



From a Fresh Start To a New Dawn

(Part II)

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The meeting on April 10th at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam between Carsten Hensel, Steve Timmins, Malcolm Pein and me was a chessic Waterloo. The confidence that I carried for the “Fresh Start” proposals was shattered. Carsten explained that Vladimir Kramnik could not possibly agree to being seeded into a round of quarter-final matches. Kramnik was bound by his contract with Einstein TV, purchased from the Brain Games Network, and was absolutely *obliged* to play a world championship *match* against the winner of the Dortmund Candidates’ tournament. Following that match, if he was successful, he was allowed under the Einstein TV contract to play another, *voluntary* world championship match.

Thus for a first cycle, the maximum number of matches that Kramnik could play would be two. Full stop. Furthermore, the contract allowed a similar provision for a second cycle; he was obliged to play against the winner of a qualifying event in a world championship match, with the possibility, once again, of a voluntary defense too. Naturally, the contract was based on the eventuality of Kramnik winning these matches. Should he be defeated, the contract would become void. Kramnik’s financial guarantees for these matches were substantial, and it was clear that no one would voluntarily give up such an agreeable position.

This news came as quite a blow to me. My discussions with Steve had indicated flexibility in Kramnik’s position, but what Carsten



stated made it very clear that Kramnik's position was completely fixed. I joked that we had all made the trip in vain. What would we do now? Indeed, we had reached an impasse.

I explained that the world would not just idly wait for the Dortmund winner and Kramnik to play a match. Rather, what had already been achieved at that time was *partial* unity. FIDE, Kasparov and the proposed Commissioners were all prepared to back the "Fresh Start" proposals, and these would probably just go ahead *sans* Kramnik. Everyone would prefer *complete* unity, but in the absence of Kramnik's participation, partial unity was, regrettably, the only option for reviving a Classical Chess championship cycle.



Steve responded that this would be a "nightmare scenario" for Einstein TV. He asked if I was absolutely sure that FIDE favored "A Fresh Start". I said I was and that FIDE would issue a press release shortly, announcing that it too wanted unity within a fair, inclusive plan. There were doubts expressed that FIDE would make such a statement, but I reassured everyone that this was indeed the case.

At this point Carsten offered a proposal: Why not have Ponomariov play a match against Kasparov and the two match-winners play a match with one another for the undisputed world championship?



Carsten explained that he would have to clear this proposal with Kramnik but that he felt it was the best way to reach complete unity. Steve and Malcolm were very pleased with this suggestion and promised their full support.



I wasn't happy to have "A Fresh Start" go up in smoke. Over a year of careful consideration had gone into my proposals. For instance, every time Garry had suggested a change to me, no matter how small, I would respond with an avalanche of arguments to justify what I had put in "A Fresh Start". So much so that it became a standing joke between Garry and me that "A Fresh Start", or "Seirawan's Defense" as Garry started calling it, was inviolate.

Now, in a stroke, "A Fresh Start" was out the window. What about the world qualification tournament in the first cycle? What about Anand and Ivanchuk, two players who had honored their obligations to FIDE? They had declined their invitations to play in



Dortmund, and the solution Carsten was putting forward would mean that they would be out of the cycle. I felt heartbroken.

We spoke about this new proposal at great length, and I was cautious. We also discussed the second cycle, i.e. the fact that the defending champion would have to defend his title *twice*, and then *thrice* for the third cycle. These were tough concessions, but they were agreed. I needed something for FIDE to show that the players were willing to make chess and the *new* World Classical Chess Championship cycle more of a *sport* and not just protect the privileged rights of the defending champion.

Reactions

My train and tram ride back to my Amsterdam apartment was an unhappy one. My brain hurt. The meeting lasted until the middle of the afternoon but Carsten and I had spoken together until nearly 7 PM. As I had arrived at Schiphol at around 11 AM all the conversations had left me drained. It had been a very tough meeting. I desperately wanted complete unity for the greatest good of chess, but there was no way to get "A Fresh Start" involved for the first cycle. By the time I arrived home I was quite depressed and fleetingly considered just forgetting what had taken place. But as an honest broker, I had to deliver this new proposal to the others. How would everyone react?

