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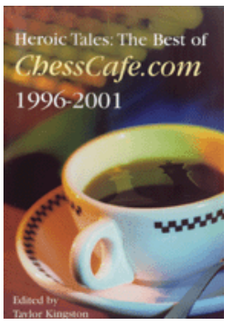





# ‘Le temps des combats de géants’

## by Rod Edwards

Long before the time of organized chess tournaments, and before there were any chess magazines to report on important events, a historic meeting (or perhaps two meetings about the same time) took place between four of the world’s strongest players. According to H.J.R. Murray (*A History of Chess*, 1913, p.878), in April 1821, William Lewis and John Cochrane visited Paris to meet the phenomenal French genius, Alexandre Deschapelles. Lewis was the acknowledged master of English chess since Jacob Sarratt’s death in 1819, and Cochrane was a brilliant young rising star. Similarly, Deschapelles reigned supreme in France, and had taken on Louis de la Bourdonnais as his protégé. The lack of contemporary accounts makes it difficult to find solid information on the meeting, and as a result it has not been accorded as prominent a place in the history of great chess contests as it deserves. The ‘prehistory’ of the world chess championship traditionally starts with the series of matches between de la Bourdonnais and McDonnell in 1834. But writers in the 1840s considered the 1821 event to be a momentous one. By 1841, de la Bourdonnais was dead, Deschapelles rarely came out of retirement from chess, Lewis had also retired from active play, and Cochrane had been away in India since the mid-1820s. So Cochrane’s return to England on leave in 1841 must have seemed like the reappearance of a character from the almost legendary past. Pierre de Saint-Amant, in *Le Palamède* (2nd series, v.1, 1842, p.45) wrote,

> M. Cochrane, gentilhomme anglais, dont le jeu élégant et ingénieux aux échecs, produisit en France une très-vive impression en 1821 et 1822,… joua beaucoup et long-temps avec M. Deschapelles et Labourdonnais: c’était alors le temps des combats de géants.
>
> [*Mr. Cochrane, an English gentleman, whose elegant and ingenious game of chess produced in France a very deep impression in 1821 and 1822,...played much and long with Mr. Deschapelles and Labourdonnais: it was, then, the time of the battles of giants.*]

Accounts of the event vary and there is, to this day, considerable confusion about what actually happened, and particularly about the results. I propose to sift through the sources I have found, to try to ascertain what the results actually were, and to see where interpretations may have gone awry. (A caveat: I do not claim to have found all relevant early sources. For example, I have not consulted *Bell’s Life* in London at all. If anyone has further information, I’d be happy to hear about it.) I will also comment on what the information found can tell us about the relative strength of these players.

*Louis-Charles Mahé de la Bourdonnais*

Three particular contests are mentioned in connection with the 1821 visit (or visits) by Lewis and Cochrane to Paris: a three game match between Lewis and Deschapelles, a triangular contest between de la Bourdonnais, Deschapelles and Cochrane and another match between Deschapelles and Cochrane. The short match between Lewis and Deschapelles is not often explicitly connected with the other two contests. However, Murray (*A History of Chess*, 1913, p.878) says that Cochrane accompanied Lewis on his visit and gives the date as April 1821, suggesting that these events all occurred at about the same time, though it is not clear in that case why Lewis did not participate in the more substantial contest between the other

three.

In any case, there is no confusion about the result of the Lewis-Deschapelles match. Deschapelles gave Lewis odds of pawn and move, Lewis won one game, the other two being drawn, and all three games were preserved. The match and result is described in *Le Palamède* (v.1, 1836, p.226) and the three games were published in George Walker's *A Selection of Games at Chess Actually Played* (1836, pp. 273, 275, 276) and later in the *Chess Player's Chronicle* (v.2, 1841, pp.358, 369, 370) and *Walker's Chess Studies* (1844, games 421-423). There was a little controversy, though, around the circumstances of the match. In 1839, Walker wrote an essay called 'Deschapelles, the Chess-King' (first published in *Fraser's Magazine*, but re-published in his 'Chess and Chess Players,' 1850), in which he describes the match (pp.51-53):

> In the year 1821, Mr. Lewis the writer on chess, went over to Paris, for the purpose of playing a match at Frascati's with Deschapelles. The necessary arrangements were made by M. la Bourdonnais, as umpire; and the odds of the pawn and move were unwillingly agreed to be yielded by the Frenchman, he wishing to give instead, pawn and two, and to play for a larger sum than his adversary chose to consent to. Of the three games constituting this match, two were drawn, and one was gained by our countrymen [*sic*]. It is certain that M. Deschapelles was not in play on this occasion; for we find him over-looking winning moves, and in other respects wanting in his usual fertility of resource. He was taken unawares by an opening of the game he had never previously encountered; and, from the fine attack Mr. Lewis invariably acquired thereby, the wonder is that the latter did not gain a more honourable triumph. M. Deschapelles felt his real superiority; and, on the match being over, challenged his opponent to a renewal of hostilities; offering publicly to give him the pawn and two moves in a match of twenty-one games, and play for any sum of money which might be required. Mr. Lewis declined playing a second match, whether at the odds of pawn and move, or pawn and two moves; and was, doubtless, justified in following out the adage of "let well alone."

