Daniel King

Sultan Khan

Chess Champion of the British Empire

With a foreword by former World Champion
Viswanathan Anand

New In Chess 2020

Contents

LONDON, 28TH APRIL 1929

In the middle of a smart function room, tables have been arranged into an enclosed rectangle, with thirty-five chessboards and pieces in their starting positions at evenly spaced intervals. On the outside of the rectangle are seated thirty-five players, but there are no chairs on the inside. The stage is set. A low buzz of nervous and excited chatter anticipates the arrival of the professional who will single-handedly take on all these players.

A gentleman with dark slicked-back hair and olive complexion, dressed immaculately in a tail-coat, steps through a gap in the tables into the middle of the arena. It is early on a Sunday afternoon, a day of the week when an Englishman is allowed to relax his standards, so the gentleman's vestments, which might appear as over-formal on others, mark him out as the star of the performance. José Raúl Capablanca has been described as the most gifted chess player that has ever lived, his victories seemingly effortless, as if he understands universal laws of the game lying deep within a position that are a mystery to others.

Warm welcoming speeches are made and the crowd applauds. Capablanca shakes the hand of the player on the first board, makes a move, and begins his perambulation around the tables. A hush takes over the room.

Capablanca's opponents on this day are cosmopolitan: the simultaneous display is hosted by the Maccabeans, a club of the Anglo-Jewish elite, in a function hall of the Jewish Liberal Synagogue in leafy St. John's Wood, north London. But even in this diverse company, the most striking player is a young Indian with a white turban jutting out in geometric shards from his head, the brilliance of the linen emphasising the dark skin of his face.

Sultan Khan arrived in England just a few days ago. He is the All-India Chess Champion, but in Europe, as yet, virtually unknown. This afternoon he will be facing not just a seasoned western professional, but arguably the greatest strategist in the history of the game. Even if Capablanca has to battle thirty-five opponents simultaneously, the standard of chess will be at a different level than the Indian champion will have ever previously experienced.

Watching over Sultan Khan is another Indian, but his confident bearing, opulent robes and colourful headgear – the word turban does not do it justice – show him to be of a higher social status. Colonel Nawab Malik Sir Umar Hayat Khan, Tiwana, K.C.I.E., C.B.E., M.V.O., is about to become a member of the council that advises the British Secretary of State for India. He has extensive landholdings in the Punjab and is fiercely

loyal to the Empire, serving in the British and Indian armies on three continents. Such loyalty marks out Sir Umar as a controversial character, even in London, where unrest among some Indians is also erupting.

Sir Umar is Sultan Khan's patron – perhaps master is a better description – bringing him into his household when he was made aware of his prodigious talent for chess. When Sir Umar came to London on his political mission, he brought his protégé with him to test his abilities against European opposition. While Sir Umar is a loyalist, one suspects his patronage of Sultan Khan is also a way of proving that Indians are the intellectual equal – at the very least – of their British masters.

Simultaneous exhibitions are a way for amateurs to pit themselves against a professional, who in return picks up a healthy fee for condescending to labour against such lowly opposition. As a national champion Sultan Khan can hardly be put into this category, and it is irregular that he is playing among the pack against the star. But no one is quite sure of his strength as there has been little contact between Indian and western players. Most professionals will have played chess for a minimum of ten years before cutting their teeth in international competition. Remarkably, Sultan Khan has been playing the international form of the game for just three years, and only against limited opposition back in India.

As is the convention in simultaneous displays, the professional takes the white pieces on all boards and, against Sultan Khan, the Cuban opens by advancing his queen's pawn two squares forward. With this first move Khan immediately finds himself transported into another world – in the Indian game the foot-soldiers only have the right to move one square forward from their initial position. Over the last three years Khan will have practised this opening with his Indian colleagues, but their opening knowledge will count for little against Capablanca, who has used it as his main weapon in two World Championship matches.

J.R.Capablanca
Sultan Khan

Simultaneous display, London
28th April 1929

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3 a6

Khan's speciality. Playing the rook's pawn forward at this early stage is somewhat unorthodox, but there is a similarity with a system that Alekhine used in the Queen's Gambit Declined against Capablanca in their World Championship match in 1927.

6.cxd5 exd5 7.♗d3 ♗e6?!

The Indian reveals his inexperience in the opening. For the moment there is no need to develop the queen's bishop. He wants to support the d-pawn, but it would have been better to castle or develop the queen's knight.

A couple of years later Capablanca was to reach this position again in a simultaneous display and his consultation opponents played better: 7...0-0 8.♕c2 ♘bd7 9.♘ge2 ♖e8 10.♘g3 ♘f8 11.♘f5 ♗xf5 12.♗xf5 c6 13.0-0 ♘h5 14.♗xe7 ♖xe7, and the game was later drawn, Capablanca-Allies, Staten Island Chess Club simul, New York, 1931.