Upon seeing me, Yvette immediately realized that something had gone terribly wrong. I was in a bad mood, and she had the good sense to let me brood while making us a good dinner. Out of frustration I bashed out an e-mail to Steve, Carsten and Malcolm and felt better for it. (The next day I would sheepishly withdraw my message.)

April 11th was telephone day. I wanted to make contact with all the proposed Commissioners to explain the new proposal. In the case of Bessel this was bad timing; he was deeply involved in meetings on the privatization of Czech Telecom and was unreachable. I spoke with his right-hand man, Serge Grimaux. Serge was a good listener, and his responses were surprising and reassuring. To paraphrase: "Look, Yasser, you've done your best and even if this solution isn't what you wanted, it gets us to chess unity. I don't see the problem. That was your goal and you've achieved it, be happy! You chess players are so brilliant, you figure out what will make everybody happy, but stop for a moment. This is the real world. Think about the *costs* of a world

qualification tournament, all those elimination matches and finally a unifying match! This new proposal is financially much easier for everyone. The players don't lose anything. The next FIDE championship begins in December 2003, and in the meantime, we get a chance to resolve the current mess. Really this is OK. It gives us time to build up the infrastructure, create a business plan and raise sponsor dollars. We need time to *market* these matches. Bessel is a businessman. He will support this counter-proposal."

Erik Anderson had a similar view. Complete unity was our goal and he didn't like partial unity. Erik thought the two-match proposal to be a reasonable compromise. Dato Tan Chin Nam was traveling, and I sent him updates by e-mail.

It was time to talk with Garry. He was agreeable but wanted to know about the draw-odds situation for both matches. I explained that they would be abolished for all cycles that fell *under* the Commissioners' purview. For sporting purposes, the public of today would insist on a tiebreaker. Garry agreed that this solution, while favoring him for the current cycle, would also be the fairest way to determine ties in future cycles.

We needed to know FIDE's reaction. Kirsan was disappointed with the new proposal. He liked "A Fresh Start", as he saw it as inclusive and fair. He understood that this, the first cycle, was a mess but he had a major concern: Anand and Ivanchuk *had* to be included in the Dortmund tournament. That way, at least the 12 highest-rated players in the world would be competing in the first cycle. Discussions then focused on possible financial support to Dortmund to make the inclusion of Anand and Ivanchuk possible. I would have to go back to Carsten and Steve and see if it could be done.

Einstein TV's Position

The next day, Friday, April 12th, I received the following e-mail message from Malcolm, which he distributed to Serge Grimaux, Steve Timmins, Carsten Hensel and Owen Williams (Kasparov's agent) and in which he summarized Einstein TV's position:

From: MALCOLMPEIN

Sent: Friday, April 12, 2002 10:32 AM

Subject: Einstein's position (post lunch)

Dear Yasser,

I was surprised and delighted when at our meeting on Wednesday in Amsterdam, Kramnik's representative presented a potentially workable and inclusive alternative to Fresh Start that could lead to unification. At this juncture I would like to summarise Einstein's position.

Einstein favour the proposed compromise with matches between Ponomariov v Kasparov & Kramnik v Dortmund qualifier and then the winners of those matches to play in Autumn 2003. This produces a Universally Recognised World Champion faster than we could have hoped for, which is to everyone's benefit and even quicker than under the original Fresh Start proposal.

We also would like to see a new WCA with Commissioners as envisaged and a committee of players that would advise on the structure of the 2nd cycle and the match between the winners of the above.

The 'cycle' above includes most of the key players bar Anand and is as

inclusive as it possibly could be at this stage unless someone drops out. The 2nd cycle will hopefully be even more inclusive.

We view unification as vital to the chess world and commercially to our

advantage. We are working on the basis that we will have continuing rights, particularly in the field of broadcast and would welcome any information on how these will be enshrined in the new organisation.

