

12. International Master Jeremy Silman Reads a Passage from Pal Benko: My Life, Games, and Compositions

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International Master Jeremy Silman has won many important tournaments including the U.S., American, and National Opens but it is as a teacher and writer that he is best known. His most important work, *How to Reassess Your Chess*, has gone through four editions and sold over 100,000 copies making it one of the best-selling chess books of all time. Silman reads passages from his book *Pal Benko: My Life, Games, and Composition* which recount Benko's participation in the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup.

Though working on Wall Street guaranteed me security, I didn't like getting up every day at a specific time and much preferred the freedom of a chessplayer's life. Since I now had some money in the bank and was comfortably situated in my new country, I quit my job and became the only professional chessplayer (along with Fischer) in the United States.

With super-tournaments like Stockholm and Curaçao behind me, I didn't expect to participate in another such event for a long time to come. Imagine my delight when I was invited to the first Piatigorsky Cup in Los Angeles, a tournament sponsored by the world-famous cellist Gregor Piatigorsky and his wife.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Piatigorsky were very nice to us, and Gregor even gave us a cello recital next to his pool in his swimming trunks. Unfortunately, only one more Piatigorsky Cup was held, and then they refused to do anymore. Gregor told me that the players continually complained, and that he couldn't make anyone happy. At one point, Mrs. Piatigorsky had to carry the demo board to the event herself (none of the players would move a muscle to help), and the constant demands for more and more money turned the whole thing sour.

Though the tournament turned out to be doomed as an ongoing event, all the players experienced the usual array of thrills, horrors, triumphs, and vexations. One memory that stands out is when Soviet politics and Disneyland rammed heads. Since we were in Los Angeles, several of the players wanted to go to Disneyland. [Paul] Keres and [Tigran] Petrosian, acting like delighted little kids, were very excited about since Disneyland was a legend in the Soviet Union. However, when the day came to go there Petrosian said he felt ill and couldn't go, and Keres said he had stay with Tigran.

It turned out that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was visiting at that time and also wanted to go. However, Walt Disney wasn't impressed and said, "He can come if he buys his own ticket." Because there was no red carpet for Khrushchev, Disneyland was suddenly off limits to poor Keres and Petrosian—they didn't dare to go and get the Soviet politicals angry.

Also fresh in my mind is the insanity that occurred in the first round against [Samuel] Reshevsky. We were both in time pressure, and I was moving so quickly that I only noticed that his flag had fallen after we made the fortieth move. At the beginning of the tournament, it was made clear that the players didn't have to call the clock because the director would always be there to point out any such forfeiture.

Unfortunately, the director presiding over our game (a friend of Reshevsky's!) chose to ignore the time forfeiture. National Master Ronny Gross was watching the whole thing and was laughing, since he watched the director stare right at the clock and deliberately avoid making the only legal and correct call. In fact, Gross told me that Sammy's flag had fallen on move thirty eight.

Once I noticed myself I tried to claim the win. However, I had left a move out on my score sheet and it was move forty one when I pointed to the clock, so he snubbed my claim. Naturally, I protested, but none of the officials supported me since that would, in effect, point to the incompetence of the director. In the end, I lost this game. It was the first of three straight losses—certainly a miserable way to begin the event. My final score of four wins, seven losses, and three draws was not an auspicious start to my new professional career.