

**From Vienna to Munich to Stockholm**

**A Chess Biography of  
Rudolf Spielmann**

Grigory Bogdanovich

**From Vienna to Munich to Stockholm: A Chess Biography of Rudolf Spielmann**

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Typesetting by Andrei Elkov

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ISBN 978-5-6046766-7-7 (paperback), 978-5-6046766-8-4 (hardback)

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## INTRODUCTION

*I dedicate this work to the memory of my coach, the most exciting chess player in the history of the Komi Republic, Roman Bogdanovich Dzhangarov*

This is my third chess biography of great players of the past. I have already published books with Elk and Ruby on Szymon Winawer (jointly with Polish chess historian Tomasz Lissowski) and on Efim Bogoljubov (in two volumes). As in the two books mentioned above, the main focus of my book about Rudolf Spielmann is a detailed study of the great chess player's games. Although I did not immerse myself in historical research about his life, I nevertheless managed to unearth some little-known facts. There are also games in this book that have not appeared in databases. As an appendix, you can find a fascinating article written by Spielmann *From the Sickbed of the King's Gambit* dating to 1923-24. I am not aware of an English version of this article being published previously.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Tomasz for providing me with interesting information about Spielmann's life.

### Abbreviations

AA – Alexander Alekhine  
AN – Aron Nimzowitsch  
BB – Benjamin Blumenfeld  
EB – Efim Bogoljubov  
GB – Grigory Bogdanovich  
IB – Igor Bondarevsky  
NG – Nikolai Grigoriev  
PR – Peter Romanovsky  
RR – Richard Reti  
ST – Savielly Tartakower  
VK – Viktor Korchnoi

# Chapter I

## The Life of Rudolf Spielmann

**5 May 1883 Vienna – 20 August 1942 Stockholm**

*“A man in the dark in a picture frame so mystic and soulful”*  
*Ure et al., 1980*

Rudolf Spielmann is known as an Austrian chess player, but I think that such a definition is open to debate. Is it just because he was born in Vienna and lived in the city for a long time, playing at the Chess Olympiad for the Austrian team, that he is called Austrian? That is all true; however, he started his chess career in Germany, where he spent almost half of his life, feeling right at home in the chess environment of Munich. Obviously, one should not understate the importance of the Austrian capital in his biography. Vienna was the location of much of his chess career as well as other parts of his life: on the one hand, there were chess tournaments and his cooperation with *Wiener Schachzeitung*; on the other hand, he saw military service in the Austrian army.

Information on Spielmann's birth was cited by Ulrich Grammel in an article “Biographische Skizze über Rudolf Spielmann” in *Deutsche Schachzeitung* in 1972. He provided the following record from the Vienna cadastral register of citizens (Katasterblatt der Wiener Heimatrolle):

“Rudolf Spielmann, born May 5, 1883, of the Jewish faith, unmarried, resident of Vienna 8, Langeasse 46/9. Chess master (father: Moritz Spielmann, mother: Cecilia Neustadt). Obtained Austrian citizenship and at the same time municipal rights in Vienna: June 17, 1931; previously held rights in Nikolsburg, Czechoslovak Republic”. (After World War I, the city of Nikolsburg was called Mikulov and was located in South Moravia, which belonged to Czechoslovakia.)

Note that a month later, in July, he played in the Prague Chess Olympiad for the Austrian team. And, as we can see, on perfectly legitimate grounds.

However, there was speculation in the Czechoslovak press of the time that he had previously agreed to represent the team of that country at the Olympiad, but that at the last moment he changed his mind and obtained Austrian citizenship.

Let us also cite another important fact: in the annals of chess history, it is noted that only German chess players and one Austrian – Spielmann – took part in the 25th Congress of the German Chess Union in 1927. Once, he was not allowed to participate in a tournament only for German chess players, since he had Czechoslovak citizenship (see the above-mentioned document). Spielmann was outraged and even sent a letter to *Wiener Schachzeitung* in 1929,

which he signed “master from Germany”. As an argument, he cited that he had participated in the congress. So I think that it is fair to call him an Austro-German (or German) chess player. Still, let’s not get fixated on passport matters.

