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Soviet Chess Grandmaster Boris Spassky Dies at 88

By AFP

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Boris Spassky in 1973. **Vladimir Savostyanov / TASS**

Soviet chess grandmaster Boris Spassky, best known for his Cold War-era defeat to American Bobby Fischer, has died at 88, the Russian Chess Federation announced late Thursday.

"The tenth world champion Boris Spassky has died at 88," the federation said in a statement, calling his passing a "great loss for the country." It did not specify the date or cause of death.

Spassky is best remembered for his 1972 world championship match against Fischer, a contest that became a symbol of U.S.-Soviet rivalry during the Cold War.

The match, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, has since been chronicled in numerous books, documentaries and films. It also inspired Walter Tevis' novel "The Queen's Gambit," which was adapted into a hit Netflix series in 2020.

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Spassky won the world championship title in 1969 but faced mounting pressure when he defended it against Fischer. The Soviet Union had dominated chess for decades, and Spassky was expected to uphold its supremacy.

He initially took the lead, but Fischer staged a remarkable comeback, ultimately claiming victory and breaking the Soviet stranglehold on the game.

Although the defeat was seen as a major blow to Moscow, Spassky later admitted that losing the title was a relief, freeing him from the "colossal responsibility" of representing Soviet chess.

Born in 1937 in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Spassky displayed exceptional talent from a young age. He became the junior world champion and, at 18, the youngest grandmaster in history at the time.

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