



Aron Nimzowitsch

(born Nov.7, 1886, died Mar.16,1935) Latvia (citizen of Denmark)

Aron Nimzowitsch, born in Riga, Latvia in 1886, came to prominence in the chess world just before the First World War. He won a string of international events in the mid-1920s which led him to challenge Jose Raul Capablanca to a World Championship match in 1925, but negotiations dissolved after monetary backing could not be found.

Nimzowitsch's chess theories flew in the face of convention. He had a lengthy and somewhat bitter conflict with Siegbert Tarrasch over which ideas constituted proper chess play. While Tarrasch refined the *classical approach* of Wilhelm Steinitz, that the center had to be controlled and *occupied by pawns*, Nimzowitsch shattered these dogmatic assumptions, and *proposed the controlling of the center with pieces afar*. In this way, the opponent is invited to occupy the center with pawns which thus become the targets of attack. This idea became known as the *hypermodern school* of chess thought.

Nimzowitsch, along with other hypermodern thinkers such as Richard Reti, revolutionized chess, proving to the chess world that *controlling the center of the board mattered more than actually occupying it*. Nimzowitsch is also a highly-regarded chess writer, most famously for the 1925 classic *My System*, to this day regarded as one of the most important chess books of all time. Other books include *Chess Praxis* which further expounds the hypermodern idea, and the seminal work *The Blockade* explores the strategy implied by his famous maxim, "First restrain, then blockade, finally destroy!"

As a profound opening theoretician, Nimzowitsch has left a legacy of variations, many of which are still popular today. The Nimzo-Indian Defense (1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4) is named after him, as are several variations of the French Defense. He also is credited in part for the Sicilian, Nimzowitsch-Rubinstein Variation (1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nf6), the Nimzowitsch-Larsen Attack (1.b3), the Nimzowitsch Defense (1.e4 Nc6) and many others. His theories and innovations have enriched master play through the years to a degree which is almost incredible.

Without exception, every great master who achieved success from 1925 on, showed definite traces of the Nimzowitsch influence. What is so remarkable about the system? Look over the table of contents in his book *My System*, and every element in it seems so obvious, so logical. But that is precisely the measure of how widespread Nimzowitsch's ideas have become. The importance of the center and centralization, the usefulness of open files, and seventh rank, the strength of the passed Pawn, the proper treatment of end-game play, the utilization of the pin, the significance of the pawn-chain, the weakness of the doubled Pawn, the value of restraint, prophylaxis, over-protection, maneuvering against weaknesses—"of course" we all knew about those details! Perhaps; but no one had the great synthesizing genius, the profound absorption in the game, the distinguished teaching ability of Nimzowitsch; nor had the strength to hold out against the ridicule of the entire chess world for two decades.

Nimzowitsch died at a time when he was at last recognized for the great man that he was. Luckily for us, he left a lasting heritage, which will give future generations as much pleasure as it caused him anguish.