Now we turn to another favorite question of chess biographers – where the hero learned his trade. So which chess schools did Rudolf Spielmann attend? It’s often affirmed that this outstanding grandmaster belonged to the Vienna chess school, the leader of which is considered to be the first world champion and founder of the positional chess school, Wilhelm Steinitz. Of course, Spielmann’s famous work published in German in 1935 *Richtig opfern* (the English version is named *The Art of Sacrifice in Chess*) points to Rudolf Spielmann belonging, rather, to the combinational chess school, which of course he did not found (Paul Morphy and Adolf Anderssen among others appeared earlier). It should be added that Savielly Tartakower placed Spielmann second in chess history in combinational talent after Morphy.

While studying Spielmann’s work, you catch yourself thinking a seditious thought: was his play typical of the Vienna chess school? What are the criteria for belonging to a particular chess school, anyway? The place of residence? Indeed, Spielmann was born in Vienna, but his chess career kicked off in Munich. Moreover, during the first years of Spielmann’s participation in tournaments, the Vienna non-chess press spoke of him as a “chess player from Berlin” or “from Munich”. He appeared in Vienna as a chess player in 1907, intending to take part in an international tournament, and before that the young Spielmann showed up in several German tournaments. He spent much of his life in Munich and, as has already been noted above, he was not a mere observer of chess life in the city, but even played for the Munich team in correspondence matches against other cities. A little-known fact is his participation in a correspondence match with Edinburgh. Doing so was not similar to playing a tournament, which you perform in and then leave: it requires an extended stay in the city.

Here is what Spielmann said: “At all the congresses of the German Chess Union in 1904-1914, I was an official representative of Germany and represented Munich chess specifically”, and then, “Until 1924, Munich was my permanent residence, then I moved to Vienna”. Moreover, according to press reviews before 1914, it was clear where he permanently resided at the time.

Back in the spring of 1914, his reviews of that year’s St. Petersburg and Baden gambit tournaments were published in *Münchener Neuesten Nachrichten*. However, in that same year, Georg Marco mentions Spielmann’s participation in the gambit tournament in Baden as a representative of Vienna. If then we take a look at an article written by Tartakower about the Marienbad tournament of 1925, we find out that Spielmann appears there as a German chess player.



Spielmann's close friend was probably well informed of the situation with his official status. And even though, as we noted above, Spielmann called himself a "master from Germany" in his letter to *Wiener Schachzeitung* in 1929, he played for Vienna in a match against Budapest in 1930. Moreover, he played for Austria at the 1931 Olympiad in Prague.

Interestingly, he played on second board in Prague, behind Ernst Grunfeld. The personal score between them up until then was

in favor of Spielmann (5:4), and Spielmann's results were more impressive. However, since Grunfeld had consistently led the Austrian team since 1927, Spielmann probably did not object. Moreover, Grunfeld had no qualms about playing in minor Viennese tournaments, whereas Spielmann avoided them. At that tournament, Grunfeld achieved a 60% result on first board in 15 games, while Spielmann scored 62.5% on second board in 16 games. Their results were hence approximately equivalent. But the very next year at the Olympiad in Folkestone, Spielmann was no longer playing for the team. There was no place for him in it, and the team put in a mediocre performance. In a letter to *Wiener Schachzeitung*, Spielmann explains the result as being due to the absence of him, Kmoch and Berger from the team.

However, in 1935 he played for the Austrian team again at the Warsaw Olympiad, although he had left Vienna by then. He would return to Vienna again, but only to play in a tournament or give a simultaneous display or lecture.