Lewis objected to a similar account of the match, however, and in the very first issue of the *Chess Player's Chronicle* appears a letter to the editor (Staunton) by Lewis contradicting a number of statements about him in 'a Sporting Newspaper of Sunday last.' He quotes this publication as saying that

> …after playing three games at the pawn and move with Des Chappelles, "Des Chappelles wanted to renew the match, and offered to give increased odds, but Mr. Lewis declined ever again playing with him;"

Lewis then counters:

> …on the occasion of my having the pleasure of playing with Des Chappelles, he politely gave me the option of encountering him upon equal terms, or of taking trifling odds; and, after I succeeded in winning the match which we played at the pawn and move, had circumstances enabled us again to meet, we should doubtless have played even. M. Des Chappelles was far too courteous and well-bred to insist on giving odds in opposition to the wishes of his adversary.

Lewis apparently did not play further on this occasion, and he is not mentioned in relation to the other contests. Paul Metzner, in Crescendo of the Virtuoso (University of California Press, 1998, pp.38-39, also partially available through Google Books) says that Lewis and Cochrane came to Paris on separate occasions, Cochrane's stay being an extended one in 1820-1821.

Walker indicates in the above quote from 'Deschapelles, the Chess-King' that the Lewis-Deschapelles match took place at Frascati's. Frascati's, which would make an interesting study in its own right, was a well-known and reputable early 19th century gaming house, café, restaurant and, apparently, ice cream parlour (see An 1807 Ice Cream Cone: Discovery and Evidence, by Robert J. Weir), appearing in *Thackeray's Vanity Fair* and *A Terribly Strange Bed* by Wilkie Collins, and the subject of one of the first novels by a Canadian (*Frascati's*, by John Richardson). The triangular match was not, however, played at Frascati's. Saint-Amant states in *Le Palamède* (2nd series, vol.4, 1844, p.313) that the triangular contest was played in a hotel at Saint Cloud. The famous Frascati's at least was not in Saint Cloud, so unless there was another Frascati's, two separate events again seem to be implicated. Saint-Amant also says that Cochrane, Deschapelles and de la Bourdonnais spent a whole month playing there. Many years later, Staunton wrote in his column in the *Illustrated London News* (9 July 1870, p.48), quoting *La Stratégie*, that the triangular contest took place at a hotel in Saint Cloud and lasted only eight days.

*John Cochrane*

The triangular contest between de la Bourdonnais, Cochrane and Deschapelles is interesting and problematic. Recent accounts rely on the description by Hooper and Whyld in *The Oxford Companion to Chess*(1st edition, 1984; unchanged in the 2nd edition, 1992). However, some accounts vary the scores given by Hooper and Whyld, who themselves are inconsistent.

On p.47 (*The Oxford Companion to Chess*, 1st ed., 1984), Hooper and Whyld say:

> A visit to Paris by COCHRANE in 1821 was the occasion for a triangular contest, Deschapelles conceding pawn and two moves to Cochrane and Bourdonnais who themselves met on even terms. There were to be seven rounds each of three games, each player contributing one napoleon (a 20 fr. gold piece) to a pool for each round. 'When I saw three napoleons on the chess board', recounts Bourdonnais, 'I went to work in earnest'; he won six of the seven pools scoring +6-1 against Deschapelles and +7-0 against Cochrane.

On p.88, they give a slightly different account:

> In Apr. 1821 Deschapelles played a triangular contest, conceding pawn and two to Bourdonnais and COCHRANE, who played level between themselves. Deschapelles defeated Cochrane (+6-1) but lost all seven games to Bourdonnais. … challenged by Cochrane to play even but to win two-thirds of the games, he lost that match too.

And on p.243:

> …challenged by his pupil BOURDONNAIS he [Deschapelles] agreed to a match of seven games at pawn and two; he lost them all.

Thus, Hooper and Whyld give the score between de la Bourdonnais and Cochrane as +7–0, and between Deschapelles and Cochrane as +6–1, but they give +6–1 for the score between de la Bourdonnais and Deschapelles on p.47 and +7–0 on p.88 and p.243. A less serious discrepancy involves the structure of the contest. In the first quote they say it consisted of rounds, each involving all three players. In the third quote, they describe the games between de la Bourdonnais and Deschapelles as a match.

