

The Facts about Larry Evans

Edward Winter

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We offer a representative sample of Larry Evans' innumerable gaffes and scurrilities. In the opening vignette he is to be witnessed not only in a pitiful muddle over the key points about a tournament game (from an event in which he participated) but also denouncing us as 'unscrupulous' for writing something which a) we did not write, and b) nobody else wrote either.

In the January-February 1987 issue of our magazine *Chess Notes* (page 6; C.N. 1312) we quoted without comment a passage from page 175 of Evans' book *Modern Chess Brilliances*:

'... At Havana 1952, one of my first great international tournaments, I learned at first hand the full meaning of Tartakower's dictum that "you can't win by resigning". The Dutch master Prins was a piece down against one of the Cuban lesser lights, Quesada; his position was obviously hopeless, but he insisted on adjourning the game. When I asked Prins why he didn't resign immediately, he replied that anything can happen. Sure enough, his opponent obliged the next day by dying of a heart attack. Such drastic solutions to the problem of saving a lost game do not readily present themselves. Nor does such a stubborn attitude endear a master to his colleagues.'

The next issue of *Chess Notes* (March-April 1987, page 49; C.N. 1385) quoted a documented denial received from Prins:

'In C.N. 1312 a mystification is quoted from Modern Chess Brilliances, page 175, by Larry Evans.

1)... "the Dutch master Prins insisted on adjourning the game" (with J. Quesada, Havana, 1952).

In fact I resigned after Quesada's 35th move, as confirmed in the Bulletin by Jack Spence (number 39, published 1959/60, in a series of limited editions), where the times read 1h.10 min. for White, 1h.59

min. for Black.

2) *Mr Quesada played at least three more games, among which draws with Pomar and Torán, thus casting doubt on Evans' claim of his dying "the next day".*

3) *Evans' allegation about "drastic solutions to the problems of saving a lost game" would seem to be a mere fabrication. Besides, Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe, to name a few, used to put up perfectly legitimate resistance when a piece down, or more.*

4) *Which stamps Evans' "nor does such a stubborn attitude endear a master to his colleagues" almost as defamation of character.'*

In that C.N. item we then added a brief factual note of our own:

*'Rob Verhoeven sends us an extract from Jack Spence's book of the tournament, which indicates that the Quesada-Prins game was played in the 13th round, on 9 March. We can add that according to page 40 of Palacio's *Ajedrez en Cuba* Quesada died on 14 March 1952.'*

We provided Evans with a complimentary copy of that issue of *Chess Notes* (despite often criticizing the magazine, he never subscribed) to enable him to reply if he so wished. He availed himself of this opportunity by sending us a letter teeming with outlandish smears but which we nonetheless published in full in C.N. 1457. On the Quesada-Prins issue he wrote:

'Re. C.N. 1385: memory plays tricks. I recalled Prins winning a hopeless adjournment from Quesada, who died before the game could be finished. I no longer have the scoretable of Havana 1952 but if Prins says he resigned, far be it from me to quibble. I stand corrected even though you must admit it makes a good story.

But you are unscrupulous to deduce that I am defaming the character of Capa, Alekhine and Euwe merely because I made the perfectly banal observation that dragging out hopeless positions does "not endear a master to his colleagues". I wasn't even thinking of the trio you dragooned out to discredit me. If I have something negative to say about any of the world champions, I can do it myself without your putting words in my mouth.'

We responded as follows on the same page:

‘The Prins-Quesada episode is not “a good story” once it is shown to be untrue. Mr Evans accuses us of being unscrupulous, dragooning out a trio, putting words in his mouth, etc., but how could he overlook that in C.N. 1385 the writer is Lodewijk Prins? Or that what Mr Prins wrote bears no relation to what Mr Evans claims was written? Nobody has suggested that Larry Evans was “defaming the character of Capa, Alekhine and Euwe”; Mr Prins simply pointed out that even those three world champions had played on – legitimately – when behind on material. Mr Evans’ inability to read plain English is remarkable.’