So, what about his style? Chess players, like ordinary people, can be divided into two "types": practical and, obviously, impractical players. The latter are called romantics in chess. Rudolf Spielmann was one of those. The creative process of the game was the priority for him, while attempts at practicality were less important for him than for most chess players. But he was perfectly "human", too: sometimes he would agree to a draw when he could still fight for victory. Alexander Alekhine said of him, in his review of the 1929 Carlsbad tournament in *Shakhmaty* No. 9 that year: "Spielmann's biggest sporting defect as a chess master was the excessive peacefulness that sometimes manifested itself. [...] Another feature of his character hindered Spielmann, namely, he thought that some masters were better than they actually were".

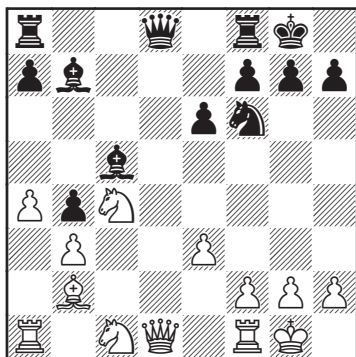


continuations 12...a5 or 12...♘bd7, the development in the text allows black to prevent the blocking move 13.a5, while enabling himself to undertake an advantageous operation via ♘c6-a5xc4.

**13.dxc5.** A premature exchange, instead of which, as Capablanca later stated, it was correct to continue via 13.♘d3.

**13...♘a5!? 14.♘e5.** An attempt to hold onto the pawn would fail after something like 14.♘d3 ♘xc4 15.bxc4 a5, and then 16...♖c8. The pawn would still be lost and he would have allowed the creation of a strong passed b4 pawn for his opponent.

**14...♘xc4 15.♘xc4 ♙xc5**

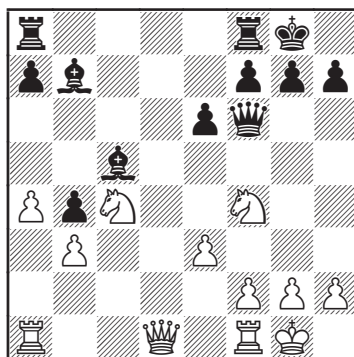


Black has already overcome all of his opening difficulties and has a great position thanks to his long-range bishops, since now he is not scared of either 16.♙xd8 ♖fxd8 17.a5 ♙a6, or the immediate 16.a5 ♙e7! Therefore, with his next move, white tries to take away bits of space from his opponent.

**16.♘d3 ♙d5 17.♘f4.** A cautious Capablanca avoids the move 17.f3 that would weaken his position – GB.

**17...♙g5 18.♙xf6.** Bitter acceptance that otherwise, after 18...♖fd8 and 19...♘d5, black's knight can become a more active piece than the proud b2 bishop. In general, only by playing for simplifications can white hold back the fury of his opponent's attack.

**18...♙xf6**



**19.♖c1.** With the minor threat of 20.♘a5, attacking both bishops. But black still has control, and he decides not to give up any of the positions he occupies.

**19...♖fd8 20.♙h5 ♖ac8 21.♖fd1.**

*The attack 21.♘a5 no longer frightens black, for example: 21...♙a6 22.♖xc5 ♙xf1 23.♖xc8 ♖xc8 24.♙xf1 ♖c1+ 25.♙e2 ♖c2+ 26.♙f3 e5 and so on – GB.*

**21...g6 22.♖xd8+ ♙xd8 23.♙e5.**

*This allows black to move his bishop to the long diagonal with tempo. The move 23.♙g4 was more cautious – GB.*

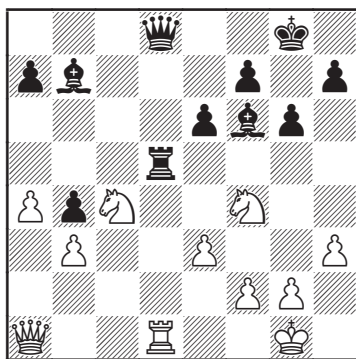
**23...♙e7!? 24.h3.** One of

Capablanca's favorite "waiting" moves, which, however, does not frighten the energetic Spielmann!

24...♖c5! 25.♚a1 ♘f6

26.♖d1. This intermediate spark unintentionally lights a whole fire. He should have politely retreated the queen 26.♚b1, avoiding the worst, although even then black with his two strong bishops (against the two knights) and the "hydraulic" b4 pawn stood much better.