Cary Utterberg, in 'De la Bourdonnais versus McDonnell, 1834' (McFarland, 2005, p.11) adopts the score +6–1 for the de la Bourdonnais-Deschapelles games and agrees with Hooper and Whyld on the other two pairings, while Paul Metzner in his *Crescendo of the Virtuoso* (pp.38-39, cited above) gives +7–0 for de la Bourdonnais-Deschapelles, but then says that "Cochrane lost to Deschapelles by an unknown score and to Labourdonnais six games to one." A number of web articles also cite one or another of theses variations. For example, "Sarah's Chess Journal" has articles on Cochrane and Deschapelles that take one of the versions given by Hooper and Whyld. Jeremy Spinrad's article on Cochrane takes the results given by Hooper and Whyld for Cochrane against the other two.

So now we have several possibilities:

| | (a) | (b) | (c) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bourdonnais-Cochrane | +7-0 | +7-0 | +6-1 |
| Deschapelles-Cochrane | +6-1 | +6-1 | unknown |
| Bourdonnais-Deschapelles | +6-1 | +7-0 | +7-0 |

Hooper and Whyld give either (a) or (b), Utterberg goes with (a), "Sarah's Chess Journal" with (b), Spinrad doesn't choose between (a) and (b), since he only gives Cochrane's results, and Metzner suggests (c). What are we to make of all this? Hooper and Whyld are normally dependable, but here they give two versions. And one additional piece of information from modern sources casts further doubt on their versions:

ChessBase has a win by Cochrane over de la Bourdonnais dated 1821 (though Cochrane is misidentified as 'James Cochrane' instead of 'John Cochrane'). Better known are two of the wins by Deschapelles over Cochrane (one is given for example by Hooper and Whyld, *Oxford Companion to Chess*, 1st ed., 1984, p.88). But, while ChessBase is not always a reliable source for historical information, if the win by Cochrane over de la Bourdonnais is from the 1821 event, then the result of the games between them could not have been 7-0.

Earlier authors tended to avoid the question of exact scores. Murray, for example, says only that "De la Bourdonnais won both his matches and Cochrane lost both his" (*A History of Chess*, 1913, p.878). Again the reference to matches, rather than pools, may have contributed to the misunderstandings about the event by later authors. Golombek, for example, says that de la Bourdonnais "won a match against Cochrane in 1821, when the latter visited Paris…" (*Golombek's Encyclopedia of Chess*, 1977, p.170).

If we go back to the earliest accounts of this event and keep an open mind, we find that Hooper and Whyld were likely on the wrong track and that all of the above versions are therefore incorrect. We have no descriptions from the time of the event itself, but here are the most informative early sources I have found, the earliest being written eighteen years after the event.

From George Walker's 1839 essay 'Deschapelles, the Chess-King,' (*Chess and Chess-Players*, 1850, p.47):

> In some pools of chess which he [Deschapelles] once played, even, with Cochrane and La Bourdonnais, he found this [playing even] to be a disadvantage, and was compelled to play more slowly than either of his two formidable antagonists.

From the *Chess Player's Chronicle* (v.1, 1841, p.25), edited by Staunton:

> Pools of Chess are rarely played in this country, but very frequently in France. Some years since M. Des Chappelles, M. De la Bourdonnais, and Mr. Cochrane played together a match, consisting of twenty-one pools; the first player giving to the other two the odds of a pawn and two moves, and they playing together upon equal terms. The result of the match, which lasted many days, was as follows:—
>
> M. Des Chappelles won six pools.
> M. De la Bourdonnais fourteen ditto.
> And Mr. Cochrane was a winner of only one pool.
>
> It is much to be regretted that a series of games so interesting as these must have been was not preserved.

From George Walker's essay 'The Light and Lustre of Chess' (*Chess Player's Chronicle*, v.4, 1843, p.250):

> The result of the Chess-pool, in which Leonardo unmasks his full force, and sweeps away the thousand scudi, reminds us irresistibly of the great De la Bourdonnais, who first came to the knowledge of his own Chess-strength, playing a similar match with Cochrane and Des Chappelles; each staking a Napoleon on the board every game. "When I saw the gold, said De la Bourdonnais to ourselves, I felt quite a new man; I went at it in earnest, and out of twenty-one pools, won eighteen!"

This was reprinted in Walker's 'Chess and Chess Players' of 1850, p.345 (without the word 'great,' with the spelling 'Deschapelles', and with the extra quotation marks that are clearly needed in the last sentence).

