Aron Nimzovich

Uncrowned Chess Champions

Copyright © 2026 Thinkers Publishing, Belgium

This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

Author: Boroljub Zlatanovic

Editorial Director: Adrien Demuth

Assistant Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Proofreading: Andrew Burnett

Software: Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Dirk Dewitte

ISBN: 9789493435346
D/2026/31732/20

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the publisher.

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

E–mail: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2026 by Thinkers Publishing.

Aron Nimzovich

Uncrowned Chess Champions

Boroljub Zlatanovic

Thinkers Publishing 2026



To my beloved wife Marijana,
my son Vasilije,
and my daughter Nikolina.

Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⟳	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
⩱	with compensation for the sacrificed material
⩲	White stands slightly better
⩱	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+-	White has a decisive advantage
-+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
⇆	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⩲	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

Table of Contents

Key to Symbols 5
Preface 7
Introduction 8

Chapter 1 – Center 11

Chapter 2 – Strategic Concepts 49

Chapter 3 – Maneuvering 155

Chapter 4 – Constriction 197

Chapter 5 – Blockade 229

Index of Games 263

Preface

Being a reader of this book and familiar with the timeless work of Aron Nimzovich places you among a special category of chess players – those for whom research, understanding, and the pursuit of chess truth are essential elements of improvement.

Much of what today's top players demonstrate in their games was already proclaimed more than a century ago by Nimzovich in his revolutionary understanding of chess. Through each chapter, the author, with a precise selection of games and insightful commentary, guides us on an instructive and fascinating chess journey.

It is not easy to express, in only a few words, an opinion about the work of one of the greatest chess theorists in history, a man who was undoubtedly far ahead of his time. His ideas about the center, the blockade of enemy pieces, and positional control, fundamentally changed the way players thought about the game. Until then, many believed that the most important goal in chess was simply to attack and deliver a quick checkmate, often through sacrifices. Nimzovich showed that chess was far richer, deeper, and more complex than that.

One cannot overlook his thoughts on maneuvering, nor his profound understanding of pawn chains. The author has successfully brought all these themes together into a coherent whole, making each new game eagerly anticipated. Nimzovich's legacy extends far beyond his theoretical masterpiece *My System*; it also includes a wealth of practical examples from his games against the strongest players of his era. In a clear and accessible manner, the author explains the key ideas and the most important moments from Nimzovich's games.

You have not made a mistake by adding this book to your chess library.

I greatly enjoyed reading it, and I can confidently promise that you will enjoy it as well.

Dragoljub Jacimovic
June 2026

Introduction

I faced a serious challenge while writing this book: how should one present perhaps the most important figure in chess history? Yes, indeed, for many players Aron Nimzovich is exactly that. Moreover, how should one present the legacy of a lifelong mentor? How can I demonstrate that such a pioneer of deep positional chess deserves a place in your chess library and in your daily chess education? How can I prove that my admiration for his play, legacy, and influence is not merely subjective?

Perhaps the solution is to write with devotion rather than trying to prove anything. You should discover his ideas and principles for yourself. Simply try to play good positional chess, and when you win a game for the first time in what you recognize as "Nimzovich's style," you will understand exactly what I mean.

Nimzovich's legacy is undisputed. Chess would not be the same without him. Just consider the list of his contributions to chess theory. Not only did he enrich opening theory (the Nimzo–Indian Defence, important developments in the French Defence, the Danish Opening, and many others), but he also introduced and explained numerous concepts, principles, and ideas in great detail: the two weaknesses principle, blockade, overprotection, and much more. He refined the theories established earlier by Steinitz and Tarrasch. He persistently fought against Tarrasch's dogmatic approach and adopted, improved, and modernized Steinitz's postulates.

Thanks to Nimzovich, chess today is a deeply explained and structured game, making it a pleasure to study. Just imagine how difficult it must have been for him to find the right balance between the teachings of Steinitz and Tarrasch while simultaneously facing younger opponents such as Alekhine, who always played with one goal in mind: to win the game directly and decisively. Consider also the challenge of confronting the immense authority of the "Doctor from Nuremberg," Tarrasch, and establishing hypermodern ideas as a legitimate alternative to accepted dogma. To be fair, some other leading authorities of the time, such as Réti, also embraced these new concepts, helping to present the chess world with a revolutionary perspective on the game.