As Prins wrote to us subsequently, Evans’ standpoint was ‘*extraordinarily silly*’. But was it a freak occurrence? Read on.

In his December 1999 column, an item about the age factor in chess masters, Evans was asked a question which included a reference to a match (against Steinitz) which Zukertort was said to have played, at the age of 44, in 1892. As we pointed out in the February 2000 issue (page 8), this was unlikely, given that Zukertort had died in 1888. That could have been the end of the matter, but Evans’ response on the same page was as emphatic as it was false:

‘Edward Winter has an exaggerated notion of his own importance and, as usual, makes mountains out of molehills (obviously 1892 was a typo instead of 1872).’

He continued to construct his own mountain in the July 2001 column:

‘Does Mr Winter truly believe it [i.e. the date 1892] was anything more than a typographical error? I think not.’

An interesting question. The date 1892 that appeared in the December 1999 issue was obviously wrong, but was it, as Evans assured his readers, an obvious typo for 1872? Definitely not, for the simple reason that *1872 is also wrong*. Since the Steinitz-Zukertort match under discussion was specified as having been played when Steinitz was 50 and Zukertort was 44 (although their actual ages were 49 and 43 respectively), the event was ‘obviously’ their world championship match of *1886*. A normal writer would be embarrassed to discover that in endeavouring to correct one wrong date (1892) he had categorically and disparagingly put forward another one (1872) which in reality was even further from the right one (1886).

Let’s make a brief survey of his *Chess Life* columns from December 1999 onwards. Even a well-known title such as *The Oxford Companion to Chess* can prove

excessively difficult for Evans to copy correctly. In December 1999 he called it '*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Chess*', just as he had done the previous month too. We corrected him on page 8 of the February 2000 *Chess Life*, but Evans still came up with something different again in June 2000: '*The Oxford Companion of Chess*'. Another reference work mentioned (in December 2000) was Edward Brace's *An illustrated Dictionary of Chess*, except that Evans called it '*An Illustrated History Of Chess*'. In the following issue (January/February 2001) he managed to reproduce impeccably the title *A Short History of Chess*, but this time it was the author's name that defeated him: Henry A. Davidson, and not 'Davison'. It is no easy matter for Evans to achieve a matching pair of correct title and correct author.

In July 2000 Evans presented a diagram from the famous game between Averbakh (Evans writes 'Averbach') and Purdy, played in 1960 in Australia ('Austalia'), which had been published in his book *Chess Catechism*. In that volume (page 39) Evans had given an inaccurate diagram, omitting a white pawn on g3, so has his level of accuracy changed in the three decades since the book appeared? Yes, indeed. In his July 2000 column the white pawn on g3 is still missing, but now there is a second absconder, from the black side: a pawn at a7.

In the following month's column a reader won the best question prize for requesting Capablanca's score during his invincible period between his loss to Chajes at New York, 1916 and his defeat by Réti at New York, 1924. Evans, though, is no more a statistician than an historian. The totals he gave were all wrong.

In June 2001 he stated that Alekhine beat Bogoljubow in 1927, instead of 1929.

Following the publication of two game positions in the December 1999 *Chess Life* we wrote to the magazine:

'If "Evans on Chess" is to lift work from my *Chess Notes* (i.e. the Borochow and Junge items in the December 1999 *Chess Life*) would it not at least be possible for that to be specified and for the material to be used accurately?'

This complaint, published in the correspondence column of the February 2000 *Chess Life*, was straightforward: his December 1999 column had included two positions (from the games Borochow v Fine, Pasadena, 1932 and N.N. v O. Junge, Concepción, circa 1909) taken, a reader in the Philippines said, from 'our local magazine *Chess Asia*'. The fact that they were culled from *Chess Notes* (which, at that time, *Chess Asia* was still publishing) was given no mention whatsoever.