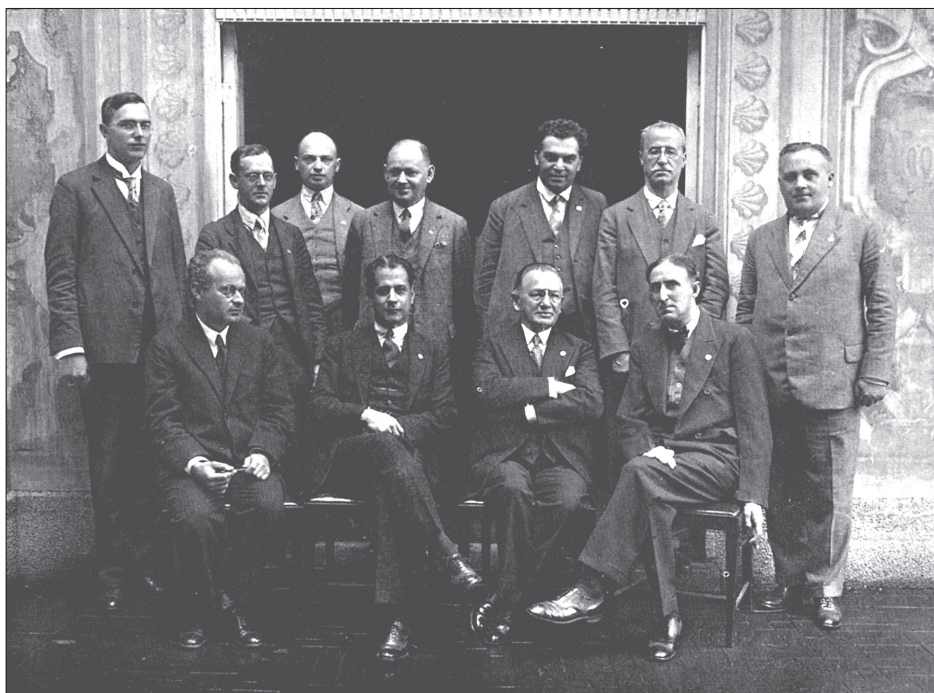
26...♖d5! With this brilliant and obviously unexpected response, black breaks the peaceful course of the game that had been followed until now.



27.♖xd5. After 27.♘b2 ♖xd1+ 28.♚xd1 ♚xd1+ 29.♘xd1 ♘e4 black also achieves a won position — GB.

27...exd5 28.♘e5? A consequence of losing his composure.

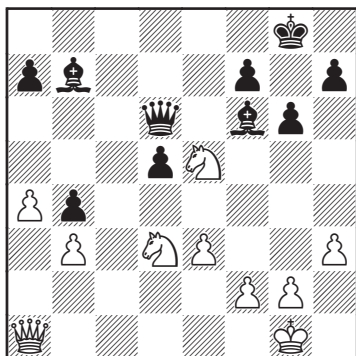
The continuation 28.♘b2 d4!? 29.♚d1 g5! was more resilient, but even



Bad Kissingen 1928. Sitting (left to right): Nimzowitsch, Capablanca, Tarrasch, Marshall; standing: Euwe, Yates, Tartakower, Spielmann, Reti, Mieses, Bogoljubov.

*in this case, black has a huge advantage due to the strength of the two bishops – GB.*

28...♔d6! 29.♘fd3



29...♔a6! White loses due to the pin along the long diagonal, aggravated by the failed mutual defense of the knights – GB.

30.♔e1 ♘xe5 31.♘xe5 ♔xe5 32.♔xb4 ♔d3 33.♔c5 ♔b8 34.b4 ♔b7 35.b5 h5 36.♔c3 ♔c4 37.e4 ♔e7 38.exd5 ♔xd5 39.a5 ♔e4. Jose Raul Capablanca resigned! The Cuban ex-world champion was outplayed in his own style! – GB.

