

From the Editor's Desk

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We are the champions, my friend....

What was supposed to be an extremely close match for the World Championship between Viswanathan Anand and Vladimir Kramnik turned into an early rout, as Anand won with black in games three and five, then took game six with white. Draws in games seven, eight, and nine brought Anand to the brink of victory, but Kramnik managed to earn one token win to stave off elimination in game ten. Winning three in a row against someone of Anand's caliber, however, was simply too much to ask, and the game eleven draw secured the title for the Indian Grandmaster.

The weird part of all this is that we now appear to have just one World Champion. I've spent so much of the last couple of decades explaining to people that there are at least two World Champions, and by some counts three or even four, that I'm not sure I can deal with having only one.

It was simple enough back when only Karpov and Kasparov played matches with each other. Then Garry made things confusing by creating a new organization every couple of years and playing matches with more or less random people other than Karpov. So FIDE ran its own championship events so Karpov could win. Then Karpov wasn't winning the FIDE title anymore, and after a bit Kasparov wasn't winning the other title either.

Usually we had to specify that there was a FIDE champion, who nobody believed was the strongest player, but he did win a knockout event for some kind of title. There was also Karpov, who probably would have won a match with the FIDE title holder. Then there was the other champion, who was either Kasparov or the guy who beat Kasparov, or the guy who beat the guy. Oh, and by the way, there was also the strongest player in the world, Garry Kasparov.

Probably.

Unless you thought Bobby Fischer was still the Champion, of course. He was, after all, undefeated, having played pretty much nobody except Boris Spassky for several decades. He was also a total nutcase.

So this was the ever expanding field of World Champions that I felt duty-bound to explain to friends and students who asked, in all innocence, who the World Champion was. Just about every time someone asked, there was one more name to remember. Some of them didn't even begin with "K." Shocking.

Suddenly Kasparov retired and ran for President of Russia, proving that Fischer wasn't the only nutcase. Then Fischer popped off, and even FIDE was able to take advantage of the reduction in claimants to start simplifying the title scene. Topalov totally outplayed Kramnik in a match, so of course Kramnik won. The next stage of the title reunification was the October match in Bonn, won decisively by Anand. Finally, Topalov has earned another shot, I forget how, exactly, but let's just go with it for the moment, and he will play Anand.

I can't help wondering what happens if Topalov beats Anand. Would we have three World Champions again?

Some past Champions have towered over the opposition. Some were more "first among equals." What happens when it's just "all more or less equal?"

Of course, during much the same period that the top players were busy messing up the whole World Championship issue, another competitor appeared, and got stronger and stronger with each passing month.

There is now little doubt that the strongest practical player in the world is named.... *Rybka 3.0*.

And we'll keep on fighting, 'til the end....