



The 2004 Aeroflot Open

Misha Savinov

2004 Aeroflot Open

ChessCafe is pleased to present its coverage of the powerful 2004 Aeroflot Open. Mikhail (Misha) Savinov is our man in Moscow for the tournament. We are sure you will enjoy his exclusive coverage of the 2004 Aeroflot Open...

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March 2: Final Wrap Up



ChessCafe's Misha Savinov

The 2004 Aeroflot Open is now history and grandmaster Sergey Rublevsky from Kazan emerged as its winner. For the third year in a row Russia hosted the strongest open tournament in the world and this time it was officially recognized by the Guinness book of records. Upon returning home I have analyzed four games from the last two rounds, so grab your chess set and enjoy the combinations!

The Rublevsky – Asrian game was similar in style to those played by David Bronstein against some computer programs back in the 90s. White opened the position and paid no attention to material during the attack. In order to restrain the dynamic potential of White's remaining pieces, Black was forced

to transpose into a lost ending even before he reached the 20th move.

Rublevsky,S - Asrian,K [B12]
Aeroflot open (8)

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5

This is an interesting variation that has been employed by Botvinnik, Karpov, Khalifman, and Kramnik.

4.c4!?

Rublevsky responds with a very rare continuation, which might now become popular after this game. Sergey explained that he did not want to allow a typical Caro-Kann pawn structure with its accompanying clear strategic plans, so he opted for a less explored configuration.

4...cxd4 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Nxd4 e6 7.Nc3 Bb4 8.Nxc6 bxc6 9.Bd3 d4?!

To keep his position solid, Black could play 9...Ne7, and if 10.cxd5, 10...Qxd5! The text move is dubious in my opinion.

10.a3 Ba5

The alternative 10...dxc3? 11.axb4 cxb2 12.Bxb2 gives White an excellent position.

11.b4 Bc7?

But this is definitely a mistake: 11...dxc3 12.bxa5 Qxa5 should be preferred, for example 13.Qe2 Ne7 14.0-0 Rb8, and Black is OK, although the absence of his dark squared bishop may tell later in the game.

12.Ne4 Bxe5 13.Qh5 Qc7 14.f4!



This is a powerful move that offers another pawn, which Black dare not take.

14...Bd6

Let's look at what happens after 14...Bxf4 15.0-0 Be5, (15...Qe5 16.Nd6+ Qxd6 17.Bxf4 and White is much better) now White has the unexpected blow: 16.Rxf7!! Bxh2+ 17.Kh1 Qxf7 18.Qxh2 and despite having an extra exchange and two pawns, Black experiences difficulties defending. For instance, 18...Qe7

19.Bg5 Nf6 20.Rf1 0-0 21.Qh4 Rf7 22.Nxf6+ gxf6 23.Bxf6, and Black loses.

Also, after the slower 16.Ra2!? the attack is still quite dangerous: 16...g6 17.Qh4 f5 18.Ng5 Bf6 19.Re2 Qe7 20.Qg3 e5 21.Bf4 e4 22.Nxe4 fxe4 23.Rxe4 Be6 24.Bd6 Qd7 25.Rfe1 winning.

15.Bb2 Ne7 16.0-0 Bxf4

Obviously a poor decision would be 16...0-0?? 17.Nf6+ gxf6 18.Qxh7#; but no better is the preliminary 16...Ng6 in view of 17.Bxd4 0-0 18.Ng5 h6 19.Nxf7! and White wins.

17.Bxd4 Nf5 18.Bc5 Ba6



Black is desperate to hide his king, even on the queenside, but Rublevsky now strikes a fatal blow.

19.Rxf4! Qxf4 20.Rf1 Qh6

Other retreats are hopeless as well: 20...Qe5 21.Nd6+; 20...Qc7 21.Rxf5 exf5 22.Nd6+. So Black must enter the endgame, which is winning for White

21.Rxf5 Qxh5 22.Nd6+ Kd7 23.Rxh5

Material is nominally even, but not for long. It is impossible for Black to defend all his weaknesses.

23...Raf8 24.b5 Bc8 25.Rh4 Kc7 26.Nxc8 Rxc8 27.Bxa7 Rhd8 28.Be4 Rd1+ 29.Kf2 Rcd8 30.Rxh7 R8d2+ 31.Kg3 Ra2 32.Bc5 Rc1 33.b6+ Kb7 34.Rxg7
Black resigns.

Armenian IM Ara Minasian defeated several 2600+ rated players during the tournament and made a GM-norm in the process. Here is a fine example of his play.

Minasian,Ara - Ehlvest,J [B40] Aeroflot open (8)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d3

Armenian players often follow their own opening paths, without respect to what is theoretically fashionable. The following moves do not require any special commentary, as they are typical for a Closed Sicilian.

3...Nc6 4.c3 Nf6 5.Nbd2 d5 6.Qe2 Be7 7.g3 b6 8.Bg2 Bb7 9.0-0 0-0 10.e5 Nd7 11.Re1 b5 12.h4 a5 13.a4!

This characteristic move is a novelty according to my database. Minasian

improves on White's play from Balashov - Dolmatov, 1979. His next three moves are directed at thwarting Black's queenside plans, in order to later return to his own kingside measures with deadly effect.

13...Ba6 14.axb5 Bxb5 15.c4 dxc4 16.dxc4 Ba6 17.b3 Nb6 18.Ne4 a4

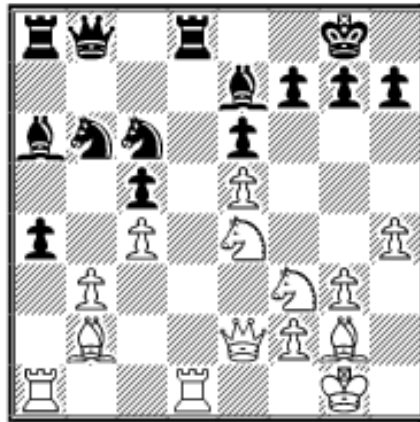
Black's only chances are in a swift queenside counterattack. However, there is no guarantee that it will help him.

19.Rd1 Qb8 20.Bb2!

This move prepares Nf6+, with devilish threats.

20...Rd8

More consistent with the previous play was 20...axb3, although it does not save Black, either. I would like to explore the continuation 21.Nf6+! Bxf6 (the only move) 22.exf6 Bxc4 23.Qe3 Rd8! And Black seems to be able to defend. Now 24.Qg5 does not lead to immediate mate: 24...g6, and on 25.Qh6? Rxd1+! 26.Rxd1 Qf8, holds the position. However, White has the killer move: 25.Ne5!! which wins in all lines! 25...Nxe5 26.Bxe5 h6 27.Qe3! or 26...b2 27.Bxa8! Please check these splendid variations for yourself as this is a real gem of a position.



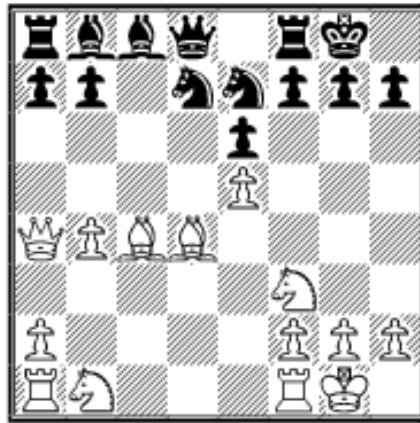
21.Nf6+! Bxf6

White also wins quickly after 21...gxf6 22.exf6 Bf8 23.Ng5 Rxd1+ 24.Rxd1 h6 25.Nxf7! The lone black king is unable to defend against the combined efforts of white's pieces.

22.exf6 Rxd1+ 23.Rxd1 Nd5 24.Ng5 g6 25.Nxe6! Black resigns.

The following game was decisive for capturing first place. It is not particularly impressive by itself, however; covering regular games during the American football season and then omitting the Superbowl because it "was not impressive" wouldn't make much sense.

**Khenkin,I - Rublevsky,S [D21]
Aeroflot open (9)**



Igor Khenkin usually does well at strong opens with a large number of grandmasters; in 2002 he took clear first at the Santo Domingo open ahead of Peter Svidler, Nigel Short, and Viorel Bologan. However, the chance to take first place here was very small as he had the poorest tie-break of all contenders, but still, there was a chance.

**12.Re1 Nf5 13.Bb2 Nb6 14.Qb3 Nxc4
15.Qxc4 Bd7 16.Nc3 Bc6 17.Rad1 Qe7
18.Nd4 Nxd4 19.Rxd4 a6 20.Rg4!?**

The text is no better than the routine 20.Rdd1, which does not offer White any winning chances, but at least it is double-edged.

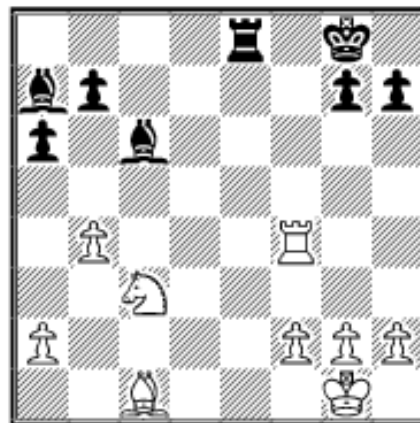
20...Ba7 21.Bc1 f5!

Rublevsky makes the strongest move, which denies his opponent any attacking opportunities.

22.exf6 Qxf6!?

Rublevsky didn't like 22...Rxf6, as after 23.Be3 Bxe3 24.Rxe3 Black has a weakness on e6, and White could continue to mount pressure against it. The pawn sacrifice does not change the evaluation of the position, but offers certain practical chances for both sides.

23.Rf4 Qg6 24.Qxe6+ Qxe6 25.Rxe6 Rfe8 26.Rxe8+ Rxe8



This is a critical position. During the post-mortem Khenkin said that he saw the equalizing 27.Bd2 Rd8 28.Be1 Re8 =. However, he had an extra pawn and decided to try to solve his tactical problems and perhaps play for a win. In general, this reasoning was characteristic for the Aeroflot Open participants. There were very few short draws, as everybody wanted to get a share of the prizes.

27.Kf1!?! Bb8 28.Rc4?!?

Despite the limited material White has to play carefully in order to keep the balance. The text turned out to be inaccurate.

28...Rc8!

There are simply too many white pieces on the c-file! Black now threatens

29...Bxg2+ and 30...Rxc4.

29.Kg1 b5

White played his next move because he discovered that the endgame after 30.Rh4 Bxg2 31.Kxg2 Rxc3 32.Be3 Rc2 33.Rd4 Be5 is unpleasant for him.

30.Rd4?? Be5

What he missed is that 31.Rd3 is met by 31...Be4, one blunder and its game over.

31.Be3 Bxd4 32.Bxd4 Rd8 33.Be5 Rd2 34.f3 Rb2 35.Bd6 Rc2 36.Be5 a5 White resigns.

The most beautiful game of the round and quite possibly of the whole event was played by the experienced Armenian GM Rafael Vaganian. During his chess career he has recorded a number of quick wins as black against very strong opposition, including Ljubojevic, Reshevsky, Beliavsky, and even Tigran Petrosian! So Joel Lautier should not be ashamed to be in such company.

Lautier,J - Vaganian,R [D31] Aeroflot open (9), 2004

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Be7

This was Petrosian's favorite move.

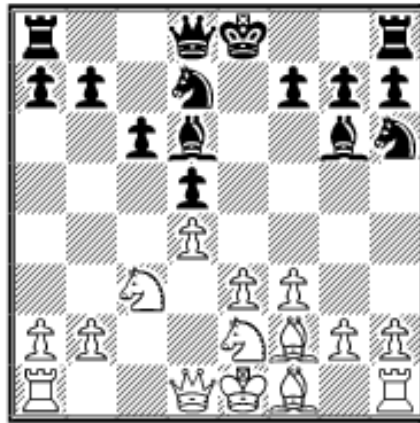
4.cxd5 exd5 5.Bf4 c6 6.e3 Bf5 7.Nge2 Nd7 8.f3 Bg6

We've reached an unusual position, and it may sound strange, but it seems Black's last move was a novelty. So, modern theory is not that comprehensive if we can have a novelty on the eighth move of a QGD.

9.Bg3 Nh6!

This is an interesting idea! Perhaps the most sensible response would be 10.Bf4. 10.e4?! is premature as after 10...dxe4 11.fxe4 Nf6! White can't keep his center intact.

10.Bf2 Bd6



Vaganian is not a dogmatic player. He immediately utilizes the opportunity to bring his bishop to a better diagonal.

11.g4

A creative decision by Lautier, after the possible 11.Bg3!? Black could either repeat the position with 11...Be7, or play 11...Nf5 12.Bxd6 Nxd6, achieving the best piece configuration for a Carlsbad structure. 11.Nc1, aiming to complete development with 12.Bd3

and 13.0-0, looks too slow and Black should not have any problems equalizing. The question is: who said that after 10 moves White still has any opening advantage?

11...f5! 12.h3 0-0

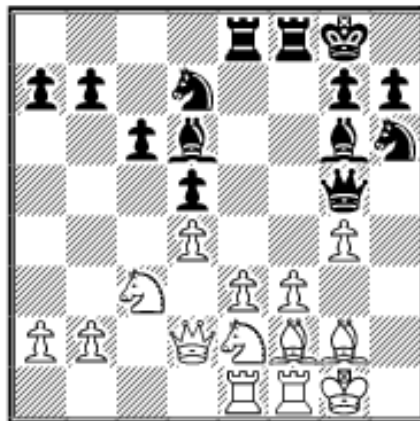
Dr. Tarrasch would probably calculate the tempi and harshly criticize White.

