



From a Fresh Start to a New Dawn

(Part III)

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GM Jeroen Piket

Unlike my relationship with Kasparov, where I can place exactly when we first met, I can't do the same with Jeroen Piket. I've known him for approximately 15 years and I'm sure I met him in one of the many great Dutch events, but was it Tilburg during the series of Interpolis tournaments? Wijk Aan Zee? VSB? Melody Amber? Donner Memorials? Or perhaps it was Ohra and one of the many Dutch Swiss events? Whatever the date, it has been a wonderful friendship. We worked especially closely with one another when we, along with Swedish GM Ulf Andersson, assisted Jan Timman in his 1993 FIDE championship match against Anatoly Karpov.

The chess world is full of truly outstanding people and Jeroen is a pearl. He's an honest, forthright person. I've a tremendous respect for his skills as a player and even more for him as a person. Jeroen was fortunate to be born Dutch and to take up the game of chess in a nation that truly appreciates it. Following in the trail blazed by Max Euwe and Jan Timman, Jeroen has been the beneficiary of numerous great Dutch tournament invitations and had a wonderful

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benefactor in Joop Van Oosterom. Therefore it came as a puzzlement to hear him say in Prague, “So these two games (with Peter Svidler) are my parting gift to the chess world.” “What,” I asked Jeroen, “are you talking about?” Jeroen then proceeded to tell me that he was retiring as an active grandmaster, that he wouldn’t be playing any further major events, only the occasional league, blitz and an exhibition simul and that was it; he was hanging up his spurs.



In a concentrated period full of surprises this was a completely unexpected blow from a different direction. I mean, my goodness! If Jeroen, with all his fortunate benefits as a leading Dutch grandmaster – and I don’t mean to embarrass him with this mention – was giving up chess, what chance is there that others will pursue chess as a profession? Consider that Jeroen at one time had a rating above 2700, was Champion of Holland many times and is still only 33 years old. That is quite young. (Kasparov is 39 and playing the best chess of his life.)

Jeroen explained that with his family, including two small children, he was concerned about their future. He has no pension and who knows in a few years what the situation may be; what if chess continued its steep decline? If there was ever a chance to make a career change, now was the time. Ten years hence, there might be no such option.



I was shaken.

I’ve witnessed so many of America’s promising players leave the game – wasn’t I considering the same thing myself? – that I refocused yet again. If chess has a future, we need to have complete unity. Goodness gracious, how do you replace such a person as Jeroen Piket? What a loss! The thought of his absence from the chess world troubled me deeply.



Khalifman’s Contribution

A frequent contributor to our nightly, informal gatherings in the SAS Radisson bar was former FIDE World Champion Alexander Khalifman. Sasha (this Russian nickname for Alexander is a tough one in the chess world; there are a lot of Alexanders playing chess) was vitally interested in the unity effort and he liked the proposals in “A Fresh Start” for the second and third cycles especially. His two main concerns were finding the proper “justice” for the first cycle and the world qualifier format. During



the tournament in Bali, Indonesia 2000, he explained to me an intriguing idea for a “double Knockout” solution to the FIDE world championships. As I had withdrawn myself from FIDE events, I listened with half an ear and subsequently forgot his idea. Now was the perfect moment for a revival.

I had long conversations with many of the players in Prague, including Michael Adams, the sixth highest ranked master in the world. Like most players, Mickey liked the future cycles but was less than happy with the Swiss system as a qualifier. Many players shared Mickey’s view – statistics notwithstanding about its efficacy. The Swiss system has a few downsides and in no particular order they include:

- The vagaries of a Swiss allow for a wide variation between the strengths of the opponents;
- In a Swiss the color allocations can be badly lopsided; getting the black pieces in the last two rounds is not uncommon;
- Once a player is in the comfort zone of qualifying, short draws may start occurring on the top boards. (The players are well aware that sponsors and the spectators don’t appreciate “GM draws” but in a Swiss qualifier the players have to put qualifying ahead of pleasing the fans.) Mickey explained that he probably “...played 25 moves for my last three rounds...” in recollecting Biel 1993 and the Swiss qualifier that took place there.
- The darkest side of the Swiss, and *all* the players complained about it, is the very *suspicion* of last-round collusion. A player who wins with Black in a must-win last round game causes eyebrows to be raised and no one likes to be double-guessed as a cheat.

For all of these reasons, Sasha’s idea of a double Knockout was much preferred to a Swiss format. I hadn’t realized the extent to which the players had come to like the knockout system. Sasha was very aware of the plan for the second cycle, that of having a world qualifier with *five* players qualifying for Candidates’ matches. The highest rated player other than the World Champion would join the five qualifiers and play elimination matches. The three winners of these matches would be joined by the defending World Champion for the semi-finals and a final championship match. “But Sasha, how do you get five qualifiers from 128 players in a double Knockout,” I asked. “Simple,” he said. He took my folder and within a few seconds wrote down the system.