From *Le Palamède* (2nd series, v.4, 1844, p.313):

> En 1822, M. Cochrane publia à Londres son *Traité sur les Echecs*. Il était venu à Paris l'année précédente; il y avait trouvé M. Deschapelles dans toute la maturité de son talent, et Labourdonnais commençant à jeter les fondemens de sa solide et brillante réputation… Afin de se livrer plus entièrement à leur jeu, ils se retirèrent tous les trois dans un hôtel à Saint-Cloud, et passèrent là un mois complet à jouer des *poules* (parties à trois, sans conseils, où le vainqueur des deux autres prend le prix composé des mises faites en entrant). M. Deschapelles donnait Pion et deux traits à Labourdonnais et à Cochrane, lesquels jouaient ensemble à but. En résultat, M. Deschapelles gagna, Labourdonnais ne gagna ni ne perdit, et ce fut M. Cochrane qui fit les frais.
>
> [*In 1822, Mr. Cochrane published in London his Treatise on the Game of Chess. He had come to Paris the preceding year; there he found Mr. Deschapelles in the full maturity of his talent, and Labourdonnais starting to lay the foundation of his solid and*

> *brilliant reputation…In order to more completely devote themselves to their game, the three of them retired to a hotel in Saint Cloud, and spent there a whole month in playing pools (contests for three, without consultation, where the victor over the two others takes the prize composed of the bets made on entry). Mr. Deschapelles gave pawn and two moves to Labourdonnais and to Cochrane, who played together even. The result was that Mr. Deschapelles won, Labourdonnais neither won nor lost, and it was Mr. Cochrane who paid the price.*]

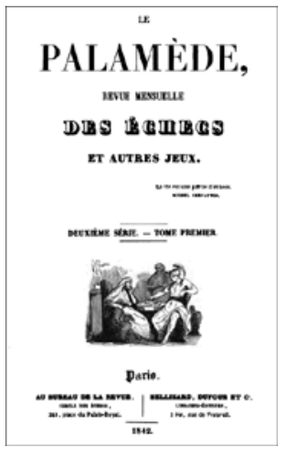
From *Le Palamède* (2nd series, v.7, 1847, pp.505-506):

> Une preuve de ce que nous disons là qui pourrait paraître étrange, est, outre l'opinion de Labourdonnais, une lutte animée et prolongée entre Deschapelles et M. Cochrane. Ce célèbre joueur anglais vint à Paris en 1820 et 1821 pour se mesurer avec Deschapelles et Labourdonnais. C'est en forme de *poule* que s'organisa la partie. Deschapelles donnait Pion et deux traits à Labourdonnais et à M. Cochrane; ceux-ci, l'un contre l'autre, jouaient à but. Le résultat le plus positif fut pour Labourdonnais, le perdant fut M. Cochrane. Deschapelles balança l'avantage qu'il obtint sur Cochrane avec le désavantage qu'il eut contre Labourdonnais.

This was translated into English in the *Chess Player's Chronicle* (v.9, 1848, p.60):

> One proof of what we have here advanced which might appear strange is, besides the opinion of La Bourdonnais, a long and animated contest between Deschapelles and Mr. Cochrane. This celebrated English player came to Paris in 1820 and 1821, to measure his strength against Deschapelles, and La Bourdonnais. The *partie* was organized in form of the *poule*. Deschapelles gave pawn and two moves to La Bourdonnais and Mr. Cochrane; these two played even. La Bourdonnais was the greatest winner, and Mr. Cochrane the greatest loser. M. Deschapelles' advantages over Mr. Cochrane were counterbalanced by his losses against La Bourdonnais.

None of the authors of the above quotes, Walker, Staunton or Saint-Amant, was present at the 1821 events, but Walker and Saint-Amant at least were both well acquainted with de la Bourdonnais. All three of them got to know Cochrane upon his return to England in 1841, but the first two quotes were written before his return. De la Bourdonnais had visited London several times, including the months he spent there in 1834 playing McDonnell, as well as a short period before his death in 1840, so the details of the 1821 event may have been common knowledge in England. And Deschapelles was still alive until 1847. Thus, although second hand, the information we have is not too far from the source.


LE

PALAMÈDE,

REVUE MENSUELLE

DES ÉCHECS

ET AUTRES JEUX.

DEUXIÈME SÉRIE. — TOME PREMIER.

Paris.

1847.

In the first quote, from Walker's 'Deshapelles, the Chess-King,' it appears that he confused the even match that Deschapelles played afterwards against Cochrane with the triangular contest, saying that Deschapelles had to play slowly when playing even. The other sources agree that in the triangular contest, Deschapelles gave pawn and two moves to both the others, who played even between themselves. The fifth quote, from *Le Palamède* (1847), says that Cochrane came to Paris in 1820 and 1821. This does not quite correspond to Murray's claim that Cochrane came with Lewis in April 1821. Either Saint-Amant here got the dates wrong, or Cochrane came twice, or as Metzner asserts, his visit was an extended one from 1820 to 1821.