8.♘ge2 h6 9.♗h4 c5

Breaking the centre open with the king in the middle feels odd: 9...♘bd7 or 9...0-0 are more sensible.

10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.0-0 ♘c6 12.♘f4

The opening has been a success for Capablanca. Black needs to bring the king to safety, but castling loses a pawn: 12...0-0 13.♘cxd5 ♗xd5 14.♘xd5 ♕xd5 15.♗xf6 (the bishop cannot be taken because of the discovered check) 15...♕e6 16.♗c3, with a stable advantage.

Therefore Khan improvises, but the pawn advance weakens his position horribly:

12...g5 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♗g3 ♔e7

Given the lack of pawn cover, castling kingside doesn't inspire confidence, but playing with his king in the middle of the board is still a bold decision.

15.♖c1 ♗d6

Making the best of the situation: Khan wants to exchange off one of Capablanca's powerful bishops, reducing the danger to his king.

16.f4

Which Capablanca prevents. Apart from that, it makes sense to open the position with Black's king still in the middle.

16...♕c7

A cool response, dissuading White from advancing or capturing with the f-pawn.

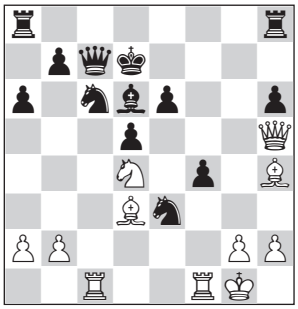
17.♘e2 ♘g4

Counterplay.

18.♘d4

This is a natural move, made on feeling rather than calculation. In a simultaneous display, lingering at a board to look deeply into a position is impossible when there are dozens of opponents also waiting for a move. 18.♕b3! is stronger but would require too much time to work through the consequences: 18...♘xe3 19.♖f3 ♘g4 20.h3 ♘f6 21.fxg5, with the advantage.

18...♘xe3 19.♕e2 gxf4 20.♗h4+ ♔d7 21.♕h5



Considering Khan's dubious opening play, and the shaky position of Black's king, I can imagine that Capablanca felt he was closing in for the kill.

21...♖af8!

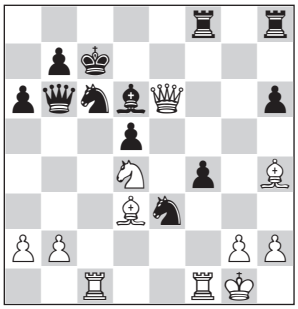
Excellent defence. Khan resists capturing the rook (21...♘xf1? 22.♘xe6! ♔xe6 23.♕f5 mate) and concentrates on preventing Capablanca's threats.

22.♕g6 ♕b6

Well calculated. Many players would panic in the face of White's attack but Khan keeps his cool.

Instead, 22...♖e8 23.♗xa6 feels perilous.

23.♕xe6+ ♔c7



With deft footwork, the king reaches a relatively secure square. Capablanca now has a bewildering number of options to consider, and no clearly correct continuation.

As the knight in the middle is en prise, then 24.♘xc6 is an obvious move: 24...bxc6 25.♖f2 (to shield the king) with a messy position, although Black's king has found some security. Chances are level after 25...♖hg8 or 25...♖e8.

24.♗f6 protects the knight and keeps more tension, but Black holds the position with 24...♖hg8 25.♗e5 ♗xe5 26.♕xe5+ ♔d7 27.♕e6+ ♔c7. Because of the threats to the knight and the pawn on g2 White should force a draw. Instead, Capablanca self-destructed:

24.♕xd5?? ♘xd5

... and resigned.

The Times correspondent wrote: 'M.Sultan Khan is the champion of India, and he had the good fortune to find Capablanca making one of his very rare slips, resulting in the loss of the queen.'

The Daily Mail correspondent was also prepared to make excuses for the star: 'Queen takes queen's pawn was an obvious oversight on the part of the ex-world champion – a blunder always possible when so many players are being opposed simultaneously.' He could at least see that by this stage Sultan Khan had survived the worst: 'Without the mistake the game might have been drawn, as Black does not appear to be at any disadvantage.'

The truth is this: Capablanca cracked in the face of stout defence. The Cuban would have been expecting to win this game considering how inaccurately his opponent had played the opening. Khan's decision to leave his king in the middle of the board was risky in the extreme, but turned out to be a masterstroke. Expecting a swift victory Capablanca was provoked into a full-scale assault, but now the game had moved away

from the smooth strategic paths where Capa was in his element towards a treacherous quagmire.

At this moment, when he found himself in peril, Sultan Khan defended with coolness and originality – qualities he was to display so often in his later chess career. Such complicated and unusual positions require time to process and, in a simultaneous display, with the pressure of the other games in progress, time was precisely what Capablanca lacked. He was stepping on uncomfortably foreign ground.