One of the two positions discussed above deserves a separate section here. The

famous miniature between Borochoh and Fine at Pasadena, 1932 is yet another example of how facts in Evans' hands stand no chance. This is shown by C.N. 1968, in which we wrote:

‘According to a number of books, the late Reuben Fine once lost a tournament game in seven moves. The score of H. Borochoh v Reuben Fine, Pasadena, 1932 is often said to be: 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 c4 Nb6 4 d4 Nc6 5 d5 Nxe5 6 c5 Nbc4 7 f4 Resigns.

Page 436 of the August 1978 *Chess Life & Review* published a letter from G.S.G. Patterson, the President of the Pasadena, 1932 International Chess Congress, reporting that the actual moves were: 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 Nc6 4 c4 Nb6 5 d5 Nxe5 6 c5 Nbc4 7 f4 e6 8 Qd4 Qh4+ 9 g3 Qh6 10 Nc3 exd5 11 fxe5 Resigns.

Patterson's letter specifically corrected Larry Evans, who had affirmed (*Chess Life & Review*, October 1977, page 557) that Fine won the game. Even so, in a book published several years later – *The Chess Beat* – Mr Evans repeated, in large bold letters, his claim that “Black won” (after 7 f4 e6), adding “But Chernev says Black resigned!” (page 24). For our part, we see no reason to doubt G.S.G. Patterson's version of the score. Mr Evans' unaccountable assertion that Fine won is refuted by the tournament crosstable.’

This text was reproduced on pages 314-315 of *Kings, Commoners and Knaves*, together with C.N. 2084. That latter item (which was the basis of what appeared in Evans' December 1999 column) reported on the researches by a correspondent of ours, Val Zemitis. Mr Zemitis also had a brief note published in Evans' May 2000 column, in which he expressed the belief that the game had indeed lasted eleven moves ‘instead of the seven as cited by Irving Chernev’. The intriguing point here is Evans' rejoinder: ‘You can't take all of Chernev's “facts” too seriously.’

Unlike Evans' ‘facts’, perhaps? Chernev had indeed been wrong (in a book published back in the mid-1950s) to give a seven-move version of the game, but at least he had correctly stated that it was White who won. Question: which author claimed in 1977 that it was *Black* who won? Answer: Evans. Question: which author was publicly corrected on this point in 1978? Answer: Evans. Question: which author nonetheless maintained in a 1982 book that Black won? Answer: Evans. Question: which author scoffed at that time, ‘But Chernev says Black resigned!’? Answer: Evans. Question: which author nonetheless has the gall to criticize Chernev for inaccuracy regarding this game? Answer: Evans.

The not-so-lucky winners of Evans' monthly 'best question' prize gain a further opportunity to assess his manhandling of facts, since the recompense is a copy of his book *The 10 Most Common Chess Mistakes*, a volume which his column contrives to mention repeatedly, in both the questions and the answers. The full title of the book is *The 10 Most Common Chess Mistakes ... and how to avoid them!* (although 'aviod' is the spelling on the spine), and the chapter headings include many subjects in which Evans undeniably specializes: 'Premature Aggression', 'Miscalculation', 'Impulsiveness' and 'Inattention'. In C.N. 2316 (i.e. on pages 97-98 of the 6/1999 *New in Chess*) we took a brief look at the book:

'Are "unspeakable" and "characteristically inept" justified descriptions of Larry Evans or have we been exaggerating? His 1998 book *The 10 Most Common Chess Mistakes* (Cardoza Publishing) provides an opportunity to judge. Although each page has little on it (just one position), Evans still manages to stockpile the blunders. Two illustrations for now:

On page 45 (containing less than ten lines of text) Evans makes the following errors:

"Thomas – Mitchell"; Black's name was Michell.

"London, 1932"; the game was played at the Hastings, 1932-33 tournament.

Wrong diagram, since the pawn at c5 should be black.

In his paragraph (a) Evans omits mention of the faster win 5 Re7+.

In his paragraph (b) he writes "Black actually lost", whereas Black actually won.