13.Bg2 Qe7 14.0-0 fxe4 15.hxe4 Qg5

Black has the initiative and patiently prepares his pieces for an attack.

16.Qd2 Rae8 17.Rae1

Played in order to untangle his pieces with 18.Bg3, and Black's next move could be considered a prophylactic one against it.



17...Rxf3!!

Even the computer, which generally does not like to sacrifice a rook for two pawns, quickly calculates that Black has a decisive advantage after this stunning move.

18.Bxf3 Nxe4 19.Bg3

No better is 19.Bxe4 Qxe4+ 20.Ng3 Nf6!

19...Nxe3 20.Kh1 Bh5! 21.Bxe5

Or 21.Nf4 Nxf1 22.Rxf1 Qxg3 23.Nxe5 Qh4+ 24.Kg1 Re6 25.Rf2 g6.

21...Qxh5+ 22.Kg1 Qh3

This move threatens mate in one.

23.Rf2 Bxg3 24.Nxg3 Qxg3+ 25.Rg2 Nxg2 26.Rxe8+ Kf7 27.Rc8 Ne3+ 28.Kh1

Black already has three pawns for the exchange. However, he prefers to attack.

28...Nf6! White resigns.

This was a lovely game by Rafael Vaganian, one which secured him second place on tie-break.

So Rublevsky, Vaganian, and Filippov all tied for first. Of the three, Filippov had a better Buchholz tie break score for progress and performance. But Vaganian and Rublevsky each played five games with Black, and Filippov only four, and color distribution was the main tie-breaking factor at the Aeroflot Open this year. Does this rule make sense?

One strong Russian grandmaster, although he is a friend of Rublevsky's, said that he considers Filippov to be the just winner. In my opinion, no tie-break is fair, except for a match between those tied for first, which is, of course, not acceptable in a commercial Swiss with fixed dates. If you find this topic interesting, please post your ideas on how to improve the tie-break system at the [ChessCafe](#) forum.

February 26: Round Nine, Three Tie for First

The 2004 Aeroflot Open has ended in a three way tie between Rublevsky, Vaganian, and Filippov. The new tie-break system, which was inaugurated here, has one important distinction in that it can be calculated as soon as the last round pairings are posted. The best tie-break had Loek Van Wely, followed by Rublevsky, Dreev, Tregubov, Sadvakasov, Vaganian, Filippov, Lautier, Mamedyarov, Berkes, Sasikiran, Graf, Motylev, Fedorov, and Khenkin.

The position of the current leader Filippov suggested that he must play for a win, however; the Siberian grandmaster never pressed his advantage even though he had a small plus against Tregubov throughout the game.

The most lively game took place on board three where Joel Lautier deviated from theory early in his game against Rafael Vaganian. However, he soon realized that while the Armenians are not always up to date in chess theory, they can improvise at the board. Vaganian won a brilliant game in which he sacrificed a rook for two pawns and a terrible attack. Lautier did not have any chances after Black's startling seventeenth move (17...Rxf3!!).

Another decisive result occurred between Khenkin and Rublevsky. Igor Khenkin is very solid player and it seems that Rublevsky stumbled upon a psychologically perfect way to beat him. First Rublevsky sacrificed a pawn in order to gain the bishop pair and some dynamic compensation, then once the queens came off the board, Khenkin had to choose to draw or play for a win with an extra pawn in a position rich with tactical chances. Khenkin chose the latter, missed a hidden tactical blow, and soon resigned. It was then revealed in the post-mortem that he

should have chosen the draw.

At that moment only Loek Van Wely could surpass Rublevsky or Filippov on the score chart. He had the advantage as black against Mamedyarov, who had to give up his rook for a passed pawn on the f-file. However; it turned out that White could save the endgame with three pawns against a pawn and rook, and to the delight of a nervous Rublevsky; Mamedyarov found the correct path. Meanwhile Filippov mechanically played out a drawn position and agreed to the result only after Van Wely's game had finished.

All of the other games in the "6-2" group were drawn as well. Graf and Dreev played an uneventful 24-move draw. Sasikiran pressed against Sadvakasov, but ended up a pawn down and barely managed to hold. Motylev's position against Fedorov looked promising, but was also drawn after about 25 moves. Smirin decided not to test Berkes and started peaceful negotiations soon after the opening.

Ekaterina Kovalevskaya, a member of Russian Olympic team, took the first female prize by drawing a rook ending versus GM Lugovoi. Scoring $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$, she surpassed Tatiana Kosintseva and Kateryna Lahno (who lost to the Russian Olympic team coach Yuri Yakovich) by a half point.



Alexander Khalifman

The rating favorite Vladimir Malakhov finished at $5\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$ and just missed out on winning a prize. Alexander Khalifman scored the same result by winning two and drawing seven games. Among the other players with $5\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$, I would like to mention the Norwegian boy Magnus Carlsen who earned international recognition and a grandmaster norm with his "+2" score and brilliant chess abilities.

GM Rustemov drew with Magnus in the last round and said that "he is a fantastic, genuine chess player who impresses me even more than Karjakin!" This is quite a declaration coming from a player who worked with Alexander Morozevich for a couple of years!

Final standings: 1-3: Rublevsky, Vaganian, and Filippov - 7-2.

4-16: Berkes, Dreev, Fedorov, Graf, Kotsur, Mamedyarov, Markowski, Motylev, Sadvakasov, Sakaev, Sasikiran, Tregubov, and Van Wely - $6\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$.

February 25: Round Eight, Guinness Book

The Aeroflot Open chess festival is now officially in the Guinness book of records. There were 164 grandmasters from 32 countries playing at the hotel Rossija, 61 of them from Russia, 19 from Ukraine, and 11 from China. The Guinness representatives also noted the age differences between the youngest (8) and the eldest (83) participants.

Tournaments "B" and "C" finished today and Alexander Potapov won the latter with 8-1. There were four players tied for first in tournament "B" at $7\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$, and 23 year old Dzhakai Dzhakaev was declared the winner on tie-break.

There was some slight controversy in the main tournament after several players, including Aleksey Aleksandrov and Andrei Kharlov, withdrew from the event prematurely. The organizing committee was unhappy about this and condemned the behavior of the players and called for accountability towards the sponsors. However, I do not understand such reasoning. It is possible that these grandmasters disappointed their colleagues, or the spectators, but what is their responsibility to the sponsors? All of the players, regardless of their ratings or titles, paid the full entry fee to the tournament and none signed any contract, as far as I am aware. Viorel Bologan, for one, did not take this warning seriously, as he withdrew after his 8th round loss.

Valerij Filippov withstood a serious test when playing black against Alexey Dreev. Dreev quickly entered into a complicated endgame in which he held a slight advantage, but Filippov reacted correctly and a draw was agreed on move 28, leaving Filippov alone in first place.



Sergey Movsesian



Giovanni Vescovi

Lautier drew with Tregubov in an even position. Sasikiran and Van Wely also drew a tense 53-move game. Ferenc Berkes has found that due to his relative inexperience, the other players are ready to take risks against him. Although, the Hungarian does not object and capitalizes on his opponents mistakes instead. Today he had an extra passed pawn against Motylev, and the Russian had to perform a miracle to save the game. Therefore, none of the players at $5\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$ managed to reach Filippov.

Their pursuers, however, were more aggressive. Alexey Fedorov confirmed his reputation as one of the most dangerous players at the Aeroflot Open by beating Vladimir Malakhov. Fedorov won two pieces for a rook, and Malakhov was unable to save the resulting endgame. Sergey Rublevsky smashed Karen Asrian with a blazing attack and Rafael Vaganian outplayed his compatriot Tigran

Petrosian. Another Armenian grandmaster, Artashes Minasian, lost to Graf with white. German Igor Khenikin offered a draw to Dmitry Jakovenko and the latter declined, but then risked too much later in the game and lost. Rustemov lost his second game in a row, this time to Mamedyarov. Only Bacrot and Volokitin drew their encounter after a long struggle where Volokitin was unable to utilize his extra pawn in the endgame.

Therefore, after eight rounds there are fourteen players with 6-2, and it is still difficult to predict the outcome of the tournament.

Standings after 8 rounds: Filippov – 6½-1½.

Berkes, Dreev, Fedorov, Graf, Khenkin, Lautier, Mamedyarov, Motylev, Rublevsky, Sadvakasov, Sasikiran, Tregubov, Vaganian, and Van Wely - 6-2.

February 24: Round Seven, The Leader of the Pack

Sooner or later it had to happen and the Aeroflot Open now has a sole leader. Valerij Filippov, a Russian Grandmaster from the Siberian city of Kemerovo, rated 2609 FIDE, won a 65-move thriller to take clear first. His opponent was Alexander Rustemov, rated 2585, and is a very solid, hard-to-beat player. Bearing in mind that Filippov is always playing for a win, this was a volatile pairing. In their two games before the Aeroflot Open, their score is even at 1-1, white having won both games.

Filippov, V - Rustemov, A [A11] Aeroflot open (7)

**1.Nf3 d5 2.g3 Bg4 3.Bg2 Nd7 4.c4 c6 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.Qa4 Ngf6 7.Nc3 Bxf3
8.Bxf3 e6 9.e4**

It is typical of Filippov to create conflict on the board as soon as possible.

9...dxe4 10.Nxe4 Nd5 11.Nc3 N5b6 12.Qa5 Qb8 13.d4 Bd6 14.0-0 a6

This was played to deprive White of the Nc3-b5 maneuver.

15.Ne4 Nd5

15...Bc7 looks more consistent with Black's previous move, however, Rustemov follows his own path.

16.Nxd6+ Qxd6 17.b3

This effectively prevents castling. Now we have an unusual situation - Black can't castle, but doesn't suffer from it!

**17...N7f6 18.Ba3 Qd8 19.Qd2 h6 20.Rac1 Rc8 21.Rxc8 Qxc8 22.Rc1 Qd8
23.Qe1 Kd7!**



An excellent solution by Rustemov! Black prepares 24...Qb8 and 25...Rc8, completing his development. His king feels at home on d7. White's dark squared bishop controls the a3-f8 diagonal, but does not do anything else, and the light squared bishop hits on the fixed knight on d5. Filippov said after the game that he had an advantage after the opening, but this was a huge overstatement. Perhaps it was this wrong evaluation of the position that resulted in loss of his queen in the middlegame.

24.Bxd5?! Nxd5 25.Qe5

White prevented Qb8, but gave up his bishop for the knight and a single check to the king.

25...Rg8 26.Qd6+ Ke8 27.Qc5 f6

Black's king finds a cozy shelter on f7. The position is objectively even and a disappointed Filippov now makes several dubious moves.

28.b4 Qd7 29.Rc2 Kf7 30.Bc1 Rd8 31.a3 Qa4 32.Qc4 Ne7! 33.Be3?!

I did not ask Filippov whether he blundered or decided to mix things up in an attempt to prove the axiom that fortune favors the brave. Whichever it was it immediately gave Black a won position. The alternative was the ugly 33.Rd2 Rc8 34.Qf1, and after 34...Nd5 Black maintains the advantage. Still, winning won positions remains one of the most difficult tasks in chess since the 19th century.

33...Rc8 34.Qxc8 Nxc8 35.Rxc8 Kg6!

Played in order to keep more pawns on board, Rustemov now plays very well until move 43.

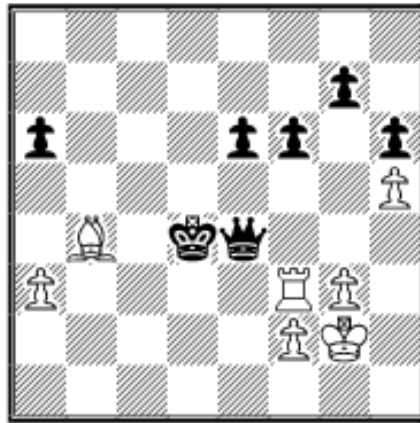
36.Rc3 Qd1+ 37.Kg2 Qa1 38.Bd2 Kf5 39.Rf3+ Ke4 40.b5 Kxd4

The level of activity of Black's king in this game is really impressive.

41.bxa6 bxa6 42.Bb4 Qb1 43.h4 Qe4

Not a mistake, but more precise was 43...h5, placing the pawn where it cannot be attacked by White's bishop.

44.h5 (diagram) f5??



This is a major blunder. After 44...e5 Black still wins easily.

45.Bc3+ Kd5 46.Bxg7 Kd6?

Black panics. Why not 46...Qg4, at least keeping the material balance?

47.Bxh6 Ke7 48.Bc1 Kf6 49.Bd2 Qc6?

This apathetic retreat allows White's next move.

50.g4! Qe4 51.h6

White's h-pawn revitalizes to bring victory.

**51...Qxg4+ 52.Rg3 Qe4+ 53.Kg1 f4 54.Rh3 Qf5 55.Kh2 Qc5 56.Be1 f3
57.Rxf3+ Kg6 58.Bd2 Kh7 59.Be3 Qxa3 60.Rf7+ Kg6 61.Rg7+ Kf6 62.Rg3**

After precise maneuvering, Filippov is ready to continue to push his passed pawn, and there is no way to stop it.