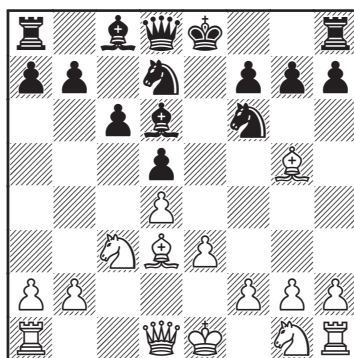
Master Benjamin Blumenfeld provided a flattering assessment of the following duel: “The game is characteristic of Spielmann’s attacking style. It stands well in comparison with the best games of Alekhine in his match with Capablanca.”

# No. 191. Queen’s Gambit SPELMANN – CAPABLANCA

Carlsbad 1929

Commentary by Aron Nimzowitsch

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♔g5 ♘bd7 5.e3 c6 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♔d3 ♔d6



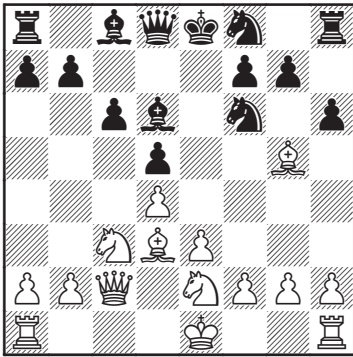
Capablanca deliberately plays the opening so that Spielmann gets an attack, because he considers his opponent tired after a long tournament and unsettled by his defeat in the previous round; therefore, his attack does not seem scary to him. But Capablanca, as we will soon see, made a mistake, and this psychological mistake cost him a share of the first prize.

8.♘ge2 ♘f8. It is possible to maneuver in the rear without much risk. It is even possible to stop completely the development process in your own camp without much harm, but only if the game is closed. But in our case, the game is only ostensibly closed, because e3-e4 can open up the position at

any moment. That is why black's strategy should be recognized as fundamentally wrong.

**9. ♖c2 h6.** We consider 9...♙e6 to be the relatively best move, for example: 10.0-0-0 ♖a5 11.♙xf6 gxf6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♙e7 or 10...♙e7 11.f3! ♖a5! 12.♙xf6 ♙xf6 13.e4? dxe4 and ♙xa2. In other words, it was necessary to take preventive measures against the threatened e4.

But since Capablanca is a specialist in prophylaxis, it would be our right to formulate the above as follows:



“In the position after the 9th move, Capablanca could still save the game by systematically playing like Capablanca!”

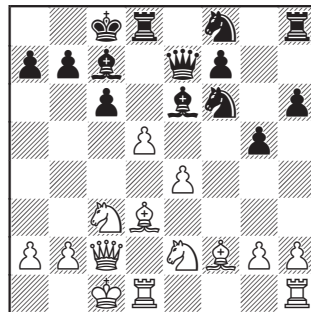
*Firstly, not “...♙xa2” due to b2-b3. Secondly, Nimzowitsch is focusing only on carrying out e3-e4. With the early development of the c8 bishop on e6, white can carry out the immediate break with the f-pawn: f2-f4, and the threat of f4-f5 will hang over black like the sword of Damocles. Nowadays, preference is given to 9...♘g6, followed*

*by h7-h6, temporarily refraining from developing the light-squared bishop, which allows black to neutralize the threat of f2-f4 – GB.*

**10. ♙h4 ♖e7.** This position of the queen makes e3-e4 even stronger.

**11.a3.** Resolutely refusing to advance the e-pawn immediately, since 11.e4 could be followed by 11...g5 12.♙g3 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♙xe4 ♙b4+ or 13.♙xd6 ♖xd6 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♙xe4 ♖b4+ 16.♘c3 ♖xd4 with an unclear position.

