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■ Posted: Tue Apr 06, 2004 1:48 am    Post subject: Bourdonnais



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Louis-Charles Mahe de La Bourdonnais followed Deschapelles as the chess champion of France and likely the world.

A complete, yet concise, biography can be found here on Bill Wall's Bourdonnais Bio Page.

Mark Weeks transcribed this article from *Frazer's Magazine* concerning the *Café de la Régence*, this part called, **Portrait of La Bourdonnais**, was published just a month before he [Bourdonnais] died.

A short account along with a download of all the games of the Bourdonnais-MacDonnell match.

All the Bourdonnais-McDonnell games can be played through on in a viewer at my game site

There are many games with annotations by Paul Morphy ay Chessgames.com.

With all these wonderful resources, I won't go into great detail on Bourdonnais' life.

When Deschapples gave up playng chess in 1821, Bourdonnais supplanted him as the strongest player in France and probably the world. Unlike Deschapples, who lorded over the *Café de la Régence* and played all comers, Bourdonnais actively sought out the strongest opponents. Having beaten John Miles Cochrane in 1821 in Paris, he traveled to London in 1823 and played William Lewis (winning 5-2-0) who himself had supplanted Jacob Henry Sarratt as the strongest player in England.

Then two years later he returned to London, beat all comers, including Lewis again, and and married an English girl while he was there.

In 1833 he wrote a book, **Nouveau Traite du Jeux des Echecs**, trying to recoup from his disaterous financial reverses caused by bad investments.

But it was 1834 where he finally reached the apex of his chess career.

Bourdonnais accepted the challenge from the Irish player, Alexander McDonnell, considered at the time to be the best player in England. Unlike other matches of those days that were usually short and quick, this match, arranged by George Walker, was really a series of six matches. They played a total of 85

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games. The moves were recorded by William Greenwood Walker, the Secretary of the Westminster Chess Club where the matches were held. Bourdonnas won 45, over half. MacDonnell won 27, about a third. There were 13 draws - so it was a fighting match. Not only were the moves recorded, but they were published in newspapers and periodicals so that the public could follow, which it did with great excitement and anticipation.

The final match was suspended when Bourdonnais had to take care of some business in Paris and McDonnell took sick. McDonnell died before the match could be resumed. He was buried at Kensal Green in London where Bourdonnais would join him in five short years. William Greenwood Walker, the recorder, also died at the conclusion of the match.

This match was important on several levels. First, no previous match had been this involved nor this revealing of the two opponents skills and weaknesses. No other match had ever been so well recorded, nor so promptly published. No other match up to this time had ever been so thoroughly studied and annotated. No other match had ever been so praised and admired by adherents to both parties. Most importantly, no other match had ever generated the level of interest as did this one. It served as a catalyst to inspire an unheard of wave of popularity for the game.

The opponents were equal in talent, the main and telling difference being Bourdonnais' knowledge of opening theory. McDonnell's mentor was William Lewis who disdained the study of openings. The games are surprisingly modern and often positional.

The games are typically numbered 1-85 in the order in which they were played.

According to British chess historian, G.H. Diggle:

**Quote:**

"Of the 85 games, the following have been agreed by generations of critics to be "the greats:" Games 17, 47, 62 and 78 won by the Frenchman and 5, 21, 30, 50 and 54 won by McDonnell."

Game 50 is usually singled out for its brilliance.

Bourdonnais' win in game 39 inspired Joseph Méry (who would co-found and co-edit the periodical, *Le Palamède*, with Bourdonnais in 1836) to write a poem honoring Bourdonnais called, **Une Revanche de Waterloo**.

According to the British Chess Magazine (BCM) review of **The Chess Player's Chronicle Volume 3** (1843):

**Quote:**

"Staunton's magazine features a long poem in French celebrating Bourdonnais vs. McDonnell, entitled *Une Revanche de Waterloo*, depicting McDonnell descending, like Rob Roy, from the mountains of Scotland to do battle with the French hero. It seems a shame to spoil this romantic vision by pointing out that McDonnell came from Belfast.

Many of the names of the players are curiously half blanked out (presumably mid-Victorian gentlemen were chary about having their full names bandied about in anything so vulgar as a chess magazine). Connoisseurs of weird openings might like to look at the analysis of the Schwarz defence - 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e4 f5!? - which had been published in *Le Palamède* the previous year."

Bourdonnais suffered a stroke in 1838. In the last three weeks of his life, Bourdonnais and his wife were supported financially through George Walker's efforts.

Louis-Charles Mahe de La Bourdonnais died December 13, 1840

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~Batgirl

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**bluebikerider**



Joined: 26 Dec 2003  
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**Quote:**

"In 1818 he started playing chess at the Cafe de la Regence. He had his own table at the Regence and played 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. ."

I guess he lost track of the time.

I remember coming across the reference to the poem "Une Revanche de Waterloo" a while ago and I thought it would be interesting to read. But I had no luck in finding a copy of it anywhere online. I guess you couldn't either otherwise I think you would have posted it.

I know you can buy copies of The Chess Player's Chronicle from various places. I would have thought someone would have posted that poem somewhere .

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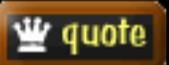


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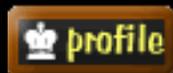
The only known picture of Bourdonnais (from *La Palamede*, I believe)



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~Batgirl

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