62...Qd6 63.h7 Qb8 64.Bd4+!

This move provides a nice geometric motif for the end.

64...e5 65.Rg8 Black resigns.

What a dramatic game! After a long post-mortem analysis a happy Filippov quickly left the tournament hall, while a pale Rustemov lit one cigarette after another and probably second-guessed the last 20 moves of the game. It is so very painful not to win won positions, especially with \$25,000 at stake. In my last article I erroneously reported that the prize fund was \$10,000.

At the start of the event, Hungarian Ferenc Berkes (2602) was likely considered to be an easy opponent, but after 6 rounds he became one of the most least-expected leaders. Today Berkes had white against Pavel Tregubov (2628) and the Hungarian grandmaster played very carefully to avoid conflict, and since Tregubov did not show any intention to lose, the draw became inevitable. A "+3" still gives chances for a decent prize.

Overall, it was very decisive round with only 11 draws from 30 games. For many it is time to decide whether to take the money (or norms, if that is your goal), or just say goodbye to your starting fee. Kharlov, Pigusov, Rashkovsky, Annakov, and Sergienko have already withdrawn from the tournament. Aleksandrov and Kobalia joined this group after the 7th round. Today Karjakin beat Kobalia in slashing style. And Aleksandrov failed to win an endgame with an extra piece against Kharitonov. So with his score at 4-3, he decided that he has no future here

in the midst of such exceptionally poor form.

Apart from Berkes and Tregubov, there are 5 other players who trail Filippov by a half point. Dreev demonstrated his will to win by beating the young Alekseev with black. The players followed Grischuk – Leko, Linares 2001 until Black's 13th move, when Dreev deviated with 13...Ne4, transposing into Alekseev - Palo, 2003. Then it was Alekseev's turn to deviate from his previous game. The queens left the board on the 18th move, and Dreev sacrificed a pawn to obtain some kingside pressure. It was not easy for White to defend, and in time trouble, he made a mistake and lost the exchange. The rest was easy for Dreev.

Joel Lautier proved to be a nemesis for those playing the King's Indian. Vasilios Kotronias lost to Lautier, who had everything one could wish for - better pawn structure, extra material, and a strong attack. It is surprising that Kotronias survived as long as he did (39 moves). Lautier is an excellent player and has good chances to earn invitations to major tournaments such as Dortmund.



The originator of the Sveshnikov Sicilian is a frequent guest at the press center. His 17 year old son Vladimir plays in tournament section "C"

Loek Van Wely finally caught fire after two very difficult Aeroflot opens in 2002 and 2003. His Sveshnikov Sicilian brought him a full point against Jaan Ehvest today, although tomorrow he will have a tough opponent in Sasikiran, who sent Tomasz Markowski back to "+2" in 44 moves. On the 12th move Sasikiran offered a strange-looking pawn sacrifice, but Markowski did not dare to accept it. The outcome of the game was then decided in the endgame, when Sasikiran's d-pawn was about to queen, Markowski gave up.

Alexander Motylev simply crushed poor Semen Dvoiryts in a Sicilian Defence. During the game I was trying to calculate how much material White had sacrificed in order to reach such a great position and as it turned out, he didn't sacrifice anything.

Asrian - Sadvakasov, Graf – Jakovenko, and Fedorov - Mamedyarov were all drawn. The nervous atmosphere that prevailed today impacted these games, as well. For example, a common post game dialog to overhear would be: "How did you do today?" "I drew." "Oh, I saw you had some problems in the opening." "Well, my position after the opening was just trash." "Well then a draw is a good result!" "No, I had great winning chances later..."

Three more rating favorites made desperate attempts to catch the tournament leaders today. Malakhov did not give any chances to Valerij Popov (2580), Rublevsky defeated Argentinian Ruben Felgaer (2572) in terrible mutual time trouble, and Bacrot won against Sarunas Sulskis (2582). They all have 5-2, and

now trail Filippov by one point.

Igor Khenkin produced a first class effort to beat Kevin Spraggett, and now has 5 points. Tigran L. Petrosian from Armenia defeated Alexander Galkin. The two fast playing tacticians, Andrey Volokitin and Magnus Carlsen, are incapable of playing for a lazy draw and after the Norwegian teenager missed a shot, Volokitin won quickly. I will give this game without annotations, as the play is very clear.

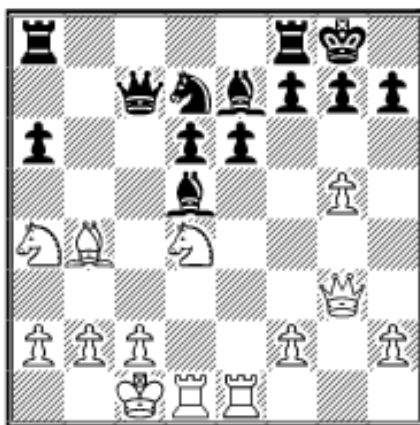


Vassily Smyslov meets Magnus Carlsen

Hopefully this day will not be remembered by Carlsen as a big disappointment, for he had a chance to chat with former world champion Vassily Smyslov who was visiting the tournament as a guest.

Volokitin,A - Carlsen,M
[B87]
Aeroflot open (7)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 b5 7.Bb3 e6 8.Qf3 Qc7
 9.g4 b4 10.g5 Nfd7 11.Na4 Nc6 12.Be3 Na5 13.0-0-0 Bb7 14.Bd2 Nxb3+
 15.Qxb3 Be7 16.Bxb4 Bxe4 17.Rhe1 Bd5 18.Qg3 0-0



19.Nf5! exf5 20.Rxe7 Qc4 21.Qxd6 Be6 22.b3
 Qh4 23.Rxe6! fxe6 24.Qxe6+ Kh8 25.Be7
 Qxf2 26.Qxd7 Rfe8 27.Bc5 Qh4 28.Qxf5
 Black resigns.

Pavel Kotsur from Kazakhstan defeated last year's Aeroflot winner, Viorel Bologan, placing Bologan out of contention for any of the prizes. Kotsur played a positional queen sacrifice to reach an unbalanced position where both players seemed to be playing for a win, but Bologan was the first to make a decisive

mistake.

It is difficult to follow the games played on the lower boards, as they are not relayed to the Internet, and therefore can only be observed from the gangway tables. Still, I have a very good game for your inspection from board 35. The young Russian GM Ernesto Inarkiev, another King's Indian devotee, overcame the Israeli GM Evgeny Postny.

Postny,E - Inarkiev,E [E81]
Aeroflot open (7)



GM Ernesto Inarkiev another King's Indian devotee

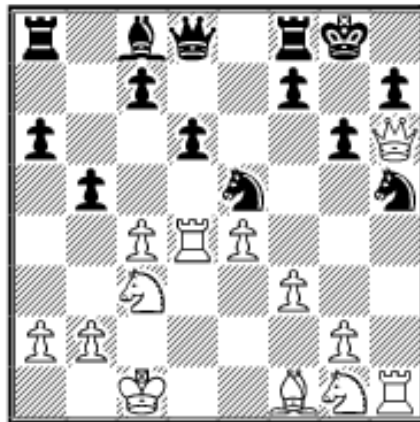
**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6
5.f3 0-0 6.Be3 a6 7.Qd2 Nbd7 8.0-0-0
b5 9.Bh6 Bxh6**

If Black fights for the initiative, he must capture on h6 in order to distract White's strongest piece from the center. There is only one disadvantage - one should always be aware of the opponent's attack.

10.Qxh6 e5 11.h4 exd4

Evgeny Postny plays in the most direct fashion and goes for mate without delay. Black takes on d4, because White's rook will be misplaced there.

12.Rxd4 Ne5 13.h5 Nxh5



A necessary move, in case of 13...c5 14.Rd1 Be6 15.Nh3 Bxc4? 16.Bxc4 Nxc4 17.Ng5! White wins because of the 18.Nd5 threat.

14.Nge2

On 14.g4 Inarkiev prepared 14...f6! 15.gxh5 g5, and after 16.cxb5 axb5 17.Bxb5 (17.Nxb5 Be6) 17...Be6!, followed by Nf7.

14...f6 15.c5 b4 16.Nd5 dxc5 17.Rd1 c6

Black spent a lot of time calculating 17...Be6, but after 18.Nb6 Nd3+ 19.Rxd3 Qxd3 20.Ng3 Qd6 (or 20...Qd4 21.Nxh5 gxh5 22.Nxa8 Rd8 23.Be2) 21.Nxh5 gxh5 22.Nxa8 Rxa8 23.Qxf6 White does not stand worse.

18.Ndf4 Qe7 19.Nxh5 gxh5 20.Nf4 Be6 21.Nxh5 Ra7

This prophylactic move was required since after 21...Bxa2 22.Rd6! White is better.

22.Be2 c4 23.g4 c3 24.g5 fxg5

The text is stronger than 24...cxb2+ 25.Kxb2 Qc5 26.Nxf6+ Rxf6 27.gxf6 Qc3+ 28.Kb1 Bxa2+ 29.Kxa2 b3+ 30.Ka3, when White forces the perpetual.

25.Rdg1 g4 26.f4 Ng6 27.f5 cxb2+ 28.Kxb2 Bxf5

Probably 28...Qc5 wins, as well, but Black calculated 28...Bxf5 to the end and

found a decisive advantage. White puts up strong resistance, but it is already too late.

29.Bc4+ Be6 30.Rxg4 Rf2+ 31.Kc1 Bxc4 32.Rxg6+ hxc6 33.Qxg6+ Kf8 34.Nf4 Bg8 35.Qh6+ Ke8 36.Qg6+ Kd7 37.Qf5+ Kc7 38.Qa5+ Kb8 39.Rd1 Rxf4 40.Qb6+ Kc8 White resigns.

To conclude my unusually lengthy report, here is a short, funny game from board 97. The Russian IM Roman Ovetchkin (1-5) meets GM Pavel Blatny (1½-4½).

**Ovetchkin,R - Blatny,P [B00]
Aeroflot open (7)**

1.e4 b6 2.d4 Bb7 3.Nc3 e6 4.Nf3 Bb4 5.Bd3 Nf6 6.e5 Ne4 7.0-0 Nxc3?!

This is weaker than the main continuation 7...Bxc3! 8.bxc3 Nxc3 9.Qe1 Bxf3 10.Qxc3, and White has compensation for a pawn.

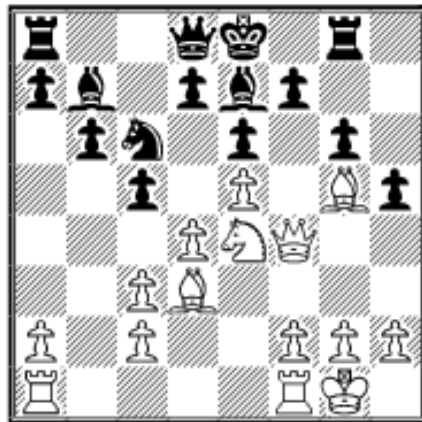
8.bxc3 Be7

After 8...Bxc3 9.Rb1 White has more than enough for a pawn.

9.Nd2 c5 10.Qg4 g6?!

A highly suspicious move that unnecessary weakens the dark squares.

11.Ne4 Nc6 12.Bh6! Rg8 13.Bg5 h5?? 14.Qf4!



14...Bxg5 15.Nd6+ Black resigns.

Standings after 7 rounds: Filippov - 6-1.

Berkes, Dreev, Lautier, Motylev, Sasikiran, Tregubov, and Van Wely – 5½-1½.

Asrian, Bacrot, Fedorov, Graf, Jakovenko, Khenkin, Korobov, Malakhov, Mamedyarov, Art. Minasian, Petrosian, Rublevsky, Rustemov, Sadvakasov, Vaganian, and Volokitin - 5-2.

February 23: Round Six, Black is OK!

Today the first nine boards did their best to secure their places on top in order to win their share of the \$10,000 prize fund. In close pursuit were the 24 nearest competitors awaiting their chances to join the top group.

On board one Loek Van Wely and Alexey Dreev agreed to a draw after 17 moves in a double-edged position. Having played at the highest level for many years perhaps they had too much respect for each other. Dermen Sadvakasov and Joel Lautier also drew their game without being involved in a serious fight.

White suffered the first major upset of the day on board three. Etienne Bacrot did not achieve any opening advantage and the young Hungarian Ferenc Berkes took the initiative after 14...d5!, and then quickly developed his positional advantage into a full point.



Valerij Filippov proving Black is OK

On board four, Sergey Rublevsky lost with white to Valerij Filippov. Rublevsky actually played rather well, he won an exchange for a pawn, but then simply left his a-pawn unprotected. After Filippov captured it, his a- and b-pawns became very powerful. Rublevsky then had a chance to return the exchange and seek sanctuary in a slightly inferior ending, but chose not to and the game was over in just a few moves.

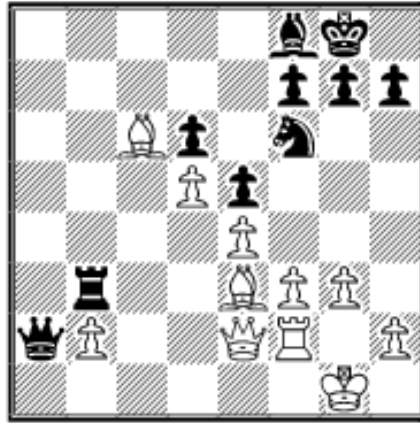
The surprise leaders Dvoiryys and Kotronias both played white, and made an effort to keep their opponents at a distance, but the result was two low risk, fighting draws. Pavel Tregubov defeated Yakov Meister, who has only had decisive results so far in this tournament. In Rustemov - Lastin the initiative changed hands several times. First Rustemov achieved a serious opening advantage; then lost most of it before the first time control. During the second time control it was Lastin's turn to make mistakes and Rustemov won on move 65.