We are looking forward to meeting everyone in Prague.

Kind regards

Malcolm Pein
(Einstein Chess Advisor)

The Commissioners accepted that this message was a confirmation of a *firm offer* from Kramnik's side that this was the course that would make complete unity possible. With the die cast, attention now turned to creating the proper structures to support a new Classical Chess cycle. Folks got busy on this part of the enterprise. There was a lot of work to do.

I responded to Malcolm's message that the commercial rights were outside of my authority (come to think about it, did I have any authority?) but that these rights could certainly be negotiated in a unity agreement in Prague. Einstein TV was clearly part and parcel of any unity plan and its position had to be respected. Besides, Einstein TV would make a great partner for guaranteeing video and television coverage!

Anand

A key player in Einstein/Kramnik's new unity proposal was Viswanathan Anand, the third highest rated player in the world and a former FIDE Champion. It would be dreadful to launch a unification cycle without his participation. There were two possible solutions: Compensate the wild-card seed, Christopher Lutz, and replace him by Anand, or expand the eight-player field in Dortmund to ten players and include both Anand and Ivanchuk.

This was the moment for me that my work stopped being fun. I empathized with Christopher, considering how he would feel if he was asked to step down. Even with cash as compensation, would he have such an opportunity again? Furthermore, such a sudden change of players would significantly upset the average strength in each of the four-player groups. There would likely have to be a reshuffling of the players, causing them major disruption in their preparations.

Expanding the groups from four players to five would be a very tough challenge to the players. With only four players in the groups, the top two from each group were to qualify for match play. With five players, only the winner from each group would go forward to a match for the right to face Kramnik. This change of format would be necessary if ten players competed, because of

the need to accommodate the Dortmund tournament venue schedule. Such a dramatic change in the format was sure to cause the players a great deal of angst. There was no easy solution. I supported a ten-player field and wanted to get additional funding for their inclusion, but Bessel would be tied up in Czech Telecom discussions for a week to come. Did I mention that this was a two billion dollar deal? Some people have strange priorities. I'd have to wait.

On April 19th, FIDE released a statement dated April 17th announcing that the FIDE President would travel to Prague and attend the meeting in a spirit of compromise and to reach unity. This caused yet another dramatic leap in my telephone and e-mail box usage. Yvette was becoming seriously annoyed; she was losing her husband, and I found myself staying up quite late every night.

The days leading up to Prague went by surprisingly quickly. The major bones of contention had boiled down to the issues of how to resolve the situation with Anand and Ivanchuk. Would the replacement of Lutz be the best and least disruptive solution, or should Anand and Ivanchuk be added to Dortmund? The discussions were heated.

One day, Malcolm explained that contact had been made with Anand through a third party, and the feedback was that he didn't want to play in Dortmund. I responded that I would prefer to speak with Anand directly in Prague and make certain that he understood that he would be declining an invitation to a tournament that would be sanctioned by FIDE as an official qualifier. As Prague was only a week or two away, everything would be settled there. I asked Carsten and Steve just to keep open the *possibility* that one or both of Ivanchuk and Anand might be included. If Malcolm was right and Anand didn't want to play, things could be left alone. I just wanted to be absolutely certain that Anand would be making an informed choice.

I considered calling Anand and speaking directly with him myself but decided not to. Delivering a message over the phone, rather than in person, has a decidedly different effect, especially on a matter of such great importance. Anand would have every reason to be skeptical that such progress had been made. In Prague, he would get the straight scoop; everyone would be there, including the FIDE President, and he would hear it directly that Dortmund would become an official qualifier in a unity cycle. Comparing a

phone call from me with the array of persons who would be in Prague made my decision clear: I'd speak with Anand, face to face, in Prague.

To sum things up, the first cycle proposals for "A Fresh Start" were out, and the matches were agreed upon as the plan that would lead to complete unity. The issues being thrashed out were the draw-odds, still a particularly contentious issue, and the potential seeding of Anand and Ivanchuk. I thought that everyone was fully focused on these points.