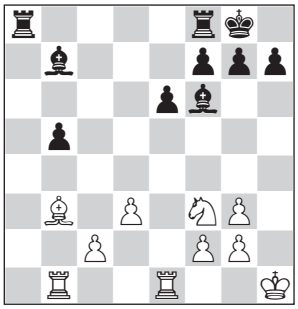
'Good fortune'? No, fine play; and all the more remarkable considering Khan's inexperience in the Western game.

Years later, Capablanca was to write: 'The fact that even under such conditions he succeeded in becoming a champion reveals a genius for chess which is nothing short of extraordinary'.

For the moment, let's leave this hall in affluent north London and transport ourselves to a dusty corner of the Indian subcontinent, where Sultan Khan's life began.

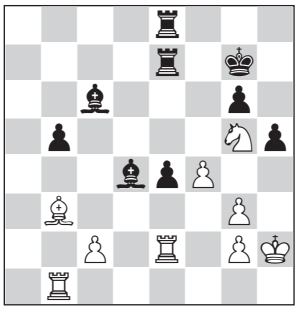
Playing rapidly does not always demonstrate great confidence. Khan has repeated his ineffective opening from their game at the Gambit which had continued 3...♘c6 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♕e2 d6 6.0-0 ♗e7 7.♗b5 ♗d7 8.♗xc6 ♗xc6 9.d4, with a roughly level game. That explains why Winter prevented the bishop moving to b5 and demonstrates his ambition.

4.a4 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♘f6 6.♕e2 ♘d4 7.♘xd4 cxd4 8.♘b1 d5 9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.0-0 ♗e7 11.d3 0-0 12.♘d2 b6 13.♘f3 ♗f6 14.♕e4 ♗b7 15.♘xd4 ♕d7 16.♘f3 ♘c3 17.♕g4 ♘e2+ 18.♔h1 ♘xc1 19.♖axc1 b5 20.axb5 axb5 21.♗b3 ♗xb2 22.♖b1 ♗f6 23.♖fe1 ♕d6 24.♕g3 ♕xg3 25.hxg3



Winter's opening strategy has been a success: the bishop on b3 remains out of play; Black's sound kingside pawn structure and the tangible advantage of the two bishops represent a solid and permanent advantage. There is no pressure on his position, so it is possible to build up steadily and make the break at the right moment. Realistically, only two results are possible: either a win for Winter or a draw.

25...♗c3 26.♖e2 ♖fd8 27.♘g5 g6 28.♘e4 ♗d4 29.f3 h5 30.♔h2 ♔g7 31.f4 ♗c6 32.♘g5 ♖e8 33.♘f3 ♗c3 34.♔g1 ♖e7 35.♘g5 ♖ae8 36.♘e4 ♗d4+ 37.♔h2 f5 38.♘g5 e5 39.♔h3 e4 40.dxe4 fxe4 41.♔h2

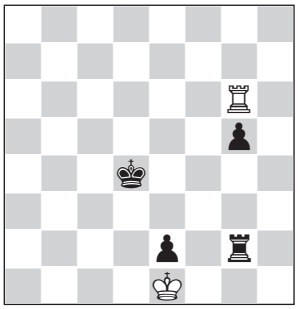


Winter has carefully nurtured his advantage and established a strong passed pawn. Khan is in trouble. The game must have been adjourned

around this position and play resumed in the evening. It was at this point that the drama took place.
The local newspaper reported that many of the players from the chess congress,

> '... enjoyed the buoyancy of the police sports in the grounds adjoining their own serene arena. When the young men and maidens on the lawn, in the evening, began tripping the light fantastic to the strains of lilting music supplied by the band of The Buffs' Depot [the local military regiment] three pairs of the masters at chess were engrossed in the struggle for the championship, and when the jazz commenced the gymnasium doors were gently closed. Jazz and chess do not mix well.'[65]

Could the stuffy conditions inside the school gymnasium and the intruding music have played on Winter's nerves at the end of this long session? Was Khan inured to these distractions by his afternoons in Simla playing beside a cacophonous band?
41...♗f6 42.♖d1 ♗xg5 43.fxg5 e3 44.♖d6 ♗d7 45.♗d5 ♗g4 46.♗f3 ♖d7 47.♖xd7+ ♗xd7 48.♖e1 b4 49.g4 hxg4 50.♗e2 ♗f5 51.♖b1 ♖e4 52.♔g3 ♔f7 53.c3 bxc3 54.♖c1 ♔e6 55.♖xc3 ♔e5 56.♖c5+ ♔d4 57.♖c4+ ♔d5 58.♖c1 ♖d4 59.♖c3 ♔e4 60.♖c7 ♖d2 61.♖e7+ ♔d4 62.♗xg4 ♗xg4 63.♔xg4 ♖xg2+ 64.♔f3 ♖f2+ 65.♔g3 ♖f5 66.♖e6 ♖xg5+ 67.♔f3 ♖f5+ 68.♔e2 ♖f2+ 69.♔e1 g5 70.♖g6 ♖g2 71.♔f1 e2+ 72.♔e1



Winter has achieved a winning position but was apparently '...exasperated by the Indian's failure to resign in a hopeless position...'[66] He should bring his king across to support the g-pawn: 72...♔e4 73.♖e6+ ♔f4 74.♖f6+ ♔g3, and so on, with a winning position. Instead...
72...♔e3?? 73.♖xg5 ½-½
If the rook is taken, stalemate.