Mamedyarov - Asrian was a lively game. Mamedyarov played actively and sacrificed a piece for several pawns, but Asrian somehow managed to hold a difficult ending to draw on move 71.

Six players broke through to the "+3" group. Four did so with the black pieces. Andrei Kharitonov almost equalized with white against Krishnan Sasikiran, but misplayed the ending and lost. Kulaots had good winning chances with extra material, but then blundered against Eugeny Alekseev.

Jaan Ehlvest and Alexey Fedorov each played the King's Indian defense, and both won slow maneuvering games against their less experienced opponents. Dmitry Jakovenko defeated Rauf Mamedov in what started out as a Sicilian defense, but soon resembled a Saemisch King's Indian with a misplaced bishop on e7 and several extra tempi for White. Jakovenko first won a pawn and then caught Mamedov in a trap.

Jakovenko,D - Mamedov,R
Aeroflot open (6)

**29.Kg2**

A tricky move typical of Jakovenko's style, and one which Black does not understand correctly.

29...Be7? 30.Qc4! 1-0

Threatening 31.Rc2 and 32.Ba4, and picking up more material. After 30...Ra3 31.Qxa2 Rxa2 32.b4 the endgame is hopeless for Black.

Tomasz Markowski won against Romanishin.

First White obtained the two bishops, then gained space on the queenside, and showed good technique to transpose into a winning ending with bishops of opposite color.

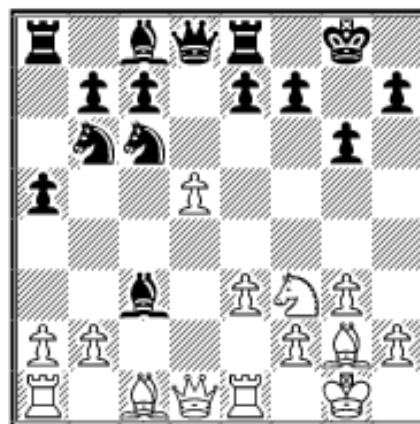
Other notable results of round six: Vladimir Malakhov won as black with nice queen sacrifice and is once again a contender for some prize money. Magnus Carlsen outplayed GM Yuri Yakovich and now has 4 points. Also Tkachiev and Vescovi have 4-2 and some chances to win big prizes in case of powerful finish. Bologan and Khalifman each made draws to remain at "+1". Aleksej Aleksandrov joined them following his win against Zagrebelny. The best female player so far is Marie Sebag, from France, with 3½-2½.

Vladislav Tkachiev's win against Sergey Kudrin deserves a closer look. An intuitive pawn sacrifice gave the Frenchman a long-lasting initiative.

Tkachiev,V - Kudrin,S [D76]

Aeroflot open (6), 23.02.2004

1.c4 g6 2.Nf3 Bg7 3.d4 Nf6 4.g3 d5 5.cxd5 Nxd5 6.Bg2 Nb6 7.Nc3 Nc6 8.e3 0-0 9.0-0 Re8 10.Re1 a5 11.d5!? Bxc3



A dubious novelty, exchanging his dark-squared bishop for extra material, White's compensation lies in his dominance of the dark squares, which are especially weak around the black king. Perhaps Kudrin could have given back the extra material to try to escape, however, he held onto it until the very end.

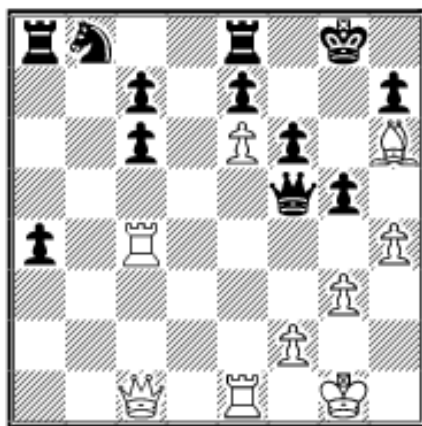
12.bxc3 Nxd5 13.Qb3 a4 14.Qc2 Nb6 15.c4 Bf5 16.e4 Bg4 17.c5 Bxf3 18.Bxf3 Nd4 19.Qc3 Nxf3+ 20.Qxf3 Nd7 21.Qc3 Nb8 22.Rb1 Ra7 23.c6 bxc6

On the more natural looking 23...Nxc6 White would also play 24.Be3!

24.Be3 Ra8 25.e5 Qd5 26.e6 f6 27.Bh6 Qxa2

Now White aims more pieces at black's kingside fortress, which is already seriously damaged.

28.Rb4 Qd5 29.Rf4 Qh5 30.Rh4 Qa5 31.Qc1 g5 32.Rc4 Qf5 33.h4



Despite his three extra pawns, Black experiences difficulties. Perhaps a4-a3-a2 was the last chance.

33...Ra5? 34.hxg5 fxg5 35.Qc3 Qg6 36.Qxa5 Qxh6 37.Rg4 Black resigns.

Standings after 6 rounds: Berkes, Filippov, Rustemov and Tregubov 5-1.

Alekseev, Asrian, Dreev, Dvoirys, Ehlvest, Fedorov, Graf, Jakovenko, Kotronias, Lautier, Mamedyarov, Markowski, Motylev,

Sadvakasov, Sasikiran and Van Wely 4½-1½.

February 22: Round Five, Sensational Dvoirys



Semen Dvoirys a real chess fanatic

There were nine leaders after 4 rounds, but after the 5th round this number has doubled! Filippov - Bacrot was not a very exciting game. Both players maneuvered carefully, were happy to exchange pieces, and after making the time control they agreed to a draw.

Vasilios Kotronias proved his mettle in today's round. He is one of the few grandmasters that dare to play the King's Indian and his opponent Alexander Graf willingly engaged in an all-or-nothing battle. Graf played a positional Rook sacrifice in

order to bring his pawns to d6 and e6 and gain full control of the b1-h7 diagonal in a sharp and unbalanced position. Kotronias then returned a minor piece to create counter-threats and with both kings in danger Graf was forced to give the perpetual.

In Rustemov – Tregubov the two Russian GMs entered a Dragon endgame that was recently made fashionable by Malakhov. White did not exploit his chances for an advantage, and the former European champion slowly took the initiative. He even won a pawn, but it was not sufficient to win the ending with rooks and bishops of opposite color. So a draw was agreed on move 55.

Loek Van Wely earned another half point in his pet Sveshnikov Sicilian. He deprived his opponent Karen Asrian of the right to castle, but did not find the best plan to develop his initiative. Asrian forced the exchange of queens and held an extra pawn. However, Black had sufficient compensation for it with strong central pawns and piece activity, which was enough for a draw.

Alexey Dreev beat one of the leaders, Kaido Kulaots, to join the "+3" group. Dreev skillfully outplayed his opponent in an endgame with two rooks and knight with a symmetrical pawn structure. It is evident from such superb technique that Dreev is a former pupil of Mark Dvoretsky.

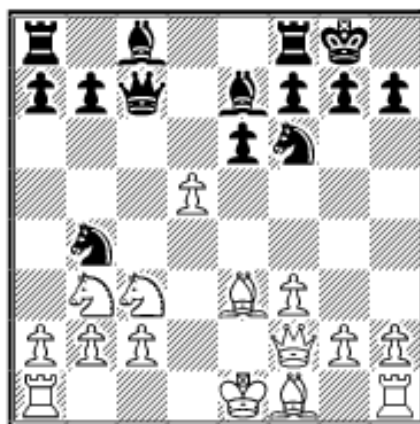
Rating favorite Vladimir Malakhov (2700) lost a short game to the experienced Semen Dvoirys. Dvoirys, who started his career in the mid-70s, is an outstanding personality in the world of chess. He is a real chess fanatic and a very good tactician. Although his rating has been stable over the years his main problem is his nerves and he can win or lose a brilliant game. Still, nobody expected the dramatic conclusion of the Malakhov - Dvoirys contest.

**Malakhov,V - Dvoirys,S [B60]
Aeroflot open (5)**

**1.Nf3 c5 2.e4 Nc6 3.Nc3 d6 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Nf6 6.Bg5 Qb6 7.Nb3 e6 8.Qd2
Be7 9.f3 0-0 10.Be3 Qc7 11.Qf2**

A dubious novelty in this position: 11.0-0-0 or 11.g4 looks more in the spirit of the variation. 11.Qf2 may well suit Malakhov's style, but objectively it is rather slow for an open Sicilian. Dvoirys, who has tremendous experience in this opening, finds a typical plan that casts doubt on Malakhov's invention.

11...d5! 12.exd5 Nb4



This is Black's idea. White is lagging in development, so a pawn sacrifice is justified. It is now difficult to find a square for White's light-squared bishop and to castle.

**13.dxe6 Bxe6 14.Nd4 Rad8 15.a3 Nbd5
16.Nxe6 fxe6 17.Nxd5 Nxd5 18.Bd3**

Finally developing the unfortunate bishop, however, Black already has the advantage.

18...Qe5! 19.Be4 Nf6 20.Qh4 (diagram)



Curiously, after 11...d5! Malakhov has made all the moves considered best by "Fritz". Yet, Dvoirys achieves a won position with an elegant "Greeting from Bronstein" sacrifice.

20...Bxa3!

The bishop is immune from capture. White now castles, but it's only a minor consolation as Black is winning.

**21.0-0 Bxb2 22.Rad1 Rxd1 23.Rxd1 a5
24.Bc1 Bd4+ 25.Kh1 Nxe4 26.Qxe4 Qxe4 27.fxe4 b5 28.g3 e5**

White is a pawn down and has no counterplay, so further resistance is hopeless. A powerful game by Semen Dvoirys!

29.Bd2 b4 30.Be1 Rc8 White resigns.

Joel Lautier solidly outplayed Armenian GM Artashes Minasian. The Frenchman won the exchange and the game lasted only 34 moves. Shakhriyar Mamedyarov (spelled Shakhriyaz in the databases) defeated Timofeev with a nice combination. The former Russian champion Motylev sacrificed an exchange in the endgame and won against Kempinski. Sergey Rublevsky outsmarted the young Ukrainian Andrei Volokitin, and scored a full point with a direct attack on the white king. Alexander Lastin slowed the progress of Kevin Spraggett by winning a sharp Sicilian that featured attacks on both flanks. Magnus Carlsen lost to the young Hungarian GM Ferenc Berkes. Russian Ernesto Inarkiev pressed too hard with black against Yakov Meister and allowed White a simple queen "sacrifice" that gained material, so Inarkiev resigned after the time control was reached.

Ilya Smirin has had difficulties joining the top group in Moscow. In the previous round he stood on the edge of defeat against Alexey Lugovoi and today he lost with white to Korotylev. Smirin now has a mediocre 2½-2½ score, as does Gregory Kaidanov, Alexander Moiseenko, Sergey Volkov, Zhang Zhong, Sergey Movsesian, and Tatiana Kosintseva. Khalifman and Bologan drew their games to remain in the "+1" group and a strong finish can still bring them into the prize-winners. Boris Gulko defeated Fabio Bellini and now also has 3 points.



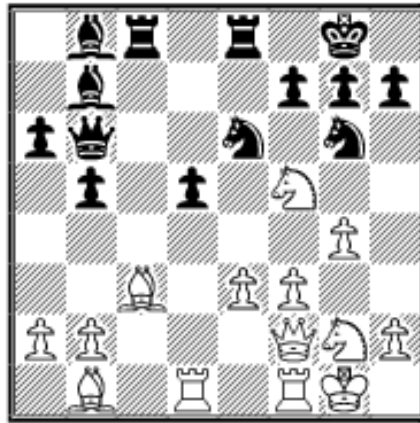
Bologan and Khalifman remain in the "+1" group



Aleksandrov winning a wild game against Lahno

Alexei Aleksandrov seems to have overcome his poor start. The grandmaster from Belarus returned to 50% by winning a wild game against the 14-year-old WGM Kateryna Lahno from Ukraine.

Aleksandrov,A - Lahno,K
Aeroflot open (5)



This original position arose from a Nimzo-Indian defense. Alexey Aleksandrov follows the usual plan of kingside expansion while Lahno creates her own play on the queenside.

24.a3

It is important to keep the bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal, as White plans to destroy the black king's shelter.

24...a5 25.Qd2 b4!?

Black insists!

26.axb4 axb4 27.Bxb4 Ba6 28.Rf2 Ng5

A tricky lady! It turns out that White can't save the exchange.

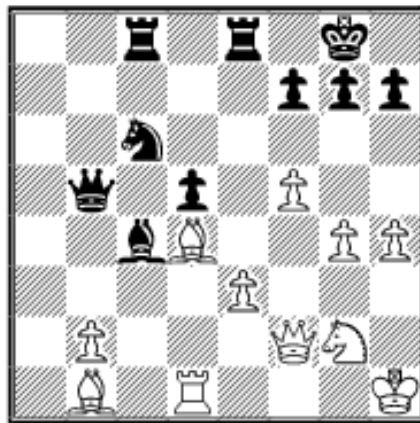
29.Bc3 Nh3+ 30.Kh1 Nxf2+ 31.Qxf2

Now all of White's remaining pieces are aimed at Black's king.