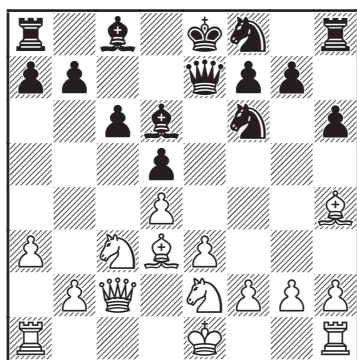
And yet we consider the move 11.a3 superfluous, since it was possible to castle instead, for example: 11.0-0-0 ♙e6 12.f3 0-0-0 13.e4 g5 14.♙f2 dxe4 15.fxe4 ♙c7 (15...♘g4? 16.♙g1) 16.d5



After 16...cxd5 17.♘b5 a6 (18. ♙c5 and then ♙d6 was threatened) white can choose between winning the exchange 18.♙c5 ♖d7 19.♘xc7 ♖xc7 20.♙e7 and a bold attack via 18.♘a7+... So now we see that 11.0-0-0 followed by f3 plus e4 led to advantageous complications for white. If Spielmann instead chose

the overly cautious 11.a3, then in his justification we could say: 1) he was not familiar with the f2-f3 plus e3-e4 construction, which in this variation was used only once, namely in my game with Romi (London 1927), and 2) it seemed important to Spielmann from a psychological point of view to inspire himself that he should not carry out the attack in his old carefree style of youth! I remember Tarrasch wanted to assure the chess world that Lasker wins by hypnosis. What an antediluvian view! In a fight against a strong opponent, no hypnosis will help. Convincing yourself is another matter. It really can do a lot! But let's get back to the game.

*An interesting note made by Nimzowitsch, which I shortened a little, without giving the attack variations with the move 18.♖a7+. The reason is that modern analysis has revealed significant flaws in them – GB.*



**11...♗d7.** Again, an incomprehensible move. Why not 11...♗e6? If 12.e4, then 12...dxe4 13.♖xe4 g5 14.♗g3 ♗xg3 15.hxg3

♗d5 and 0-0-0. In this game, Capablanca makes a number of “anticonsolidating” moves – an extremely rare phenomenon for him.

*Above all, we will note that the following order of moves was more accurate: 12...g5!? (instead of 12...dxe4) 13.♗g3 dxe4 14.♖xe4 ♗xg3, since in this case there is no intermediate 14.♖xd6+ (instead of 14.♗g3) 14...♔xd6 15.♗g3. And again, Nimzowitsch considers only the immediate e3-e4 for white, although with the bishop on e6, as I mentioned above, white has other good opportunities at his disposal. Among other points, the development of the bishop to d7 prevents the plan with f2-f3 and e3-e4 which is dangerous for black. So it's too early to criticize Capablanca, even if you are Nimzowitsch! – GB.*

**12.e4.** With this move, white gets the advantage: the black pieces are placed poorly, and after the opening of the game they will not be able to gain strength quickly enough – RS.

**12...g5.** 13.e5 was threatened. After the immediate 12...dxe4 13.♖xe4 black will have to play under more unfavorable circumstances than after 12...g5, as he must prevent the doubling of the pawns on the f-file. Black's kingside looks quite ugly! – Max Euwe.

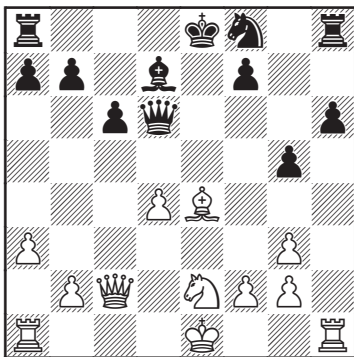
**13.♗g3 dxe4 14.♖xe4 ♗xe4.** He should have finally thought about consolidation. It's dangerous to joke with Spielmann for so long! It was necessary to play 14...♗xg3 15.hxg3

♘d5. The bishop should have been placed on e6 to reinforce the d5 knight with the idea of preventing all of this.

**15. ♖xe4 ♙xg3 16.hxg3.** Now black lacks harmony; above all, he needs blockaders of the d4 pawn. And it would be great to have a bishop on e6 or a knight on b6 to then play ♘d5 or ♙d5.