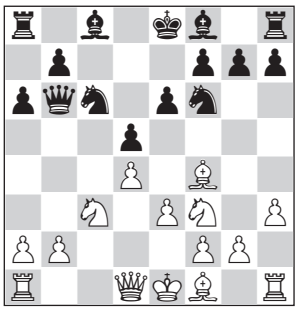
> 'Poor Willie, distraught in the extreme, ran up and down the hall tearing at his hair and swearing he would never play in the same tournament as Sultan Khan. He soon forgot this.' (Golombek)[67]

A massive slice of luck, certainly, but it would not have occurred without Khan's tenacity and concentration.

Heading into the last round Khan was a full point clear of Michell, so just needed a draw to be sure of undisputed first place. He faced Arthur Eva, who was in last position in the tournament. The game was anything but smooth.

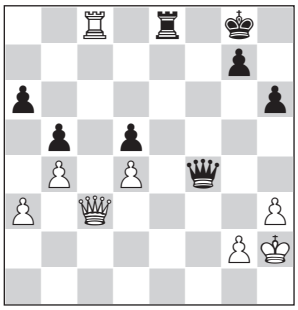
A.Eva
Sultan Khan
British Championship, Ramsgate (11)
9th August 1929

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 a6 4.cxd5 cxd5 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.♗f4 ♘f6
Khan has repeated the same line as his game against Michell, but here Eva deviates first with...
7.h3
Preventing 7...♗g4, but a better way to do this is to play 7.♖c1, as in So-Carlsen, Stavanger 2018.
7...e6 8.e3 ♕b6



Khan has not learned the lesson of his game against Michell. In fact, throughout his career, Khan had a weakness for an early adventure with his queen in a variety of openings.
In this case, it wastes time and encourages White to carry out his strategic plan of ♘a4-c5. Instead 8...♗d6, exchanging off the strong bishop on f4, is sensible.
9.♖b1 ♗b4 10.♗d3 ♗d7 11.0-0 ♖c8 12.♘a4 ♕a7 13.a3 ♗e7 14.b4 b6

Understandably, Khan does not wish to allow the knight into c5. But with this move he overlooks a tactic: 15.♗xa6, winning a pawn.
Eva ignores this, but still retains a massive positional advantage – which he then proceeds to squander.
15.♕e2 ♘b8 16.♖fc1 0-0 17.♘c3 b5 18.♘e5 ♘c6 19.♗g5 h6 20.♗h4 ♗e8 21.♖b3 ♘e4 22.♗xe7 ♘xe7 23.♗b1 f6 24.♘d3 ♘xc3 25.♖bxc3 ♖xc3 26.♖xc3 ♗g6 27.♕d1 ♗xd3 28.♕xd3 f5 29.♖c5 ♖c8 30.f3 ♕b8 31.e4 ♖f8 32.♗a2 fxe4 33.fxe4 ♕f4 34.exd5 ♘xd5
Steering the game towards a dead draw. Khan could have won a piece with 34...♕f2+ 35.♔h2 ♕xa2, but he probably didn't want to have to deal with the tricky 36.♕e4.
35.♔h1 ♕f2 36.♗xd5 exd5 37.♕c3 ♖e8 38.♖c8 ♕f1+ 39.♔h2 ♕f4+ 40.♔h1 ♕f1+ 41.♔h2 ♕f4+



Draw agreed. All's well that ends well.[68]

It was reported that,

> 'Sultan's last opponent, Eva, put up a good defence against the Indian player, but Sultan needed only a draw and obtained that result amid general congratulations before the lunch time adjournment.'

It seems that the correspondent didn't examine the game too closely.