More significantly, the triangular contest is in all these sources said to have been in the form of 'pools' (*'poules'*). In both English and French, this term carries the meaning of combined bets made by many participants (*Oxford English Dictionary*: "The collective stakes put forward by players in a game, hand, or round; the kitty, the pot.") and of all players playing all others (Larousse: "Groupe d'adversaires ou d'équipes qui doivent s'affronter, tour à tour, jusqu'à ce que chacun d'eux

ou chacune d'elles ait rencontré tous les autres." [*Group of adversaries or teams who must confront each other in turn, until each one of them has encountered all the others*]). The 1844 quote from *Le Palamède* confirms this interpretation explicitly. Thus, these accounts indicate that the event was not organized in the form of matches between pairs of players, but rather in all-play-all rounds, each round involving a bet.

Walker, in 'The Light and Lustre of Chess,' says that each player staked a Napoleon "on the board every game." This statement is confusing because if betting was made on "every game," rather than every round (pool), then why would "each" of the three players bet every time? This may have led to later confusion between 'pools' and 'games.' Hooper and Whyld give a slightly different version of what de la Bourdonnais said (in quotation marks, so perhaps from another source?), specifying that three napoleons were placed on the board, and not saying "every game," which more clearly indicates that the stake was to be won by the winner of a three-way round or pool.

However, there seems to be no doubt about the number of pools. Staunton and Walker both specifically state that twenty-one pools were played, not twenty-one games in seven all-play-all rounds, as claimed by Hooper and Whyld.

There is an obvious discrepancy between Walker's claim that de la Bourdonnais said he won eighteen of the twenty-one pools, and Staunton's that he won fourteen. It is easy to see how the interpretation by Hooper and Whyld could have come from Staunton's account. If only twenty-one games were played in seven rounds of three, then each player must have played fourteen games, so the fourteen wins by de la Bourdonnais fits neatly if he won every game. However, there is no way that de la Bourdonnais could have claimed to win eighteen games under this arrangement. Whether or not he actually won that many games, the claim itself shows that Hooper and Whyld have got it wrong: there were twenty-one pools, not twenty-one games.

Now which account should we believe? Walker's accuracy is never certain, and even if he quoted de la Bourdonnais correctly, the latter may have been stretching the truth. Although Staunton was often accused of distorting results, this was more by omission of inconvenient facts or by skewed judgement and interpretation, rather than by direct falsification or lack of care in relaying factual information accurately. Staunton's version of the score is also complete and precise, so I take it to be correct.

An additional confusion is introduced by Saint-Amant's 1844 account, however, which states that Deschapelles won, and de la Bourdonnais broke even; this contradicts the earlier accounts that de la Bourdonnais won most of the pools. Furthermore, Saint-Amant contradicts himself in 1847, where he agrees with the earlier accounts. In his much later account in the *Illustrated London News* (9 July 1870, p.48) taken from *La Stratégie*, Staunton (or his source) again confuses the names of the two French players, saying that "Deschapelles came off conqueror; Labourdonnais balanced his gains and losses, and Cochrane was the most ill-treated." Quite likely, this account was based on Saint-Amant's 1844 account. On balance, it seems likely that Saint-Amant simply inverted the two names in error in 1844 and corrected himself in 1847.

If we accept that there were twenty-one pools, not twenty-one games, then knowing how many pools each player won does not actually tell us how many games each player won. For those interested in assessing playing strength of historical players based on their results, we need to know the score in terms of games. To win a pool, one had to beat both opponents. So, in fourteen of the pools, for example (if we believe Staunton's numbers), de la Bourdonnais won against both the others. But we don't know the result of the game between the other two players, who did not win the pool. Thus, overall, we know the result of only two-thirds of the games: twenty-eight wins for de la Bourdonnais (fourteen against each opponent), twelve wins for Deschapelles (six against each opponent) and two wins for Cochrane (one against each opponent). But each player should have played twenty-one games against each opponent. It is conceivable, of course, that the third game in a pool might not always have been played if the first two were won by the same player, thus clinching the round. But in any case, this interpretation of the results gives (B = Bourdonnais; C = Cochrane; D = Deschapelles; W = winner):

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | 0 |
| C | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | 1 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ? |
| D | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | ? |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| D | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| W | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | B | D | D | D | D | D | D | C |

The pools could, of course, have been in any order. Alternatively, we can represent the results in a crosstable, thinking of it as a twenty-one round all-play-all tournament involving only three players:

| | B | C | D | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | x | 14 + ? | 14 + ? | 28 + ? |
| C | 1 + ? | x | 1 + ? | 2 + ? |
| D | 6 + ? | 6 + ? | x | 12 + ? |
| | 7 + ? | 20 + ? | 15 + ? | 63 |

