

14. National Master Bruce Monson Reads Svetozar Gligoric's Memories of the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup

Recorded: September 12, 2013

National Master Bruce Monson has long been known as one of the best players in Colorado where he works as a firefighter. The author of a book on the Belgrade Gambit and a contributor to *Pasadena 1932*, Monson is known as an outstanding chess archivist skilled at finding long lost historical information. He is currently at work on books on the Piatigorsky Cups and Herman Steiner. Here he reads Svetozar Gligoric's memories about the 1963 Piatigorsky Cup tournament.

Svetozar Gligoric is one of the legendary figures of chess in the twentieth century. Twelve times champion of his native Yugoslavia, Gligoric was one of the best players in the world in the 1950s and the 1960s. Though he won many important tournaments, Gligoric is likely to be best remembered for his contributions to opening theory, in particular, Kings Indian, Nimzo Indian, and Ruy Lopez. His column "Game of the Month", which appeared in magazines around the world for close to two decades, was a must-read for all serious players. Gligoric's autobiography and best games collection *I Play Against Pieces* typified his 'play the board and not the man' approach that set him apart from most of his rivals.

In my sixty years of being in chess competitions, not counting World War II, which forced me to a five year absence from chess as a youngster, my fondest memories belong to the Piatigorsky Cup of 1963. Players rather think gladly of their best results; my feelings here are free of vanity because this tournament was far from my greatest success. I remember it for bigger reasons: the unforgettable way that all the grandmasters were received and treated and for the significance of the event.

In Los Angeles 1963, I had the most erratic result. It was a double round-robin, and I was leading alone at the halfway mark with four and a half points, but in the second half I had the worst result of all my competitors with only one and a half points out of the remaining seven games. My explanation is that I had a hidden weakness, a dislike of long-lasting tension. Besides, I was not really the strongest favorite. In my wish to be friendly, I began accepting invitations in the second half to pleasant social occasions, breaking my rule of coming to each game well-rested and prepared. I am not looking here for an excuse. In a similar high class tournament in Dallas 1957, but without grandmasters from the U.S.S.R., I kept the lead throughout and having none of the above mentioned temptations, I shared first prize with [Samuel] Reshevsky.

Now, when writing this text after forty three years, I am eighty-three and still equally enchanted with memories of the first Piatigorsky Cup because of its dignity and the unrepeatable, beautiful atmosphere around it. Between the two World Wars, the U.S.A. had the strongest team in Chess Olympiads, but in the mid-years of the twentieth century there was a striking discrepancy between the great tradition of American chess and a lack of world class competitions on U.S. territory. The initiative of Mrs. Jacqueline Piatigorsky and her husband

Gregor, the world-renowned cellist, to be sponsors of great competitions in North America with even the World Champion in [them] came as a salvation from that situation, strongly influencing world chess.

After their arrival, participants understood that the vital force of the tournament was Mrs. Piatigorsky. Months before, she attended to a myriad of matters for the full success of the organization of the tournament. Her pre-tournament tasks were complicated with the coming of the U.S.S.R. new world champion [Tigran] Petrosian and [Paul] Keres, and, with former U.S. Champion and member of victorious Olympic teams Isaac Kashdan, took the responsibilities of the director of the tournament. Every day, hours before the start of each round, Mrs. Piatigorsky was at the tournament site checking all the details to assure a smooth-running competition. Her devotion to the game was illustrated by the fact that she had a room for a chess studio at her beautiful home and was herself an accomplished chess player. As a lady of high social prestige, having loved chess so much she represented a welcome complement to the profession of visiting grandmasters. The warm cordiality of her husband, Mr. Piatigorsky, towards the participating grandmasters I took as his benevolence to his wife, and his wish to provide some help in her noble efforts. Years afterwards, I was accidently shown a photo of myself playing Herman Steiner in Hollywood in 1952, and there was a gentleman sitting beside our table watching the game with interest. That person was Mr. Piatigorsky himself, eleven years before I knew Gregor personally. I realized my mistake; in fact, that Jacqueline was not the only chess fan in the family.

The very important part of my profound satisfaction in having played in the first Piatigorsky Cup is having been acquainted with the Piatigorsky couple. Both of them were tall, strong, good looking people. Their marriage was reminiscent of films in Hollywood, that factory of dreams. In a quiet way, Gregor and Jacqueline were famous for a variety of reasons. Being one generation behind them in age, they probably felt my deepest respect for them. My belief is that there is no art which can touch the human heart as deeply as music does. Gregor saw my enthusiasm for his art and gave me a gift, one of his LPs with a personal written dedication to it on me, of which I have been proud all these years since. Another time in the garden of the Piatigorskys' house at a friendly reception for the grandmasters, Gregor took his precious cello, sat close to me, and played a composition called "Prayer." Was it by Brahms? I did not hide my admiration for the heavenly sound of his noble instrument.

Chess and writing, these two occupations have been talking all the time of my professional career. To meet my ancient wish to learn music Gregor bides me to find the book called *Progressive Harmony*. I was reading from that book from time to time for the next forty years. It meant the beginning of my musical self-education. At age eighty one, I retired from all other activities, deciding to make music my only concern. At eighty two, with more knowledge, I began composing light music with the joyful slogans such as, "I have a new mission in life," and, "There is nothing that comes too late."

During my stay in California Mrs. Piatigorsky was equally kind to me. Jacqueline took me and several more guests to a first-class restaurant and offered us a meal, which I cannot forget. It

was seafood in Hawaii style: fish with tropical fruits, altogether having exquisite taste unknown before to me. Since I understood Russian too, Gregor complained once about the deterioration of the classical Russian language in the U.S.S.R. Mr. Piatigorsky spoke beautifully both in English and his native Russian and took care of translating to the audience Petrosian's speech at the final ceremony.

Several years later I happened to be in Los Angeles for different reasons. Knowing about my presence, the Piatigorsky couple did not miss the opportunity to invite me to their home and to a meal for three people only. Jacqueline, Gregor, and myself. Informed then of Gregor's failing health, I felt doubly touched and had to hide my sadness. He did not drink nor did Jacqueline, but she brought out an old bottle of French red wine for me. I was puzzled over the damp cork, strangely green in color, and took the bottle in my hands. That wine originated from 1900, the last year of the nineteenth century. I guess that such rarities must have been kept so long in the famous cellar of her brother Baron Rothschild in Paris. Returning to Europe, I boasted many times about the unreachable peak of my little-known career as a wine connoisseur. It was my last meeting with the Piatigorsky couple. I regret deeply that such a wonderful personality, healthy-looking Gregor could not win against his unexpected illness to stay together with Jacqueline in her heroic mid-nineties today. Their generous contribution to the art of chess will remain as a monument.

From Svetozar Gligoric's CD, *Life Is All We Have: How Did I Survive the Twentieth Century?*

Before it happened, I visited Hollywood for the first time in 1952. My dream was to have the perfect sound in listening to music at home, so I accepted a device of an expert in Los Angeles to buy the best JBL speakers. I presume this to be Armin Steiner. Placed in two table-sized boxes covered with a decorative lace, they cost me almost as much as a small car. Transporting them back to Belgrade was a real accomplishment of mine. I had to hire an Italian company which had a cargo flight for transportation over America and the Atlantic and then from Trieste, [Italy], by freight train. Speakers arrived at Belgrade. I was overwhelmed. The everyday connection with music was a precious middle support for me over the years.