

Chess Awards

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(2004)

If chess is 99% tactics, chess awards are 99% tack. The obsession with handing out tinsel crowns now seems unshakable, and it is time to give due recognition to those chess organizations which have made the greatest contribution to turning awards into a laughing-stock. The top three winners are announced here in reverse order.

Third prize goes to the *Chess Journalists of America*, a dazzlingly undemanding body with a track-record of dispensing hundreds of awards, often to self-nominees with no realistic hope of an accolade from elsewhere. The winners read like a *Who's Who* of who deserves nothing. The one blot on the CJA's copybook is that a few deserving chess writers have, just occasionally over the years, found their way onto the prize-list, and such inconsistency by the Association has dashed its chances of top honours in our contest here.

The CJA has also had the misfortune to be up against two organizations singularly gifted at making awards look absurd beyond belief, albeit in starkly contrasting ways. While one body deploys shadowy yet brash cronyism in favour of a particular individual, the other indulges in seemingly random bestowals for all and sundry.

After mature reflection, our second prize goes to the '*International Chess Writers Association*'. The following report on page 278 of *Kings, Commoners and Knaves* summarizes how the 'Association' conducts itself:

'*The Times* of 22 April 1995 (page 20) reported in all seriousness that Mr Raymond Keene had been named Chess Journalist of 1994. A photograph showed him receiving an engraved statuette from "Demetri Djelica" (*sic*), who was described as the Director of the "International Chess Writers Association". No information was offered, then or later, about the origins or composition of this hitherto unknown set-up.'

Page 279 of *Kings, Commoners and Knaves* (published in 1999) included a comment also written in 1995: 'Mr Keene will surely triumph again if another such award is

offered. Who else would even consider accepting it?' From 1995 onwards the 'Association' lay low, but it unabashedly turned up again on page 25 of the December 2000 *CHESS*, which published another photograph of Mr Keene once more receiving a trophy from the egregious Mr Bjelica. The object was described by *CHESS* as 'the "Chess Journalist of the Year" Oscar', and the magazine's extensive photo caption indicated that it did not for one moment take the award seriously. Our records contain no other information on the 'International Chess Writers Association' (e.g. its statutes, officers, membership list, voting rules, etc.), but a chess journalist of America may care to aim for a CJA 'best investigative journalism' prize by looking into the 'International Chess Writers Association'.

Moving on from the domain of prize hackery, we announce that the top spot is awarded to the *Fédération Internationale des Echecs*. FIDE has taken to doling out awards by the bucketful to all manner of legal and natural persons, as recorded in the recent publication *FIDE Golden book 1924-2002* by W. Iclicki.

Parties towards whom the Federation is merely lukewarm may be appointed a 'Most Esteemed Friend of FIDE'. Such 'Friends' include Nigeria Breweries, Carlsberg (Philippines), Taag Angola Airlines, United Concrete Products, Air Seychelles, Seychelles Petroleum Co. Ltd., Zambia State Insurance, Linhas Aereas de Mozambique, Hotel Polana Mozambique, and British Airways Zambia.

Those who do slightly more for world chess than brew beer in Nigeria or the Philippines can aspire to become a 'Knight of FIDE', as are, for example, 'Michael Eisner, Chairman, CEO, Walt Disney Company, USA' and 'Jurgen Schrempp, Chairman, Daimler Chrysler AG, Germany'.

Then comes the 'Grand Knight of FIDE'. Two of those created in 1992 were 'H.E. Corazon Aquino, Former President of Philippines' and 'H.E. President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida of Nigeria', whereas the 1999 winners included 'H.E. Francis [sic] Chiluba, President of the Republic [sic] of Zambia', the Presidents of Georgia and El Salvador, Mikhail Gorbachov (Soviet Union) and James Callaghan (United Kingdom). Most impressive of all is the final entry in this 'Grand Knight of FIDE' category: 'Ernesto Che Guevarra [sic]. Post Humous [sic] Award, Cuba'.

In 1992 'H.E. President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida of Nigeria' hit the jackpot, for he was appointed not only a 'Grand Knight of FIDE' but also something grander still: 'Commander [sic] of the Legion of Grandmasters'. Further 'Commanders' came into existence in 1999 and included:

- 'H.E. Aslan Abashidze, Chairman Supreme Council of Adjarian Republic [sic] of Georgia'

- ‘Lenox [*sic*] Lewis, World Heavyweight Boxing Champion, England’
- ‘Pierre Sisman [*sic*] President of Disney Consumer Product [*sic*] S.A., France’.

(This second mention of Disney should come as no surprise in the present account of Mickey Mouse awards.)

Top of the heap, finally, comes the Rolls Royce of FIDE patronage: ‘Grand Commander [*sic*] of the Legion of Grandmasters’. This ultra-exclusive club comprises three individuals, all appointed in 1999, without whom chess would doubtless have withered away:

- ‘H.E. Jacques Chirac, President of France’
- ‘H.H. John Paul II, The Pope, Poland’
- ‘H.E. Fidel Ramos, Former President of Philippines’.

In conclusion, we offer congratulations, though nothing more concrete, to all three of our own ‘special awardees’, to use FIDE’s term. Long may they work selflessly for quality, rigour and dignity in the chess world.

Afterword

The above article (C.N. 3157) was written in January 2004. Below is a follow-up item (C.N. 3303) from May 2004:

Lest any reader suspected that our account of those risible awards in C.N. 3157 was a hoax, below is an extract from the website homepage of the Fédération Internationale des Echecs:

‘FIDE Honorary Member, Holder of the Order of Grand Commander of the Legion of Grandmasters Aslan Abashidze has made his personal present for chess and Georgian chess federation by having transferred the World Women Chess Championship 2004 to Elista, Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, further to the request of the FIDE President, President of Kalmykia H.E. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.’

How anybody, or any body, can write in such a way is beyond comprehension.

C.N. 3882 (August 2005):

It has been noticeable in recent years that the intensity of hankering for an/any award is often inversely proportional to the merit of the hankerer and to the prestige, if any, of the award hankered for. The spectacle is an embarrassment, of course, but it is difficult too to take seriously those 'hall of fame' schemes so favoured in the United States. There even exists, we jest not, a ['World Chess Hall of Fame'](#) whose 'inductees' as 'charter members' include 'Robert James (Bobbie) [*sic*] Fischer'. He is in the 2001 crop, which also cheapens the memory of Morphy, Steinitz, Lasker and Capablanca (although Alekhine escapes) by appointing them World Chess Hall of Fame inductee charter members, or possibly World Chess Hall of Fame charter member inductees.

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