Another possibility is that a win against one opponent and a draw against the other could have sufficed to win a round, if the opponent who got the draw did not also beat the other opponent. Although we cannot rule this out, in that era draws were almost universally considered not to count in matches, and were in any case much more rare than in later eras (the Lewis-Deschapelles match notwithstanding). The idea that a score of 1½ by player B in a round beats scores of ½ and 1 by players C and D respectively may be a modern one. In the context of the time if player B won against player C, and the other two games were drawn, for example, then the result between B and D might be considered not yet to be determined and needing to be replayed. In any case, someone had to win the stakes in each round, so if draws counted, something would have to have been done in the case of a tie, with scores of 1-1-1 or 1½-1½-0. We don't hear about these details. Most likely, any draws were simply replayed.

Let us assume that there were no draws (or if there were they were few and replayed, unless perhaps the other player had already won the pool) and that all sixty-three games were played. Then the result of forty-two games is known, namely those wins needed to win a pool. It is an interesting exercise in probability theory to determine the best estimate of the outcomes of the other twenty-one games whose result is unknown. If we take the 'maximum likelihood' estimate as best, then the calculation shows that the number of wins in the unknown games between each pair of players are most likely to be in the same proportion as those in the known games between the same pair of players. The estimated unknown scores and total scores are then as follows:

| Pairing | Known Games | Unknown (Estimate) | Total (Estimate) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bourd.-Cochr. | 14/15 (+14-1) | 5.6/6 (*5½-½*) | 19.6/21 (*19½-1½*) |
| Bourd.-Desch. | 14/20 (+14-6) | 0.7/1 (*½-½*) | 14.7/21 (*14½-6½*) |
| Cochr.-Desch. | 1/7 (+1-6) | 2.0/14 (*2-12*) | 3.0/21 (*3-18*) |

Thus, to take an example, we estimate that de la Bourdonnais should have scored 5.6 in his six additional games against Cochrane (i.e., the ones in the pools won by Deschapelles, where de la Bourdonnais and Cochrane were the two 'losers'). Of course, in practice the scores could only be whole numbers or halves (for draws). We give the estimates rounded to the nearest half in italics in the above table. These are the most likely actually realizable scores. The estimated total scores of each player come out as: Bourdonnais, 19½+14½=34 out of forty-two games (81.0%); Cochrane, 1½+3=4½ out of forty-two (10.7%); and Deschapelles, 6½ +18=24½ games out of forty-two (58.3%).

This gives a somewhat different impression than Hooper's and Whyld's 7-0, 7-0, 6-1 interpretation, in which de la Bourdonnais' total score was 14/14 (100%), Cochrane's was 1/14 (7%) and Deschapelles' was 6/14 (42.9%). In particular, from the point of view of estimates of playing strength, a 100% score is vastly different than an 81% score. Hooper's and Whyld's version of events suggests a considerably greater difference in playing strengths between the three players. If draws were counted, or if we used an 'expected value' estimate using a Bayesian approach rather than a 'maximum likelihood' estimate, the estimated playing strengths and thus the estimated game scores would be a little closer to each other still. These estimated results should not be interpreted as my assertion about what actually happened, but rather as an illustration of what a likely outcome of the entire contest might have looked like. I am more certain about the results of the 'known games' in the table above and would like to assert that they reflect historical truth (with reservations because of the possibilities of drawn games).

So can we assess rating differences based on the results of this contest? A 100% score cannot be converted to a rating difference, since the greater the difference in rating, the more likely is a 100% score. Our version, however, gives from the games whose results we know a proportion of 14/15 for de la Bourdonnais against Cochrane, corresponding to a 458-point rating difference (according to the usual logistic formula), and a proportion of 14/20 for de la Bourdonnais against Deschapelles, corresponding to a 147-point rating difference. Of course, Deschapelles was giving pawn and two move odds, and thus was actually stronger than this difference would indicate. If giving the odds of pawn and two gives more than a 147-point rating disadvantage, then this event would indicate that Deschapelles was still slightly stronger than de la Bourdonnais. Both

my version of the results and that given by Hooper and Whyld give a proportion of 6/7 for Deschapelles against Cochrane, corresponding to a 311-point rating difference. Taking account of the odds, of course, suggests that the difference was actually considerably greater. The even match between Cochrane and Deschapelles described below, however, must temper this assessment.