New Upset

On April 14th a new concern was thrust into public view. The FIDE Rapid Chess Grand Prix had just been completed, and it was reported that a crisis had erupted on the eve of that event. Apparently, Peter Leko, a client of Carsten Hensel (small world), had traveled to Dubai with a signed contract guaranteeing him that the prize fund would be \$500,000 USD. I had read the announcements on the FIDE website promising \$120,000 USD and was surprised by an angry letter from Alexey Shirov published on the TWIC website protesting about the prize fund. Apparently, Kirsan Iljumzhinov had flown to Dubai to make what he thought would be the opening ceremonial move and let the event get underway, only to be confronted with a confused situation. On the spot, Kirsan had dug into his pocket for an extra \$120,000 USD, upping the prize fund to \$240,000 USD and the tournament took place. Leko, the player promised a half a million-dollar prize fund, was the winner...

I called Garry to speak about this, and we had a surprising call together. Since Kirsan had acted in such exemplary fashion regarding chess unity, we both felt great sympathy and sadness for his situation. FIDE Commerce and the Octagon Group had handled all the details and arrangements for these events, and Kirsan, completely unaware of the details, had literally stepped into a mess. Solving it in the style that he did was a magnificent gesture.

For me the Dubai episode reinforced my strong belief in the need for a Chess Commissioners' Office where the legal agreements would be clear and transparent. I also recalled the aborted Kasparov v Shirov match of a few years ago. These things just can't be allowed to happen in the future!

On Sunday, April 21st, I called and spoke with Steve. He was in fine spirits, looking forward to Prague and happy to support the new proposal of the two matches. "A Fresh Start" had become ancient history. We knew the outstanding issues and both felt that accommodation could be reached for Anand and Ivanchuk if they *wished* to participate. The following Tuesday Yvette and I set off to Prague in high spirits. I was confident about the future cycles, concerned about the draw-odds for the first cycle and expectant that Bessel and the other proposed Commissioners could find financial support for the Dortmund tournament and the placement of the two players.

Prague

Prague is a beautiful city, which is becoming prettier by the day. Since the velvet revolution, it has had a complete facelift, and each return has made me marvel at the construction and progress being made. The peace conference would bring new meaning to the term "Prague Spring." Yvette and I had arrived early for the tournament as she was a member of the organizational staff, and I had been relishing our early arrival as an opportunity to speak with Bessel and Serge. We were all looking forward to coming events when Bessel surprised me with a strong cautionary note that something could easily go wrong. "Listen to an old fox, Yasser. We haven't achieved an agreement yet." Even so, Bessel was in a good mood, and when Serge showed me the playing hall I was blown over. The Žofín Palace was simply a stunning setting, boasting a magnificent playing hall. I was determined to do my best in the tournament!

On Thursday, April 25th, sometime in the early afternoon, Garry phoned my room with a simple message, "Let's walk." There was a strange tone in his voice. I knew something was wrong, but was completely clueless as to what it might be. We started our walk, and I realized that Garry was doing his best not to explode. "Did you read the London Einstein statement?" "Huh? What London Einstein statement?"

<http://www.chessbase.com/newsdetail.asp?newsid=278>

Garry then proceeded to floor me with the news of the Einstein TV plan for unification. A plan that would have Ivanchuk and Anand play a match, the winner to play with Kasparov and the winner to play with Ponomarev ceding draw-odds to the defending champion. I was absolutely staggered. The announcement and its plan had never been discussed with me by

anyone. It violated our blackout rule and made all the work of the previous two months seem pointless. Garry was terribly upset, and I couldn't blame him. "Do Einstein and Kramnik want unity or to play games? I came here to Prague to help their tournament, help the players and now this! They make an offer, we accept and they take it back. They violate the rules of no announcements, and now FIDE will be upset. Where is the *goodwill*?" I felt like a complete dope. Garry vented for a few miles, and after our walk I rushed to Serge's offices for an Internet connection to read the London announcement. When I met Serge and Bessel later that evening for a few drinks, the mood was decidedly somber.