Then page 157 has an alleged position from the Marshall v Capablanca match of 1909 (5th game), with Evans claiming that, "incredibly", White missed an immediate victory (mate or gain of the queen) through 45 Qe8+. Untrue, because Marshall's queen was on b6, and not c6. This elementary matter has been pointed out countless times, and even by Evans himself on page 750 of *Chess Life & Review*, November 1974.'

As regards the substance of our charge that 'Evans on Chess' has very few actual chess games and positions but features a barrage of chess politics (especially of the frenetically anti-FIDE variety), that too is an easily proven fact. Within the period under discussion here (i.e. from December 1999 to July 2001), the question and answer sessions in 'Evans on Chess' contained the following:

5 columns with at least one full game-score: December 1999 (two games, including Borochow v Fine ...), March 2000 (one game, which Evans did not realize was a hoax), December 2000 (an Evans win from 1967 and two games from the pre-history of chess), March 2001 (Kasparov v a celebrity and the Maróczy v Korchnoi 'astral correspondence' game), June 2001 (Alekhine v Böök – or 'Book' as Evans writes the name). These games were not annotated.

14 columns without any full game-scores: January 2000, February 2000, April 2000, May 2000, June 2000, July 2000, August 2000, September 2000, October 2000, November 2000, January/February 2001, April 2001, May 2001, July 2001. Moreover, of these 14 columns, two had neither game-scores nor even positions: February 2000, January/February 2001.

Contrast that with Evans' treatment of political matters:

14 columns with criticism of FIDE: December 1999, January 2000, February 2000, March 2000, April 2000, May 2000, June 2000, July 2000, September 2000, October 2000, November 2000, January/February 2001, March 2001, June 2001.

5 columns without criticism of FIDE: August 2000, December 2000, April 2001, May 2001, July 2001.

It might be argued that if Evans can get away with (mis)using his column as a soapbox for incessant regurgitation of his political sentiments and conjecture, so be it, but in his politicking Evans cuts no more of a credible figure than in the rest of his output. Readers are referred, by way of example, to a detailed article by John Watson entitled 'Chess and Politics' (*Kingpin*, Spring 1999, pages 33-38), which contains such observations on Evans as: 'huge bias'; 'long histories of ignoring and distorting evidence' and 'Evans' absurd arguments'.

Page 60 of the Autumn 1999 *Kingpin* carried a brief reply from Evans. Although, in reality, he replied to virtually nothing, he did dispute Watson's description of Taylor Kingston as a critic of Evans' claims (claims made, wrote Watson, without 'even a shred of actual evidence') that Keres was forced to throw his games to Botvinnik in the 1948 world championship event. In his 'reply' Evans triumphantly quoted a supportive letter from Kingston which had been published in his August 1997 *Chess Life* column. A devastating blow? Yes, but *against Evans*. That became manifest when the Spring 2000 issue of *Kingpin* (page 64) published this response from Taylor Kingston:

'I did indeed write the letter Evans quotes, but that was before I researched and analyzed his article in detail. On deeper examination I

found his logic and evidence to be highly questionable. I made this quite clear, both publicly in my article “Keres and Botvinnik: A Survey of the Evidence” (*CL* 5/98) and privately in letters to Evans himself. For Evans to say or even imply that I now support him, is amazingly, grossly dishonest.’

‘Amazingly, grossly dishonest.’ Somehow such words keep coming back in any discerning scrutiny of Evans’ writings. In 2000 Yasser Seirawan published on his *Inside Chess* website a strongly-worded open letter ‘Enough is Enough’ which called on the FIDE President to resign. In a follow-up article (also on-line at *Inside Chess*) Seirawan reviewed the reaction, including that of the ‘long time rabid critic of FIDE, GM Evans’. After pointing out how Evans had misrepresented his open letter, Seirawan concluded: ‘Experienced Evans-watchers know that it is the kind of untruth and distortion that is endemic in him.’

The above article about Larry Evans, who over the years has made countless deceitful attacks on us, is reprinted from pages 316-321 of [A Chess Omnibus](#). It is an abridged version of our June 2001 exposé of him at the Chess Café Skittles Room.

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