*What has white achieved? Outwardly little; his d-pawn is weak, meanwhile black is not lagging behind him in development. In fact, black's position would have been quite solid had his kingside not been so thoroughly shaken up. Now black can castle long, but this will give his opponent the opportunity to play d4-d5 – Max Euwe.*

**16... ♖d6?!** Completely ruining the game. It was necessary to continue 16...0-0-0 (17.d5 ♙b8 18.dxc6 ♖c8). But even in this case, by continuing 17.0-0-0 and then 18.♘c3 white would, of course, have maintained his positional advantage.



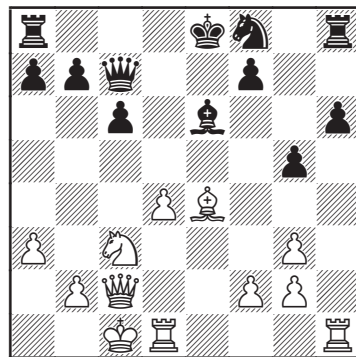
**17.0-0-0 ♙e6?!** Now black is in a difficult position, for example, the

move 17...0-0-0 would be met by 18.d5 c5 19.♘d4!?, and if 19...♙b8, then 20.♘c6+! – GB.

**18.♘c3.** Threatening 19.d5 cxd5 20.♘b5 and 21.♘c7+.

*Now there is no defense against the terrible threat of a d4-d5 break; in the case of 18...♙d5 white plays 19.♙xd5, followed by 20.♘b5. The move 18... ♖c8 is first followed by the preparatory move 19.♖he1 – RS.*

**18... ♖c7**

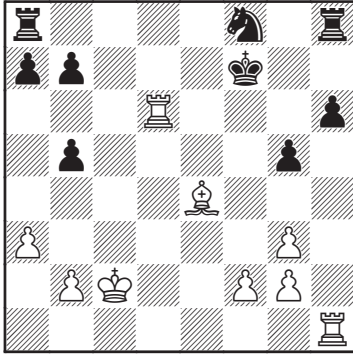


**19.♘b5.** *It was more energetic to play 19.d5!?, and after 19... cxd5 20.♙xd5 not 20...0-0-0 due to 21.♙xb7+! ♙xb7 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.♖e4+ and so on – GB.*

**19... ♖d7.** After 19...♖b6 20.♘d6+ the black king gets stuck in the center – GB.

**20.d5! cxb5 21.dxe6 ♖c8 22.exf7+ ♙xf7 23.♖d6 ♖xc2+ 24.♙xc2.** After white's successful breakthrough, the disharmony of black's formation becomes even more pronounced: the a8 and h8 rooks stand awkwardly (i.e. disconnected), the b7 and h6 pawns

are loose, and most importantly, white is preparing to centralize all his forces (i.e., they occupy the middle of the board).

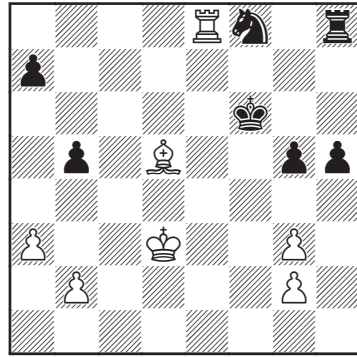


**24...Re8.** According to Nimzowitsch, this is the best chance – GB.

**25. Bxb7.** We would prefer 25.f3, after which black would have nothing to move with; the central e4 bishop would not let the f8 knight out of his den. But Spielmann seems to be tired of playing for the position: he remembers the past and furiously attacks his enemy's king, not caring at all about the fate of his pawns.

**25...Re2+ 26. Kd3 Rxf2 27. Re1.** White's threat is as follows: 28. Bd5+ Kg7 29. Re7+ – GB.

**27...Rf6 28. Bd5+ Kg6 29. Rxf6+ Kxf6 30. Re8 h5.** After 30...Ng6 31. Rxb8 Nxb8 32. Kd4 black's pawns on the queenside perish, and the white bishop controls the situation on the kingside. Black is unable to save the bishop vs knight endgame with play on both flanks – GB.