Bessel got me with the old, "I told you so," and then we discussed what to do. It was at this point that Bessel made one of the many tough calls that he would make in Prague with the unity effort: "We have to treat the announcement as a trial balloon and proceed on the basis that we have an agreement that we are all willing to support." Answering the London statement with one from the proposed Commissioners didn't seem viable. Bessel didn't want to get caught in a tit-for-tat open exchange with the media. A blanket rejection would push Kramnik away and might offend Madame Nahed Ojjeh, who was clearly trying her best to support the unity effort. How would FIDE feel? The officials at FIDE were going to be angry as they had never been consulted about a new proposal and this one directly told FIDE what it should do to manage its side. We decided that we should all get a good night's sleep and concentrate on the tournament. Things would calm down.

As for me, a good night's sleep sounded like a great idea, but sleep wouldn't come. Mentally, I kept re-reading the Einstein TV proposal. A good deal of work had gone into its creation. How long had *that* process been going on? Days, perhaps weeks? Didn't I just speak with Steve on Sunday and get reassured that everything was fine? I had trusted Steve and felt a very good bond with him. Back on March 15th Steve had been the hero very much responsible for saving the day and bringing us to Prague. Why throw this spanner in the works so shortly before our conference? There had to be a reasonable explanation, and I felt sure that the current unrest would blow over. When Steve and Carsten arrived in Prague, we would have a good chat together.

Players Arrive

By Friday, April 26th, most of the players had arrived for the

Eurotel tournament. They were very keen to discuss the unity efforts, and the bar of the SAS Radisson Hotel became a regular meeting place where groups formed. The London unity plan received a great deal of attention; with Madame Nahed OjjeH guaranteeing her financial support, the players realized that at long last unity was a very serious possibility. The excitement was palpable.

I had a number of discussions with my old friend Arthur Yusupov. He explained to me that before arriving in Prague he had been very pessimistic about unity, but now, *especially* after reading Einstein TV's plan, he had flipped and was very optimistic! I responded that before I came to Prague I had been very optimistic but that *especially* after reading the Einstein TV plan I had become very pessimistic! We spent a long time playing catch-up. I'm not sure, but after our discussions Arthur may have joined me in the pessimists' camp.

There was still the outstanding issue of how to respond to the Einstein TV plan. Garry wanted a press release to go out *immediately*. Bessel was in a very tough position. His own press release the month before had stated that he wouldn't be making any further public comments. Damned if you do and damned if you don't. In the end, he didn't make any further public comments, but it remained a constant source of irritation throughout. I think that in the end Bessel made the right decision. FIDE officials would have every reason to be upset by being blindsided with a new proposal. Previously they had concentrated upon "Fresh Start" and had been considering a new two-match proposal.

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony for the Eurotel tournament was a joy. The Žofín Palace hosted a packed house to witness the First Lady of the Czech Republic, Mrs. Havel, officially opening the Eurotel tournament. For the drawing of lots two fencers dressed in Black and White faced off. Kasparov selected the White fighter, who won a well-fought duel. Garry chose White in his first game against his first-round opponent, Gilberto Milos. The players quickly calculated their own colors. I would have Black in my first game with Boris Gelfand.

Afterwards, by happenstance, I took my dinner back at the hotel and I was eating alone as Yvette would be busy with last-minute

tournament details. Vishy Anand and his wife Aruna were having dinner, and I joined them. It was a very enjoyable conversation, and I found myself admiring Vishy and his princely statesmanship yet again.

I gave Vishy a data-dump of all the events that had come to pass, so that he was completely up-to-date on the situation. He was impressed by the effort that had been made and was now fully aware of how serious everyone was. We then spoke about his status. Vishy's view was very clear: he had declined Dortmund and didn't want to play there, even in the obviously changed circumstances. Full stop. He considered his position in the chess world not to be so different from Kasparov's. Okay, a bit less, but why should he have to play in a qualifier event? He was a former World Champion and felt that he should be treated more respectfully. His major point, and he made it *repeatedly*, was that unity was an absolute necessity for chess, that this had to come first. That he would *not be involved* in this first cycle but would rather take his chances in the second cycle.

