

BETWEEN A ROOK AND A HARD SPOT

Sherwood Moore

36 years of accumulated stories

Sportsmanship is an important feature of chess. All players should be good sports, win, lose, or draw. John Barto was an exceptionally good sport. Whether he won, drew, or lost, John was always a gentleman. It was because of this that the satellite to the State Closed was named for John. I have always tried to imitate his graciousness, but there have been times when I've failed.

In 2003, we (Montana Chess community) had a new player from another country. The January Thaw was being conducted in Helena. Dan McCourt was doing the directing. I was paired with our new arrival in the first round. Going into the middle game, I anchored a knight on e6. My opponent had not castled. He attempted to castle Queenside. I explained, in a soft voice that he could not castle through check.

He whispered back, "I not in check."

I said, "I know, but you cannot castle through check either.

In a loud voice he announced, "I Not in Check!"

I answered, "I know. BUT you cannot..." At that point my opponent made a move I had not anticipated.

"HE CHEATS! HE CHEATS!" he shrieked! Standing and pointing his finger at me. Of course, ALL the other players stopped and looked at me. I stopped the clock and motioned for Dan; who indicated we should follow him into the kitchen of the playing site.

I explained, over my opponents outcries, what had transpired. Dan then took the rulebook and began explaining the rule, showing the rule to my opponent. As it was going to take a bit, I exited the kitchen and returned to table. A few minutes passed and my opponent returned and seated himself.

"I not know the rule," he whispered.

"OK," I responded and started the clock.

My opponent offered his hand, and I reached to shake it and heard him softly whisper, "I offer a draw."

I jerked my hand, shook my head, and went on to win the game.

Dan told me later that this person was noted for such shenanigans. I thought of John Barto, and how HE would have felt of such behavior. He'd smiled, shaken his head, and slowly walked away.