All the players were enthusiastic. We had a new system for the world qualifier!

“FIDE WORLD QUALIFIER The FIDE World Qualifier tournament will be a 128-player **double match elimination elimination** event. For the second cycle, 5 players qualify to Candidate Match play. Concept by GM Alexander Khalifman.”

Start	128			(Attachment Annex B)
R 1	64	64		
R 2	32	$32 + 32 = 64$	32 players eliminated	
R 3	16	$16 + 32 = 48$	24 players eliminated	
R 4	8	$8 + 24 = 32$	16 players eliminated	
R 5	4	$4 + 16 = 20$	10 players eliminated	
R 6	2	$2 + 10 = 12$	6 players eliminated	
R 7	1 + 1	6	6 players eliminated	
R 8		3	3 players eliminated	
Qualifiers	2	3	5 Qualifiers	

Both Kramnik and Kasparov liked Khalifman’s solution too. You see the magic of meetings – Unity!

The conversations with Sasha regarding the first cycle were serious affairs. He recognized as much as anybody that Kasparov was something “special” as a player and deserved an opportunity to rejoin FIDE but Sasha couldn’t shake the feeling that a direct challenge to FIDE Champion Ponomarev was the incorrect way. Unity was the goal and reconciling the goal with a more “just” first cycle caused the conversations to spin in circles. (Explanations were given in Part Two of these articles.)

Carsten Hensel: A Genuine Proposal for Unity?

The one issue that I definitely wanted to sort out before the conference was the unexpected release of the Einstein proposal prior to Prague. I had very long discussions with Carsten in the Czech capital and we were often the last in the Radisson bar. After the last call for drinks we would take a short walk outside the hotel. What had happened?

I explained to Carsten that it was clear to me that the Einstein proposal was his and not Steve's. The English had been too halting and was a dead give-away. The announcement had hit Prague like a bomb and had made Garry totally furious; it had in fact poisoned the atmosphere and made me feel like a mushroom.

Carsten began by apologizing to me, saying that the announcement was nothing personal against me, that he didn't mean to undercut my role and the work that I had been doing. While complimenting me for my personal initiative, he explained, at great length, that my "A Fresh Start" article had created a firestorm of complications for himself, Kramnik and the Dortmund organizers. After my article appeared, it seemed to him that everyone he spoke with wanted to talk about it. The Commissioners' press release had upped the ante. Then Garry had taken a pro-active stance in articles on his website. FIDE's supportive press release had been the final blow. Suddenly *both* Kramnik *and* Dortmund were under tremendous pressure to state their position publicly.

For Carsten, the situation had grown intolerable. Rumors were swirling around about the status of Dortmund, including the question of whether it had any status at all. His sponsors were growing nervous. My "A Fresh Start" proposals hadn't mentioned Dortmund's inclusion, which was quite true. Kramnik just *had* to make a statement that would clarify his commitment to Dortmund and to his own position as the Classical Chess World Champion.

This was the crux of the problem. Carsten was caught between a rock and a hard place. He was in a classic conflict of interest. On the one hand, his client Vladimir Kramnik had to make a statement. Fair enough. If Vladimir had made a statement along the lines of, "I, World Chess Champion Vladimir Kramnik, look forward to defending my title against the Dortmund winner and will support a unity effort after fulfilling this obligation," life would have been fine. The problem is that Carsten was also an advisor to the Dortmund tournament. For years Carsten has helped the Dortmund organizers build up an annual world-class tournament. Simultaneously he wanted to protect it, as well as the participants, from being subjected to any last-minute replacements, which might have "damaged" the event and all the planning that had been carried on for over one year! Thus the Einstein plan had included a way for Anand and Ivanchuk to be involved in the first cycle, *outside* of the Dortmund event. Carsten's Plan, as we now called it, was an entirely logical

attempt to protect both of his clients. The problem is that by making his announcement he took a very grave risk of derailing a complete unity effort and he almost forced a partial unity outcome.

While simultaneously expressing my sympathy and understanding as to why the Einstein plan had been released, I also explained its devastating effects:

- Malcolm's message of April 12th had been received as a firm offer. An offer Kasparov and the proposed Commissioners had accepted. (FIDE preferred the "Fresh Start" proposal.) The new Einstein plan was seen as withdrawing the April 12th offer and putting a new, less attractive one in its place.
- Einstein and Steve Timmins in particular had gotten a black eye, as he was the co-signer of the press release, and Malcolm's message, on behalf of Einstein, meant that the two plans were at odds.
- The Einstein plan had broken our blackout rule.

Carsten accepted that all these criticisms had validity, but he felt he had had no choice and had been compelled to make a public response. In a strange way, I was the one to "blame," for having launched "A Fresh Start". Inadvertently I had rocked Carsten's world.