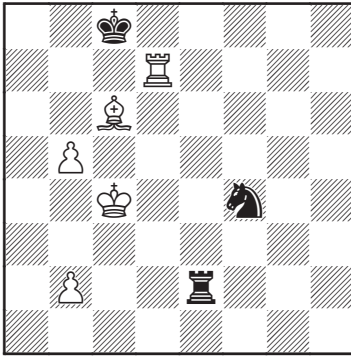
**31. Ra8.** This was a poor choice, too. Spielmann suddenly forgets his newfound wisdom. He needed to play the centralizing 31. Ke4; for example: 31...Ng6 32. Re6+ Kg7 33. Kf5 with a win or 31...h4 32.g4.

*It was simpler to play 31. Kc3 h4 32. Kb4 with dominance of the queenside – GB.*

**31...h4 32. gxh4 gxh4 33. Rxa7 Ke5 34. Bc6 h3 35. gxh3 Rxb3+ 36. Kc2 b4 37. axb4.** It is not easy to win anymore. White should not let the black king ensconce itself on the dark squares (for example, if the white pawn were on b5, the black king on c5 would save the endgame).

**37...Ne6.** With proper play in the endgame (31. Ke4! instead of the weak 31. Ra8) this knight would never have broken free.

**38. Ba4 Nf4 39. Re7+ Kd6 40. Rd7+ Ke5 41. Bc6 Rh6 42. b5 Rd6 43. Re7+ Re6 44. Rc7 Kd6 45. Rc8 Re2+ 46. Kc3 Re3+ 47. Kc4 Re2 48. Rd8+! Kc7 49. Rd7+ Kc8. 49...Kb6 50. Rb7+ Ka5 51. b4+ Ka4 52. Ra7# – GB.**



50. ♖c5! ♜xb2 51. ♖b6 ♜e2  
 52. ♜c7+ ♔d8 53. ♜d7+ ♔c8  
 54. ♜d4! ♞e6 55. ♞b7+ ♔b8 56. ♜c4  
 Black resigned.

*This far from flawless game is still very interesting and [...] is characteristic of both Capablanca and Spielmann. Capablanca discovered in it that he has a strange perception of the neo-romantic playing style. Apparently, he believes that consolidation does not play a big role in it. And indeed, he misses consolidating opportunities several times. On the other hand, Spielmann initially showed a desire for consolidation (11. a3), but when it came to the endgame, he suddenly forgot that he should have applied centralization, which is one of the main tenets of consolidation play. As a result, he barely managed to win. In some moments, however, he showed brilliance and beauty.*

*In summary, let's say that both Capablanca and Spielmann have changed their playing style in recent years. Capablanca has apparently fallen in love with neo-romanticism, while Spielmann has discovered a positional talent in himself. But both of them are*

*still showing a certain uncertainty in the application of an uncommon method of playing. The further development of their style is very difficult to predict – AN.*

The year before, in Bad Kissingen, Spielmann also won against Capablanca. In fact, he was the only master to record two tournament victories over the Cuban. Here is what Alekhine wrote about their meeting in 1929: “This game was conducted by Spielmann very skillfully. From the first to the last move, Capablanca could not oppose anything to the Hungarian grandmaster’s attack.” After this victory, the score between them was even. Their last historic meeting at the Moscow International Tournament in 1935 ended in a draw. A decent result against one of the strongest chess players of all time.

In the next game, Spielmann defeated the Great Reformer Aron Nimzowitsch. He can also be considered a problematic opponent for Spielmann. This is especially noticeable towards the end of their rivalry, in the last years of Nimzowitsch’s relatively short life. If at the beginning and in the middle of their unspoken competition they took turns capturing the edge – first Spielmann was ahead, then Nimzowitsch, then Spielmann caught up with him – at the end of their confrontation Nimzowitsch began to break away. Nimzowitsch, whose analytical mind surpassed even that of the world champions of that epoch and enabled him write the seminal