



Correspondence Chess in America



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Preface

The story of correspondence chess in America is largely the story of the Correspondence Chess League of America (CCLA). Its origins in 1909 make it the oldest such organization in America and the second oldest in the world. It predates the United States Chess Federation by thirty years, the International Correspondence Chess Federation by almost forty years, and the other major American postal clubs by more than half a century.

The remarkable continuity of the CCLA is partly due to its makeup of officers and, since 1938, a board of directors regularly elected by the membership. Unlike groups that depend entirely on one or two people and cease to function when they leave, the League has always had enough volunteers to keep going. One other key to its success is its status as a nonprofit organization; most such clubs in America are set up as money-making enterprises and simply fail, whereas the CCLA is unhampered by any such requirement.

The idea for this book came from the 1965 Horowitz and Battell book *The Best of Chess*, which contains highlights from more than thirty years of the magazine *Chess Review*: games, fiction, cartoons, and other chess-related items. I first determined to put together a similar book containing the best from the CCLA magazine *The Chess Correspondent*, using material that the League had

published during my fourteen years of membership to that point.

But I soon came to understand Robert Pirsig: “The further back you go, the further back you see you have to go..., until what looked like a small problem ... turns into a major ... enquiry.” As I delved into the club’s history, I found many gaps, anachronisms and errors. The impetus to expand to a full-length history came when I read several comments to the effect that no one can know anything about CCLA history before 1933 because the records do not exist. I have used contextual clues from various accounts and found that information is indeed available — to those who look hard enough.

This book notes the many American luminaries who have been involved with correspondence chess, including Frank Marshall, Isaac Kashdan and Reuben Fine. It explains why Volume 72 of *The Chess Correspondent* appears in 1999 even though the Correspondence Chess League of America originally dates from 1909 and its magazine dates from 1933. It even explains the foundation of the long-running CCLA “North American” tournament and reconciles the conflicting accounts of the founding of the United States Postal Chess Federation. Appendix A contains a discussion of the world’s first numerical system for rating chess players.

In general, I have chosen a course of

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In the Beginning (to 1909)

The “modern” era of correspondence chess is generally traced to the London-Edinburgh five-game match played between April 1824 and July 1828. This match was not the first of its kind, as many records indicate that chess was being played one move at a time over a period of days long before 1824. But the London-Edinburgh match stands out, especially the second game.

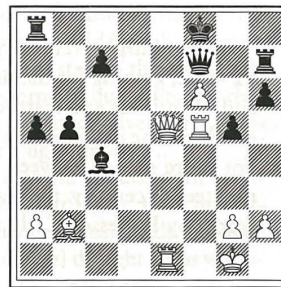
Game 1 Correspondence Match, 1824–1828, Second Game, London-Edinburgh *Scotch Game*

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4

Unlike some openings which are here today and only a footnote tomorrow, the Scotch's viability even in recent world-class chess was demonstrated by Kasparov in his 1990 match against Karpov.

3. ... exd4 4. Bc4 Bc5 5. c3 Qe7
6. 0-0 dxc3 7. Nxc3 d6 8. Nd5 Qd7
9. b4 Nxb4 10. Nxb4 Bxb4 11. Ng5
Nh6 12. Bb2 Kf8 13. Qb3 Qe7 14. Nxf7
Nxf7 15. Qxb4 Ne5 16. f4 Nxc4
17. Qxc4 Qf7 18. Qc3 Be6 19. f5 Bc4
20. Rf4 b5 21. e5 dxe5 22. Qxe5 h6
23. Re1 Rh7 24. f6 g5 25. Rf5 a5

After 25. ... a5



This position has become a famous example of the conditional, or “if-then,” move in correspondence chess. Thinking that mate is now forced, London now committed itself to the following sequence by writing it all on the same message.

26. Qc5**ch** Kg8 27. R×g5**ch**!?? h×g5
28. Q×g5**ch**

Some hours after London decided on this sequence, a member of the club found that Edinburgh could safely take the rook. Club members then learned to their horror that their secretary had left the club two hours earlier than usual that day and had already mailed the faulty sequence!

After trying to retrieve the message from the mail system, as impossible then as it is now, London sent another letter

1

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