

# Draughts Champion Supreme... the story of Arnold Fitzpatrick

**A**UGHAVAS IN THE PAST has been well known for its renowned footballers of never-say-die spirit. It also has another distinction in that one of its sons was the first Irishman to compete for the World Professional Draughts Championship in 1984.

Arnold Fitzpatrick was incapacitated in his young days with the result that having completed infants in National School, he subsequently had to miss out on 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th class and had just one year, in 6th class, to prepare for second level education from which he emerged to go on to University and a 30 year career in teaching in Rossy NS, Keshcarrigan VS and Carrigallen VS.

During his time in incapacity he could not move any part of his body except his head and his hands, being enclosed for two years in a case of steel and subsequently required three years to acquire the ability to walk again. During this time his father presented him with a draught board for Christmas while he was on his back looking up at the ceiling. He could with difficulty look down on his chest and the draught board. A love was born.

A light shone in the wilderness when Hugh Pat Charles, who now resides opposite the Mart in Carrigallen and formerly of Drumshanbo North built a trolley with castors that meant Arnold could be moved outside the house on sunny days with his paternal grandmother, Rose, in close attention.

Arnold was taught the finer points in draughts by the great Con Moran, Aughaloch. He always stated that one could not have had a better teacher. It is not very often that one can find a person who teaches someone who subsequently goes on to compete for a world title. According to Arnold, 'Con was a very special teacher'.

Arnold won the first 32-County Professional Championship in 1977 and has been a member of the Irish International team since then. With his great friend, Tubbercurry native and Irish team captain, Con McCarrick, he has been continuously selected on the European

team that take on the Americans in Petal, Mississippi and Las Vegas.

Arnold Fitzpatrick lost his battle for the World Title by one game in forty—in that one game, seventeen of eighteen endings won (new corrected published play) and one lost, which his opponent Mr Johnston of Canada found to his credit.

Arnold was regularly found by his wife, Kathleen, during school holidays, at tables in the sitting room and dining room of their home at early hours in the morning amongst his 42 draught boards and hundreds of draught books, not having visited a bed during the night.

This ferocious attention to detail and dedication is absolutely essential to be in contention with the top professional players in the world.

When Arnold won the British Open Championship—a competition open to every player in the world—he was entitled by right to compete for the world championship at that time, 1983. However the Irish Champion was not allowed to compete. Fitzpatrick refused to compete under the Union Jack and would only compete under an Irish flag. The ACF (American Checker/Draughts Federation) relented, the chief world body in Draughts allowed Arnold compete under the Green, White and Gold.

He continues to play on the Irish team, and says that he 'partakes in a game—Chess—which requires less intellectual ability, but is still a brilliant game—not really a game but a 'battle'.

His great friend, Pat McCarthy, Castle-townbears, Co Cork, who lived in England and left us at 59 years, was according to Arnold the greatest Irish Draughts player of all time. He was the second and only other Irishman, after Fitzpatrick to play for the World title—a match which he drew against the World Champion, Ronald King of Barbados 2-2-36.

Arnold is also immersed in Darts and has marked at the highest level. He has marked at the Winmau Masters in Park Lane, London



and has been asked to mark at the World Championship in Frimley Green, Lakeside, next year. He has marked games which involved his great friend, the 'Viking' Andy Fordham and has marked games for his friends in world competition such as the Dutch players Co Strompe, Ronald Scholten and Raymond Barnevelolt and ex world champion and commentator, John Part of Canada. Arnold has also been a judge in Boxing at ringside.

Like his father, the late Master P. of Ceili House, Mohill he has made a tremendous contribution to generations of boys and girls over the years in his teaching profession.

He still plays a major role in World Draughts, having already been Chairman of the Irish Draughts Association for eight years, and having refereed several World Championship matches and is in constant contact with the English Draughts Association and the American Checkers Federation.

Arnold Fitzpatrick has never sought a public profile, either nationally or locally, preferring to do whatever had to be done with his head held low without any fanfare.

Perhaps in his mature years he will yet win Leitrim its greatest accolade—that of having a World champion.

We, in Leitrim, look forward to that day.