31...Be5 32.Nd4 Bc4 33.h4 Ne7 34.f4 Bxd4 35.Bxd4 Qb5 36.f5

Aleksandrov is very consistent and these pawns represent a serious threat.

36...Nc6



Now what should White play? After 37.Bc3 Black has 37...Ne5, blocking the dangerous diagonal.

37.Bxg7! Kxg7 38.f6+ Kf8 39.Qf5 Qxb2

Preparing for 40.Qxh7? Qxf6.

40.g5 Re6 41.Qxh7

White has only two pawns for the sacrificed rook, but Black's pieces lack coordination and his king is in great danger, which allows Aleksandrov to regain the material.

41...Ke8 42.Bf5 Qe5 43.Nf4! d4

On 43...Nd8 there is 44.g6!

44.Qg8+ Kd7 45.Qxf7+ Kd6 46.Bxe6 Bxe6 47.Qxe6+ Qxe6 48.Nxe6 Kxe6

49.exd4

Now that the storm has passed White has a decisive advantage in the endgame.

49...Nb4 50.Rf1 Kf7 51.h5 Rh8 52.g6+ Kg8 53.Rf5 Nc6 54.Rd5 Rh6 55.Kg2
Black resigns, as there are no sensible moves left.

Standings after 5 rounds: Asrian, Bacrot, Berkes, Dreev, Dvoirys, Filippov, Graf, Kotronias, Lastin, Lautier, Mamedyarov, Meister, Motylev, Rublevsky, Rustemov, Sadvakasov, Tregubov and van Wely - 4-1.

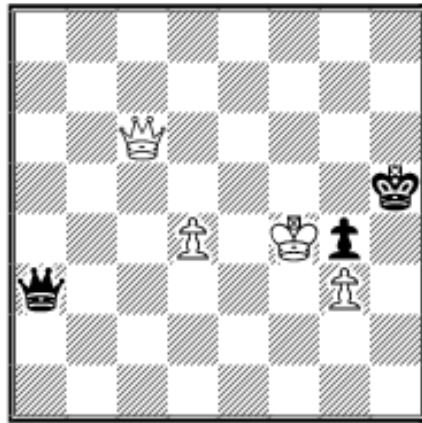
February 21: Round Four, Fighting Draws

From now on the attention of the chess journalists will be divided between the Aeroflot festival and Linares. It is tempting to speculate on how Kasparov and company would fare in our section "A". For example, Viorel Bologan, who recently tied in Wijk aan Zee for 4th-5th with Topalov (who is playing in Linares), has only scored 1½-1½ after three rounds in Moscow. Loek van Wely, who tied with Kramnik and Bareev for 6th-8th at Wijk aan Zee, started the fourth round on board one. Perhaps one can conclude that Aeroflot, like any other major open tournament, demands good form and good luck. In a tournament such as Linares, a top player in poor form can play without any risk, since scoring 50% would not be a disappointment. In Moscow it would be a disaster. Statistically, beating a 2590 rated player is a more difficult task than drawing with a 2690 rated player, and it seems that to win this year's Aeroflot "A" one needs to score at least six wins.

After three rounds of play, three players were half way to completing this challenging task, as Van Wely, Rustemov and Filippov all had three points. Yet, none of them managed to keep the pace in round four, even though they all tried hard.

Van Wely and Rustemov are well acquainted, once on the ICC they played a marathon blitz match for 25 hours! Rustemov, a highly skilled speed player, won that match decisively. However, Van Wely has a better score at classical chess, so the chances appeared about equal in this round. After massive exchanges of pieces and the central pawns an unbalanced ending arose. Rustemov picked at weak pawns on the white queenside, while Van Wely went for the win of an exchange. In the end Rustemov's evaluation proved more accurate, although White managed to hold the draw.

Valerij Filippov faced Konstantin Sakaev, another strong grandmaster from St. Petersburg. Fillipov played the gambit line of the Catalan, in which Black takes on c4 and holds the extra pawn as long as possible. Sakaev is not a player who fears gambits. He accepted the pawn and suffered for it, as Filippov pressed throughout the whole game. Yet, Sakaev demonstrated his excellent defensive ability and managed to draw in Q+2p vs. Q+1p endgame.



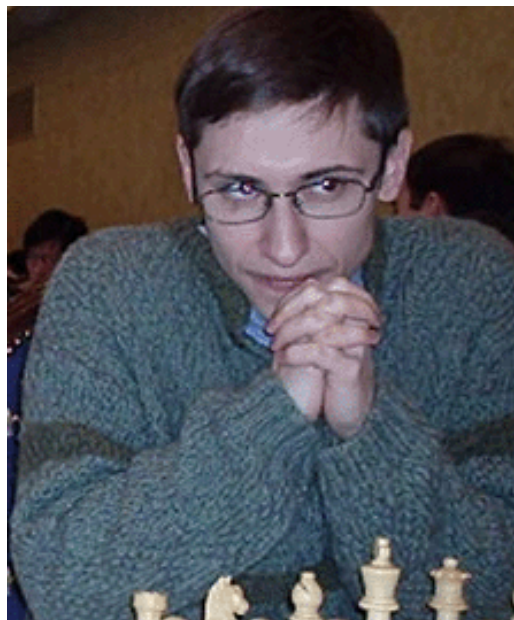
Black forced draw with simple but elegant **55...Qd6+!**

Since the tournament leaders drew their games this allowed the other six players to catch up. Etienne Bacrot had a small advantage against Yuri Yakovich; however the latter made a blunder and did not capitalize on all his defensive resources. Krishnan Sasikiran went down in flames against Cypriot Vasilios Kotronias. The German champion Alexander Graf won a fine endgame against Mikhail

Ulibin. Armenian Karen Asrian defeated Mark Bluvshtein, the only IM among the top boards. Former European champion Pavel Tregubov won a difficult 99-move effort versus Andrey Shariyazdanov, which was one of the longest decisive games of the tournament.



Etienne Bacrot had a small advantage against Yuri Yakovich



GM Jakovenko



GM Vasilios Kotronias

The following game is the first encounter between Estonian GM Kaido Kulaots and Alexey Fedorov from Belarus, who shared first place last year in Moscow.

Kulaots,K - Fedorov,A
Aeroflot open (4)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6

Fedorov has played the Najdorf almost exclusively for years, but recently joined the large group of players following the opening ideas of Evgeny Sveshnikov.

3.Nc3

This move makes sense if you don't like to play against the Sveshnikov Sicilian after 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5. The point is that on 3...Nf6 White has 4.Bb5, reaching a good line of the Rossolimo variation. The drawback is that Black can now effectively block the d2-d4 advance.

3...e5 4.Bc4 Be7 5.d3 Nf6 6.Ng5 0-0 7.f4

This line is very popular at all levels. Sveshnikov suggested a gambit line for Black to solve his opening problems by tactical means and Fedorov, according to his style, enters the complications.

7...d5 8.exd5 Bg4 9.Qd2

Kulaots refuses the customary 9.Nf3, and makes a natural move, leaving his knight on an active post.

9...Nd4 10.h3!

“So what was the point of 8...Bg4?” - inquires the h-pawn.

10...Bh5 11.g4 h6

On 11...Bg6 12.f5 Nxc4 White had the interesting move 13.0-0!, maintaining the advantage. 11...exf4 looks natural, but after 12.0-0 Bg6 13.Nf3 White should be preferred. Fedorov chooses to counterattack by chasing the white knight that controls f3-square.

12.Qg2 hxg5?!

12...Bg6 13.f5 Bh7 14.Nxh7 Kxh7 15.0-0 or 15.Rg1 does not look promising for Black.

13.fxc5 Nh7 14.gxh5 Bxc5 15.Rg1!

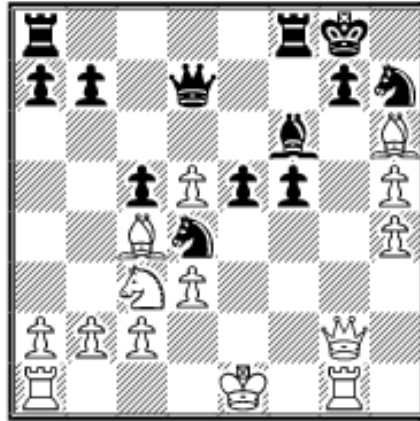
White's attack is now irresistible and Black's gambit has failed. White takes a

pawn, holds it, and gains a powerful initiative.

15...f5 16.h4 Bf6

16...Bh4+ doesn't change anything.

17.Bh6 Qd7



18.Bxg7! Qxg7 19.Qxg7+ Bxg7 20.h6

White temporarily sacrifices his Rook in order not to lose the attacking initiative.

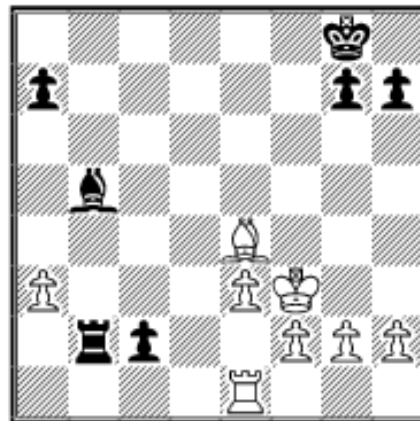
20...Nf3+ 21.Ke2 Nxf1+ 22.Rxf1 Nf6 23.d6+ Kh7 24.hxg7 Rfd8 25.Nd5!

A final thrust.

25...Nh5 26.Rg5 Nxf7 27.Nf6+

And Black resigned in view of 27...Kh8 28.Rg6! with decisive material gains.

Joel Lautier defeated Vladimir Belov with a nice tactical blow:

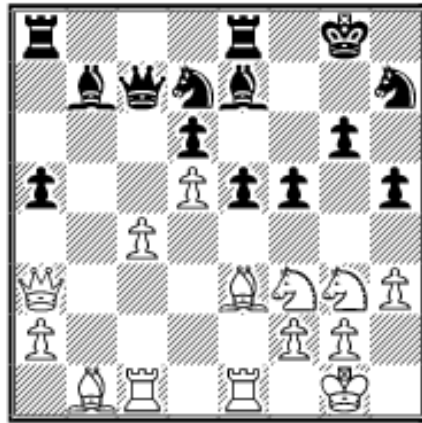


31...Be2+!

Belov bravely resisted until move 49, but Lautier's technique did not let him down.

32.Kg3 Bd1 33.Bxc2 Bxc2 34.Re2 a5 35.Rd2 Ra2 36.Rd8+ Kf7 37.Rd7+ Kf6 38.Rd6+ Ke5 39.Rd7 Kf6 40.Rd6+ Ke7 41.Rc6 a4 42.Rc7+ Kf6 43.Rc6+ Ke5 44.Rc7 Kd6 45.Rxf7 Rxa3 46.Kf4 Ra1 47.e4 a3 48.Ra7 Bb3 49.e5+ Kc6 0-1

Kevin Spraggett played an excellent game by beating Giovanni Vescovi in 37 moves.



Spraggett,K - Vescovi,G
Aeroflot open (4)

28.Bxf5 gxf5 29.Nxf5 Bf8 30.N3h4

Spraggett's penetration into the black king's position makes a strong impression.

30...Bc8 31.Bb6

Other bishop moves win as well, for instance, 31.Bd2 or 31.Bf4.

31...Nxb6 32.Qg3+ Qg7

A sad necessity as 32...Kh8 allows mate in three, and 32...Bg7 a very nice mate in two with 33.Nh6+ Kh8(f8) 34.Ng6#.

33.Nh6+ Kh8 34.Ng6+ Qxg6 35.Qxg6 Bxh6 36.Qxe8+ Bf8 37.Qc6 1-0

This double attack was the final straw for Black.

Magnus Carlsen won his third game in a row. This time he surprised Eugeny Shaposhnikov in the opening with the g2-g4 thrust. The St. Petersburg player reacted in the worst way and lost quickly. In the post-mortem analysis he found that after the correct reaction he could have obtained the better position.

Alexander Khalifman finally won his first game. He outplayed Narciso Dublan, but then started to lose his advantage in time trouble. Khalifman offered a draw, but his opponent did not respond and blundered on his next move. Viorel Bologan won his second game in a row and joined Khalifman in the "+1" group.

GM Ratmir Kholmov, the most experienced participant of section "A," won his first game (against GM Annakov) and placed himself comfortably in the middle of the crosstable with 2-2. Kholmov, by the way, has 1-1 score with Bobby Fischer.

Standings after 4 rounds: Asrian, Bacrot, Philippov, Graf, Kotronias, Kulaots, Rustemov, Tregubov and van Wely – 3½-0½.

February 20: Round Three, Settling Up

Finally, on the third day of the event, the online transmission of games began to work and we are going to have thirty games from tournament "A" printed out every evening. Obtaining anything from the lower boards is more complicated as one has to contact the arbiters for score sheets. It is still uncertain if there will be any PGN files. Hopefully the organizers understand the importance of compiling such an archive, and do not view it as an exclusive service requiring special effort. Since the computer experts have fixed the electronic boards, one might anticipate

another breakthrough.