Chess history is full of fascinating "what if" questions: the planned Lasker–Rubinstein match of 1914, Alekhine's sudden death and the 1948 World Championship

tournament, the Fischer–Karpov match of 1975, Kasparov leaving FIDE in 1992, Carlsen's retirement, and many more. Yet for me, one of the most intriguing possibilities is the match between Alekhine and Nimzovich that, according to some sources, could have taken place in 1929. Such a match would have been a completely different story from the Alekhine–Bogoljubow match organized that same year.

Today we have a relatively clear view of Nimzovich and his body of work. His classic books—*My System*, *Blockade*, and *Chess Praxis*—remain evergreen masterpieces and essential reading for any serious player. The arrival of engines and the computer era has only reinforced their importance. Young players often make mistakes because they do not truly understand chess; they insist on active play even when the position does not justify it. Familiarity with Nimzovich's principles will help you expose and punish such unobjective approaches. That is why I believe the most important goal today is to learn to understand chess rather than simply to learn good moves. For that task, there is probably no better mentor than Aron Nimzovich.

In this book I present 64 annotated games. I did not want to focus exclusively on famous games or obvious masterpieces. You will see many mistakes made by Nimzovich himself. Yet we should not judge him too harshly for them. After all, Nimzovich did not learn from principles established by others—he helped create modern chess theory for us. My goal was to capture the real tension of practical chess, to present Nimzovich's views on a variety of themes, and to offer instructive games. Some are played against lesser–known opponents, while others feature famous masters. I find this mixture particularly interesting because anyone is capable of finding a good move. The games are divided into five chapters: Center, Strategic Concepts, Maneuvering, Constriction, and Blockade. You may read them in any order you wish, but within each chapter I recommend following the order in which they are presented.

I am convinced that Nimzovich's principles will help improve your understanding of chess, just as they have already helped thousands of players. Without absorbing his ideas, it is impossible to become a truly complete master.

If you have any suggestions, please feel free to write to me at borzlat@gmail.com.
Sincerely yours,

A devoted admirer of Nimzovich,
IM Boroljub Zlatanovic June 2026



1

Center

Nimzovich was the pioneer of **hypermodern chess**. The defining characteristic of this school is its approach to the center. Contrary to Tarrasch's famous dogmatic statement that *'the center must be occupied by pawns,'* Nimzovich repeatedly demonstrated the success of the opposite approach. He proved that **any effective control of the center is good control**.

Thanks to him, modern chess inherited the entire family of Indian Defences, all based on the same strategic idea: controlling the center from a distance with a fianchettoed bishop before later challenging White's pawn center. Building and maintaining a large pawn center usually costs time—this was one of Nimzovich's fundamental principles. Instead, he preferred rapid development, early castling, and timely counterplay.

Of course, the struggle for the center is not limited to pawns. **Centralization** remains one of the fundamental principles of chess, and Nimzovich expressed this perfectly with one of his most famous sayings:

'Don't despair—just centralize!'



Game 1

♙ Nimzovich, Aron
♟ Steiner, Lajos
Bad Niendorf 1927

As with many other leading players of all time, Nimzovich recognized the center as the most important – in fact, the ultimate – chess principle. Let's see a few games he managed to win by punishing his opponents' mistakes related to the center. The first one is not so famous, but still instructive.

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♘c3 ♘f6 4. ♗b5

This was Nimzovich's all-time favorite opening as White. He enriched it with many important ideas for White.

4... d6

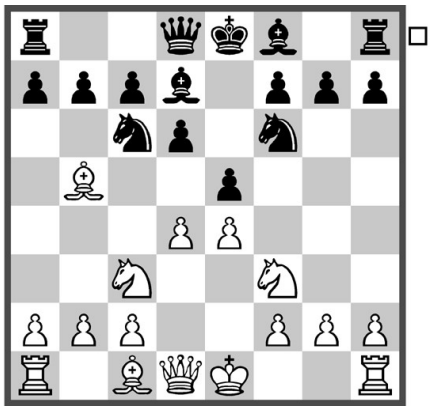
4... ♗b4 5. ♗xc6 was Nimzovich's favorite line. Thanks to his efforts,

nowadays White players have clear paths to follow.

5. d4

Now we get a Spanish (Ruy Lopez) situation on the board.