Vishy put the situation in dramatic fashion; if it had not been for one lost game with White in the FIDE semi-final with Ivanchuk he could have been in the FIDE final championship match and we might be talking an entirely different story. He had his chance and would participate in a second cycle, provided that it was fair.

I explained to Vishy the loose details of the second cycle: a world qualifier, five players advancing to the Candidates' matches, to be joined by the highest-rated player who was not the defending champion. These six masters would play eight-game Candidates' matches; the defending champion would join the three winners and play 12-game matches, and the championship would be a 16-game match. In the third cycle the defending champion would join the round of quarter-final players and, to retain the title, would have to win three matches. This plan, including such details as the time-controls, tiebreaks and number of games, would have to be *approved* by a steering committee of grandmasters, as well as FIDE, but this design would be the one that was most likely to be adopted. Vishy was very favorable to these plans for the future cycles.

He was more than curious about one point: did *both* Kasparov and Kramnik really agree to these concessions? That they wouldn't receive an *automatic* seeding into a championship final match? Yes, they had agreed. These were huge concessions! Vishy felt

that with such concessions agreed, a Classical Chess world championship cycle would, once again, become a crown jewel in the chess world. And what about draw-odds? They were out. Permanently. This new cycle was definitely more of a sporting cycle than the old traditional ones. We also spoke about new annual Rapid Chess and Blitz Chess championships, and Vishy was quite happy with these new, separate lines of champions. It would be a great step forward for professional chess. Who would become the first “Triple-Chess-Crown winner?” We also spoke of the need to protect the existing major Classical Chess tournaments and to create a calendar that extended well into the future. We had to prevent the current chess wars from continuing.

Satisfied that we had had a good exchange of views, we wished one another well in the tournament and said our goodnights. While I regretted Vishy’s refusal to play in Dortmund, I respected his decision.

Eurotel Trophy Tournament Begins

The big talk of the day was that a man had been arrested for scalping tickets to the games. This put all the players in a good mood. There is nothing quite as wonderful as playing to a packed house. The players feel it as a call to do their best, and for the Eurotel tournament Serge and crew put on a truly magnificent event. Eurotel President Terrence Valeski was radiant. The tournament boasted 30 registered foreign journalists, as well as TV and local press. Folks, it doesn’t get any better than this.

For this day, my world focused in a new direction, the 64-squared board. My chess was definitely rusty, but in the first game things went well enough. I equalized easily, and Boris Gelfand offered a draw in an even position. Great! Now it was *my* turn with the White pieces! Ha! Well, the great plans of mice and men got a setback in the second game. I liked my position until I came up with an atrocious plan of Bf1-d3-h7, completely misplacing a good defensive piece. Boris played in excellent style and wiped me off the board. Rats!

At this point in my narrative I will turn my attention away from the Eurotel tournament and back to the unity process.

Grandmaster Voices

In my view, one of the great tragedies about the professional chess

world is the almost complete lack of input by grandmasters to *their* sport. After the days of the Grandmasters Association, professional players have seemed content to leave it up to the FIDE General Assembly to change the rules. Isolated voices of protest are politely ignored, and life goes on. One of the enormous benefits of the Eurotel tournament is that as, one by one, the players were knocked out of the event they were free to discuss the peace plan, possible options and the future of chess, all in a wonderfully relaxed atmosphere. The conversations were lively and free flowing. It was an extraordinarily rare opportunity, and I was grateful for it. The players who showed their concerns by participating in these late-night discussions also enjoyed the opportunity to speak with their colleagues.

