

MY BEST MOVE

Fred Wilson

Noted Chess
Bookseller

Became a Master
at age 71

MY BEST MOVE IS TWOFOLD, CONSISTING of two moves made almost exactly 50 years apart; the first was played over the board while the second, and most important, was made in “real life.”

My first “best move” was played in the fifth round of the Manhattan Open on August 6th, 1967. I was 21 years old, already married with two kids, rated 2049, and still trying to “make master”—a quest that began in 1961 at the New York City Junior Championship, where I’d scored only 3-3, but did win the “best-played game” prize awarded by GM Bill Lombardy, and got my first US Chess rating (1704). After four rounds I had three points, having lost to GM Nicolas Rossolimo in the second round (in a good game published both by *The New York Times* and *Chess Review*). And now I faced future-IM Walter Shipman and played what is still probably my best game ever:

MY BEST GAME EVER

Fred Wilson
Walter Shipman
Manhattan Open, 1967 (5)



AFTER 20. ... Bb5

After about five minutes’ thought I felt I was somewhat worse, but then after another 10 minutes or so I found it:

21. Qxb5!! My Best Move. 21. ... axb5 22. Nxd6 Rc2 23. Nxe8 Qxe8 24. Rfe1 f5

Risky. Probably Black should play 24. ... Rc8, with the idea of keeping the d-pawn under control, with more or less even chances.

25. Kf1 Qe4 26. Rbd1! h5? 27. Bd6! Qc4 28.



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“I was used to dealing with tactical surprises and I handle time pressure well.”

Bc5 Bxc5 29. bxc5 Qxc5 30. d6 Qc8 31. d7 Qd8 32. Nd4 Rxf2+ (The best try.) 33. Kxf2 Qxd7 34. Nf3 Qe7 35. Rd5 g4 36. Red1! Qa3 37. Rd8+ Kf7 38. R8d7+ Ke8 39. Ng5 Qb2+ 40. R1d2 Qf6 41. Rd8+ Qxd8 42. Rxd8+ Kxd8 43. Ne6+ Kd7 44. Nd4 b4 45. Ke2 Kd6 46. Nxf5+ Ke5 47. Nd4 Ke4 48. Nb3 h4 49. Nd2+ Ke5 50. g3 h3 51. Kd3, Black resigned.

I tied for first place with GMs Rossolimo, Pal Benko and Arthur Bisguier, winning \$167.50 (a week’s pay back then!) and gaining 80 rating points.

This brings me to the second, absolutely crucial “best move” I had to make in my life, though this time it was totally *forced*. After 38 years at the same location, my little bookshop, Fred Wilson Chess Books, had to move out. My old (1854) six-story office building at 799 Broadway in New York City—formerly the St. Denis Hotel where Paul Morphy stayed in 1857 and Abraham Lincoln in 1860—was sold for one hundred million dollars in early 2017 and will be replaced by a modern tech building. All 60 small businesses had to move out by the middle of 2018 and the new owner told us that any remaining months on our leases would be waived as soon as we left.

But here being a good chessplayer helped. I was used to dealing with tactical surprises and I handle time pressure well. I immediately began scouring my Greenwich Village neighborhood looking for anything affordable nearby, got on many waiting lists, and discovered to my horror why local realtors refer to my area as the “gold coast!” Everything was so expensive!

Putting on my best negotiator face, I entered a beautiful old (1896), 11-story building at 41 Union Square West. Wow! Seeing the large room (170 square feet) with a 12-foot ceiling, the original yellow oak floor, a handy, well-built storage loft, and a large window looking north out over Broadway with a spectacular view of the Empire State Building, I immediately said “I love it!” So much for my negotiator face, but the good news is I could afford it and moved my inventory of 2,000 chess books and dozens of vintage chess sets and clocks here on Dec. 19th, 2017.

And here on 17th Street is where I will stay, at least until I achieve both of my remaining goals: to be in business for 50 consecutive years and to become the oldest player to reach 2300. Or, die trying. ♠