Real Trouble With Carsten's Plan

During my lengthy discussions with Carsten I had to keep my admiration for what he had done secret. Kasparov, Bessel and others were still very annoyed with him. What he had managed to do was a bit of a coup: he had *momentarily* focused attention away from Dortmund. It had been a clever ruse. Unfortunately, it was entirely unnecessary for the simple reason that Anand didn't want to play in Dortmund at all. As the days moved forward towards May 6th, reintroducing Anand and Ivanchuk into Dortmund again became the most discussed option during the pressure-packed talks. One ironical note is that while everyone wanted to talk to Anand about his participating in the Dortmund tournament he was busily winning the Prague event. We all felt it would be grossly unfair to disturb his concentration during the tournament. Anand won the Eurotel trophy and was thus "unreachable" while we all quarreled amongst ourselves over what to do. Strange how these things go.

While I wasn't as upset as others about the bullet points set out above, my annoyance with "Carsten's Plan" lay in a completely different direction: the plan itself. My view was that while all is fair in love and war, Carsten's Plan was, as Bessel said, "...A trial balloon..." designed to divert attention. Properly ignored, it was a case of no harm no foul. No, it was the plan itself that was so grating.

The Carsten Plan was released under the guise of attempting "unity" in the chess world. In truth, I couldn't think of a single *worse* idea for preventing such a glorious goal. The whole world knew that Kasparov didn't believe that *any* qualifier for him was necessary. He wanted – no, demanded – a direct rematch. Placing *two* qualifying matches in his path was designed to provoke a strong rejection from him. Particularly pernicious was the condition that a match with Ponomarev would cede the FIDE World Champion draw-odds. Why *deliberately* bring up a condition that would absolutely be a non-starter? Viewed from this perspective, I doubted that Kramnik's side was sincere. If those doubts were founded, then complete unity was an impossibility. Such a realization forced me to accept that May 6th would only produce partial unity.

Carsten explained that, yes, while his plan had its drawbacks, it could all be negotiated. I had to accept that this was a negotiating tactic: First you make a new unpleasant offer and then you negotiate backwards to show what a reasonable fellow you are. Somehow this chapter was missing in all those "How to get to Yes" books that I used to read.

I expressed my pessimistic view to Bessel and to Eric Keyzer, an attorney for the large European law firm Allen & Overy. Eric would come to play a most important positive role in the days ahead, and I will introduce him shortly. Bessel encouraged me to do my best to seek a solution and reminded me that we hadn't failed yet.

Steve Timmins: Get Out of Jail Free

As the Eurotel tournament wound down, Einstein TV's CEO Steve Timmins arrived in Prague over the weekend and prepared himself for the May 6th peace conference. Poor Steve seemed to spend the entire weekend apologizing to everyone he spoke with for having released the "Einstein Unity Plan." We joked that his

chambermaid got an apology on check-in.

In America, one of the most popular board games is Monopoly. The budding young capitalists of the nation learn to buy and sell properties, build houses and hotels and collect rents from the other players who land on their property. As players move around the board they sometimes have to go to "jail." Cards of chance include a "Get Out of Jail Free" card that helps the player get back in the game. What Steve didn't know is that in my eyes he possessed just such a card. Back in Seattle on March 15th, Steve was very much the hero with me. If it had not been for him at that crucial moment, there would have been no unity plan at all.

Upon seeing me, Steve was white-faced with apology. I interrupted him and told him that there was no problem between us at all. Sit down and have a cup of tea. He got something stronger. Still, I was curious: How had it come to happen that the "Einstein Unity Proposal" had been released at all?

Like most problems in life, it was based on a simple miscommunication. I paraphrase his explanation: "I was traveling abroad when Carsten sent me his plan. I sent him an e-mail asking him if "everyone" had received it. For me "everyone" included you. For Carsten, "everyone" meant Kramnik, Malcolm and myself. I called Malcolm, who had made some corrections to the text, and asked him if he thought it was okay. Malcolm thought so but asked, 'Has Yasser seen it?' I told Malcolm that I thought so." So simple. Communicating by e-mail has its obvious drawbacks.

Steve continued that Carsten had been particularly anxious to make the plan public. I had left for Prague and Yvette's cellular phone had been replaced with one for local use. (The Eurotel tournament was sponsored by Ericsson and also by Juice, which is a local wireless connector.) It all made perfect sense to me. I reassured Steve that there was no problem and we brought one another up to date.

A point already made in Part 1 of my account is that Kramnik and Einstein TV are not one and the same. Although they have a common interest, their perspectives are also quite different. Put simply, Einstein TV wants to make a cycle that is compelling for sponsors and is therefore profitable. Kramnik, while certainly wanting the same thing, also has his own interests and that of the chess world to consider. