amateur and professional, they ultimately supported the professional growth of the game. The organizers of the BCA, therefore, conformed to the vision of chess put forward by the *CPC* and *CPM*.

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<sup>202</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 108 & 260

However, the contrasting vision of English amateurism outlined in the previous section, as one would expect, was deeply opposed to the internationalist aims of the BCA. By exploring the opposition to the BCA, again led by Staunton's *CW*, we can further examine the construction of the amateur ethos and tie apart the demographics of the two contrasting visions of English chess. The criticism of the BCA followed similar lines to the vision of English amateurism outlined in the first section, drawing on the same contempt for professionalism, foreign involvement, and the universal growth of the game in its opposition to the body. However, the support from the far northern counties of Durham, York, and Newcastle highlight the presence of regional hostilities in the formation of an amateur ethos.

The *CW*'s initial criticisms of the BCA were of the body's inaction from 1862 to 1866 and its attempts to amend chess laws. While the magazine labelled the association "dead" in its first issue in 1865, it deemed the body's attempts to revise chess law as "less than an insult" to Englishmen.<sup>203</sup> Given the failure of the body in organizing meetings after 1862, the questioning of the body's existence is not surprising. However, a closer inspection of the criticism to its amending of chess laws suggests a deeper contempt for the body's acceptance of foreign influence. For example, while Staunton was critical of foreign involvement, other influential players such as Samuel Boden similarly framed the laws as an insult to Englishman, arguing that the main problem was the influence of "foreign players".<sup>204</sup> While early opposition to the body stemmed from its own inadequacies, xenophobia was also an influential factor.

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<sup>203</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (London, 1865), p. 216

<sup>204</sup> *The Era* (8 august 1863)

The *CW*'s further opposition to the body shows that its acceptance of foreign professionalism was a key factor. While Staunton labelled George Medley an "eminent bungler", he held special criticism for the body's foreign make up. Staunton deemed it a "monstrous thing" that a foreign professional was running a body funded by English amateurs. This, alongside amateurs having to play with foreign players who took the game as the "business of their lives" was a deep injustice for what was meant to be an English body.<sup>205</sup>

The letters in support of the magazine's position suggests that this position chimed with large portions of the chess playing public.<sup>206</sup> For example, letters expressed their happiness at the magazine's defence of the "distinctively national spirit of chess", as opposed to the "pseudo-management of the British Chess Association".<sup>207</sup> That these sentiments also crept their way into Lowenthal's magazine further suggests opposition from across the country. While Lowenthal himself acknowledged the fact that many viewed the failures of the body as "derogatory to the chess-players of this country", letters of disapproval also made their way into the magazine's pages. As one would expect, these were tame in relation to the *CW*, merely expressing disappointment that a meeting had taken place since 1862.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), p. 232

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, p. 342

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, p. 375

<sup>208</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine*, Volume 1, (1865), p. 38 & 180

Despite the body's inaction driving much of the criticism, its comeback meeting in 1866 did not appease its opponents. While opposition to the body's acceptance of foreign professionalism still drove the *CW's* criticism, anti-metropolitan sentiments also infused the magazine's rhetoric. For example, it accused the BCA of being responsible for failing to tackle the decline of chess in the provinces. In focusing on metropolitan chess, the provincial chess clubs had now sustained "such decay" that they could no longer "exercise the influence" necessary for the development of the game.<sup>209</sup> The *CW* framed the favoring of metropolitan over provincial chess as a part of the wider vice of "grasping centralization" and the overextension of the Association "beyond its peculiar providence".<sup>210</sup> In this view, the metropolis had "had its turn", and it was time for the provinces to have its share in the running of the body. It was unlikely, however, that the larger midland and northern towns would offer up their labours at the disposal of the "three men who misrepresented English Chess".<sup>211</sup> While a dislike for foreign professionalism shaped the *CW's* vision of English amateurism, it was also infused with anti-metropolitan sentiments.

The BCA's favouring of metropolitan over provincial brought regional hostilities into sharp focus. This was particularly true for the northern counties, who were unable to attend the earlier meetings in the midlands and south, and the later meetings that presided solely in London.<sup>212</sup> The reaction to the BCA from the counties of Yorkshire, Durham, and Newcastle

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<sup>209</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 3 (1867), p. 100

<sup>210</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), p. 4

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, p. 358

<sup>212</sup> It was decided in 1866 that the yearly meetings would take place in London. *The Transactions of the British Chess Association, 1866-1867* (London, 1868), p. 2.

drew parallels with the opposition voiced by the CW. Similarly, the clubs and associations vocalized their opposition to foreign professionalism, the favouring of metropolitan matters, and voiced their belief in English amateurism as the basis for the game. For example, the Meeting of the Newcastle and Borough of Tynemouth Chess Clubs saw the chairman attack the foreign and professional elements of the body in defence of their amateur ideals. The main issue objected to by the chairman was the payment of British amateurs to the pockets of foreign professionals who sought to hold the meetings in the metropolis and “confine the conducts of its affairs to a clique”.<sup>213</sup> As well as opposing the BCA, the northern associations also looked to challenge the body’s legitimacy in 1866. The 1866 meeting in Yorkshire, for example, saw the organizers assert a desire for it to be of a “national character”.<sup>214</sup> The Newcastle Daily Journal supported the organizer’s assertions, stating their objection to being “managed by the medley of muffs and mercenaries” of the BCA<sup>215</sup>.

This tension between north and south mirrors the experience of both football and cricket during the period. Strikingly, however, the ideologies that drove the divisions between north and south were reversed. The southern teams in cricket and football largely united around the ideology of amateurism in contrast to the north’s perceived acceptance of the professional and commercial growth of the game.<sup>216</sup> In regard to chess, however, the north appears to have had more of a tie to the ideology of amateurism.

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<sup>213</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 3 (1867, London), p. 55

<sup>214</sup> *The Chess Player’s Magazine*, Volume 2 (1866), p. 26

<sup>215</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 3 (1867), p. 121

<sup>216</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 256-266 & 272; Swain, “Cultural Continuity and Football in Nineteenth-century Lancashire”, p. 579.

The northern counties' opposition to the BCA suggests that the *CW* represented the interests of parts of the country. Staunton put their example forward as the basis for English chess, calling for their upholding of locality, focus on English talent, chivalry, and "genuine amateur feeling" to be followed by all parts of the country.<sup>217</sup> In alliance with the *CW*, the northern clubs and associations opposed both the BCA's metropolitan focus and acceptance of foreign professionalism. In their view, a national body should above all focus on the "defence of English Chess" through encouraging a "bona fide amateur spirit".<sup>218</sup> Instead, this alliance viewed the BCA as a metropolitan body that endorsed professionalism and foreign influence. Like the vision of English amateurism outlined in the first section, they believed that the only way for the English School to produce players of real talent was to maintain a distinct national approach. However, in relation to the formation of a national body, the magazine stressed this in anti-metropolitan terms. For example, it argued that the establishment of an English Chess School should spring naturally from a "union of County Associations".<sup>219</sup> The rejection of "grasping centralisation" and the keeping of independence and individuality was the means for English players to discover "great original ability".<sup>220</sup> The framing of English amateurism against the BCA, therefore, while conforming to the vision outlined in the first section, was infused with more anti-metropolitan sentiments. Again, this conforms to Weiner's assertion of the country's rejection of the "industrial spirit".

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<sup>217</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 3 (1867), pp. 100-102.

<sup>218</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), p. 4.

<sup>219</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 3 (1867), pp. 101-102

<sup>220</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 1 (1865), p. 4.



While the vision of English amateurism was supported in the northern provinces, to what extent was the internationalist vision led by the *CPM* and *BCA* really supported by those in the midlands and south? The body's period of silence between 1862 and 1866 suggests that it was not able to command the support it required. Disorganisation and the logistical difficulties one would expect in establishing a national body, however, can partially explain this. For example, the proposed meeting of 1865 failed due to the Managing Committee's dilatory preparation.<sup>221</sup> However, the successful meeting of 1866 and the establishing of the body on firm footing suggests that those in the metropolis were supportive of its aims.

Despite the body's success from 1866 to 1872, however, there were those in London who supported the vision of English amateurism. A key example of this was the creation of The Westminster Chess Club in 1867. Led by the English amateur H. E. Bird, the club was born out of a desire to defend the interests of British chess from the "shew" it had experienced in spirit. Many leading English players such as Hewitt, Boden, Burden, and Duffy flocked to the club at "first whisper", which Bird viewed as a sign of the sorry state to which British chess had fallen.<sup>222</sup> The club commissioned its own magazine the next year, *The Westminster Club Papers*, which ran up until 1878. As discussed in the first section, the message of this magazine was a belief in the amateur ethos. It warned of the perils of taking the game too seriously and criticized the vanity in which players looked for fame and recognition in the chess world. As one

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<sup>221</sup> *The Chess Player's Magazine* (1865), p. 180

<sup>222</sup> *The Chess World*, Volume 3 (1867), p. 154

would expect, the *CW* celebrated the “patriotic spirit” shown by the new club in their attempts to “protect the interests of our national school of play.” If the new club could take on the functions of the BCA and develop English amateurism in the metropolis, Staunton hoped it would become the “undisputed center and head-quarters of chess in England”.<sup>223</sup> There were those in the south, therefore, who opposed the universal nature of English chess the BCA endorsed. Like the northern counties, the players of The Westminster Chess Club looked to defend the distinct nationality of English chess.

This southern adherence to English amateurism, however, did not espouse the same level of contempt for foreign professionalism and the BCA as either the *CW* or the northern counties. While the *WP* supported the BCA in its pages, the membership of the two also overlapped and cooperated. For example, both George Medley and Mongredien, leading members of the BCA, joined the club in 1869. The club also allowed Lowenthal, both manager of the body and foreign professional, to attend the annual dinner in 1868.<sup>224</sup> Despite the links with the BCA, however, the club was nonetheless national in spirit. The problem tournaments were open only to British players, and the annual dinners were desirous for the returning of a distinct nationality to the game.<sup>225</sup> The entertainment for the dinner of 1868, for example, contained a patriotic song celebrating the triumphs of English chess. The song eulogized the leading English players of the day, with the second verse reading:

“Old England ever yet the first,

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 132-133; *The Chess World*, Volume 4 (1868), p. 33

<sup>224</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 1 (London, 1868), p. 53; Volume 2 (1869), pp. 151-152; *Bell's Life* (December 5, 1868)

<sup>225</sup> *The Gentleman's Journal* (July, 1871), p. 187

In piping peace or battle.  
Still keeps the lead in gentler arts,  
As mid the riffles rattle.”<sup>226</sup>

While advocating the distinct nationality of English chess, revealing, one of the players celebrated in the song was Lowenthal. The case of Lowenthal, a key figure throughout the period, lucidly highlights the differing views of the north and south in the construction of an amateur ethos. While Staunton and the northern clubs viewed Lowenthal’s involvement as an example of the corrupting influence of foreign professionalism, the Hungarian was rather popular in the capital. For example, the St. George’s Club organised a trust fund in 1864 to acknowledge Lowenthal’s services to English chess, raising £300. He was also granted British citizenship under the name John Lowenthal in 1866 and became the only professional to become president of the St. George’s Chess Club in 1872.<sup>227</sup> In contrast to the CW and the northern counties, therefore, those in London tended to view Lowenthal as an Englishman.

Why, then, given the hostility to foreign professionals that manifested in parts of the country, did some regard Lowenthal as an adopted Englishman? One of the reasons lay in the Hungarian’s successful integration. For example, George MacDonnell (a different figure to Alexander McDonnell discussed in the first chapter) and Duffy both praised Lowenthal’s ability to integrate into society unlike many other immigrants, as well as praising his generosity and spirit.<sup>228</sup> Another reason was that contemporaries also deemed Lowenthal’s means of making a living from the game “respectable”. William Wayte, for example, praised Lowenthal’s focus on

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<sup>226</sup> *Bell’s Life* (Dec 5, 1868)

<sup>227</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 73 & 103 & 105

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103; *Land and Water* (29 July 1856), p. 54

editorship rather than professional tours and “shillings acquired in casual play”.<sup>229</sup> There were still those, however, who criticised Lowenthal’s status as a professional. Mongredien in 1888 criticised Lowenthal’s sole devotion to chess, stating such a life was a “wretched one”.<sup>230</sup> Written over a decade after his death, however, Mongredien was speaking in a different time that held more contempt for professionalism, as will be shown in the next chapter. At the time of Lowenthal’s death, many in the capital viewed Lowenthal as both a true gentleman and an adopted Englishman. While attitudes to foreign professionals soured, Lowenthal remained a popular and respected figure.

Other foreign players, however, did not have such an easy time. For example, Harrwitz, who lived in London from 1846 to 1854, was not so successful. While able to make a living from editorship, tours, coaching, and blindfold performances, he had to give up his column in the *Family Friend* due to complaints.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, his “contentious” character led him into constant disputes with other leading figures. Unlike Lowenthal, he was unable to act with the deferentially needed to integrate into English society and become a popular figure, ultimately resulting in his emigration to France.

While attitudes to foreign professionalism soured and shaped visions of English amateurism, the case of individual players highlights the complexity of contemporary opinion. While

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<sup>229</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1888), p. 276

<sup>230</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1888), p. 224

<sup>231</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 77; Harvey, “You May Say What You Like to the Professionals and Dismiss Them When You Want”, p. 409

Staunton and the northern clubs viewed foreign professionalism with contempt, views in the capital were more nuanced. Although southern supporters for English amateurism framed their beliefs with a national focus, their ties to foreign professionals and the BCA resulted in more cooperation and support. The acceptance and popularity of foreign professionals, however, was dependent on deferentially and an ability to integrate. The southern emergence of amateurism, will striving for a distinct nationality to the game, was more accepting of the growing foreign presence. This view can also seen to have been held by those in the north. For example, the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* lucidly summarized its tamer interpretation of Staunton's position.

“What he disliked was a fostering care of foreign professionalism under pretence of promoting British chess; what he dreaded was the advent of a time when an English leader in chess society would be as rare a phenomenon as an English player at a London opera house.”<sup>232</sup>

While Staunton's writings shaped attitudes to foreign professionalism, contemporaries often took a more nuanced approach. So long as foreign players were deferential to their hosts and gave themselves to the English cause, foreign professionals such as Lowenthal could succeed.

Overall, the institutionalization of chess on a national footing was fraught with a number of problems as the organizers battled with opposition from across the country. While all supported the BCA's desire to restore the golden age of English chess, the body's promotion of professionalism and universalism were contested topics for those who looked to promote an amateur ethos. While this vision followed the same lines as outlined in the first chapter, in its opposition to the BCA, it was also influenced by regional and anti-metropolitan sentiments.

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<sup>232</sup> *Glasgow Weekly Herald* (18 July, 1874)

The growth of the BCA also highlights the differing conceptions of an amateur ethos in the south compared to the north. While the south also developed an amateur ethos that strove for the national dependency of the game, xenophobia and opposition to the BCA were less influential, as foreign players such as Lowenthal remained popular. The alliance between the desire for the game's national focus and the acceptance of foreign professionalism, however, was shaky and depended on foreign professionals' ability to integrate. The successes of Lowenthal, as will be shown in the next chapter, were not repeated up until the end of the period.

### **Conclusion:**

Visions for the future of English chess during the period were split into largely two camps: those who supported the growing trend of foreign professionalism, and those who did not. The first was a universal vision of chess led by the organizers of the BCA – Lowenthal, Lyttleton and Medley. This vision looked to promote a community of international masters, encouraging the professionalization and commercialization of the game. The second, led by Staunton and The Westminster Chess Club, in alliance with the north and parts of the provinces and the south, opposed them. In opposition to the BCA and the growing involvement of foreign professionals, a belief in an amateur ethos was put forward as the only way for an English gentleman to respectably play the game. Like other sports, this ethos called for players to strive for innovation, creativity, and chivalry, rather than personal gain. However, unlike the other sports of the period, the chess world framed the amateur ethos in national, rather than class terms.

Against the approach of the foreign professional, contemporaries imagined the amateur ethos as innately English, an embodiment of the English spirit. While predominantly framed against the image of the foreign professional, the belief in an amateur ethos was also infused with local and regional resentments.

The one belief that united the two camps was the desire to “defend” English chess and restore the supremacy of the English School. This view highlights the continuing view of a nation’s chess playing ability representing national prestige alongside the view of England as a special and superior nation. This conception saw contemporaries continue to view the English School as both a summation of English chess playing ability and output of literature. However, the construction of an amateur ethos began to widen its meaning. While still desirous for the revival of chess hegemony, it began to move towards seeing chess as just a game. The result of this was the gradual shift towards viewing other nations’ chess playing ability as symbolic of their immoral play ethic. This changing vision of international master chess began to manifest in the 1850s, as leading writers and players heralded national superiority in different ways. Rather than celebrating chess ability, the average standard of play, superior chess literature, and the wider popularity of the game were the new symbols of England’s more advanced civilization. While contemporaries still strove for chess supremacy, many had begun to move towards viewing chess as just a game. The reasons behind this were twofold. Firstly, matters of respectability that drove the anxieties around leisure certainly played a part. Secondly, however, was the continued failure of English players on the international stage. In this way, the construction of an amateur ethos was a reaction to placate English failures.

## Chapter 3: The Age of Amateurism, 1874-1904

The following period from 1874 to 1904 witnessed a new generation of English players come through the ranks. While performances improved, English players remained largely unsuccessful on the international stage as the title of world's first player remained in foreign hands. Despite this, however, London remained the "mecca of the chess world", as foreign players continued to reside in England in their attempts to make a living from the game. This period also witnessed both the game's growing popularity and further attempts at the establishment of a national body. While in 1870 there were 212 chess clubs, by 1890, there were 672.<sup>233</sup> After the fall of the BCA, the Counties Chess Association (CCA), a provincial body, held authority over the organization of English chess from 1874 to 1892. However, further attempts at establishing a national body were made in 1885 and 1904. The first attempt in 1885 was a revitalization of the BCA. While the body existed until 1892, it was ultimately unsuccessful. The second attempt in 1904 saw the successful establishment of the British Chess Federation (BCF), the body still in charge of the country's chess affairs today. This chapter will continue to explore the attitudes to and growth of professional chess, chess clubs, players, and the games institutions to elucidate the conceptualization of international master chess and the shaping of visions for English chess and the English School.

The first section will explore attitudes towards professionalism and the further attempts at institutionalizing chess on a national footing. While the period from 1851 to 1874 was largely

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<sup>233</sup> Harvey, "You May Say What You Like to the Professionals and Dismiss Them When You Want", p. 404



one of opposition but tolerance, attitudes towards foreigners and professionals in this period only intensified. Unlike before, the chess world largely united around their opposition to professionals and foreigners in their support for an amateur ethos. While attitudes towards professionalism soured, contemporaries imagined it as an innately foreign practice. As leading writers and players examined its corrupting influences, they imagined the amateur ethos as a traditionally “English” and superior way of playing the game. The result of this was the widespread rejection of chess playing ability representing national superiority. Instead, it became symbolic of a nation’s immoral play ethic. While contemporary columns, books, and magazines show that this belief in English amateurism largely united the chess world, it ultimately hindered the professional and institutional growth of the game. As the game grew in popularity, it remained, an amateur’s game.

The second section will explore the experiences of and attitudes to the leading foreign and English professionals of the period. Through tracing their contrasting experiences, this section will show how writers and players distinguished between both “professionals and professionals”. One was respectable; the other immoral. Contemporaries made this distinction along national lines, imagining ideas of respectability, fair play, and chivalry as English qualities. While Steinitz became the immoral face of foreign professionalism, the professionalism of Blackburne and Bird was deemed respectable, gentlemanly, and entertaining. Again, the valuing of character and approach over chess playing ability resulted in the changing conception of international master chess. National superiority was not drawn from chess playing ability, but a nation’s play ethic. This however, did not stop English triumphs on the

international stage from becoming matters of national pride. While chess was just a game, its importance was still national, and contemporaries continued to construct notions of English superiority in a number of different ways.

### **An Amateur's Game**

Through exploring contemporary columns, books, and magazines, this section will show how the chess world largely united around their opposition to foreigners and professionals in their support for an amateur ethos. The leading pedagogical figure to emerge after Staunton's death was Henry Bird, who shaped attitudes towards English chess more than any other player. Bird spent his early years as an amateur alongside his successful career as an accountant, while later becoming a professional in the mid-1880s. Bird was a veteran of the English chess scene and was the only remaining player from the famous international tournament of 1851.<sup>234</sup> Bird took on Staunton's mantle and continued to attack foreign professionalism, defending the amateur ethos as the only basis for English chess. While frequently espousing these views, his two most influential writings on the subject came in 1880 and 1894. Through analysing these two works alongside reactions from other contemporaries, we can see how opposition to professionalism became widespread. However, while attitudes towards professionalism as a whole soured, contemporaries imagined it as an innately foreign practice. As leading writers and players examined the corrupting influences of the foreign professionals, they simultaneously imagined the amateur ethos as a traditionally "English" way of playing the game. This further construction of an amateur ethos, as before, valued innovation, chivalry, and style.

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<sup>234</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, pp. 116-117

Bird's first significant intervention was an open letter to the chess community where he announced his "farewell to chess" in 1880. The letter offered a critique upon the state of English chess, citing English decline as the reason for his retirement. One of the main tenants of English decline outlined by Bird was the lack of chivalry and willingness to play. Bird painted the picture of a lacklustre chess scene where players shied away from competing, comparing it to the preceding decades where the leading players would compete regularly and casually. The letter called for an open and prosperous chess scene with play driven by chivalry rather than the professional jealousies imported by the foreign professionals.<sup>235</sup> Part of the foreign import, Bird argued, was the increasing obsession with stakes, which had destroyed the open, chivalrous spirit of play, driven players from the arena, and made public games matters of private reputation. While primarily concerned with the spirit of play, Bird voiced concern as to the effects of this on the future of English talent. How could English amateurs, he asked, hope to follow in the footsteps of Staunton, Buckle, or Cochrane in one day wielding the sceptre of chess if they could not hope to get regular play with the foreign professionals? The result of all this was the death of chivalry, the "old chess spirit", and the last "remnant[s]" of the "old English chess school".<sup>236</sup> While not only corrupting the English spirit of play, Bird argued that foreign professionalism also hindered chances of success on the international stage.

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<sup>235</sup> Hans Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games* (McFarland, 2016), p. 561

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, p. 561

The reaction to Bird's letter was one of support from the wider chess playing public. Bird claimed to have received many letters in support of his assessments in a column in the *Glasgow Weekly Herald*.<sup>237</sup> Support was also voiced in papers such as the *Liverpool Weekly Albion*, while other leading figures such as MacDonnell expressed similar sentiments, also arguing that master chess had assumed a "wholly...business form".<sup>238</sup> There were those, however, who opposed Bird's letter. Potter, for example, disapproved of the manner of his attack, believing that he had done "serious injury" to the cause of chess.<sup>239</sup> Potter was also sceptical as to the attributing of professionalism as the cause of English decline, reminding the Englishman that professionalism was also rife in the days in which he eulogized. These disagreements, however, were trivial ones. While disagreeing with the manner of the letter, Potter agreed with Bird in spirit, sharing his "repugnance" for foreign professionalism. Potter's comments ended with a call to support Wisker's request for the foreign players to "return to the land they love".<sup>240</sup> By as early as 1880, contemporary opinion towards foreign professionalism was one of widespread disapproval.

While contempt for foreign professionalism was widespread, there were those who were not so opposed to some of the aspects of the game's professionalization. The *British Chess Magazine (BCM)* for example, viewed the growing size of stakes as "favourable". The *BCM's* support, however, stemmed from the viewing of international master chess as a vehicle for national

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<sup>237</sup> *Glasgow Weekly Herald* (25, December, 1880)

<sup>238</sup> *Liverpool Weekly Albion* (26<sup>th</sup> April, 1882) & Bird Bio, p. 276

<sup>239</sup> *Land and Water* (11<sup>th</sup> December, 1880)

<sup>240</sup> *Land and Water* (8<sup>th</sup> January, 1882)

prestige. The growth of stakes, it argued, would result in the promotion of international chess matches on a larger scale, bringing with it a greater reward for the “knight errant who crossed the water to do battle for his country.”<sup>241</sup> The *BCM* also offered a defence of professionalism in 1888, stating that their “presence and practise” was of “very great benefit”. This, defence, however, was in response to a German contemporary’s claim that their country had and did not want any professionals in the English sense of the word.<sup>242</sup> While growing opposition to the professionalization of the game dominated the minds of leading writers and players, there were those who looked on developments kindly. These sympathies, however, stemmed from the conception of international master chess as a vehicle for national prestige.

Bird’s second significant attack on foreign professionalism came in 1894 in his book *History and Reminiscences to Chess*. Like the attack in 1880, the book attacked foreign professionalism and its import of stakes as corrupting the chivalrous spirit of English play. The book begins with a passionate remembrance of the national spirit of chess in the golden age of the 1840s.<sup>243</sup> Bird wrote proudly of the national chess spirit and the glory of the English School when its ascendancy became “universally recognized”. He contrasted this with an assessment of chess in 1894, deploring the decline of “first class chivalrous chess” and arguing that the dominating influence of foreign professionalism would result in British masters becoming a “thing of the past” as the sceptres of McDonnell and Staunton “crumbled into dust”.<sup>244</sup> Bird then went into

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<sup>241</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1881), p. 258

<sup>242</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1888), p. 177

<sup>243</sup> Henry Bird, *History and Reminiscences* (London, 1894), p. 1 & 6 & 56

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4 & 12

more detail regarding the effects of the increasing stakes of professional games, taking particular issue with the 1886 match between Steinitz and Zukertort, played for £400. Bird argued that the ultimate result was the decline in the quality of play as both players could not afford to lose. Unlike his first work in 1880, however, Bird also spoke out against the players' adherence to the cautious and boring chess of the "modern school", which he argued produced "few interesting games".<sup>245</sup> The "modern school" followed on from the German School and similarly treated the game as a theoretical science. This style of chess was defensive and calculating, grinding out victories through the slow accumulation of advantages. While it was revolutionary, ultimately advancing the standard of play and changing the game, contemporaries viewed it with suspicion. While foreign professionalism had ruined the chivalrous spirit of play, in this view, the approach of the "modern school" had also removed the romantic attacking style that defined English play.<sup>246</sup>

While Bird remained a frequent critic, other figures such as John Ruskin also vocalized criticism and espoused support for the more romantic tradition of chess.<sup>247</sup> Ruskin condemned the quasi-scientific nature of the "modern school", and called for the return of the "good old days of chess", even making plans to publish a book of games of "real genius and imagination" rather

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 85-86

<sup>246</sup> While the main figurehead of the modern school was the Austrian, Steinitz, the association with the modern school and preconceived German stereotypes is not surprising given the long-standing uncertainty of German identity. Despite the creation of Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Hanover, German stereotypes throughout the period were still constructed with "geographical and temporal discrepancies". William Bertollette, "British Identity and the German Other", *Louisiana State University Doctoral Dissertations* (2012), p. 141

<sup>247</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1900), p. 65 & Renette, H. E. *Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games*, p. 10

than those played by adherents of the modern school.<sup>248</sup> Other leading figures such as Blackburne also condemned the modern school, asserting that England would not have a truly great player so long as the game went upon “tedious, plodding German lines”.<sup>249</sup> In opposing the strategy of the “modern school”, contemporaries simultaneously vilified the foreign approach to the game and celebrated the traditional “English” spirit of play. This view, therefore, ties in with the wider arts and crafts movement’s rejection of modernity and professionalisation. The movement led by Ruskin and William Morris encouraged amateur practice, opposing the professional standards imposed by the Royal Institute of British Architects out of a fear that it would stifle creativity.<sup>250</sup> Like the previous period, therefore, the promotion of amateur ideals can be seen as part of the wider rejection of the “industrial spirit” in favour of the values of “country” England.<sup>251</sup>

While this drive against foreign professionalism and the “modern school” saw contemporaries offer up English amateurism as the basis for English chess, the drive against the “modern school” also resulted in contemporaries turning on the scientific nature of chess altogether. “Too much of a science for a game” was a view some writers feared would turn contemporaries away from chess, resulting in efforts being made to clarify its status. For example, James Mason wrote in the *BCM* that while it was a science “to those who will have”, it was “above all a

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<sup>248</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (6<sup>th</sup> June, 1884); Harvey, “You May Say What You Want to the Professionals and Dismiss Them When You Want”, p. 412

<sup>249</sup> *Newcastle Courant* (May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1895)

<sup>250</sup> Garry Beegan and Paul Atkinson, “Professionalism, Amateurism and the Boundaries of Design”, *Journal of Design History* 21 (2008), (pp. 305-313) p. 308; Alan Crawford, “Ideas and Objects: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain”, *Design Issues* 13 (1997), (p. 15-26), p. 15

<sup>251</sup> Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, p. xv-6

game”, and should be spread as a recreation to all.<sup>252</sup> Because of this backlash against the scientific approach of the modern school, some contemporaries even went as far as suggesting the changing of the rules. For example, Bird, Reverend Greene and members of the City of London Chess Club all proposed modifications to the rules. These proposals varied from minor changes such as offering new ways for players to get out of check, to completely altering the starting positions of the pieces.<sup>253</sup> The idea behind such changes was to restore the chivalry and innovation back into play. These changes would eliminate “bookishness” and the memorization of openings that defined the “modern school” and restore originality back to the game to allow “mind” to “grapple with mind” on an even playing field.<sup>254</sup> All of this was done to purify chess from the negative effects of foreign professionalism and return the game to the traditionally “English” way of playing the game.

The growing focus on chess problems rather than games also highlights the attack on the scientific approach of the “modern school”. While problems were a focus for the *WP* as part of their attempts to promote an amateur ethos, they increasingly became a common feature at chess associations and congresses.<sup>255</sup> While this was done in conjunction with the wider anxieties around the game’s status, it also became a tool to assert English superiority. For example, a significant work on British problems and composers in 1897 celebrated the supremacy and beauty of the “British School of Composition”, asserting that similarly to British

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<sup>252</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1893), p. 252

<sup>253</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 121; *The Chess Player’s Quarterly Chronicle* (1877), p. 65

<sup>254</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 121

<sup>255</sup> *Manchester Times* (March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1898)



dominance in physical pursuits, the British school was the “Mecca” of chess-problem art. In contrast to the American and Bohemian School whose works form “but a factor in the constitution of a British Masterpiece”, Britain ruled supreme.<sup>256</sup> While writers and players re-imagined chess as a game in opposition to the foreign professional’s adherence to the “modern school”, they still used chess’ new status as a tool to assert national superiority.

From the 1880s onwards, contemporaries were largely unified in their vision of chess as a game rather than a science. This is a surprising development, considering that the period from 1851 to 1870 saw some social reformers actively stress the scientific qualities of chess, as demonstrated in the second chapter. The social reformer’s use of chess as an educational tool, therefore, appears to have taken a back seat. The social reformer’s rejection of chess as an educational tool is also illustrated by the changing ways contemporaries warned of its dangers. While the fear of taking the game too seriously was driven by fair play and English amateurism in the current period, the social reformer’s initial warnings focused on the dangers the mind could suffer because of over study. For example, *The Household Chess Magazine* advised moderation, warning that too much time devoted to chess was “dangerous” for the mind.<sup>257</sup> Alongside the view of chess as a science, therefore, this view was replaced with a focus on fair play and English amateurism.

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<sup>256</sup> Gittins, “The Chess Bouquet or, The Book of the British Composers of Chess Problems” (London, 1897), p. 15

<sup>257</sup> *The Household Chess Magazine*, No. 1 (1865), p. 2.

The rejection of the narratives that drove the rational recreation scheme for chess, alongside the documented failures of its longevity, show that the project for chess was largely abandoned in the 1860s.<sup>258</sup> Why, then, when other schemes for rational recreation carried on into the 1870s, did the scheme for chess all but come to a halt in the 1860s? One reason is the clear conflict between the social reformers advocacy of chess as a science and the contempt for foreign professionalism. As attitudes to professionalism soured, the vision of English amateurism won out over the vision of the social reformer.

Another reason also lay in middle-class anxiety. While many looked to promote chess to the working-classes, the new freedoms of leisure brought with it a "status anxiety" that saw many look to distance themselves and their activities from the lower orders.<sup>259</sup> As seen in both football and cricket, this desire resulted in the active dissuasion of working-class membership at chess clubs.<sup>260</sup> In some cases this was done through the use of ballot systems where members had to be both nominated and voted in by the club, while other clubs simply required nomination.<sup>261</sup> In the case of chess, therefore, it appears that many viewed matters of class and respectability as more important than the promotion of the game to the lowering orders. The abandoning of chess as a tool for social reform, therefore, was influenced by both souring attitudes to foreign professionalism and the desire for social distance. When the rational

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<sup>258</sup> Ed Harrison, "Chess as a Rational Recreation, 1840-1880", pp. 6-21

<sup>259</sup> Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850*, p. 204; Bailey, "'A Mingled Mass of Perfectly Legitimate Pleasures'", p. 13. Peter Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?' Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability", *Journal of Social History* 3 (Spring, 1979), (pp. 336-353) p. 340.

<sup>260</sup> Sandiford, "Cricket and the Victorians", p. 430; Swain, "Cultural Continuity and Football in Nineteenth-century Lancashire", p. 579.

<sup>261</sup> Ed Harrison, "Chess as a Rational Recreation, 1840-1880" (2015), p. 29-31.

recreation scheme for chess came into conflict with matters of middle-class identity, social reform took a back seat.

By 1904, the writings of leading players in contemporary books, columns, and magazines show a widespread contempt for foreign professionalism. While attitudes soured on professionalism, they viewed it as predominantly a foreign phenomenon that had removed the chivalry and reduced the game to petty jealousies. In opposing the enemy of foreign professionalism and the “modern school”, contemporaries looked to purify the game from its negative influences and return it to its previous state. This was done through the remembering and further construction of an amateur ethos which was viewed as traditionally “English”. This vision called for first class play, not first class chess; a playing for a love of the game, not for personal gain. This traditionally English way of playing the game strove for innovation, chivalry, and style.

While contemporary discourse united in support of an amateur ethos, the actions of chess clubs shows that it filtered down to the wider chess playing public. The first major sign of opposition to professional chess from clubs came in 1875, when the City of London Chess Club banned professional membership.<sup>262</sup> While members agreed they should pay the professionals for their work, they opposed their powers over the club money.<sup>263</sup> The banning passed with the “large majority” of the committee and also received wide support from figures such as

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<sup>262</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 137

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141

MacDonnell and other writers in the *WP* who praised the stand against the “overbearing conduct” of the professionals.<sup>264</sup>

Through exploring the further attempts at institutionalizing chess on a regional and national footing, we can see that attitudes towards professionalism resulted in chess remaining an amateur’s game. The three bodies that held claim to represent English chess during the period were the Counties Chess Association (CCA – running from 1870-1892), The British Chess Association (BCA – running from 1885-1892), and The British Chess Federation (BCF – the body that still presides over English chess today, founded in 1904). Through exploring the attitudes to and successes of the CCA, BCA, and BCF, we are able to see how attitudes to foreigners and professionals shaped their growth and the spread of the game. The CCA, a body dedicated to the spread of the amateur game, was able to achieve much support and success up until its end in 1892. The BCA, however, a top down attempt to aid the professional growth of the game, was not able to achieve such success. The creation of the BCF, similarly to the successes of the CCA, stemmed from its amateur and local make up. By 1904, chess was an “amateur’s game”, both in the minds of leading players and writers, as well as in the approach of its clubs and institutional bodies.

The body to hold authority over English chess after the failure of the BCA in 1872 was the CCA, founded and run in 1870 by Arthur Skipworth, a provincial amateur who was dedicated to the

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid, pp. 140-141

spread of the amateur game.<sup>265</sup> The CCA mirrored much of the writings discussed earlier in the chapter, opposing foreign professionalism and promoting an amateur ethos. One example of this was the body's acceptance of professional attendees. Up until 1875, for example, the body banned all professional players.<sup>266</sup> While this was revoked at the 1875 Congress at Glasgow, members of the CCA were quick to point out that the aim of the congress was not to foster foreign or "native professionals".<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, members reinstated the policy of banning professionals at the next meeting in 1876.

While the body was opposed to professionalism, it followed suit in also viewing it as an inherently foreign phenomenon, highlighted by the body's further loosening of the rules. The Boston meeting in 1880, for example, allowed the attendance of two English professionals, Bird and MacDonnell.<sup>268</sup> Despite their invitation, however, some still expressed delight that neither was able to claim victory.<sup>269</sup> The body's more accepting approach to English professionals was a regular feature for the CCA. For example, Blackburne and MacDonnell were guests at the Manchester gathering in 1882.<sup>270</sup> Despite this tolerance of English professionalism, however, the body never gave the English professionals their full support, again banning them in 1887.<sup>271</sup> Overall, the CCA was opposed to the growth of professionalism, and while showed some cooperation with English professionals, it remained hostile to foreign players.

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<sup>265</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 134

<sup>266</sup> Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games*, p. 166

<sup>267</sup> *Glasgow Herald* (2 August, 1875)

<sup>268</sup> Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games*, p. 259

<sup>269</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 149

<sup>270</sup> *The British Chess Magazine*, Volume 2 (1882), p. 288

<sup>271</sup> Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games*, p. 331; *Land and Water* (8 March, 1884); (16 August, 1884)

The second attempt at installing a national body came in 1885, as Leopold Hoffer proposed the re-creation of the British Chess Association.<sup>272</sup> Similar to the first BCA, it was a top-down effort to aid the professional growth of the game. Despite the success of its first meeting, it was unable to establish itself on firm footing and become truly popular.<sup>273</sup> One of the key reasons for this lay in contemporary opinion towards professional chess. For example, while the body held both amateur and master tournaments, contemporaries questioned the decision to hold the two tournaments simultaneously due to concerns that the amateur tournament would be overshadowed.<sup>274</sup> While the body looked to cater for both the needs of the amateur and professional, public opinion favoured the interests of the amateur and remained largely unsupportive of the body.

Public views towards the body's leadership also show that the chess playing public regarded it as unrepresentative of their vision for English chess. For example, while the provinces viewed the membership as consisting of "ornamental figure heads" and players from the Divan, The City of London Chess Club stated it did not see any benefit to being at the "beck and call" of another association. Chess after all, was "but merely a game", with many opposed to the "childish ideas of conferring degrees for proficiency."<sup>275</sup> The City of London Chess Club's rejection of the body's legitimacy, therefore, stemmed from their opposition to its desire to aid

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<sup>272</sup> Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games*, p. 331

<sup>273</sup> Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games*, p. 333 & 40

<sup>274</sup> *The British Chess Magazine*, Volume 8 (1888), p. 29 & pp. 337-347

<sup>275</sup> Harvey, "You May Say What You Like to the Professionals and Dismiss Them When You Want" p. 414; *International Chess Magazine* (June, 1885), p. 164

the growth of professional chess. With chess being just a game, and not a professional sport, it did not see the need for a body to oversee its interests. While the body looked to aid the professional growth of the game, the wider chess playing public opposed its aims and did not give it the support it needed. The result of this was the failure of the body, with the meeting of 1892 being its last.

Contemporary writings, the actions of chess clubs, and the attempts at the game's institutionalization all show that by the mid-1890s the chess world opposed professionalism in support of an amateur ethos. While the works of leading writers opposed professionalism, the actions of clubs and the growth of the game's institutions shows that this vision filtered down to the wider chess playing public. The *BCM* in 1893 reported that professional chess was becoming "even less successful" year on year as the game remained "before all things an amateur's game". The magazine viewed this as a cause for celebration and heralded the growing number of clubs and amateur players, as well as the declining "reverence" of the chess professor.<sup>276</sup>

The first amateur contest between north and south in 1892, a gathering in Birmingham of the 212 best amateurs, represents the conformity of opinion on this vision for English chess. While the previous period was one of tension between the provinces and the metropolis, the north and south came together to both display regional pride and unite in their adherence to an

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<sup>276</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1893), pp. 18-20

amateur ethos.<sup>277</sup> The reporting of the event celebrated both the amateur nature of the gathering and both sides' adherence to the amateur rather than professional ethos. For example, the *BCM* praised Rev. Wayte, captain of the southern team, for his "cautious and sound" approach to the game that managed to avoid degenerating into the over-rigid "fiscalness" of the modern school. While the magazine deemed him to have been familiar with the discoveries of the German theorists, Wayte's style of play was nonetheless truly "English": "direct and powerful."<sup>278</sup> The magazine similarly praised the captain of the northern team, Rev. Owen, for being just as "thoroughly English", with his innovative and creative approach being "strictly original".<sup>279</sup> The adherence to an amateur ethos on both sides highlights the unity across the country in their shared vision for how the game was to be played.

Following the fall of both the BCA and CCA in 1892, there remained no national body to represent English chess up until 1904. Authority instead deferred to the county associations, which were present in Yorkshire, Cheshire, Cumberland, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Staffordshire, Surrey, Sussex, and Manchester. These bodies were aided by the creation of the Southern Counties Chess Union in 1892, The Midland Counties Chess Union in 1897, and the Northern Counties Chess Union in 1899.<sup>280</sup> Up until 1904, therefore, the game remained in local and regional hands, highlighting the decline of professional chess and the amateur approach of clubs. The creation of the BCF in 1904, however, witnessed the successful implementation of a

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*, p. 66

<sup>278</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1893), pp. 73-74

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75

<sup>280</sup> <http://www.englishchess.org.uk/100-year-history-of-the-british-chess-federation/>



national body. Unlike the two previous attempts in the form of the BCA, the chess world met the BCF with support, allowing the body to install itself on firm footing, remaining the body that still presides over chess today. Unlike the first two top down attempts, the creation of the BCF arose from a bottom up union of regional bodies, The Northern, Southern, and Midland Counties Chess Unions combined with the London Chess League.<sup>281</sup> Unlike the two BCAs, therefore, the body was not a top down attempt to aid the professional growth of the game, but rather a genuine unity of regional associations that looked to represent the interests of provincial and metropolitan chess. While the body also looked to aid British representatives on the international stage, the body was committed to the widespread diffusion of the game.<sup>282</sup> The first successful national body to preside over English chess, therefore, stemmed from regional amateur associations, rather than a top down attempt to aid the professional game.

By 1904, opposition to professionalism and support for an amateur ethos as the basis for English chess united the chess world. While opposing professionalism, contemporaries imagined it as an innately foreign practice. In opposing both the manner and approach of foreign professionalism, writers looked to purify English chess from its corrupting influences and imagined the amateur ethos as both traditionally “English” and superior. The strength of the backlash against the approach of the foreign professional not only hindered the institutional growth of the game, but also saw its status as a game re-affirmed. The result of this was the waning of a nation’s chess playing ability representing national prestige. Instead,

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<sup>281</sup> *The Times* (23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1904)

<sup>282</sup> *Hastings and St. Leonards Observer* (28<sup>th</sup> May, 1904)

contemporaries asserted national superiority through their superior play ethic, which allowed the Englishman to play the game in a more civilized spirit than his foreign counterpart.

### **The Professionals**

Despite the decline of professional chess, there were players who still made a living from the game. While all professionals suffered because of the wider pushback, as has been show, contemporaries regarded professionalism as an innately foreign problem. Through tracing the experiences of the leading foreign and English professionals, I will show how writers and players distinguished between both “professionals and professionals”.<sup>283</sup> One was respectable, the other immoral. One conformed to the respectable ideals of an amateur ethos and played in the English spirit of the game, the other represented the ideals of the quasi-scientific “modern school”. Contemporary writers and players drew this distinction along national lines, imagining ideas of respectability, fair play, and chivalry as innately English qualities. Steinitz, in failing to conform to these standards, became the immoral face of foreign professionalism and was attacked and ridiculed along xenophobic lines. In contrast, the professionalism of Blackburne and Bird was deemed respectable, gentlemanly, and entertaining, as both became national representatives of the English School. This dichotomy reflected both the wider acceptance of an amateur ethos and the moving of chess towards becoming just a “game”. Rather than chess ability reflecting a nation’s progress and intellectual prosperity, contemporaries envisaged it as symbolic of a nation’s immoral play ethic. Contemporaries began to judge national prosperity not by results, but by how players played the game. This however, did not stop English

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<sup>283</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 141

triumphs on the international stage from becoming matters of national pride. While chess was just a game, its importance was still national, and contemporaries continued to construct notions of English superiority in a number of different ways.

**(i) The Foreign Professionals**

The most successful foreign professional during this period was Wilhelm Steinitz. Steinitz began his career in Austria and moved to London in 1862, where he would reside up until his move to America in 1883. Regarding his early years in England, Steinitz's career in London was rather innocuous. While by no means a popular figure, he was a respected force and acknowledged to be the strongest player of the day.<sup>284</sup> However, as time went on, contemporaries began to attack the Austrian for his conduct and approach to the game. Public assessments of the Austrian portrayed him as the embodiment of both the corrupting effects of the professional ethos and the scientific approach of the "modern school". In doing so, contemporaries vilified Steinitz as the immoral face of foreign professionalism and asserted the superiority of the English play ethic.

While his early years in England were largely uneventful, the first major incident that turned public opinion came in 1874 after the Austrian attacked the "analytical blunderings" of Wormald's new book in the pages of *The City of London Chess Magazine*. The backlash from the chess world was one of outrage, with Steinitz's review viewed as unfair for two reasons. Firstly, Wormald was a popular figure in the chess world, and secondly, he was ill at the time of the

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<sup>284</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 160-165

review's publication. While the *WP* received many letters in complaint of the review, it decided to print that of an amateur from Newcastle under the pretence that it represented the "general feeling amongst English chess players."<sup>285</sup> The amateur argued the piece, driven by petty jealousy, was an attack on Wormald's career under the pretence of a review, similar to "inflicting a stab in the dark or a blow under the belt". This, argued the amateur, represented the effects of "professional pests" that had corrupted the "genial spirit of camaraderie".<sup>286</sup> Reactions presented Steinitz' conduct in this episode, therefore, as an example of the corrupting effects of foreign professionalism. They viewed it as both unfair and driven by jealousy, qualities that did not conform to a respectable play ethic.

The second major incident came in 1876, as Steinitz played a match against Blackburne, beating the Englishman seven games to nil, an unprecedented score in the chess world. In this episode, contemporaries attacked Steinitz for his conduct and style of play, framing foreign professionalism as antithetical to the superior approach of his English counterpart. The first contention for leading writers stemmed from the long drawn out private negotiations for the match. The *WP* presented these as symbolic of Steinitz's pursuit for profit, asserting that the delay was a result of obsessing about the size of the stake. While the Austrian claimed "exclusive devotion to Caissa" in his publications, the *WP* labelled it ridiculous and "mercenary" that the Austrian's devotion was being "measured...at so many pennies a move".<sup>287</sup> The initial depiction of Steinitz, therefore, was as a profit hungry professional.

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<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 178-179

<sup>286</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 141

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187 & p. 215

The *WP* further reporting on the charging of admissions for spectators strengthened this depiction. The paper questioned why the public should be charged “for the purpose of witnessing a chess farce”. All of this, the paper argued, was to “put a few half guineas into somebody’s pocket.”<sup>288</sup> Compared with the negotiations and match between Potter and Zukertort the same year, deemed a chivalrous and genuine public trial of skill, the negotiations and charging of admissions saw Steinitz framed as the profit hungry professional.<sup>289</sup> In the eyes of contemporaries, to obsess over stakes was to take the game too seriously, and to do so at the cost of public interest was to go against the spirit of the game. These qualities were the embodiment of the foreign professional, and the cost was to the English spirit of play.

While the negotiations pitted Steinitz as the profit hungry professional, the reporting of the match further vilified the Austrian’s character. The point of contention this time was the Austrian’s manner of victory and style of play. The *WP* analysis, for example, painted the Englishman as the more gifted of the two, with the Austrian’s victory stemming from his cold, calculating and boring style. While the paper deemed Blackburne to have outplayed Steinitz in every game up until the midway point, it attributed Steinitz’ victory as a result of slowly wearing the Englishman down. The boring manner of such a victory, which saw the Austrian add another “spangle to his tinsel crown”, asserted the paper, served to only “increased the indifference” to the contest.<sup>290</sup> While the reporting of the pre-match negotiations depicted

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<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, p. 177

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215

Steinitz as the profit hungry professional, the paper also portrayed his victory and style of play as cold, calculating, and boring. While these qualities saw the Austrian claim victory, his English counterpart was still the superior.

The aftermath of the contest with Blackburne saw attitudes to the Austrian sour as chess clubs and the chess press mocked the Austrian and his victory. For example, members of The City of London Chess Club mocked the Austrian's claim that the game was "momentous" at the annual festival later that year, as Walker's speech stated that he could not remember if the victory was supposed to be "momentous" or "momentary". This was followed with the reminder that the club depended "upon the goodwill of no individual chess player", referring to the recently banned Steinitz.<sup>291</sup>



who sought solely for profit at the expense of respectability and style.<sup>292</sup> For example, the

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 235

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, pp. 213-214

biography stated that a “conscientious attachment to his own interest” was Steinitz’ sole driver, while his dedication to chess led to his neglecting of the “branches of polite learning” necessary for social intercourse.<sup>293</sup> Again, the *WP* depiction deemed the Austrian to have failed to conform to English standards of respectability and play, putting him forward as the immoral face of foreign professionalism.

The chess column in the *Standard* also added to this depiction, referring to the Austrian as “Herr Riesenschnantze”. Duffy later explained in the pages of the *WP* that those at the West End Club used the term “Riesenschnantze” to express their secret opinions of a member of the club, obviously referring to Steinitz.<sup>294</sup> The literal translation of the name is “giant snout”, with “riesen” meaning “giant” and “schnantze” (most probably a misprint for schnautze) meaning “snout”. Harding has suggested that the term translates to “dog with a giant nose”, with the term schnautze specifically referring to a boxer-like breed used as police dogs.<sup>295</sup> The xenophobic attacks in the *Standard* and *WP*, therefore, highlight the widespread contempt for the foreign professional. While the previous period was one of tolerance, the following was one of opposition.

Another point of contention over the following years was Steinitz’s play at the divans. Steinitz was one of a number of professionals who took to the divans and played contemporaries for the price of a shilling a game. At the time, there was a concerted backlash against the

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 214

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 232

<sup>295</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 182

professional players' practice of shilling playing, with it being seen to have made the Divan



“unsafe for any gentleman desirous for avoiding embroilment in a tavern brawl”.<sup>296</sup> However, the columns of Duffy and MacDonnell singled out Steinitz’ practicing of “shilling-hunting”, framing the Austrian as the main culprit. For example, Duffy labelled the West End Chess Club the “happy hunting ground of the noisiest German

band in London” and condemned the German’s view that winning other people’s money was “credible”. Among Englishmen, Duffy asserted, “there is a strong preference for earning it”.<sup>297</sup>

The *WP* also attacked Steinitz on this front, labelling the German the “Vehm-gericht of shilling-hunting” (Vehm-gericht meaning a medieval executioner), as well as poking fun at Steinitz’s response to such attacks in his column. The *WP* reported that the German had vowed to “crush” those who derided the “noble sport of shilling-hunting”.<sup>298</sup> MacDonnell joined in through his column in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* and joked that Steinitz even planned to go after Blackburne (who had not attacked the Austrian in print) because he had not joined him and fought “against his countrymen.”<sup>299</sup> The Austrian’s playing for shillings, therefore, was also used by leading writers to depict Steinitz as the corrupting face of foreign professionalism.

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<sup>296</sup> *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (29 September 1877) p. 44

<sup>297</sup> *Land and Water* (6 Oct 1877), p. 293

<sup>298</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 10 (1877-1878), p. 75

<sup>299</sup> *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (15 September 1877), p. 633



While Steinitz's image was soured and clearly unpopular with much of the chess world, some did not view the Austrian with the same contempt. While he remained a regular at chess meetings and clubs across the country (despite years of inactivity from 1877 and 1880, most probably because of the attacks against him), he still had the support of some leading figures. For example, Fraser brought attention to the contradiction of Duffy's and MacDonnell's position, noting it unfair how professionalism was "belauded in Mackenzie and execrated in Steinitz."<sup>300</sup> This, however, succinctly sums up the complicated attitudes towards professionalism. Contemporaries judged a player's professional status not by their reliance on the game for money, but by the manner in which they conducted themselves. The result of this was the clear distinction between "professionals and professionals". While some (the foreign professionals) looked to act out of jealousy and bitterness, others were "gentlemanly, courteous, and, in the main, honourable".<sup>301</sup> Despite the acknowledgement of this perceived contradiction, regarding Steinitz's professional status, most associated the Austrian with the former; writers viewed his focus on profit, victory at all costs, jealousy, and adherence to the modern school as embodiments of foreign professionalism and antithetical to English notions of chivalry and fair play.

However, the fact that Steinitz remained a regular at chess meetings and associations also highlights that the anxieties around respectability and fair play were perhaps not as important to the wider chess playing public. Harding has rightly pointed out that many amateurs would

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<sup>300</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 186

<sup>301</sup> *The Westminster Clubs Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 141

have been desirous to see Steinitz in action or perhaps play the champion during a simultaneous display, and this appears to have been the case when the *BCM* supported Steinitz's plans for a world tour in 1893.<sup>302</sup> While many would still have been desirous to see the Austrian in action, the influence of Duffy and MacDonnell in shaping public opinion, however, was significant. Continued attacks and resentment drove the Austrian out of England, and the numbers of foreign professionals plying their trade in the capital declined up until 1904.

Once a respected force in English chess, by 1878 Steinitz's fortunes had changed. His attack on Wormald, victory over Blackburne, style of play, and practice of "shilling-hunting" all resulted in his portrayal as the immoral face of foreign professionalism. These incidents and practices saw leading writers such as Duffy, MacDonnell and Bird portray the German as a jealous, bitter and ungentlemanly professional who failed to conform to the English spirit of play. They deemed his defensive and calculating style of the "modern game" as a corrupting influence on the English notions of chivalry and fair play, as the Austrian valued victory at all costs and profit at the expense of entertainment. While putting forward Steinitz's qualities as innately "foreign", they viewed the values in which he failed to conform as innately "English".

The experience of Steinitz, therefore, was the polar-opposite to that of Lowenthal in the previous period. While Lowenthal was able to become a popular figure, an adopted Englishman, Steinitz was the vilified face of foreign professionalism. Why, then, was Lowenthal celebrated and Steinitz vilified? Firstly, the souring attitudes to professionalism and foreign

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<sup>302</sup> *The British Chess Magazine*, Volume 13 (1893), p. 85

players obviously influenced matters. However, the differing approach of the two players highlights the drivers for xenophobic attacks on particular players. One of the key differentials between the two players was a displaying of integration and deferential behavior. While Lowenthal managed to integrate and dedicate himself to English chess, Steinitz' inability served to turn opinion against him.

While the previous successes of foreign professionals relied on integration and deferential behavior, the souring attitudes towards foreign professionals made any deviation a matter of conflict. This is shown by the experience of other foreign players who suffered in the same ways as Steinitz. The eminent Leopold Hoffer, for example, experienced this in 1887. An article he penned in *The Fortnightly Review* entitled "Chess Masters of the Day" was, similarly to Steinitz's review of Wormald's work, met with widespread criticism and outrage. Bird led the backlash to the article with "unanimous" support from Cunningham and other "British Masters". The issue at hand was Hoffer's decision to focus more than three-quarters of the work on foreign players.<sup>303</sup> The fact that the article, which attempted to portray the great masters of the ages, featured "not a line to Staunton or Buckle" was seen to have been both preposterous and an insult. Bird argued that not only were they the finest players of their day, they were also fine men, with Staunton's work on Shakespeare and Buckle's "The History of Civilization" making them figures more worthy of public interest.<sup>304</sup> Cunningham also expressed this view in the pages of the *International Chess Magazine*, where he argued that Staunton and Buckle were

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<sup>303</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1887), pp. 148-149

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 150-155

not just chess players, but men of substance. Perhaps, he suggested, this was why Hoffer chose Lowenthal and Horwitz instead of the Englishmen, for they were “chess players, pure and simple”.<sup>305</sup> This episode highlights a few key points. Firstly, contemporaries’ underlying belief in English superiority resulted in their prioritizing of English triumphs. Secondly, the judging of players by both their chess playing ability and other worldly pursuits highlights the widespread adherence to an amateur ethos and the value of not taking the game too seriously. Thirdly, the souring attitudes to foreign professionals meant any deviation from deferential behaviour resulted in a concerted backlash from English writers.

Another case of this was in 1875, when Herr Berger criticised the BCA’s Problem tournament in the pages of *The Sportsman*. Here the German questioned the “taste” upon which the problems were judged, going on to suggest that the committee was favouring Englishmen. In response to these accusations, the *WP* perceived the review as an attack on their “national sense of fairness”.<sup>306</sup> They argued it was ridiculous and offensive that a “sauer-kraut-eating” foreigner was “permitted to express distrust of gentlemen whose high social standing [was] acknowledged throughout the civilized world.”<sup>307</sup> The xenophobic manner of opposition highlights the deep level of contempt for foreign players, as well as the belief in English fair play.

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<sup>305</sup> *International Chess Magazine* (February, 1887), p. 42

<sup>306</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 2

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22

However, there were figures, as before, who were able to become popular during the period. One such figure was Zukertort. Despite becoming a somewhat popular figure, however, the souring attitudes towards foreign professionals resulted in the German still being the butt of jokes. Writing in his column in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, for example, MacDonnell joked that the German could “remember facts that never occurred and paint scenes from nature that have no existence but in his mind’s eye.”<sup>308</sup> Another example of this was an anecdote in MacDonnell’s 1894 work entitled *The Knights and Kings of Chess*. The anecdote told the story of Zukertort and Steinitz both laying claim to the title of world champion at a chess meeting, with the guests fleeing before Zukertort had a chance to finish his speech.<sup>309</sup> While becoming a largely popular figure, some contemporaries still portrayed the German in a negative light. Even players who acted in a deferential manner and looked to integrate, therefore, were unable to become truly popular as figures had done in the previous period.

The experiences and public opinion of foreign professionals during the period shows the widespread opposition to foreign professionalism. While contemporaries portrayed Steinitz as the immoral face of foreign professionalism, other players who attempted to integrate were unable to achieve the same successes seen between the period from 1851 and 1874. This opposition stemmed from the foreign professional’s conduct and approach to the game. Writers linked any acts of bitterness and jealousy to their status as foreign professionals and

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<sup>308</sup> *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (26<sup>th</sup> June, 1880)

<sup>309</sup> George MacDonnell, *The Knights and Kings of Chess* (London, 1894), pp. 21-22

reported on their adherence to the modern school as examples of their corrupting influence. The result of such narratives was to envisage both the approach and conduct of the foreign professional as antithetical to the superior approach and character of the English.

## **(ii) The English “Professionals”**

While leading English professionals still suffered from the moves against professionalism, the two leading English professionals up until 1904 were respected and popular national representatives of the games. Their respectability stemmed from the way they conducted themselves, played, performed, and made a living from the game. They were seen and portrayed by the chess world as chivalrous entertainers who displayed both grace and integrity. In opposition to the foreign professional’s approach to the game, leading writers imagined these qualities as quintessentially English. While imagining their qualities as innately English, leading writers and players envisaged the superior play ethic of the English professionals as symbolic of English superiority. Rather than international master chess symbolising national prestige, it became a symbol of a nation’s immoral play ethic. This, however, did not stop contemporaries from celebrating English triumphs on the international stage with national pride.

The most successful English professional during the period was Joseph Blackburne. His two major successes in tournament play came in Vienna in 1873 and Berlin in 1881. While the press and chess clubs treated these successes with excitement and national pride, contemporaries began to move away from viewing international master chess as a vehicle for national prestige.

Instead, contemporaries celebrated Blackburne's character, play ethic, and style of play as symptomatic of English superiority. Writers imagined these English qualities as chivalrous examples of the English spirit of play and espoused his superiority even in defeat.

His first major success in international tournament play came in 1873, losing to Steinitz in a play-off at the Vienna Congress to claim second place. The following of the tournament back at home was one of national excitement. For example, the *WP* recounted that the excitement of Blackburne's results spread "beyond the clientele of Chess rooms, and became almost national in its universality."<sup>310</sup> The paper too treated the announcing of the play-off with excitement. The result, regardless of the victor, was to be one for English Chess. While the magazine acknowledged Steinitz to be a "borrowed sprig" on English "wreath", he was still seen as a secondary representative of English chess due to his residence and "English training".<sup>311</sup> The view of Steinitz as a tacit English representative is an interesting one. While international master chess up until 1851 viewed players as national representatives, the part ownership of Steinitz suggests its move towards becoming more of an individualistic sport. Despite the relaxing of previous national dichotomies, however, contemporaries still viewed players primarily as national representatives. For example, while the Germans held an honoree dinner for Steinitz after the tourney, so did the City of London Chess Club for Blackburne.<sup>312</sup> Furthermore, despite the loosening of national ties, the excitement shown at the prospect of Blackburne's success also shows contemporaries' recurring willingness to view international

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<sup>310</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 6 (1873-1874), p. 85

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103 & 131

master chess with national implications. While the idea of international master chess symbolizing national prestige waned from 1851 to 1904, in the face of English successes on the international stage, leading writers and players continued to view contests as symbolic tests of supremacy. The tendency for contemporaries to only view chess playing ability as symbolic of national prestige in the face of English victories suggests that had English players been more successful on the international stage, the vision of amateurism would not have been constructed in such overtly national ways.

Another example of contemporary willingness to recycle old conceptions of international master chess was Blackburne's match with Zukertort in 1881. With Steinitz inactive from play, reporters billed it as a contest for the title of world's best player. The match, however, saw Zukertort claim victory seven games to two. The reaction from the chess press in the face of defeat was both national disappointment and a reassertion of England's superior play ethic. Potter, for example, branded the loss "disastrous" for English chess, before adding: "we" Englishmen "dislike Teutonic supremacy".<sup>313</sup> The *BCM's* analysis, however, praised both Blackburne's spirit and character. Unlike his cautious foreign counterpart, his "chivalrously pugnacious" style saw him prepared to "put it to the touch, to win or lose it all".<sup>314</sup> The prospects of English success on the international stage, therefore, saw a reinvigoration of old conceptions. While the view of international master chess as a tester for national prestige waned throughout the period, it did not stop contemporaries from investing in its national

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<sup>313</sup> Timothy Harding, *Joseph Henry Blackburne: A Chess Biography* (McFarland, 2015), p. 167

<sup>314</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1881), p. 257



importance. Even in defeat, however, contemporaries celebrated the superior play ethic of their English representative.

Blackburne's win at the Berlin Congress later that year also illustrates this point. The chess world back in England celebrated the victory with national pride and yet again asserted the supremacy of English chess. For example, Potter's column reported that the "excitement" and "universal pleasure" experience by supporters at home had not yet died away some weeks after the contest.<sup>315</sup> While the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* both carried leading articles, MacDonnell's column in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* labelled Blackburne one of the "heroes of the day" for demolishing the "ascendency of foreign professionalism".

Chronicling the scepter of chess from Staunton, Anderssen, Steinitz, and Zukertort, he stated that once again an Englishman was "champion of the world."<sup>316</sup> He was welcomed back to the City of London Chess Club with open arms, and his simultaneous display on October 12<sup>th</sup> was watched by over 500 spectators.<sup>317</sup> The BCM later wrote in 1899 that Blackburne's success at Berlin made him a "popular idol".<sup>318</sup> While the contest saw contemporaries celebrate the victory as one for the whole of England, they failed to view it as a symbol of England's national prestige as seen in the days of Staunton. Instead, writers viewed it more as a victory for the English play ethic over the enemy of foreign professionalism. While the view of international master chess as a tester for national prestige waned, contemporaries still viewed English

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<sup>315</sup> *Land and Water* (24<sup>th</sup> September, 1881)

<sup>316</sup> *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (11<sup>th</sup> March, 1882)

<sup>317</sup> Harding, *Joseph Henry Blackburne: A Chess Biography*, p. 174

<sup>318</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1899), p. 284

success in the context of English superiority. The new bastion of superiority, however, was the English play ethic.

The contest between Blackburne and Emmanuel Lasker in 1892, which the Englishman lost six to nothing, further shows the continued viewing of international master chess as a matter of national importance. For example, the *BCM* expressed disappointment that “native talent” had “once again” let the title of champion of England pass to a foreigner.<sup>319</sup> However, the softening of attitudes to Lasker compared to Steinitz suggests a further loosening of international master chess’ national importance. While framed as a loss for English chess, the fact that Lasker was so “indissolubly connected with English chess” was, similarly to Steinitz, something not to “grumble”.<sup>320</sup> Furthermore, public opinion was more congenial of Lasker than Steinitz. Despite the German’s adherence to the modern school, the *BCM* deemed him to have been a “pleasant[ly] featured genial-mannered man” who did not follow Steinitz’s theory of chess in a “slavish spirit”. While he could be just as cautious as Steinitz, he could be just as brilliant as Morphy.<sup>321</sup> Attitudes to foreign players towards the end of the century, therefore, appear to have cooled with the decline of foreign professionalism and the establishing of amateurism as the basis for English chess.

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<sup>319</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1892), p. 293

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid*, p. 293

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138

In contrast to Steinitz, writers put Blackburne forward as the respectable face of professionalism. The cartoon of Blackburne in the pages of the *WP*, just a month after its



"A LITTLE BIT OF MORPHY."

caricature of Steinitz, represents the differing attitudes towards the two. In contrast to the xenophobic depiction of Steinitz as the immoral foreign professional, the cartoon and biography portrayed Blackburne as a chivalrous gentleman, a respectable professional, and a treasured national representative of the game. The cartoon itself is one of a youthful Blackburne striking a traditional pose reminiscent of Paul Morphy, the American

genius whose demolition of the top masters in 1858 saw him become the first unofficial champion of the world. The likeness to Morphy brings attention to the Englishman's blindfold chess ability, a practice for which the American also became famous. As a blindfold player, Blackburne was considered "sui generis", playing more with more "freedom from effort" than any player in history. The focusing on Blackburne's blindfold talent illustrates contemporary focus on performance and play rather than ability. His respectability and popularity, therefore, stemmed largely from his role as an entertainer.

The drawing's accompanying biography also looks to differentiate between the brands of professionalism of the two. While the *WP* conceded Blackburne's status as a "professional", they viewed him as both respectable and chivalrous. One such differential between the two stemmed from Blackburne's conduct. In contrast to Steinitz, his "manners and bearing" made him a courteous gentleman. The second stemmed from Blackburne's approach to the game.

While Steinitz sought for victory at all costs, the Englishman advocated for “first-rate chess players, as distinct from the cause of first-rate chess”.<sup>322</sup> The distinction here is an adherence to an amateur ethos and an advocacy for the playing of the game for the game’s sake. The *WP*’s portrayal of Blackburne, therefore, depicts a respectable and chivalrous figure. In juxtaposition to Steinitz, the foreign professional, they posit Blackburne as conforming to the English standards of play. While a professional, he played the game for the game’s sake, valuing style of victory.

Wider popularity and support for Blackburne also stemmed from his approach to the game, which saw the Englishman look to adopt an aggressive and entertaining style. For example, his tours of the country, which included blindfold and simultaneous matches, were extremely popular for their entertaining qualities, with Potter labeling Blackburne the “Hercules of Chess.”<sup>323</sup> While his abilities and tours declined in the 1890s due to his age, he remained a popular figure and nonetheless a national representative of the game. While contemporaries referred to Blackburne as the “Grand Old Man of British Chess”, the *BCM* celebration of Blackburne in 1899 went so far as to suggest a national testimonial. The piece in the *BCM* also illustrated Blackburne’s widespread popularity in the chess world, as well as a celebration of his approach to the game. For example, the article made the hyperbolic assertion that the Englishman was the most “distinguished and accomplished chess player the world has ever known.”<sup>324</sup> The article then followed with a celebration of the Englishman’s character. While

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<sup>322</sup> *The Westminster Club Papers*, Volume 8 (1875-1876), p. 233

<sup>323</sup> *Land and Water* (9<sup>th</sup> December, 1882)

<sup>324</sup> Harding, *Joseph Henry Blackburne: A Chess Biography*, p. 390; *The British Chess Magazine* (1899), p. 281

the piece conceded that Blackburne “to a certain extent” lived for chess, he was not just a “peripatetic chess player”. His knowledge of “men and manners” was “comprehensive and interesting”, and he always viewed the game of life as “greater” than the game of chess.<sup>325</sup> Again, contemporaries celebrated Blackburne’s character as both a player and gentleman.

Blackburne’s popularity as a chess player, therefore, stemmed from both his approach to the game, manner of professionalism, and character. Despite being a professional, he conformed to English standards of fair play and the amateur ethos. He played the game for the game’s sake, did not take the game too seriously, and acted with chivalry. Celebrations of these qualities, constructed against the image of the foreign professional, saw contemporaries imagine them as innately “English”.

The second leading English player of the latter half of the century was Henry Edward Bird. Like Blackburne, he became an extremely popular figure across the country, becoming a national figure for the game and another respectable face of professional chess. By exploring the case of Bird, we can further see how contemporaries distinguished between foreign and English professionals, imaging the qualities of Bird as innately English.

While there were similarities between the two, dissimilar to Blackburne, Bird’s respectability also drew from the fact that for much of his career he was an amateur, having a successful career as an accountant both before and during his chess career. Contemporaries celebrated

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<sup>325</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1899), p. 286

Bird's status as an amateur and his pursuits outside of chess with vigour and pride. For example, they regarded his competing at a high level at the early stages of his career when his income relied solely on accountancy with special praise. This was particularly the case with his close contest with Steinitz in 1866, where he was recorded to have played after a full day's work.<sup>326</sup> The celebration of endurance mirrors the valuing of heroism in Victorian cricket. Like the endurance of W. C. Grace, contemporaries viewed this feat as a heroic act of courage.<sup>327</sup>

Writers also celebrated Bird's professional career as a matter of pride. For example, the *BCM* made a strong note on Bird's authority on the details of railway accounts in both 1884 and his obituary in 1908, stating there to have been "hardly a man in England his equal."<sup>328</sup> Bird's popularity and respectability, therefore, was largely influenced by his amateur status and successes outside of the world of chess. This highlights the contemporary view of chess as merely a game as well as the tendency of contemporaries to view success at chess within the context of other worldly pursuits. This was a recurring rubric to judge players, with contemporaries too praising other players such as Medley and Mongredien, both distinguished political economists, for having careers outside of chess.<sup>329</sup>

Bird's status as an amateur, however, came under threat as the Englishman increasingly relied on chess for his income in the mid-1880s. Part of Bird's reliance on the game for a living,

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<sup>326</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 117

<sup>327</sup> W. F. Mandle, "W. C. Grace as a Victorian Hero", *Historical Studies* 19 (2008), (pp. 353-368) pp. 361-362

<sup>328</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1884), p. 284; (1908), p. 251

<sup>329</sup> *The British Chess Magazine* (1883), p. 364

similarly to Steinitz, saw him play for small stakes at the Simpson's Divan. Unlike Steinitz, however, Bird remained an extremely popular figure throughout the chess world following his transition from an amateur to professional. The continuing popularity stemmed from Bird's adherence to the qualities of an amateur ethos: his attractive playing style and conversational skills. Unlike Steinitz, Bird's playing at the divans saw him become a truly popular professional, a "living legend".<sup>330</sup> The contrasting fortunes of Steinitz and Bird in their playing for shillings highlight both the xenophobia that drove opinion alongside the judging of professionalism based on a respectable play ethic.

The popularity Bird received from his blindfold and simultaneous games also stemmed from his approach to the game: his chivalry, attacking performances, and devotion to the game for no personal desires. For example, MacDonnell, writing in *Chess-Life Pictures*, stated that there was not a more "striking" or "chivalrous player" in the chess world. While others played the game purely to win money, gain a reputation, or other professional jealousies, Bird played purely for an "unselfish" love of the game, preferring to lose a good game than to win a bad one.<sup>331</sup> Other contemporaries too shared this view, with a review from an Athenaeum stating that there was nobody that could "fairly claim to represent the national school" more than Bird.<sup>332</sup> Bird was also a favourite of the art critic John Ruskin, who in a personal letter to Bird praised his "originality and vivacity", stating that the Englishman had done more for chess than anyone at

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<sup>330</sup> Renette, *H. E. Bird: A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games*, p. 331

<sup>331</sup> Harding, *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, p. 133

<sup>332</sup> Bird, *History and Reminiscences*, p. 6

home or abroad.<sup>333</sup> Rather than ability, Bird's popularity stemmed from his approach to the game. His displays of chivalry and aggressive play saw him become a popular and respected professional. The continued displaying of these qualities, therefore, saw Bird, despite a professional, conform to the ideals of an amateur ethos.

Much like Blackburne, contemporaries celebrated Bird as a respectable professional and a national representative of the game. In contrast to the foreign professionals, the chess world viewed Bird as a respectable professional. As a result, Bird became a popular figure within the chess world, even releasing his own chess set which he advertised in his 1887 work *Modern Chess and Chess Masterpieces*, 1882 *Chess Practice*.<sup>334</sup>

Overall, the popularity and respectability of both Bird and Blackburne stemmed from their approach, style of play, and adherence to an amateur ethos. Against the image of the foreign professional, writers imagined their qualities as both superior, and English. Like those in cricket, Bird and Blackburne became national figures, more than just sportsmen.<sup>335</sup> The viewing of the English spirit of play as superior to the approach of foreign professionalism saw contemporaries begin to view a nation's chess playing ability as symbolic of a nation's immoral play ethic. The changing view of international master chess, however, did not stop the chess world from

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>334</sup> <http://www.chesshistory.com/winter/winter42.html>

<sup>335</sup> Richard Holt, "Cricket and Englishness: The Batsman as Hero", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 13 (2007), (pp. 48-70), pp. 48-50



celebrating English successes with national pride. Rather than symbolic of English supremacy, however, writers portrayed victories more as a triumph of the English play ethic.

### **Conclusion:**

While the previous period saw the chess world divided into two opposing camps regarding future visions for English chess, by 1904, the support for an amateur ethos united the chess world. Contemporaries continued to construct this ethos against the image of the professional, and simultaneously imagined it as both traditionally “English” and superior. This conformity filtered down to the wider chess playing public, who supported the clubs and associations’ adherence to English amateurism. The institutional attempts to aid the professional growth of the game were unsuccessful, as chess remained an amateur’s game. While the result was the decline of professional chess and the souring of attitudes to professionalism in general, contemporaries differentiated between English and foreign professionalism. The leading English professionals’ adherence to the English spirit of play saw their brand of professionalism deemed respectable and popular. As seen in cricket, supporters celebrated the leading English players as national figures, not just for their play, but also for their character and quintessential Englishness.

The vilification of foreign professionals and the celebration of English professionals also saw a shift in the conception of international master chess. As the rubric became one’s approach rather than chess playing ability, chess ability became symbolic of a nation’s immoral play ethic. The result of this was that, even in the face of defeat on the international stage,

contemporaries celebrated the superiority of the English play ethic. This, however, did not stop the chess world from celebrating English victories. Although bastions of national pride, however, the chess world viewed these victories as triumphs of the English play ethic. This rejection of international master chess as a tester for national prestige also resulted in the declining use of the term the English School. While still used by contemporaries, the widening of its definition saw it used alongside the generalised term, English chess.

## Conclusion:

By 1851, chess was the first truly international sport, experiencing regular matches and tournaments between English and foreign players both at home and abroad, as well as the residing of European professionals in the capital. Throughout the period, the presence and intimate involvement of foreign professionals in English chess brought with it unique national tensions. These tensions resulted in leading writers, players, and the wider chess playing public projecting national sentiments onto the game through the imagining of English qualities and the viewing of English victories and losses with national importance. Through these sentiments, the chess world viewed England as a distinct and superior nation in a number of different ways.

The overarching means for projecting national sentiments onto the game throughout the period was through the construction of the English School of Chess. Throughout the period, its conception and meaning underwent a number of changes. Its initial construction from 1834 to 1851 centred around narratives of supremacy as contemporaries celebrated English victories and her subsequent position at the apogee of international chess as symptomatic of their intellectual superiority. Alongside this narrative came the construction of international master chess as a form of intellectual warfare that symbolised progress and national prestige. The English School's initial meaning as a summation of England's chess playing ability and output of literature, therefore, allowed contemporaries to use this view of international master chess as a tool to assert the superiority of England over all other nations.

The further construction of the English School from 1851 to 1874 centred on English decline as two contrasting visions for the game divided the chess world. The first looked to support the professional and universal growth of the game, while the second looked to oppose these developments in favour of an amateur ethos. In constructing this amateur ethos against the enemy of foreign professionalism, this vision imagined the virtues of an amateur ethos as both innately English and morally superior. While this vision still strove for the revival of English chess supremacy, it began to move away from viewing chess playing ability as symbolic of national prestige. Instead, the English play ethic was heralded as the new bastion of English superiority. While the chess world was united around a common desire for the revival of English supremacy, the vision of English amateurism began to challenge international master chess' symbolic meaning. The result, however, was the same: England was seen to be a special, distinct, and superior nation.

The period from 1874 to 1904 saw the continuing construction of an amateur ethos and the reshaping of attitudes towards international master chess and the English School. Unlike the previous period, however, the chess world was largely united around one vision of the game: English amateurism. As public opinion united around this vision, professional chess declined, and the game remained an "amateur's game". Alongside this conformity was the rejection of chess ability representing progress and national prestige. Instead, contemporaries viewed England's adherence to an amateur ethos, which saw their players approach the game in a more civilized way, as symbolic of England's superior play ethic. This changing conception,

however, did not stop contemporaries from celebrating other English victories on the international stage.

Over the period, the meaning of the English School, international master chess, and the game's status changed over time. While its initial conception viewed success at international master chess as symbolic of national prestige, it would go on to become symbolic of a nation's immoral play ethic. The underlying constant to these changes was the use of the game to imagine England as a special and distinct nation. That this changed with continued English failures on the international stage, alongside the continued celebration of other individual and collective triumphs, suggests there was a certain level of expedience in its construction. Had contemporaries been able to halt English decline in the 1850s and 1860s and restore the former glory of the English School, it is highly likely that narratives of supremacy would have continued to dominate. The construction of an amateur ethos, therefore, was also an expedient reaction to placate English failures on the international stage rather than just a mirroring of the amateur ethos in other sports.

The rejection of chess ability representing national prestige and the construction of an amateur ethos can also be viewed in the context of the wider reaction to industrialism and capitalist values. Weiner has argued that the growing middle classes were resistant to embrace industrial and capitalist values in favour of the traditional slow-changing "country" life.<sup>336</sup> While the 1850s and 1860s saw some acceptance of professionalism, cosmopolitanism, and chess as a science,

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<sup>336</sup> Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, p. xvi-6

these developments were ultimately rejected in favour of the artistic approach of traditional country England. The growth of chess, therefore, conforms to Weiner's theory of a widespread rejection of industrialization and capitalist values.

While the chess world viewed England as a special and distinct nation, the manner and shape in which it was expressed suggests conformity with the wider historiography on national identity. Firstly, English identity was throughout the period constructed against a foreign "other". This, in the first period, was the French, while in the second and third it was the wider category of foreign professionalism and the German School of Chess. The switching from French to German throughout the period reflected the wider national anxieties experienced at the time, as the years from 1834 to 1851 coincided with a series of wars between England and France, while the following years coincided with the new anxieties around Germany economic, industrial and naval power. This is not to suggest that contemporaries spuriously imposed their wider anxieties onto their assessments of international chess; the strength, influence, and relevance of French and German chess was a reality. The coinciding of these realities, however, served to strengthen the rivalries and anxieties that drove the construction of the English School and the amateur ethos.

While the formation of national identity through chess stemmed from the presence of a foreign "other", the prevailing upper and middling class make-up of the chess world may too have been partially responsible for this. The greater level of national awareness amongst the middle and upper classes has already been made part of the historical record through studies of cricket and

popular imperialism.<sup>337</sup> That the chess world projected more national sentiments onto the game than other sports, therefore, serves to strengthen the perception of class as a significant influencer in the formation of national identity.

Secondly, the viewing of English victories in the wider contexts of empire conforms to Kumar's view of imperial or civilizing nationalism. This was particularly the case from 1834 to 1851, where contemporaries both celebrated the supremacy of English chess in the context of empire and constructed visions of England as a civilizing nation. However, Kumar argues that contemporaries looked to stress the British rather than English nature of Empire, arguing that the emergence of a distinctly "English" identity did not emerge until the 1870s in tandem with the decline of Empire. However, this was not the case with the celebration of chess victories and the construction of the English School, which were made in Anglo-centric terms. While viewed in the context of empire with the occasional use of the term British, the chess world viewed victories and supremacy in English context. The changing nature of the English School's conception in the 1870s, however, suggests Kumar's assertion of the emergence of a distinctly English identity during the decline of empire bears some fruit. From this period onwards, the focus was less on the celebration of English supremacy, but the imagining of English qualities and characteristics. The imagining of English qualities, therefore, does suggest a more advanced idea of "Englishness" that developed independent from empire.

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<sup>337</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2006); Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 266

Regarding the influence of the amateur ethos in shaping chess' growth, by the end of the period, unlike most other sports, chess was able to remain an amateur's game. While the cases of cricket, football, and athletics all witnessed middle-class attempts at shaping the game along amateur lines, these attempts were largely unsuccessful. Instead, the working classes largely shaped the game along their own independent lines and embraced the professional and commercial growth of sport. Why, then, were the middle-class patrons of chess able to shape the game along the lines of an amateur ethos?

One of the reasons for this may lie in the differing class makeup of the chess world compared to other sports. While the game would open up to the lower classes towards the end of the period, the makeup of chess clubs and the practicing of chess as a profession largely remained an activity of the upper and middling classes. The middle-class anxieties around respectability and social distancing that defined the period, therefore, may well have played a part here in the wider acceptance of an amateur ethos. That chess clubs imposed strict rules on membership alongside the English professional's adherence to amateurism suggests this was the case.

The differing nature of chess compared to other sports also seems to have been influential in the success of the amateur ethos. While the nature of cricket and football brought with it the opportunities of commercial gain, only the upper echelons of chess players were presented with the opportunity to make money. These commercial prospects stemmed not from chess' ability to draw in spectators, but in the staking of matches and tournaments. Chess, therefore, lent itself more neatly as a local amateur game, rather than a commercial sport.



One must remember, however, that despite the game's lack of potential for commercial growth, professional chess significantly declined during the period, suggesting that other factors were at play. That opportunities for professional players to make a living from the game declined serves to highlight the strength of the forces that drove the amateur ethos: xenophobia, a belief in English superiority, and matters of class and respectability.

Overall, the case of chess is unique in its experience compared to other nineteenth century sports and games. While the search for national identity in other major sports of the period has left historians largely empty handed, the universal nature of chess resulted in the formation of national identity in the chess world, as contemporaries used the game to view England as a distinct, special, and superior nation. While the chess world was an isolated "imagined community", its experience highlights the prevalence and strength of national identity in nineteenth century England.

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