Instead of enjoying a well-earned rest, Khan was invited to play in a living chess display in the afternoon featuring school children dressed up in costumes playing on a giant board. He played against Dr Arpad Vajda, who had shared first in the Major Open tournament – and lost. I'm sure he just wanted to go back and rest.[69]

British Championship, Ramsgate 1929														
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	Khan	*	1	1	½	½	½	0	1	1	1	½	1	8
2	Michell	0	*	1	½	0	½	1	½	1	1	1	½	7
3	Price	0	0	*	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	½	1	7
4	Morrison	½	½	½	*	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	6½
5	Tylor	½	1	½	0	*	½	1	½	0	½	1	1	6½
6	Winter	½	½	0	1	½	*	1	½	0	½	1	1	6½
7	Hamond	1	0	0	1	0	0	*	½	1	0	1	1	5½
8	Drewitt	0	½	½	0	½	½	½	*	1	0	1	1	5½
9	Abrahams	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	*	1	1	1	5
10	Fairhurst	0	0	0	0	½	½	1	1	0	*	1	½	4½
11	Eva	½	0	½	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	0	2
12	Kirk	0	½	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	1	*	2

On the morning of Saturday 10th August, the closing ceremony was presided over by the president of the British Chess Federation, Canon A.G.Gordon Ross, and followed the stiff protocol of the time with a procession of speeches by officials and dignitaries all thanking each other for their good work.

Nevertheless, the occasion was livened by the presence of Sir Umar, who had arrived in Ramsgate to witness, and take part in, Sultan's coronation.[70]

The *British Chess Magazine* reported that:

> 'The memorable victory of M. Sultan Khan is of peculiar appropriateness, as he hails from India, the traditional birthplace of chess, and this point was emphasised in dramatic fashion at the farewell meeting when Colonel Sir Nawab Umar Hayat Khan, a great patron of chess in India, moved several places across the platform in order to deliver an able speech from right by the side of Canon Gordon Ross, president of the British Federation.
>
> With his hand on the shoulder of the president, the Nawab gave refutation to Kipling's lines: "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet," and in stirring manner alluded to the great value of his protégé's victory in strengthening the bonds of Empire.'[71]

How typical of Sir Umar to take centre stage (literally), stealing some credit for Khan's victory; and how ironic that he proclaims 'the bonds of Empire' as he breaches English social etiquette. One can just imagine the murmurs as this fierce warrior of a man, resplendent in eastern garments

and elaborate turban, approached the president, a Church of England clergyman.

Nevertheless, Khan had his moment:

> 'Particular enthusiasm was aroused when M.Sultan Khan – a picturesque figure in snow-white turban – went up to receive the splendid crown that represents the blue riband of British Empire chess. In honour of his victory he also receives a gold medal, the gift of Sir Umar.'[72]

Other speakers also put Khan's victory into political context. Sir Richard Barnett MP (former Irish Champion, and president of the House of Commons Chess Circle) declared that 'Sultan Khan's win was a splendid achievement for British and Imperial chess.'

As Khan's English wasn't good enough to give a speech, a certain Mr Bosworth Smith thanked the meeting on his behalf remarking that his victory 'was a great gain for India, and opened the door for all members of the Empire'.[73]

CHAPTER 16

Prague International Team Tournament 1931

'You have an Indian playing for England?' 'No, for the British Empire.'

The British Chess Federation committee met in London in April to agree on a team for the International Team Tournament in Prague, from 11-26th July. Five players were selected: Sultan Khan, Fred Yates, William Winter, Sir George Thomas (captain) and Victor Wahltuch. The British lady champion, Agnes Stevenson, was invited to represent the British Chess Federation in the Women's World Championship tournament to be held concurrently with the congress. The committee estimated that the expenses for the players would come to around £150, which could not be met out of the regular British Chess Federation income. A 'strong appeal' was made for donations to a special fund for the event 'to bring back both cups to Great Britain, the country of their origin!'[138]

Britain was very good at donating trophies, but less successful at winning them back. The Hamilton-Russell Cup is still played for at Chess Olympiads and has never been won by an English, or even a British Empire team.[139]

The appeal for funds is a reminder of the amateur status of the game at that time. As the *British Chess Magazine* reported, 'It was wonderful to see all the finest players in the world playing their best chess for national honour only.' A lofty view. For Sir George Thomas, who had a private income, all very well, but for Yates and Winter, struggling as professionals, it was more problematic. They relied on their journalism to subsidise such events. Even for Sultan Khan, supported by Sir Umar Hayat Khan, there was no prospect of financial independence.

The British amateur attitude went further than mere remuneration. *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, in a diary piece from Prague, noted that 'Individual matches are frequently adjourned for lunch, when most Continental teams confer about the position, good or bad, on their nationals' board. It is a practice which custom has honoured, although originally it was rarely pursued.'

How unsporting! Those 'Continentals' analyse adjourned positions together! Clearly a sordid practice in which the British Empire team, made of stiffer moral fibre, did not indulge.

Nineteen countries competed for the Hamilton-Russell trophy – one more than the year before. There was praise for the hosts, the Czechoslovakian Chess Association, in the *British Chess Magazine*:

> 'We all associate the name of Bohemia with good fellowship, hospitality and free and easy customs; but everyone did not realise that these would be combined with a precision and attention to details great and small which would command the admiration of players and onlookers alike.' The correspondent went further: 'The amount of international good feeling produced was wonderful, and it is to be hoped that this splendid competition – a League of Nations which really functions – will never be allowed to lapse.'