One particular complaint seemed to be a common denominator for everyone: Time-controls. Nigel Short told me that in his last four, or maybe five, events there had been a different time-control used in each! Boris Gelfand was a harsh critic of the new FIDE time-control of “four-hour” chess. Everyone that I spoke with had the same view: organizers should be free to make *any* time-control they wish for their events. However, professional players should support three, and *only* three, time-controls: Classical Chess (or seven-hour games), Rapid Chess and Blitz Chess.

Discussions focused on the time-control for the Eurotel tournament. The matches were “Rapid Chess”, but no one had *any* experience with this time-control! As is common with Rapid Chess, the players started the game with 25 minutes each, but, instead of receiving a “bonus time increment of ten seconds per move”, which is common for Rapid Chess, the Eurotel event featured a “Bronstein Delay” method of five seconds per move. That means that after a player’s clock has been started, it doesn’t begin ticking for five seconds. If a player moves before the five seconds have elapsed, no delay-time is “accrued” for the next move. A player either utilizes the delay feature or does not. Both Anand and Ivanchuk’s second asked me to explain to them the new time-control. I think they were the most honest, and in truth no one had a clear idea of the time-control, owing to lack of experience. In my match with Boris Gelfand, for instance, I counted five seconds for my first two moves in order to be sure that *my* clock was correctly set, but Boris bashed out his opening moves so quickly that I couldn’t be sure that *his* side was correctly set!

Neither was the “Rapid Chess” aspect of the Eurotel tournament

the only time-control that was questioned. The “Blitz Chess” tiebreaker featured five minutes per player plus a two-second-bonus increment. Compare this with the FIDE Rapid Chess Grand Prix blitz tiebreaker, where each player began with five minutes plus a *ten-second* increment. And what about “Classical Chess”, or seven-hour chess itself? What should be *the* time-control for this form of chess? Is 40 moves in two hours, followed by 20 moves in one hour, followed by 30 minutes for the rest of the game, the very best time-control? Discussions focused on the third time-control, with a preference expressed for 15 minutes per player plus a *thirty-second* bonus increment. The increment method was preferred, as this would avoid any possible interference by the arbiter in the case of certain positions.

One thing that was universally agreed upon: A proper Grandmaster Committee *had* to be put in place to resolve these questions for *professional players*, and the sooner the better.

Formats For Unity

By far the most interesting discussion topic, and the one that generated the most creative concepts, was the unity plan for the first cycle. The Einstein TV proposal that had been published was a catalyst for a number of solutions. I couldn’t possibly list all the plans that were floated. Instead, I’ll just focus upon the three that received the most consideration.

Quadrangular

In this plan, four players would be seeded: Ponomariov, Kasparov, Ivanchuk and Anand. They would play four games against each other (i.e. 12 rounds of play), and the victor would be the FIDE representative against the winner of the match between Kramnik and the top-finisher in the Dortmund tournament.

Seeded Eight

This idea was twice as inclusive. Eight players would be seeded: the four mentioned in the “Quadrangular” idea and four others, three of whom would be Svidler, as the previous FIDE semi-finalist, and Khalifman and Karpov as former FIDE Champions. Should the eighth player be the next highest rated player missing from both cycles or should it be Judit Polgar, as the highest rated woman player? Such a field would make for a very interesting event. The “Seeded Eight” would play a double round robin.

Seeded Four Plus Qualifier

Finally, the third attractive plan was to have a world qualification tournament with four players joining the same four players seeded into the “Quadrangular.” The eight players would then contest a double round robin tournament.

Again, there were other plans floated, but these were the three that were discussed the most. Quick! Make your choice. Which one would you prefer? If you read further you’ll see the criticisms regarding these plans, so find the one you like best.

Problems with All Plans

Each plan presented above has its drawbacks. One way of looking at the “Quadrangular” was that the highest-rated players not in the Dortmund cycle were now in the cycle. The twelve highest rated players in the world, in fact. Another point of view is that three of the four players had competed in the 2001/2002 FIDE semi-final and final matches. In this case, Kasparov had replaced the other semi-final player, Peter Svidler. Was it fair to exclude Peter? If so, why? The sentiment seemed to be that the “Seeded Eight” format was more inclusive and fair.