5... ♗d7?!



Position after: 5... ♗d7?!

An imprecision leading immediately to problems.

5... exd4 is correct. 6. ♘xd4 [6. ♕xd4 is good as well.] 6... ♗d7 gives a well-known position. Black hasn't much space, but his position is stable with a clear plan to finish development.

6. ♗xc6!

Nimzovich classily solves the problem.

6... ♗xc6 7. ♕d3

Suddenly there is problem with the e5-pawn.

7... ♘d7

An extravagance to hold the e5-point. Black does not develop and is clearly outplayed.

7... exd4 8. ♘xd4 is a worse version of the above-mentioned line. 8... ♗e7 9. ♘xc6 bxc6 10. b3 is much better for White. Black has problems with the c6-pawn and in case of its advance there will be problems on the light squares.

8. ♗e3!

White's army is fully centralized. White can castle either side with a dangerous initiative in the center.

8... exd4 9. ♗xd4?!

This is a failure.

9. ♘xd4! ♘c5 10. ♕c4 is horrible for Black. There is no good advice to be given in any case, as 10... ♗d7 11. 0-0-0 is not an escape. Black can't finish development, and central play for White based on preparing e5 would easily bring the win.

9... f6?!

This weakens the e6-spot and opens doors to White's pieces.

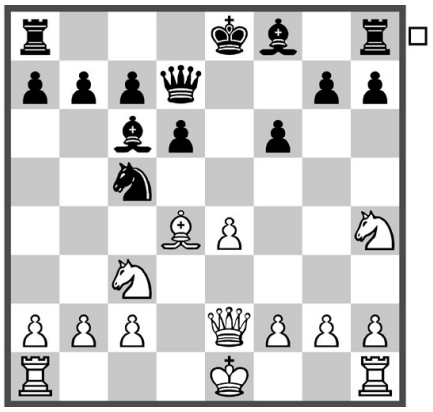
9... ♘c5! 10. ♕c4 [10. ♕e2 ♕e7 and Black is problem-free; 10. ♗xc5 dxc5 is not so superior for White – the bishop

pair compensates the pawn structure defects.] 10... ♘xe4 11. ♘xe4 d5! 12. ♕c3 dxe4 13. 0-0-0 f6! is an escape for Black. 14. ♗c5 keeps some plus, but after 14... ♗d6 15. ♗xd6 cxd6 16. ♘d4 ♕d7 Black generally should not complain.

10. ♘h4

10. ♘d5 is an obvious move. White would later decide from many normal moves like c4, 0-0-0, ♕b3, etc...

10... ♘c5 11. ♕e2 ♕d7



Position after: 11... ♕d7

12. ♘f5?

White is consistent but putting the rook on d1 with or without castling is both natural and better.

12... ♘e6?

Black makes knight maneuvers as well, but this is bad here.

12... 0-0-0 gives Black a comfortable position.

13. 0-0! b6?

Another mistake, creating holes and neglecting development. Black prepares castling, but he will not castle at all...

13... 0-0-0 is normal. After 14. ♗xa7! b6 15. a4 White keeps an advantage.

14. a4!?

14. ♘d5! was possible immediately, and more logical, of course. 14... 0-0-0 15. a4 destroys Black's queenside.

14... a5?!

14... ♗e7 is the best move, although 15. ♘d5 ♗d8 16. b4 would keep a strong dominance.

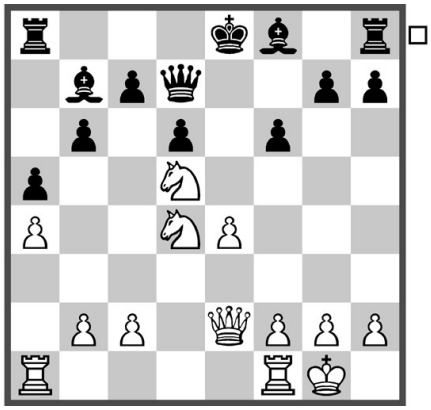
15. ♘d5

Now the knight jumps in an even better version. For instance, Black must think about the bishop sacrifice on b6.

15... ♘xd4

Played to reduce the tension, but now the knight pair will dance. Black is just lost. His pieces are... nowhere. The centralized white army will easily finish the game.

