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Chess players Polish-Americans

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by John S. Hilbert

Although Arthur William Dake was born in Portland, Oregon, on April 8, 1910, his father's family name was Darkowski. According to Casey Bush's account, given in *Grandmaster From Oregon: The Life and Games of Arthur Dake* (1991), the chess master's father; "maintained a deep feeling for the nation of his birth. So at a young age Arthur became conscious of his ethnic inheritance".

And Arthur Dake, today eighty-eight years old, feels the same. In a personal communication with this author dated June 23, 1998, Dake recalled that "due to respect for my father passing in 1935 I did not chose to play against Poland" in the 1935 Warsaw Olympiad, "although at the 1933 Folkestone Chess Olympiad I played and won from Makarczyk of Poland". Amazing as it may sound, Dake did not learn the game until he was seventeen, in 1927. Just four years later at Prague, due to his amazing talent, he was playing for the 1931 United States Olympiad squad, scoring a solid +5 -2 =7! Two years later, he played the following game:

Dake - Makarczyk
Folkestone Olympiad, Rd.4
May-June 1933

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4 5.Qa4+ Bd7 6.Qxd4 exd5 7.Qxd5 Nf6 8.Qb3 Nc6 9.e3 Bb4 10.Bd2 0-0 11.Nf3 Qe7 12.Be2 Be6 13.Qc2 Rac8 14.0-0 h6 15.Rfd1 Bg4 16.Rac1 Ne5 17.Nd4 Bd7 18.Be1 a6 19.Qb3 Nc6 20.Nd5 Nxd5 21.Qxd5 Bxe1 22.Rxe1 Nxd4 23.Qxd4 Bc6 24.Red1 Qg5 25.Qg4 Qxg4 26.Bxg4 Rcd8 27.Rxd8 Rxd8 28.Rd1 Rxd1+ 29.Bxd1 b6 30.Kf1 Kf8 31.Bf3 Bd7 32.Ke2 Ke7 33.Kd3 Kd6 34.Kd4 a5 35.Bd5 f6 36.Ke4 Be8 and Black lost on time 1-0

Dake bettered his first Olympiad performance at Folkestone, scoring +9 -2 =2.

He recalls spending an evening at Folkestone analyzing chess openings with Alexander Alekhine and Salo Flohr. Quite an experience for a young man, then only twenty-five, who had left home at age sixteen and sailed to the orient as a merchant marine.

And yet analyzing with the world champion was hardly out of place for the young Dake. After all, he had beaten him the year before, in a tournament encounter!

Dake - Alekhine
Pasadena, Rd.10
August 27, 1932

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Be6 7.c5 g6 8.Bb5 Bg7 9.Ne5 Qc8 10.Qa4 Bd7 11.0-0 0-0 12.Bf4 a6 13.Bxc6 bxc6 14.Rfe1 Nh5 15.Bd2 Ra7 16.Re2 Be8 17.Rae1 f5 18.Nf3 Nf6 19.Rxe7 Rxe7 20.Rxe7 f4 21.Bxf4 Ne4 22.Be5 Bh6 23.Nxe4 dxe4 24.Ng5 Qf5 25.Qb3+ Bf7 26.Nxf7 Rxf7 27.Rxf7 Qxf7 28.Qb8+ Qf8 >29.d5 e3 30.f4 Qxb8 31.Bxb8 Kf7 32.dxc6 Ke8 33.b4 g5 34.g3 gxf4 35.gxf4 Kd8 36.a4 Kc8 37.Bd6 Bg7 38.Kf1 1-0

Indeed, Dake's chess experiences are too many and varied to do justice to in such a brief
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article. Certainly one should mention, though, that for his play at Warsaw in 1935, where he had the highest winning percentage of any participant, a stunning 86 percent (+13 -0 =5), he received with great pleasure a large and famous oil painting of Polish rural life by Polish artist Wasilewski (in fact: J. Chelmonski - "Vistula").

Dake's achievement was instrumental in the United States winning its third chess Olympiad in a row. Here is a very short and highly entertaining game Dake played during his masterful Warsaw performance.

Dake - De Burca
Warsaw Olympiad, Rd.6
August 1935

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 dxe4 5.Nxe4 Be7 6.Bxf6 Bxf6 7.Nf3 Nd7 8.c3 0-0 9.Qc2 Be7 10.0-0-0 c6 11.h4 Nf6 12.Nxf6+ Bxf6 13.Bd3 g6 14.h5 Kg7 15.Rh2 Rg8 16.Qd2 Kh8 17.Qh6 Bg7 18.Qxh7+ Kxh7 19.hxg6 mate 1-0

But perhaps his greatest "prize"; associated with the 1935 Warsaw Olympiad involved his trip back to the United States, with the victorious American team of Fine, Marshall, Kupchik, and Horowitz, on board the S.S. Polaski. For it was during that voyage he met Helen Gerwatowski, who was returning from a visit to her parents, who lived in the country out-side Warsaw. Six weeks later, they were married. Dake would write in Chess Life in July 1994 that "this remarkable person, who was truly my most wonderful chess prize, became my wife for 58 years until her death on April 1, 1994". Dake's wife was a deeply religious woman, one who unflinchingly prayed the rosary every morning, "and who passed away, fit-tingly," he would write in Chess Life, "on Good Friday with a palm-leaf crucifix in her hand".

Dake writes that his grandfather, Joseph Darkowski, owned a farm between Warsaw and Lublin, near a town named Potusk. He lived to be 104. Dake, now eighty-eight, writes that "hopefully, I'll make ninety". He was awarded the Grandmaster title by FIDE in 1986 for his amazing accomplishments in the 1930s. He is the world's oldest living grandmaster, a title we hope he maintains for years to come. Arthur Dake has given the chess world many beautiful chess games, and deserves the love and affection of all those who value our collective chess heritage.

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