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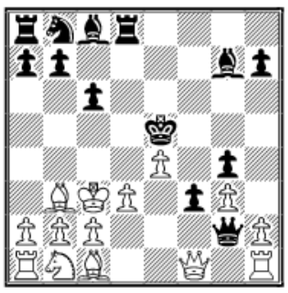
Finally, the apparent existence of an 1821 game won by Cochrane over de la Bourdonnais, mentioned above, is consistent with this interpretation of the triangular contest, but not with that given by Hooper and Whyld. It may explain why Metzner deviated from the account of Hooper and Whyld by claiming that de la Bourdonnais beat Cochrane by a score of only 6-1, rather than 7-0. But we now have a more natural explanation – in winning one pool, Cochrane must have beaten de la Bourdonnais. The game won by Cochrane over de la Bourdonnais included in ChessBase is one of two appearing in *Staunton's Illustrated London News* column (7 August 1869, p.148), the other being a draw. Staunton here dates them as circa 1824. The fact that the publication of these games coincided with the time of Cochrane's final return from India suggests that Staunton got the scores from Cochrane himself. In principle, an 1824 date is not implausible, since Cochrane had not left England for India yet, at least in mid-1824 when the Edinburgh-London correspondence match started, and many years earlier, Staunton had claimed that Cochrane "…played frequently with M. De la Bourdonnais, and of their last fifty games each won twenty-five" (*Chess Player's Chronicle*, v.1, 1841, pp.234-235). De la Bourdonnais did visit London in either 1823 (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 1913, p.882) or 1825 (Hooper and Whyld, *Oxford Companion to Chess*, 1st ed., 1984, p.184). However, the first game, the win by Cochrane, could not have been played in 1823-1825, since it appears (without player attributions) in Cochrane's book, 'A Treatise on the Game of Chess,' published in 1822 (pp.276-278). It is almost certain then that this game, at least, belongs to the triangular contest of 1821.

Since it is perhaps the least accessible of the games of these events that has survived, I give here the drawn game between Cochrane and de la Bourdonnais, 'c1824' according to Staunton, but possibly 1821, like the other game of the pair. I have reversed the colours to match modern convention, as de la Bourdonnais actually played first with the black pieces.

**White: de la Bourdonnais**
**Black: Cochrane**
Paris, 1821?, c1824?

**1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.Bc4 g4 5.Ne5 Qh4+ 6.Kf1 f3 7.g3 Qh3+ 8. Kf2 Qg2+ 9.Ke3 Bh6+ 10.Kd3 d5 11.Bxd5 c6 12.Bxf7+ Ke7 13.Qf1 Kf6 14.Bxg8 Kxe5 15.Bb3 Rd8+ 16.Kc3 Bg7 17.d3**



**17… Kd6+ 18.d4 Kc7 19.Bf4+Kb6 20.e5 a5 21.Nd2 Ka7 22.Qxg2 fxg2 23.Rhg1 b5 24.Ne4 Bf5 25.Rae1 Na6 26.a3 c5 27.Nxc5 Rac8 28.Bf7 Nxc5 29.dxc5 Rxc5+ 30.Kb3 Rxc2 31.Rc1 Rdc8 32.Rxc2 Rxc2 33.Bd5 Re2 34.Rxg2 Re1** and the result was a drawn battle. (*Illustrated London News*, 7 August 1869, p.148.)

Two of the wins by Deschapelles (giving odds of pawn and two move) over Cochrane are well known. The one given by Hooper and Whyld

appears in *Le Palamède*, v.2, 1837, p.431 (though the date given there is 1822); both appear in Walker's 'Chess Studies,' 1844, games 419 and 420; and both originate from Cochrane's 'A Treatise on the Game of Chess,' 1822, pp.70-73.

The match between Cochrane and Deschapelles following the triangular contest is described pretty consistently. This was played without odds but Deschapelles bet two to one on each game so that he had to win two thirds of the games to break even, which he failed to do. I have not found any reports of the number of games or the exact score. Only one of these games seems to have been preserved, a win by Cochrane that Cochrane again published in his 'A Treatise on the Game of Chess' (1822, pp.251-253). He did not name the players there, but it was identified by de la Bourdonnais and Méry in *Le Palamède* (v.2, 1837, p.431), and appeared in the *Chess Player's Chronicle* (v.2, 1841, p.151), *Le Palamède* (1844, pp.318-320), Walker's 'Chess Studies' (1844, game 424), Staunton's 'Chess Player's Handbook' (1847, p.176) and later sources.