The goodwill didn't, however, prevent a minor diplomatic incident. *The Times* reported that '... there appears to have been some discussion among the players as to Sultan Khan's position. Bogoljubow raised the point by asking, "You have an Indian playing for England?" "No," was the reply – "for the British Empire"; and Bogoljubow cheerfully admitted the truth of the correction.'

Bogoljubow wasn't the only one to find Khan's situation odd. Many in India would have liked to have seen an independent Indian team. Even in England, one newspaper chess columnist exclaimed with surprise 'The British Empire (one country!)'[140]

The final placings of the event showed that there was a new power in the chess world: 1st United States of America, 48 points, 2nd Poland, 47 (last year's winners), 3rd Czechoslovakia, 46½.

The USA team comprised four young players: Kashdan, Dake, Steiner, Horwitz and the veteran Frank Marshall – who scored 10/16 on board 2. At the bibulous closing banquet, William Winter recollects 'Marshall replying to the toast of the victorious American team, rising unsteadily to his feet, waving the Stars and Stripes and shouting "Hip, Hip, Hurrah!" and then collapsing in his chair.'[141]

The British Empire team started very well, winning their first six matches – but then lost in rounds 7-11. The strain of several double-round days, not to mention adjournments on top of that, must have had an effect. A recovery in the second half brought them to 9th place at the end, similar to their performance in Hamburg, yet they were only 4 points off the USA in first place which, given the long event, is practically a photo-finish.

Yates was somewhat disappointing on board 2 with 9½/18; Sir George Thomas did well on board 3 with 12½/18, Winter on board 4 performed reasonably with 10/17. The reserve, Victor Wahltuch, (a veteran of 56

years old) was considerably weaker than the others and was only used twice, scoring a draw and a loss. That left the rest of the team with a near relentless schedule, and no doubt contributed to fatigue.

Sultan Khan scored 11½/17 on board 1: eight wins, two losses and seven draws. Considering his opposition, this was a good score. The *British Chess Magazine* remarked that 'Mir Sultan Khan maintained his reputation as one of the leading world players.' If we compare the scores of all the board one players, it is hard to disagree.

1 Alekhine 13½/18 = 75%
2 Bogoljubow 12½/17 = 73.5%
3 Kashdan 12/17 = 70%
4 Sultan Khan 11½/17 = 67.6%
5 Stahlberg 11½/18 = 63.9%
6 Flohr 11/18 = 61.1%
7 Grünfeld 9/15 = 60%
8 Rubinstein 9½/16 = 59.4%
9 Mikenas 10/18 = 55.5%
10 Vidmar 8½/16 = 53.1%
11 Matisons 7/14 = 50%
12 Steiner 6½/15 = 43.3%
13 Golmayo 6½/15 = 43.3%
14 Johner 6/15 = 40%
15 Andersen 6/16 = 37.5%
16 Rosselli 6/18 = 33.3%
17 Erdelyi 5/16 = 31.2%
18 Weenink 5/17 = 29.4%
19 Christoffersen 1½/14 = 10.7%

Alekhine was on imperious form and arguably at the height of his career. Bogoljubow had played a World Championship match against Alekhine in 1929; Kashdan, Stahlberg and Flohr were the best of the younger generation – but in their individual games Sultan Khan held all of them and defeated the last named. Overall his result was excellent, but we shouldn't let it mask some serious defects in his play.

Khan started with four wins out of four – before crashing in the fifth. A familiar pattern. The first round was easy. He played a Nimzo-Indian against Stefan Erdelyi from Romania, swiftly won a pawn and then the endgame. His play in the next three rounds was curious in that he employed a similar strategy in all the games. This was a development of the Colle and Stonewall systems that he had tried out, without success, in the match against Tartakower.

Sultan Khan
A.Rubinstein
Prague International Team Tournament (2)
12th July 1931

Rubinstein was the clear favourite going into this game. Last year he had defeated Khan in Scarborough and Hamburg, and missed a win in Liège by the slenderest of margins.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.e3 e6 4.♘e5

The Colle System, but with Khan's own special twist, planting the knight onto the outpost at the earliest possible moment. *The Sunday Times* chess correspondent was not impressed: 'Premature, and against principles'. He had tried a similar strategy in the cable match a couple of months previously; and there are certain similarities with a currently modish line of the Caro-Kann: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.♘e5.

4...♘f6 5.♘d2 ♘bd7 6.f4

'... our old acquaintance the "Stonewall"; much in vogue about thirty or forty years ago, but long discarded as inferior.' (*The Sunday Times*)

6...♗d6 7.c3 b6 8.♗d3 ♗b7 9.♕f3

After the unusual beginning, a standard Stonewall position has been reached. This remains a popular system with those that have little time or

inclination to study as the first few moves can be made without looking up from the board. In other words, it suited Khan.

