

Paul Morphy

"Shooting Star"

Born	June 22, 1837 New Orleans, America	Died	July 10, 1884
Won Tittle	1858	Lost title	1859
Succeeded	Adolph Anderssen	Replaced by	Wilhelm Steinitz
Rating	No ratings at that time	Style	Master of development
Occupation	Lawyer (gentleman of leisure)	Favourite Opening	Scotch Gambit

Paul Morphy was clearly a chess genius. When he was only 12 he defeated the Hungarian master Jacob Lowenthal by 2½ - ½. However it wasn't only chess that he was brilliant at. He excelled in all areas of school study and was also a talented actor. In fact it was only on Sunday that he took time away from his studies to play chess.

Of all the champion chess players Morphy is the only one who did not have a passion for the game. In 1857 he finished his law degree and was forced to wait until he was 21 years of age before he could start practicing law. It was this spare time he used to play chess.

1857 happened also to be the year of the first National Chess Congress in New York and Morphy was persuaded to play. He won the tournament with 14 wins 1 loss and 3 draws (defeating Louis Paulsen in the final).

Howard Staunton of England publicly claimed to be the strongest player in the world, although Anderssen's tournament win in London, 1851 dented this reputation. And so, in 1858, Staunton was offered the chance to play a match against Morphy in New Orleans for a stake of \$5,000.

Staunton had not played chess for 5 years by this time and initially seemed genuine in wanting to play Morphy. However, Staunton prevaricated, using health and lack of preparation as excuses. Eventually it became obvious that the match would never eventuate.

During his time waiting for a match with Staunton, Paul Morphy travelled to England

and convincingly defeated the best players in the country giving "pawn and move" odds (removing the f-pawn). He then travelled to the continent and proceeded to defeat the top players there with just the same ease.

Morphy thought nothing of challenging 8 strong chess players simultaneously without sight of the board! This seems insignificant now when compared to Najdorf's 1947 record of 45 simultaneous blindfold games, but was considered a great feat in those days. The record being held by Philidor of 3 games had been set in 1783!

In 1858 Morphy challenged Anderssen in Paris. His winning margin +7 -2 =2 left no doubt that he was the greatest player of his time. He offered "pawn and move" odds to any player in the world, but the challenge was never accepted.

Back in America in 1859 Paul Morphy slowly withdrew from chess, hoping to continue a legal career (not playing any games after 1861). His psychological health deteriorated and by 1875 he was psychotic. His paranoia waxed and waned right up until his death, from a cerebral haemorrhage, in 1884.

Throughout his career Morphy viewed chess as a recreation and refused to accept financial remuneration from chess. Any prize-money he won was donated to a good cause or used to facilitate further matches or tournaments.

Morphy was the first player to truly understand the concept of rapid development. His pieces always worked to their maximum efficiency.