16. ♘xd4 ♗b7



Position after: 16... ♗b7

17. ♘e6!

An obvious jump and the logical consequence.

17... ♖c8

It is easy to check there is no help for Black. The knight is immune due to the fork on c7.

18. ♕h5+

Even this!

18... g6 19. ♘xf6+ ♔f7 20. ♘xd7 gxh5 21. ♘dxf8

Black resigned.

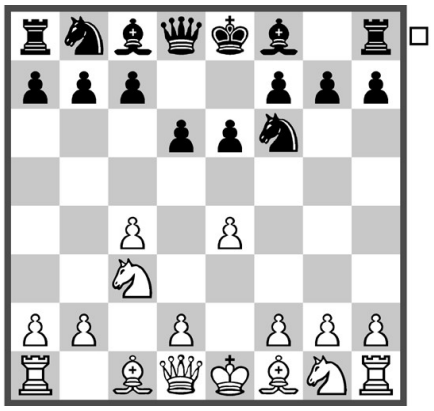
1-0

The next game is less complex, but an equally brutal win for Nimzovich.

Game 2

♙ Nimzovich, Aron
♟ Flohr, Salo
Bled 1931

1. c4 ♘f6 2. ♘c3 e6 3. e4 d6?



Position after: 3... d6?

Move that must be criticized, especially in connection with Black's next move.

4. d4 e5

A waste of time is not something you would recommend to Black in the opening. Instead, Flohr could try to choose some Hippopotamus!?

5. ♘ge2

I like this approach. With the tempo gained, White supports the tension on the board; pawn advances or exchanges would not be so dangerous. White wants to use the f3-pawn to secure the e3-square for the bishop.

5. ♘f3 looks even better.

5... ♗e7 6. f3 c6 7. ♗e3

White has chosen the so-called 'Sämisch' system. It was (and periodically still is) a very popular setup against the King's Indian defense. It is solid and promising here as well.

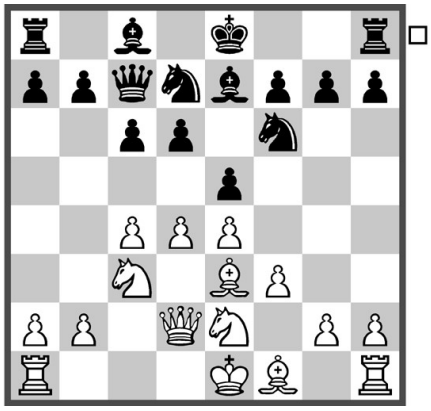
7... ♕c7?!

'Logical', but an imprecise move. Castling is better; Black can later decide about the queen.

8. ♕d2

8. g4 is the natural and more dangerous reaction. The idea of constricting is well-known here from many openings. If 8... h6 9. ♕d2 Black can't easily organize castling queenside while castling kingside here looks suicidal.

8... ♘bd7



Position after: 8... ♘bd7

9. d5

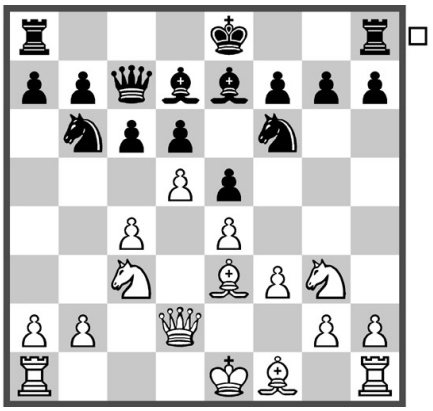
White wants to block the center so that his kingside advance and constriction plan can proceed unhindered.

9... ♘b6?!

Black wants to put pressure on the c4-square, but the knight doesn't belong here in Black's chosen system. Also, Black lacks central control – there are no good spots for his pieces.

9... h5 is more natural to prevent White's plan of g4. This is nowadays a well-known resource in many Sicilian branches.

10. ♘g3 ♗d7



Position after: 10... ♗d7

Now the bishop is on a strange spot, blocking other pieces.

11. b3!

A typical Nimzovich move: White restricts the black knight which therefore renders many other black pieces simply bad.

11... h5 12. ♗d3 g6 13. 0-0 ♘h7

Played to control the g5-spot, not to prepare ...f5, of course. This is another anti-centralizing knight move.