There is nothing wrong with 9...0-0, 9...♕e7 or 9...♕c7. Rubinstein over-reacts to the aggression.

9...h5 10.♕g3

Highlighting Black's weaknesses. The natural response to the threat to the g-pawn is to castle kingside, but that would leave the h-pawn dangling. So Rubinstein makes a concession.

10...♔f8 11.0-0 h4 12.♕h3 ♖c8 13.♘df3 ♘e4 14.♗d2 ♘xd2

Exchanging off the so-called bad bishop, but the threat to move to e1, attacking the h-pawn, was unpleasant.

15.♘xd2 ♘f6 16.♘df3 ♖c7 17.♘g5 ♗c8

What about the forced sequence 18.♘gxf7 ♖xf7 19.♘g6+ ♔g8 20.♘xh8 ♔xh8 21.♕xh4+ ♔g8 22.♗g6...? It's easy to get this far, but Khan obviously couldn't see the win from here and decided not to cash in so early.

18.♖f3 ♖h6 19.♖af1 ♔g8 20.♖3f2 ♕f8 21.♕f3 cxd4 22.cxd4 g6

Here, 23.♖c2 would gain control over the c-file, leaving the rook on h6 out of play. Which is why Khan's next move is a bit odd.

23.g4 hxg3 24.hxg3

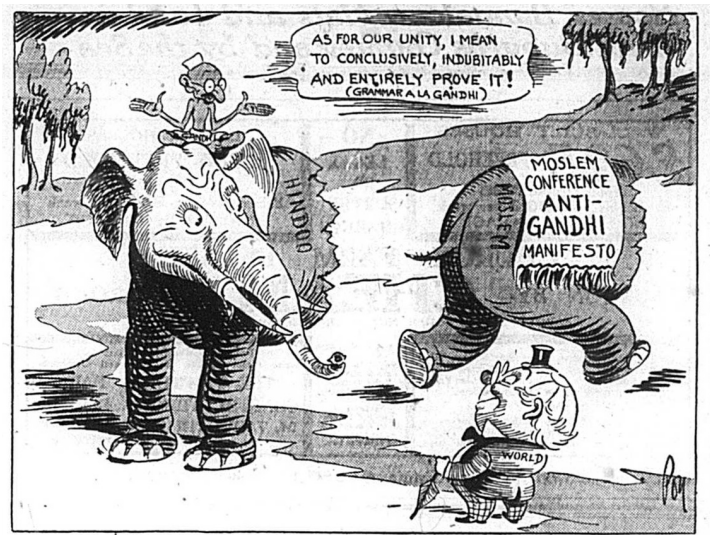
24...♘h7

A big mistake. 24...♘e4 25.♘xe4 dxe4 26.♗xe4 f5 followed by swinging the rook to h7 coordinates Black's pieces at a stroke.

First, Gandhi was looking for outright independence for India. Instead, on offer was a slow crawl to self-governance under Dominion status. In other words, for the foreseeable future, and perhaps beyond, it was quite possible that the British would retain control over the defence forces, foreign policy and finances.

Second, the representatives of the minorities in India – i.e. Sikhs, Untouchables, Christians, and the largest group, the Muslims – were looking for safeguards of their status in India. They were fearful of marginalisation and discrimination by a Hindu-dominated centralised government. Gandhi took a different ideological position: he was against the splintering of the nationalist movement into diverse groups, wanting instead to maintain a united front against the British.

Whose views would the British Government more naturally heed? The head of the Muslim League, the Anglophile barrister Muhammed Ali Jinnah, dressed in a tweed suit, backed by trusted advisors such as Sir Umar Hayat Khan; or Mahatma Gandhi, however softly spoken, dressed in a loin-cloth, who fraternised with radicals, and who sometimes seemed to speak in mystical riddles? Or was this all just pandering to troublemakers? There was a growing element in the Conservative Party that was against consulting with Indians at all.



Cartoon in the *Evening News* 11 April 1931, satirising Gandhi's convoluted language and emphasising the split between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

In the end, the British Government went against Gandhi's wishes and pursued the policy that was proposed at the first Round Table Conference

of a federal system and, in the parlance of the time, the 'safeguarding' of the minorities. Gandhi might have won favour with a large part of the British public, but convincing Muslims that he and the broader Congress Party would be able to look after their best interests was another matter. Although the Congress Party had started out as a pan-religious movement, it was now mainly led by Hindus, and Gandhi's image as a Hindu mystic only reinforced that perception.