Even with all the problems the organizers have faced, it does not reflect on the arbiters working at the tournament. They do their best to manage more than 600 players, who are often capricious and impatient when away from the board. With the exception of the first day's mishap, the pairings are completed in a timely and proper manner. Today there was a mobile phone mishap in tournament "B" and Mr. Gijssen had to forfeit one of the players. The forfeited player, although obviously unhappy, accepted his decision and did not protest.

The top three boards in tournament "A" all drew their games. Dvoirys, a renowned Gruenfeld expert, held against Sakaev. Asrian and Bacrot finished in only 24 moves, apparently saving their efforts for later rounds, while Mamedyarov played the 3.c3 Sicilian against Kulaots, who equalized easily. There were also three decisive games in the leaders' group. Alexander Rustemov used 44 moves to skillfully outplay Sergey Movsesian, whose problems began in the opening. Rustemov's style is strictly positional and he emphasizes the importance of exchanging the right pieces, although he does have a keen eye for tactics, which is obvious when observing him playing blitz.



Loek Van Wely

Loek Van Wely crushed Sarunas Sulskis at the fifth board. Sulskis tried 11.Nxb5 against the Dutchman's Sveshnikov Sicilian, but as GM Rogozenko noted: "this is less dangerous than 11.Bxb5." While White pushed his passed queenside pawns, Black organized a strong attack on the kingside.

Sulskis,S - Van Wely,L
Aeroflot open (3)

26...f4

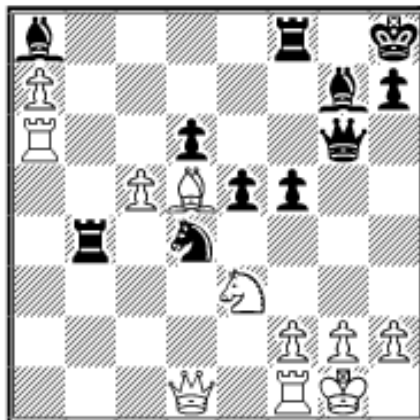
Black crosses the centerline, as most of his pieces are prepared for the final assault.

27.Rxd6 Qg5 28.Nc2 f3 29.Ne1

Or 29.g3 Ne2+ 30.Kh1 Rh4! with mate.

29...e4 30.Bxa8 Rxa8 31.Rb6 Rxb6
32.cxb6 fxg2

And White resigned in view of 33.Nxg2 Nf3+ 34.Kh1 Qh5.

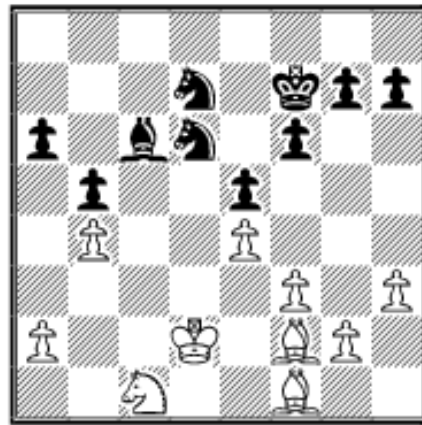


Former Russian international Valerij Filippov benefited from Evgeny Postny's blunder to win an endgame with the more active pieces and an extra pawn, while Joel Lautier was unable to obtain an opening advantage against Eugeny Shaposhnikov and drew in 22 moves. Only Rustemov, Van Wely, and Filippov managed to keep perfect scores after three rounds.

The only IM among the leaders, Mark Bluvshtein, played an interesting game with Russian Ernesto Inarkiev. Both juniors play uncompromising chess and they did not disappoint in today's game. They quickly reached an unbalanced position in a sharp line of the King's Indian defense, which attracted many spectators and a few fellow GMs to their table. The more experienced Inarkiev finally obtained a won ending, but failed to find the winning idea and offered a draw. Dreev and Malakhov defeated Sorokin and Markowski respectively. Dreev fought a real battle and had to play very precisely to win with extra piece for a couple of pawns, while Malakhov gave an instructive example of winning with two bishops vs. bishop + knight in a quiet ending.

Malakhov, V - Markowski, T
Aeroflot open (3)

White has the two bishops and Black's queenside pawns are weak. Meanwhile his knight has only two invasion squares: a5 and c5.



39.Nb3 Nb7

Protecting both invasion squares.

40.Na5

Malakhov forces the exchange of knights. His doubled pawn on a5 is very strong, as it restrains Black's pieces and now White has the b4-square in his possession.

40...Nxa5 41.bxa5

Here Black could transfer his knight to e6, where it would be more active, although it might not change the evaluation of the position.

41...Bb7 42.Kc3 Ke6 43.Kb4 Kd6 44.Ba7 Bc8 45.a4 bxa4 46.Kxa4 Bb7 47.Kb4 Bc8 48.Bc4 Bb7 49.h4 h6 50.h5

Fixing another weakness.

50...Kc6 51.Be3 Kd6 52.Bb6 Ke7 53.Bc5+ Ke8 54.Bd6 Kd8

Black is almost paralyzed and Malakhov activates his king.

55.Kc3 Ke8 56.Kd3 Kd8 57.g3 Ke8 58.Ke3 Nf8 59.f4 Nd7 60.Kf3 exf4 61.Kxf4 Nf8 62.e5

With the white king approaching Black's camp, the end of game is imminent.

62...fxe5+ 63.Kxe5 Nd7+ 64.Kf5 Nf8 65.Bxf8 Kxf8 66.Ke6 Ke8 67.Be2 Bc8+ 68.Kd6 Kd8 69.Kc6 Black resigns.

The other rating favorites overcame their difficulties from the prior rounds. Both



Malakhov prepares for a quiet ending

Bologan and Aleksandrov won their games, while Giovanni Vescovi won his second to promote to the "+1" group. Former FIDE champion Alexander Khalifman did all he could to win, but the young GM Boris Grachev from Moscow was able to hold a draw. However, one could predict that Khalifman is not going to wait too long before posting his first win, especially if he continues to play as he did today.

Yuri Kruppa lost with white to Mikhail Ulibin and GM Naum Rashkovsky, the trainer of the Russian team, withdrew from the event after blundering a rook to Ukrainian WGM Natalia Zhukova.

Underscoring just how strong the competition is in this year's Aeroflot

Open, is the fact that one of the strongest Hungarians, GM Peter Acs, a former world champion U20, has yet to score any points from his first three rounds. For a man who beat Peter Leko in Budapest 2003 this is quite an unusual start.

Magnus Carlsen had a tough opponent in Sergey Dolmatov, but the game was surprisingly short. Dolmatov resigned at move 19 and quickly left the playing hall. Conversely Magnus stayed until the last post-mortem analysis of the last grandmaster game, absorbing the chess knowledge with great enthusiasm. He is a clear candidate for a special junior's prize. Or, perhaps, he prefers one of the main prizes?

Standings after three rounds: Van Wely, Filippov and Rustemov - 3-0.

Asrian, Bacrot, Berkes, Bluvshstein, Dreev, Dvoiry, Ehlvest, Fedorov, Graf, Inarkiev, Jakovenko, Kotronias, Kulaots, Lastin, Malakhov, Mamedov Rauf, Mamedyarov, Sakaev, Sasikiran, Shariyazdanov, Timofeev, Tregubov, Ulibin, Volokitin and Yakovich – 2½-0½.

February 19: Round Two, The Games

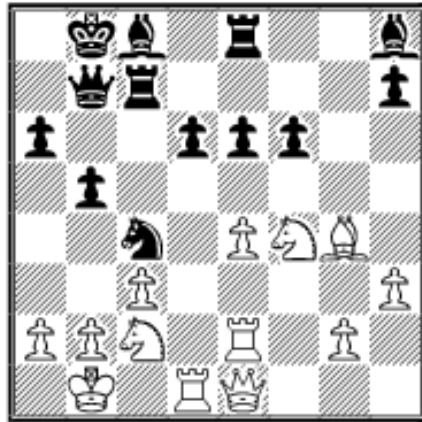
The rating difference in the pairings is still quite large at such an early stage of the tournament. Normally the favorites do not press too hard and simply wait for an opponent's mistake, which sometimes leads to uneventful draws. For example, such strong grandmasters as Alexander Khalifman and Andrei Kharlov have not won a single game. While this strategy often benefits the better player, let's look at the exceptions. Perhaps these two illustrations will motivate the favorites to play more actively.

Sergey Dolmatov (2591) gained the initiative in his game with Mark Bluvshstein (2453). It can be said that his initiative was solely based on his ability to force a

move repetition, nonetheless, he managed to outsmart his less experienced opponent in the middlegame.

**Dolmatov,S - Bluvshstein,M [B69]
Aeroflot open (2), 18.02.2004**

This position arose from a Sicilian Defense as can be seen from the pawn structure. White can increase the pressure on the e6-pawn; however Black has a sufficient defense. So Dolmatov first lulls the vigilance of Bluvshstein with seemingly innocent maneuvers.



27.Bh5 Rd8 28.Nd4 Re7

On 28...e5 White has 29.Nde6, of course.

29.Nd3 Qb6 30.Bf3

The importance of this move soon becomes clear.

30...Rc7 31.Nf4 Re7?

Black errs and his position immediately becomes very difficult. Better was 31...Re8, and after 32.Bg4 Rce7 White remains slightly better.

32.e5!

White's bishop is at full strength.

32...Nxe5 33.Rxe5 fxe5 34.Nc6+ Kc7 35.Nd5+

The experienced grandmaster does not miss a single nuance. This knight move damages Black's pawn structure.

35...exd5 36.Nxe7 Kb8 37.Bxd5 Bd7 38.Qe4 Rf8

Bluvshstein correctly seeks counterplay, but Dolmatov has sufficient defensive resources.

39.Qxh7

This greedy queen move is actually best. White capitalizes on his positional advantage and gains material.

39...b4!



Mark Bluvshtein correctly seeks counterplay

The only way to complicate things.

40.Qh6

Also possible is 40.c4 e4 41.Qh6! defending against all the threats, but not 41.Ng6? b3! and Black suddenly wins.

40...Re8 41.Nc6+ Kc7



If 41...Bxc6 then
42.Qxd6+
Kb7
43.Qd7+
capturing everything.

42.Be4??

An unfortunate

moment to threaten mate in two! It was possible to take on b4: 42.Nxb4 a5 43.Nd3 and if 43...Bf5 44.g4!? Bxg4 45.Rf1 etc. 43.Nc2 also deserves consideration.

42...d5

Black was on the defensive for most of the game, now he is winning a piece. The following moves could well have been omitted.

43.Rxd5

43.cxb4 Bxc6 44.Bxd5 Bxd5 and Black is winning.

43...Bxc6 44.Qd6+ Kb7 45.cxb4 Rc8 46.Bf5 Rc7 47.Rd1 e4 48.Qc5 e3 49.g4 Bf3 50.Qxb6+ Kxb6 51.Rd6+ Rc6 White resigns.

GM Leonid Yurtaev (2527) is normally a sharp combinational player, yet he exchanged queens in the opening against Magnus Carlsen (2484). He followed the old maxim: "Go for an ending against juniors!" He expected that the Norwegian's lack of experience would tell, and it did, but the tactics did not leave the board along with the queens.

**Yurtaev,L - Carlsen,M [B92]
Aeroflot open (2), 18.02.2004**

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.f4 b5 10.Bf3 Bb7 11.fxe5!?

I found only one game with this move in the Megabase database. Clearly, Yurtaev is playing in accordance with the aforementioned motto. However, White's scoring percentage in other continuations is simply appalling.

11...dxe5 12.Qxd8 Rxd8 13.Na5 Bc8

In case of 13...Bc6 White does not need to take on c6, helping his opponent to develop. Better is 14.Be3 b4 15.Nxc6 Nxc6 16.Nd5 with a small advantage.

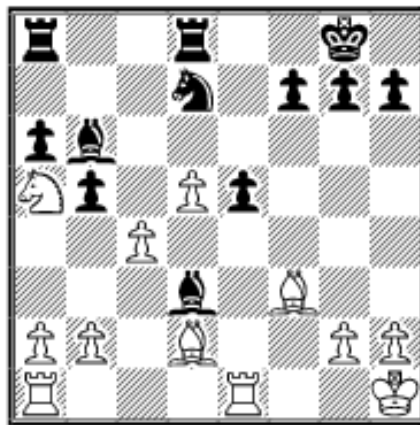
14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Bc5+ 16.Kh1 Bb6 17.Bd2 Bf5

Another idea is 17...f5 when White could apply pressure with 18.c4! e4 19.Be2. Play could continue: 19...Bd4!? 20.Bc3 Bxc3 21.bxc3 Ra7, and even after 22.a4!? Black has problems. The whole plan with 11.fxe5, not only looks justified from a psychological point of view, but also objectively sound.

18.c4

This is very natural, but not the best continuation. Yurtaev could seriously test his young opponent with the unexpected 18.Rae1! Take a look at the following line (by no means forced, of course): 18...Re8 19.Nb7! Bxc2 20.Nd6 Rd8?! 21.Nxf7 Kxf7 22.Bd1+ Kg8 23.Bxc2 with a big advantage for White.

18...Bd3 19.Rfe1 Nd7



The tempting 19...bxc4 20.Rxe5 Bd4 was no good in view of 21.Re7 Bxb2 22.Rae1 Nd7 23.Nb7 Bf6 24.d6! Bxe7 25.dxe7 Re8 26.Nd6. Magnus does not go for suspicious material gains and utilizes his chance to connect his Rooks.