Better yet was the “Seeded Four Plus Qualifier” format. Now we were getting back to “A Fresh Start”, and this plan seemed to garner the most support. One question posed was whether, for the world qualifier, the seven players from Dortmund who didn’t win there would *also* be eligible. My view was, why not? Let them play. A counter-view was that they would already have had one chance in Dortmund, and why should they receive a second opportunity? Discussions were lively.

The one clear *fault* with all of these plans was the position of Ruslan Ponomarev. Whether participating in a quadrangular or a round robin, wasn’t his position as FIDE World Champion being demoted? After all, he *is the official World Champion*.

Participating in a *qualifier* to play against the Kramnik Dortmund winner didn’t do justice to his status. For instance, in the “Seeded Eight” player plan, he would be facing players whom he had defeated in the semi-final and final matches. Why should he have to do that? Shouldn’t Ponomarev be placed in the same advantageous position as Kramnik? Let others play a quadrangular, a round robin of eight seeds, and the winner would

challenge him!

Fixing the Agenda

I presented all of these plans to Bessel, setting out the corresponding advantages and drawbacks. We needed to fix the agenda so that the meeting didn't descend into a chorus of voices and votes. Bessel was a careful listener and surprised me with an altogether different counter-argument: "The sides have to be balanced. On Kramnik's side there is a Dortmund event and a subsequent match. If we make an eight-player qualifier for the FIDE side, we know Garry won't play. He already deserves a direct re-match, so that is out. As I see it, there really are only two choices: Either we go back to your original proposal, "A Fresh Start", in which case Kramnik is out, or we have to support the matches as our only solution."

It was a very tough decision, but it was also clear that the only way to obtain complete unity was with the plan for two matches. The agenda was thus fixed.

It has taken me a while to write this account of the events before and in Prague. The time has given me the benefit of reading, in particular, two sets of post-Prague impressions, one from Alexey Shirov and one from Anatoly Karpov. Alexey explains that he had sent a fax to Bessel supporting a grand 16-player round robin event to decide the championship title. Bessel had shared this fax with me; this plan was unworkable because of Kramnik's contract with Einstein TV. Karpov's plan was a triangular event between Ponomarev, Kramnik and Kasparov, the simplest idea of all. Yet again, Kramnik's contract forbade such a solution. Kramnik's position was fixed in contractual stone. He had to play a *match* and, if he was successful, there could be a voluntary second match.

This wasn't the first or the last time that Bessel and I were tripped up by Kramnik's contract. It was annoying always to be presented with this obstacle, and the thought of simply supporting "A Fresh Start" was tempting. But such a course would be a total failure of what we all wanted: complete unity. We wished to make that our primary goal, and if it meant that we would be criticized, we would have to suffer the consequences. Complete unity opened the doors to commercial sponsors. Partial unity only insured the continuation of all the existing rivalry and chaos of the day. We had to bite the bullet and fix the agenda with a single plan for

complete unity. It was crunch-time, and Bessel made it easier for me: "Yasser, if the players ask, this was my decision."

At this point, I would like to interrupt my narrative. Readers may not like "A Fresh Start" or the plans presented, or even the arguments for and against them, but this presentation fairly explains what plans were discussed and why they were ultimately rejected. We weren't wasting our time in Prague and we were all actively searching for complete unity. If we didn't achieve complete unity, the future of chess would be uncertain. Conversely, complete unity would put the future of chess on a positive road to recovery.

One thing I truly wanted to know was why Einstein TV's proposal had been published shortly before our peace conference. (There would be a logical explanation and Steve and Carsten would reveal all.) The conference was approaching quickly. But for an agreement to be concluded in Prague lots of arrangements were still needed. The players were still discussing everything in groups. Tension was growing. The date of the long-awaited conference was approaching fast, and it was realized that almost anything was still possible. The best or the worst. An historic agreement or an ignominious debacle.

[End Part I I]

(The third and final part will be posted at ChessCafe.com shortly.)



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