Gandhi was to say afterwards that the Round Table Conference 'marked the definite rupture of relations between the Indian nation and the British Government.' He vowed to return to India to restart his struggle against the British in the form of passive resistance and the boycotting of goods.[149]

Sultan Khan was finally back at the chessboard on 13th October 1931 when he played for the Imperial Chess Club versus Lloyds Bank, almost a year to the day since their last encounter. This time he managed to defeat Harold Felce.[150]

The day after, 14th October, Khan gave a simultaneous exhibition at the Empire Social Chess Club in Whiteley's department store, scoring 20 wins, drawing one game (against Mrs Edith Holloway – a former British ladies champion), and losing two, against H.St. John Brooks and the 20-year old Harry Golombek, a future British champion and *Times* chess correspondent from 1945-89.[151]

Getty Images

Simultaneous display by Sultan Khan in Whiteley's, 14 October 1931. Golombek is seated on the right with the dark hair and blurred hand.

Compared to the faltering first display that Khan had given in September 1929, his technique had greatly improved, and that was confirmed by his next exhibition on 3rd November at the Hampstead chess club – one of the strongest in London – where he scored 23 wins, two draws and just one loss.

The correspondent of the *London Evening News* noted that he played '... with fine yet rapid judgment, but in many of the games he deliberately encouraged complications and trappy positions.'

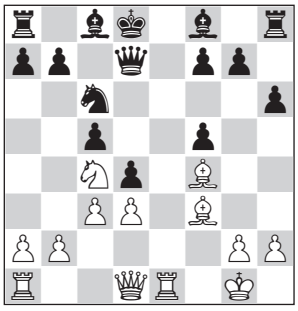
His only defeat came at the hands of the youngest player, a 17-year-old from the University College School, who 'took full advantage of his chances, and, as Sultan Khan himself said, he played very well indeed.'

Khan played with total abandon, improvising the opening, then sacrificing a couple of pawns for an attack. In the middle he lost his way (17.h4 and 18.g3 underestimate his opponent's counter-attacking potential) but that can easily happen in a simul. It would be good to see some of Khan's victories from these exhibitions using this adventurous style, but it's the misfortune of the simul-giver that usually only the losses are published.

Sultan Khan
A.H.Gould

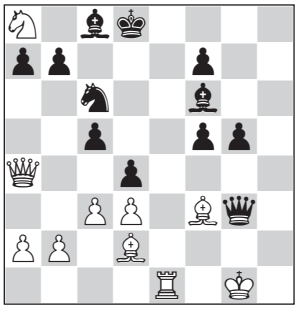
Simultaneous display, Hampstead Chess Club
3rd November 1931

1.e4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.e5 c5 4.d3 ♘c6 5.♗e2 ♘ge7 6.c3 d4 7.♗g5 ♕d7 8.♘bd2 ♘g6 9.0-0 ♘gxe5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.f4 ♘c6 12.f5 exf5 13.♗f3 ♘e7 14.♖e1 h6 15.♗f4 ♔d8 16.♘c4 ♘c6



Here, 17.♕b3, threatening 18.♗xc6 and 19.♘e5, is winning for White.

17.h4 ♗e7 18.g3 ♖e8 19.♕a4 g5 20.hxg5 hxg5 21.♗d2 ♗f6 22.♘b6 ♖xe1+ 23.♖xe1 ♕c7 24.♘xa8 ♕xg3+



25.♗g2 f4 26.♕d1 ♗g4 27.♕b3 ♗f3 28.♖e2 ♗xe2 29.♕d5+ ♔c8 30.♕f5+ ♔b8 31.♕xf6 ♔xa8 32.♕h8+ ♘b8 33.♕h3 0-1

White is completely lost but, in a simul, one could hope for a miracle. Khan obviously felt his opponent had already shown enough skill and graciously resigned. The game isn't worth scrutinising too closely – there were massive mistakes on both sides – but I simply like the spirit with which Sultan Khan plays: he is completely unafraid.[152]

A week later Khan played his very first county match, representing Middlesex against Sussex at the St. Bride's Institute, which hosted chess events for decades.

The institute was set up in 1891 to serve the growing printing and publishing trade in nearby Fleet Street. It was the venue for London League matches, county matches and tournaments right into the 1980s. I have vivid memories of the cramped upper room with dark wooden panels filled with tight rows of tables replete with chess sets – proper Staunton chess sets that were probably worth a fortune – and old-fashioned chess clocks that looked as though they had been made in Victorian times. The ceiling was stained a dirty yellow through years of cigarette smoke that filled the unventilated room.

Khan's opponent, Vera Menchik, had recently defended her Women's World Championship title in Prague and won the Major Open tournament at the Congress in Worcester. She was very active on the English chess scene and had recently taken over as resident professional at the Empire Social Chess Club.[153] This was played on the second board as it was the custom for the county champion (in this case J.H.Morrison) to lead the team. Sultan Khan, obliging as ever, said that he fully approved of this principle, so long as he got a good game. His wish was fulfilled.[154]