20.Rac1?

Stronger is 20.Nc6! Re8 21.d6. If 21...Bf2, then 22.Nxe5! Bxe1 23.Rxe1 Nxe5 24.Bxa8 Rxa8 25.Rxe5 and wins. On 21...e4!? there is 22.Ne7+ Kh8 23.Bxe4 Bxe4 24.Rxe4 Nf6 25.Rf4! (a precise move that freezes Black's knight) 25...Rad8 26.cxb5 axb5 (26...Rxd6 27.Bb4) 27.Bb4, with a decisive advantage. Despite the early Queen trade, the position is very rich in combinations. Maybe Yurtaev underestimated that.

20...Re8

The rook goes to e-file to support a pawn advance. It is possible that Magnus has already foreseen his 27th move.

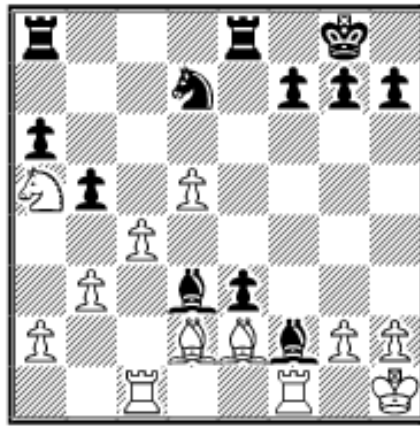
21.b3

A lazy move that allows Black's following combination. It seems White should have tried 21.Be2 Bxa5 22.Bxa5 bxc4 23.Bd1! (planning Ba4), where he would have had compensation for the pawn, for example, 23...Nc5 24.b3.

21...e4! 22.Be2

Surprisingly, White is still kicking after 22.Bg4 Ne5 23.Bh3 Bf2?! 24.c5 Bxe1 25.Rxe1, but what makes the difference in this line is 23...bxc4! 24.bxc4 Bf2 25.c5 Bxe1. Now Black has c4 for his knight and the b-file for his rooks and this is an easy win.

22...Bf2 23.Rf1 e3



Playing 23...Bxe2 would be inconsistent: 24.Rxf2 Bd3 25.Be3 with small advantage for White.

24.Bxd3 exd2 25.Rcd1 Re1!

An unexpected blow! Magnus is a very good tactician.

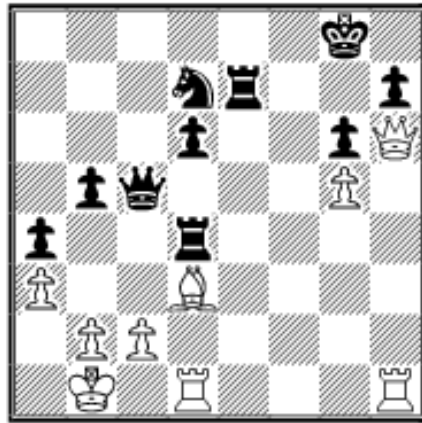
26.Rxd2 Rxf1+ 27.Bxf1 Be1

Winning a piece and the rest is technique.

28.Rd1 Bxa5 29.cxb5 axb5 30.Bxb5 Rd8 31.d6 Kf8 32.g3 Nf6 33.d7 Ke7 34.a3 Nxd7 35.b4 Ne5 36.Rxd8 Bxd8 37.a4 Kd6 0-1

I have prepared a small quiz to finish this report. It is based on the Movsesian - Korobov game to test your logic and sense of danger. With Black to move, what is the evaluation of the position and which of White's pieces is the most dangerous for you? What are Black's candidate moves?

**Movsesian,S - Korobov,A [B90]
Aeroflot open (2), 18.02.2004**



After 34.Qh6

In principle 34...b4 is playable, but on 35.Bxg6! Rxd1+ 36.Rxd1 you have to respond with 36...Nf8, as 36...hxg6 loses immediately: 37.Qxg6+ Rg7 38.Qe6+. After 36...Nf8 37.axb4 Qxb4 38.c3 and 39.Bd3 White has better chances, but Black is more or less OK.

From the variation above, one can see that the most dangerous attacking piece for Black is the white bishop. This may then help you to find an interesting defensive resource: 34...Qd5! 35.Rdf1 (removing the Rook from the pin) 35...Rxd3! (by eliminating the bishop Black gets counterplay) 36.cxd3 Qxd3+ 37.Ka1 b4. White's attack has evaporated, and Black stands well with two pawns for the exchange.

And here is what happened in the game:

34...Ne5?

Surprisingly, this might be the decisive mistake, although it's not easy to see the reason.

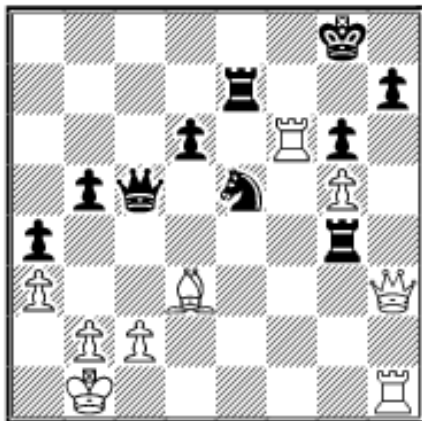
35.Rdf1 Rf7

35...Rg8 leads to the same position.

36.Qh3 Re7

36...Rxf1+ does not help. After 37.Rxf1 Black is helpless, as his pieces fail to defend his King.

37.Rf6! Rg4



38.Rxg6+!

All of a sudden White sacrifices a heavy piece. Now the black king embarks on a journey from which there is no return.

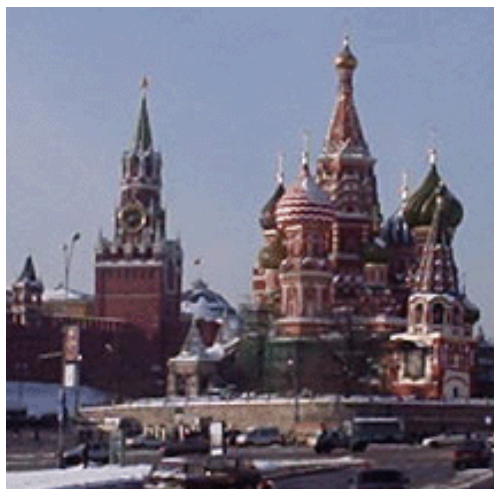
38...hxg6 39.Qh8+ Kf7 40.Rh7+ Ke6 41.Qf6+ Kd5 42.Rxe7 Kc6 43.Qh8 Kd5 44.Qh1+ Kd4 45.Qd1 Black resigns.

Standings after two rounds: Asrian, Bacrot, Bluvshstein, Dvoirys, Filippov, Inarkiev,

Kulaots, Mamedyarov, Markowsky, Movsesian, Postny, Rustemov, Sakaev, Sulskis and Van Wely - 2-0.

February 18: Round Two, No Respect

The Internet transmission of the games is still a complete mess. So I will concentrate only on the results in today's brief report. The major surprise of round two was the losses of previous Aeroflot Open winners Kaidanov and Bologan.



The 2004 Aeroflot Open takes place in Moscow

Kaidanov lost to GM Kaido Kulaots, ranked 92nd in the tournament, while Bologan faced Yuri Kruppa, who drew against Dreev yesterday. Bologan first gained the initiative to have a superior position in the middlegame, but then played an unsuccessful sacrifice and subsequently lost the game. Alexey Aleksandrov, who tied for first place in the two previous years, began with two losses this year.

The other rating favorites fared much better in this round. Bacrot won against Goloschapov from Ukraine and Sakaev defeated Kotsur from Kazakhstan. Rublevsky and Karjakin played a head-spinning game where one slight mistake could cost either side the game, but they each walked the tightrope with the highest of skill and it ended as a draw. First round victors Lautier and Sasikiran each drew their games as black without trouble.



Shaposhnikov – Smirin faced off in Round Two

In Shaposhnikov – Smirin, White's position looked dubious after the opening because of his un-castled king. However the Israeli Grandmaster played inaccurately and Shaposhnikov considerably improved his chances by finding the hidden drawbacks of his opponent's move. Nevertheless, the players agreed to a

draw in a position with a slight advantage for White.

After two rounds there are 15 players with two points out of two. Fourteen are GMs: Karen Asrian, Etienne Bacrot, Konstantin Sakaev, Semen Dvoirys, Shakhriyaz Mamedyarov, Kaido Kulaots, Alexander Rustemov, Sergei Movsesian, Sarunas Sulskis, Loek Van Wely (who won an elegant rook ending versus Romanishin), Evgeny Postny, Valerij Filippov, Ernesto Inarkiev, and Tomasz Markovsky. The other player, International Master Mark Bluvshstein, is a Canadian junior who defeated GMs Vladimir Belov and Sergey Dolmatov.

February 17: Round One, Chess Actors Struggling

With more than 150 Grandmasters and over 650 participants, this year's Aeroflot Open is a record-breaking tournament. While this is a source of pride for the organizers, it is also a tremendous headache. The difficulties were evident with the uncertainty about the starting time for section "A". Some of the players were told that play began at 3pm, while the Internet site listed 3:30 pm. Finally, Chief Arbiter Geurt Gijssen decided on the latter and posted an announcement on the bulletin board.



Chief Arbiter Geurt Gijssen

As it happens both the "B" and "C" sections accepted the FIDE time control this year. These sections were scheduled to play nine rounds in eight days to allow for an early start of the final round in the main event. So section "B" players were to play two rounds today and the double round for section "C" was scheduled on the 18th.

Yet, due to the 30 second increment in the time control, one of the 1st round games in section "B" finished awfully late while the pairings for the 2nd round were still in progress. Since sections "A" and "B" are played in the same hall it was impossible to start the games. After about an

hour, Mr. Gijssen announced a computer failure and permitted the main tournament to begin, but asked the "B" players to wait for the pairings to be announced. Unfortunately, another hour later the round was cancelled and the double round was rescheduled to the 19th.

The major problem in the main event was the online transmission of the games, which simply failed to work. Probably the only game transmitted without mistakes was that between Matveeva and Vaganian. That's because the moves were typed manually into the computer. However, the tech-experts are optimistic that they can fix the problem. So just be patient, it is always difficult to break records.

The starting line-up for section "A" underwent one important change when Vladimir Malakhov was called in to replace the top seed Vladimir Akopian. The student from Moscow could not decline the opportunity to play at home and his 2700 FIDE rating will be a rather important factor for promoting the tournament.

Section "A" has 205 players from 36 countries. The youngest player is the Norwegian Magnus Carlsen. The most experienced, by far, is GM Ratmir Kholmov, who was born in 1926. The top six boards are placed onstage and are surrounded by observers, TV cameras, and cables. As is usual in Swiss system tournaments, the favorites are paired with weaker players in the first round; but the leaders struggled to prove their superiority. Many experienced some difficulties. Perhaps playing onstage causes additional pressure, or perhaps the reason was the aforementioned delay.

Vladimir Malakhov, who is one of the best defensive players in the world, was paired with another Moscow student, Sergey Grigoriants. Grigoriants was a rising star in junior chess, but his progress has since slowed, especially when compared to the likes of Karjakin.



Sergey Karjakin at the Aeroflot Open

Malakhov, in his usual style, did not gamble in the opening and opted for a slow middlegame and endgame. Nevertheless, Grigoriants took the initiative and converted it into a pawn advantage in the approaching endgame. However, one has to have a forced mate or an overwhelming material advantage to beat Malakhov and the game ended as a draw.

Alexey Dreev fought for the initiative as black and his position was cause for anxiety around move eighteen because of his risky opening play. GM Yuri Kruppa stood clearly better than his famous opponent, but had spent too much time on the clock, and Dreev came away with the draw. However, it is not a good sign for Dreev when his sense of

danger deserts him, as he plays very double-edged openings.

Viorel Bologan also had difficulties equalizing against the Ukrainian GM Valery Neverov. A pawn down in a knight ending, the previous year's winner had to earn his draw!

On the other hand, former FIDE champion Alexander Khalifman had no problems with Alexei Iljushin and accepted a draw from a slightly better position. Perhaps he was so concentrated on obtaining comfortable equality with black that he wasn't ready to change his plans.

The main upset of the first round was Alexei Aleksandrov's loss with white to the Russian GM Marat Makarov. As Aleksandrov had tied for first in 2002 and 2003. Only Joel Lautier defended the reputation of the higher-rated players by defeating GM Leonid Yurtaev in 25 moves.



GM Joel Lautier defends his reputation against GM Leonid Yurtaev

**Lautier, J - Yurtaev, L [E81]
Aeroflot open (1), 17.02.2004**

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7

Leonid Yurtaev is a devoted King's Indian player. While he often achieves success, he relies on his opening intuition rather than home preparation. Joel Lautier's theoretical knowledge is more deep-seated.

4.e4 d6 5.f3 0-0 6.Be3 Nbd7 7.Qd2 c5 8.Nge2 a6 9.Bh6 Bxh6

9...Qa5 is the main line. However, the text is also occasionally employed, for example, by Garry Kasparov against Lautier in Horgen 1994.

10.Qxh6 b5 11.h4 e5

This seems dubious, not only because Kasparov went for 11...b4!? but because Black allows stabilization of the center and this is not in his favor.

12.dxe5! Nxe5 13.Nf4 b4

Only now Yurtaev deviates from Murey - Martinovic, 1986, 1-0 (50). Slobodan Martinovic played 13...bxc4, and lost in worse endgame.