The quote from the 1847 volume of *Le Palamède* above continues (2nd series, v.7, 1847, p.506):

> M. Cochrane, mécontent de toutes ses parties à Pion et deux traits contre Deschapelles, lui proposa de jouer à but un contre deux. Deschapelles n'y consentit qu'après l'avoir prévenu qu'il n'en gagnerait peut-être pas une. Cochrane, admirable sur les Gambits, versé à fond sur le *Giuoco-Piano*, et possédant d'ailleurs une érudition vaste et complète de tout ce que les meilleurs auteurs ont écrit sur les débuts, gagna plus du tiers des parties, et par conséquent rattrapa une partie de son argent perdu à Pion et deux traits. Quinze ans après, Deschapelles nous le rappelait encore naïvement: « Pendant les vingt premiers coups, disait-il, j'avais toujours mauvais jeu, et je ne gagnais que des parties qu'on jugeait désespérées. »

The translation from the *Chess Player's Chronicle* continues (v.9, 1848, p.60):

> Mr. Cochrane, tired of playing at Pawn and two moves with Deschapelles, proposed to play him even, betting one to two. Deschapelles did not consent to this arrangement before intimating to Mr. Cochrane he would not perhaps gain a single game. Cochrane, admirable in the Gambits, perfectly at home in the Giuoco Piano, and possessing besides a vast and complete knowledge of all the best authors who have written on the openings, won more than a third, and consequently recovered a part of the money he had lost at Pawn and two moves. Fifteen years afterwards, M. Deschapelles still naively recounted to us "For the first twenty moves I had always a bad game, and I only won games that were considered desperate."

A similar account appears in the 1844 volume of *Le Palamède* (2nd series, v.4, 1844, p.313).

If our interpretation of the financial side of the triangular contest is correct, each player bet a total of twenty-one napoleons, de la Bourdonnais winning back 14 x 3 = 42 napoleons, for a profit of twenty-one, Deschapelles won back 6 x 3 = 18 napoleons, for a net loss of three (close to balancing gains against losses), and Cochrane won back only three napoleons and thus had a net loss of eighteen. By winning more than a third of the games in his even match with Deschapelles, Cochrane would have done better than break even and would thus have recovered some of his money from the triangular contest.

The translation above makes it ambiguous as to whether Deschapelles was being arrogant or humble (who, exactly, does he say would not win a single game?), but the original French makes his humility clear: he did not expect to win a single game against Cochrane playing even because he had not studied the openings in the conventional game. The remark by Deschapelles that he won only the 'desperate' games implies at least that he did win some of the games (plural, so at least two). Thus, there must have been at the very least four games in the match, in order for Deschapelles to win at least two and Cochrane to win more than a third. And however many games were played, Cochrane's total could not have exceeded one-third of the games by as much as six games, as then he'd have made up all his losses from the triangular contest, and we hear that he only partially made up for his losses. This gives at least some feel for how the match went, though Cochrane's score still could have been as different as, for example, 5/14 (36%) or 9/11 (82%) and still satisfy these constraints.

This is not accurate enough to be able to assess the rating difference between Deschapelles and Cochrane with any reliability. In fact, it is difficult to interpret meaningfully a single rating for a player like Deschapelles, who had had a huge amount of practice at giving pawn and two move odds, but who had very little knowledge of conventional openings. Ratings are, essentially, just a means to predict scores between

pairs of players. Whatever rating we propose for Deschapelles, we will either predict scores too low when playing at pawn and two, or too high when playing even. The best we can do is balance the two to account for overall ability in a variety of circumstances. Despite his experience at the pawn and two move game, he certainly couldn't have expected to win at those odds against a player who was anywhere near his own strength (recall that he lost to Lewis at pawn and move odds). But Cochrane's opening knowledge made him much closer to Deschapelles' strength in the conventional game. And according to Saint-Amant (*Le Palamède*, 2nd series, vol.4, 1844, p.314), Cochrane was not used to receiving pawn and two move odds, and so was disadvantaged by lack of practice in that game.

On balance, we have to conclude that Cochrane was still in 1821 much weaker than either de la Bourdonnais or Deschapelles, and that these two were close to equal, with Deschapelles still possibly stronger in raw ability, though weaker in opening knowledge in the conventional game. The three games between Lewis and Deschapelles are not enough to assess relative strength with any confidence, but in themselves they suggest something close to equality, though Lewis would later lose a seven-game match to de la Bourdonnais +2–5. Thus, de la Bourdonnais, who was still young, was probably gaining in strength. Cochrane must also have improved considerably, especially if we believe Staunton's assertion that he won twenty-five of his last fifty games against de la Bourdonnais, presumably a few years after the 1821 event. In later years, these four players continued to show that they were capable of holding their own against the next generation. Lewis was giving McDonnell odds of pawn and move or pawn and two moves in 1829 and claimed to still be able to give him odds at the time of the McDonnell-de la Bourdonnais matches in 1834. Cochrane beat everyone but Staunton during his leave from 1841-1843. Deschapelles came out of retirement in 1836 and 1842 to defeat (or tie while giving odds) Saint-Amant, Schulten and de la Bourdonnais again. De la Bourdonnais dominated over everyone else until his death in 1840. The era of the early encounters between these four illustrious characters, then, is aptly called 'the time of the battles of giants.'

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