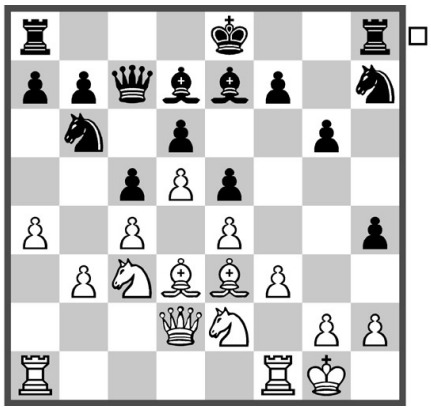
14. a4!

Constricting on both sides. With dominance in the center and a space advantage, it is good advice.

14... h4

Of course, Black's kingside play is not dangerous.

15. ♘ge2 c5



Position after: 15... c5

A defensive idea to slow down White's expansion. Still, White's centralized army can easily play on both sides while Black is so constricted.

16. f4

A natural approach. Such an advance is usually good if Black can't occupy the e5-square with his pieces.

16. a5 looks more methodical, to keep open the option of playing on both wings.

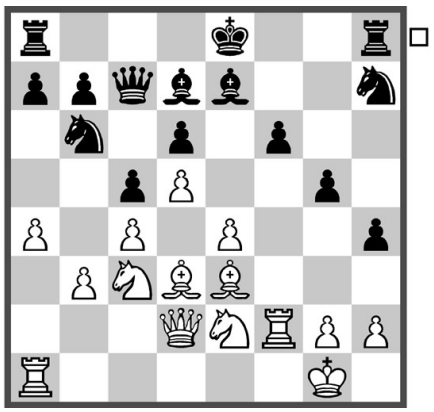
16... exf4

16... a5 is more logical, to at least block one sector. Anyway, 17. ♖f2 leaves White in the driving seat. There is no good advice for Black.

17. ♖xf4 g5

17... ♗g5 looks logical, but after 18. ♖f2 ♗xe3 19. ♕xe3 Black can't really castle, whereas White at the same time threatens the destructive e5-thrust.

18. ♖f2 f6



Position after: 18... f6

Black desperately wants to keep the position blocked. Having lost control of the center, he is forced to create weaknesses to slow down White's initiative.

19. e5!

Such a natural advance, allowing White to invade. The game is effectively decided.

19... dxe5

19... fxe5 20. ♗g6+ ♔d8 21. ♗xh7 ♖xh7 22. ♗xg5 wins easily for White.

20. ♗g6+ ♔d8 21. ♘e4

A brutal invasion is impending; the threat is d6.

21... ♘c8

21... ♗d6 22. ♗xh7 ♖xh7 23. ♘xf6+–

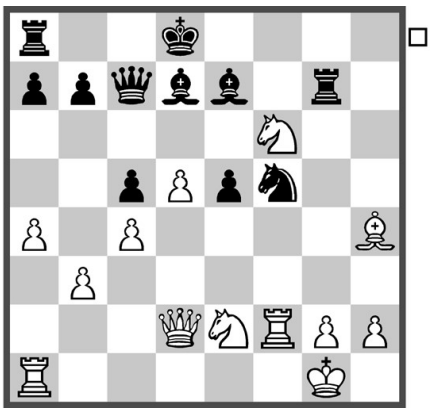
22. ♗xh7

The simplest move here.

22... ♖xh7 23. ♘xf6

Black's position is in ruins. His pieces are scattered and with his king in the center there is no hope of escape.

23... ♖g7 24. ♗xg5 ♘d6 25. ♗xh4 ♘f5



Position after: 25... ♘f5

26. ♖xf5

Even this wins. Further comments are redundant.

26... ♗xf5 27. d6 ♕xd6

27... ♗xd6 28. ♘d5++–

28. ♕xd6+ ♗xd6 29. ♘h5+ ♖e7 30. ♖f1 ♗d3 31. ♖f8+ ♔d7 32. ♖xa8 ♗xe2 33. ♗xe7 ♗xe7 34. ♘g3 ♗d1 35. ♘f5 ♗d8 36. ♖xa7 ♔c6 37. ♖a8 ♔d7 38. ♘e3 ♗xb3 39. ♔f2 e4 40. ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 41. a5 ♗a2 42. g4

Black resigned.

1-0