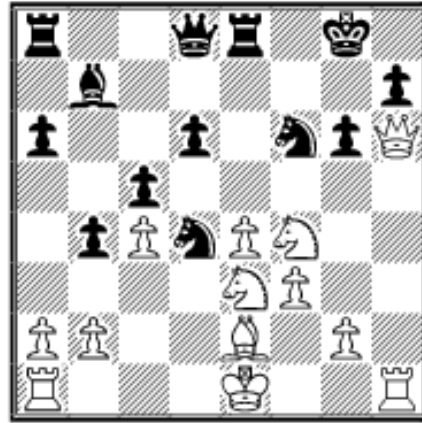
14.Nd1

Lautier spent much time on this move, but then played quickly until the end of the tactical skirmish.

14...Re8 15.Ne3 Bb7 16.Be2

White prepares for h4-h5 with a strong attack. Here Black had the interesting move 16...Kh8!?, preventing the h-pawns advance or forcing white's queen out. With his 16th move Yurtaev tries to create his own threats, but Lautier's attack is too dangerous to ignore.

16...Nc6 17.h5 Nd4 18.hxg6 fxg6



19.Ng4!

This wins by force.

19...Bxe4 20.Qh4

A very calm human move; not allowing any chances for the defender.

**20...Nh5 21.Nxh5 Qxh4+ 22.Rxh4 Bd3
23.Ngf6+ Kh8 24.Ng3**, and Black resigned on the next move.

Another notable first round result was Magnus Carlsen's loss to GM Sarunas Sulskis, who was highly concentrated and determined until the very end. Carlsen's surprise win in Wijk aan Zee C might affect his Aeroflot performance negatively since it places his opponents on notice! Sergey Karjakin's rating ensured him a relatively easy pairing in the first round and the Ukrainian prodigy won his game quite comfortably in a technical style.

Given the tournament tie-break system, one could suggest that winning with black in the first round might considerably improve a player's chances for a larger amount of the prize money in the case of tie. Among the contenders who won their games as black are Etienne Bacrot, Sergei Rublevsky, Sergej Movsesian, Pavel Tregubov, Alexander Moiseenko, and Loek Van Wely. Sergey Volkov did do, too. In fact, he won in only eleven moves.

Annakov, B - Volkov, S [D15]

Aeroflot open (1), 17.02.2004

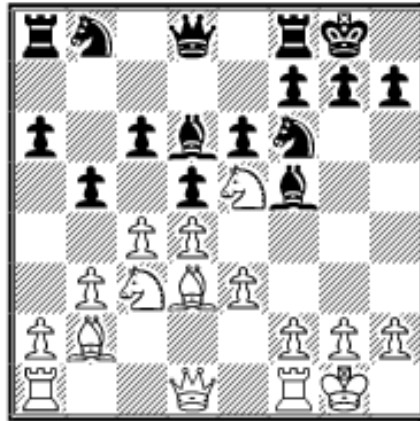
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 a6

Volkov's favorite system.

5.e3 b5 6.b3 Bf5

Black has a very solid position and his score in this variation is quite good.

7.Bd3 e6 8.0-0 Bd6 9.Bb2 0-0 10.Ne5?



A huge blunder, GM Annakov probably had not woken up yet, since he flew in from the States a day before. It takes awhile to adjust to the time difference.

10...Bxd3 11.Qxd3?!

11.Nxd3 was somewhat better, but Black would still have good winning chances. Now it's basically over.

11...dxc4 12.Qe2 b4 13.Na4 c3 14.Bc1 Qc7

15.a3 a5 16.f4 Nbd7, etc. 0-1

Ilya Smirin, Konstantin Sakaev, Shakhriyaz Mamedyarov, and Gregory Kaidanov all had to satisfy themselves by winning with white. The young Indian GM Krishnan Sasikiran won with a spectacular attack and shared his brief impressions about the game.



GM Krishnan Sasikiran

**Sasikiran, K - Kosyrev, V [D58]
Aeroflot open (1), 17.02.2004**

**1.d4 e6 2.c4 Nf6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Bg5 Be7 5.e3 0-0
6.Nf3 h6 7.Bh4 b6 8.Be2 Bb7 9.Bxf6 Bxf6
10.cxd5 exd5 11.0-0 c6**

This is a popular variation of Nimzo-Indian. Maybe 12.b4 is the most precise continuation, but I wanted to try 12.Qa4.

12.Qa4 Re8 13.Rfd1 Nd7

On 13...Qd6 I would play 14.Bd3 Nd7 15.e4

with an advantage.

14.Rac1 a6

This move looked suspicious to me at the board. Maybe it was better to go for 14...Nf8, and after 15.b4 White has a small plus.

15.Qb3

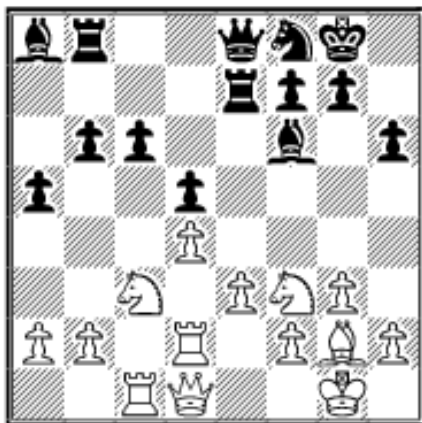
Defending against c6-c5, also possible is 15.Bf1

15...Rb8 16.Bf1 a5

My opponent rejected 16...Nf8, fearing 17.Na4 Ba8 18.Bxa6 b5 19.Nc5, but after 19...Ne6 20.a4 Nxc5 21.Rxc5 Qa5! 22.axb5 Qxa6 23.bxa6 Rxb3 Black wins a piece.

17.g3 Nf8 18.Bg2 Ba8 19.Rd2 Re7

I do not understand this move and the following play by Black. I would prefer 19...Ne6.

20.Qd1 Qe8

Somewhere around here I concluded that White should take the initiative and begin a kingside pawn expansion. With the queenside and center blocked, the fate of this game would be decided on the Kingside.

21.h4 Rd7 22.Nh2 Be7 23.Ng4 Bd6

Black's transfer of his bishop from f6 to d6 seemed dubious to me, and I decided that this is the proper time to break in the center.

24.e4 dxe4 25.Nxe4 Qd8?

White is clearly better after 25...Qe6, too, but at least there is no forced win.

26.a3

Instead of this weird looking move, White wins after 26.Nef6+ gxf6 27.Nxh6+ Kh8 28.Qh5 Nh7 29.Be4, but I didn't see the last move of the variation at the board.

26...Ne6

I expected 26...Kh8 27.Ne5 Bxe5 28.dxe5 Rxd2 29.Qxd2 Qxd2 30.Nxd2 c5 31.Bxa8 Rxa8 32.Nc4 with a better endgame, so 26...Ne6 was a pleasant surprise. Then I did not hesitate and took on f6.

27.Nef6+ gxf6 28.Nxh6+ Kf8

On 28...Kh8 my intention was 29.Qh5 Ng7 30.Nxf7+ Kg8 31.Nh6+ Kh8 32.Qg6. My opponent was already in time trouble, when it is extremely difficult to defend.

29.Nf5 Ng7

After 29...Ke8 30.Qg4 Bf8 31.Rxc6 Bxc6 32.Bxc6 a picturesque position could arise. It feels as if White is winning here.

30.Nxg7 Kxg7 31.Qg4+ Kh6

This looks strange, but I saw no defense after the more natural 31...Kf8 32.Qh5, too.

32.Rc3

Intending Rc1-c3-f3-f5-h5#.

32...f5 33.Qxf5 Rc7 34.Be4 Kg7 35.Qh7+ Kf8 36.Rf3 Be5

36...c5 37.Bxa8 Rxa8 38.Re2.

37.dxe5 Qxd2 38.Qh8+ Ke7 39.Qf6+

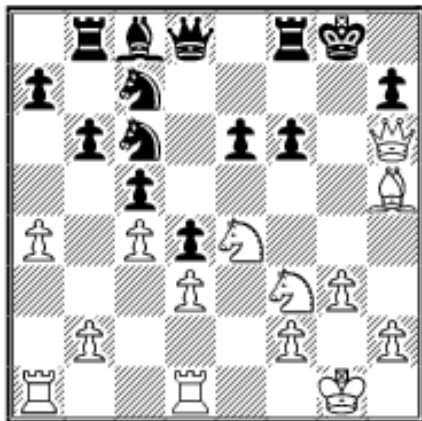
Played to make the time control.

39...Kf8 40.Qh8+ Ke7 41.Qxb8 Black resigns.

Eugeny Shaposhnikov earned a full point with a nice attack, even without queens.

Shaposhnikov, E - Bellaiche, A [C00]
Aeroflot open (1), 17.02.2004

Black is underdeveloped, but how would you exploit this?



21.g4! Qe7 22.g5 fxe5 23.Kh1

Played to utilize the open g-file; Black now forces a queen swap, but it does not save the game.

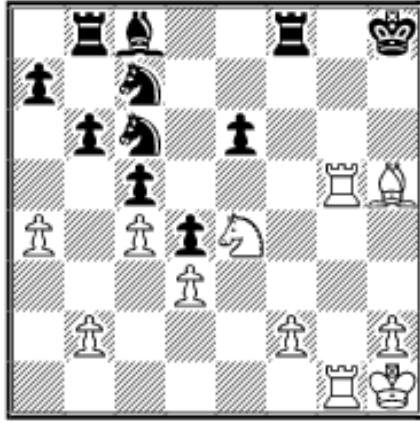
23...Qg7 24.Qxg7+ Kxg7 25.Rg1

This is a nuance as White does not have to take on g5 immediately.

25...h6 26.Nfxg5 hxe5 27.Rxe5+ Kh8
28.Rag1 (See Diagram)

28...Ne7

I had hoped for 28...Bd7 29.Bf7! Rxf7 30.Nf6! Rxf6 31.Rh5+, but my opponent preferred a less spectacular way to lose.



29.Be8 Rf5 30.R5g3 Black resigns.

So after the first round we have sixty leaders with one point. You can check the results and standings at the official tournament site: www.aeroflotchess.com. And, of course, visit **ChessCafe** for more stories and games.

February 16: The Gathering of the Fellowship

There is no other place in the world where you can observe so many Grandmasters in such a short period of time as at the hotel Rossiya. Chess players from all over just kept arriving; with everybody looked tired after the long journey to Moscow. I noticed Loek van Wely patiently waiting for a clerk's attention in the seemingly endless line to check in. And they're all going to play tomorrow, more than 600 players, which is a new world record according to the organizers. Another remarkable figure is that we have about 200 Grandmasters! More exact numbers will appear after the pairings are prepared. Hopefully everyone will get their room keys by that time.

Nevertheless, members of the fellowship of chess appeared quite happy meeting each other, exchanging news, discussing various issues such as Ilyumzhinov's recent proposal to organize the next FIDE knock-out championship in Libya. There was also tragic news about International Master Sergey Kiselev, from Moscow, who died in a fire in his apartment. Sergey was brilliant blitz player and he really loved chess.

The opening ceremony was scheduled for 8 pm, yet neither the playing hall nor the lobby was ready by 4 pm. However, the hotel staff performed a miracle as usual. They cleaned carpets, brought chairs and tables, installed monitors, and did everything possible for the ceremony to begin on time. Thankfully, the first thing that the organizers fixed was the internet connection.

The organizers have also addressed the issue of safety, which is especially relevant in Moscow after the recent terrorist attacks. They have increased the number of security guards and installed metal detectors at the entrance to the tournament lobby. The hotel also has its own security service, so the chessplayers will hopefully avoid any unnecessary trouble. Only the most absent-minded players might be affected, as they have to remember to bring their badges to the tournament hall.

Vassily Smyslov, Boris Spassky, and Anatoly Karpov all made speeches at the opening ceremony. Spassky was eloquent in his usual style, and his speech was very well received by the audience. The 10th World Champion said that the age-old viewpoint of the extinction of chess due to "draw death" did not come true. However, he is worried that modern chess players might die out due to hunger! There are simply too few good tournaments in the calendar. The "Aeroflot" open being a nice exception. Spassky also took issue with the customary



Viktor Korchnoi, Boris Spassky, and Anatoly Karpov at the 2004 Aeroflot Open.

pronouncement: "Let the strongest player win!" He reasoned that we should not be unhappy if the weakest player wins, so he wished the best of luck to all the weaker players.

The chief arbiter of the tournament (and **ChessCafe** columnist), Geurt Gijssen, made the drawing of lots with the help of Norwegian wunderkind Magnus Carlsen, who quickly guessed that Gijssen held a white pawn in his right hand. Therefore #1 seed, GM Vladimir Malakhov will have white in his

first game tomorrow.



WGM Mirzoeva interviews Joel Lautier

The Russian media will cover the event extensively and today there were three teams from the national TV channels. The most wide-ranging coverage was offered by the sport channel "7-TV." They not only filmed the speeches, but also interviewed several Grandmasters, including Victor Korchnoi and Joel Lautier. This comes as no surprise as the "7-TV" interviewer is WGM Elmira Mirzoeva, who switched from a chess career to television.

With a record number of participants concentrating on chess tomorrow, it is sure to produce some brilliant games. I will do my best to bring them to you. There will not be any PGN files of the round, but scanned scoresheets instead.



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