



FOREWORD BY PRESIDENT OF ICELAND GUÐNI TH. JÓHANNESSON

The Republic of Iceland is young. Iceland did not become a fully independent republic until 1944, when it was one of the smallest nations in the world. In the early years of the Republic, Icelanders had to demonstrate to themselves and others that they could stand on their own feet, be a nation among nations. That required economic development, a campaign for control over the fishing grounds around the island, and augmentation of communications and other infrastructure.



But we also had a need for improvements to education and more support for culture and the arts. We built schools and other educational institutions, a National Theatre, a National Museum, libraries and art galleries.

Moreover, we had the opportunity to celebrate Icelanders' achievements in the international arena. Novelist Halldór Laxness won the Nobel Prize for Literature; Icelanders excelled in sports; and scientists made their mark.

And then there was Friðrik Ólafsson. At a young age, he attracted attention for his performance at the chessboard. In 1953, Icelanders celebrated as Friðrik won the Nordic Chess Championship for the first time. Five years later, the nation

rejoiced again when he became Grandmaster, the first Icelander to achieve that tribute.

More victories followed. Throughout his career, Friðrik Ólafsson carried the reputation of his nation around the world. He gained renown for his brilliance at the chessboard, and equally for his refinement and elegance. Thus, Friðrik won the respect and admiration of all Icelanders, as well as vast numbers of chess fans internationally.

In the chess world, Friðrik was elected to high office, serving as president of the World Chess Federation, FIDE. He went on to

establish a chess school in Iceland, and some years ago he once again excelled as a member of the Icelandic team at the World Senior 50+ Team Chess Championship. At that time, more than sixty years had passed since Friðrik first competed for our country.

Last year a fine new biography of Friðrik Ólafsson was published in Icelandic – a fitting tribute to his life and his achievements in chess. Now that is followed by an excellent overview in English, about Friðrik and his chess style. I welcome this initiative and express my thanks to all who have been involved in the publication.

PREFACE

THE CHESS SAGA OF FRIDRIK

Fridrik Ólafsson may be the strongest chess player of the 20th century about whom until now no book existed in any of the big languages. It feels great to present to the world this first book outside Iceland about the chess career of their first and most prominent grandmaster.

During 25 years from about 1955 to 1980 he was one of the world's ten to fifty best players, in spite of coming from remote Iceland and in spite of giving priority also to his studies, his job, his family, and being elected President of FIDE.

Fridrik Ólafsson has had a personal attacking style which you may study and admire in this book, with more than 50 games explained by Fridrik himself. Among his victims are World Champions Tal, Petrosian, Fischer and Karpov, and other top players of the era like Keres, Geller, Korchnoi, Taimanov, Averbakh, Stein, Najdorf, Panno, Larsen, Gligorić, Uhlmann, Benkö, Portisch, Szabo, O'Kelly, Donner and Unzicker, and also somewhat younger players like Hübner, Tukmakov, Savon, Kavalek, Smejkal, Ribli, Sax, Quinteros, Andersson, Timman, Browne, Miles and Seirawan.

The platform of the book is Fridrik's own Icelandic games collection from 1976 "*Vid skákborðid í aldarfjórðung – 50 valdar sóknar skákir*" (*At the chess board for a quarter of a century – 50 selected chess games*). Another appropriate name of his book would have been "50 Attacking Games".

There are many lessons to be learnt here about both how to build an attack and how to carry it out.

The work on an English edition started in Reykjavik 2009 when Fridrik presented to Gunnar Finnlaugsson the handwritten manuscript with a translation of his Icelandic book, made by the late Icelandic chess player and English teacher Björn Jóhannesson. Gunnar later got exclusive game commentaries to this book from grandmasters Tiger Hillarp Persson, Axel Smith, Ian Rogers and Yasser Seirawan, and was permitted to use annotations by Margeir Pétursson, Jóhann Hjartarson and Jan Timman.

Gunnar Finnlaugsson (born 1947) is the Icelandic chess player who moved to the Swedish town Lund in 1976 and kept both his citizenship and enthusiasm for his home country. In 1975 and 77 he had participated in the top group of the Icelandic Championship.

In 2016 Gunnar asked me to take over the writing and





Gunnar Finnlaugsson in Reykjavik 2011.

publishing of this book in English. More than three years later did I realize that the project still waited for me. When back in 1999 I wrote and released a book on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Nordic Chess Federation, I asked Fridrik Ólafsson and Bent Larsen to write one brief chapter each, and I was very grateful that they just did it. Now it is time for me to pay my respect for the chess heritage of Fridrik Ólafsson and his country.

Iceland and Icelandic chess are both something special, and not least for us Norwegians, since this beautiful and to some degree frightening island was settled mainly by Norwegian emigrants from the 9th century onwards. The written accounts of this early history – the famous Icelandic Sagas – disclose that board games – first *hnefatafl* and later chess – were always popular in this country, this due to the long winters.

The Icelandic names are part of the proud history. Contrary to all countries around, the Icelanders still give children a traditional name, combined with the information usually of who is their father, and only in a few cases instead who is their mother. Family names are very rare, so Fridrik Ólafsson tells that the boy is Fridrik and a son of Ólafur. First names are most important. In Iceland “Fridrik against Larsen” is the normal way to mention games between the Nordic chess stars Fridrik Ólafsson and Bent Larsen.

As for Icelandic names in the book, we have tried to get the accents right, like Ólafsson, while instead of the special Icelandic letters *ð* like in Friðrik and *þ* like in Þorbergsson, we usually write Fridrik and Thórbergsson, in English. We make exceptions in the heading of the games, telling in Icelandic who is White and Black.

I thank Guðmundur G. Thórarinsson (Guðmundur G. Þórarinsson) who wrote a nice introduction to the book, explaining Fridrik's importance both for his country and for Icelandic chess. He also wrote a text about Fridrik's decisive importance in getting the 1972 World Championship match to Reykjavik.

In 1972 President Kristján Eldjárn decorated Fridrik with the “The Knight of Iron Cross of the Icelandic Falcon Order”, and in 1980 he got “The Great Knight of Iron Cross of the Icelandic Falcon Order” from President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. Meanwhile Fridrik Ólafsson was elected “Man of the Year” in 1978. He is an honorary member of FIDE since 2014 and honorary citizen of Reykjavik since 2015.

An extra motivation for this book is that the proud Icelandic chess history has been mostly described and printed only in the beautiful, but tiny language, which is read and understood only by 365.000 native Icelanders.

The same applies much to Nordic chess history in general, except for the extra big names of Bent Larsen and Magnus Carlsen. Our Nordic chess history is quite hidden, but not insignificant. While chess writings have been understood and translated between the big European languages like Russian, English, German, French and Spanish, Nordic sources rarely exist even in books and on web pages from major chess history writers.

I met Fridrik for the first time during the Nice Olympiad 1974, when as a young train tourist I got his autograph, among many world stars there, and also took a photo of him at play, which now found its way into this book, together with other photos I took particularly during the next Chess Olympiads.



Grandmaster Tiger Hillarp Persson annotated five games for this book.

My special thanks to everybody who contributed to this book over the years, in addition to the game annotators mentioned already. Gunnar Finnlaugsson created a resource group with the top guys Calle Erlandsson, Johan Sigeman, Axel Smith, Peter Holmgren and Hans Tikkanen, and also Gunnar's wife Gunilla and their son Johannes contributed.

I am happy that the book includes quite many nice photos and also a few drawings. Two valuable sources were the Dutch National Archives at nationaalarchief.nl and the Icelandic Chess Heritage Society website skaksogufelagid.is, and we thank also Calle Erlandsson, Einar S. Einarsson, Bjørn Berg Johansen, the late Arinbjörn Guðmundsson and others, some unidentified, for their valuable contributions.

Further big thanks to the proof-readers Tony Gillam and Hakon Adler and to our graphical designer Tommy Modøl.

And most of all we thank Fridrik Ólafsson, whose chess games we are given the privilege to share with the world through this book. More than 50 of them are presented with his own lucid and instructive commentaries written in the 1970s, long before chess engines took over. I have let the engines Stockfish and Komodo add only a few critical corrections and updates, printed in parentheses.

It has been a nice journey for me to see and study many of Fridrik's games for the Chess Saga. Altogether the book has 118 of his games, including four game finishes. It is a rich treasure to enjoy.

Drammen, January 2021

Øystein Brekke



Fridrik beside the bust of him in the Reykjavik Chess Club (Tauffélag Reykjavíkur), which was unveiled on January 26th 2020, his 85th birthday.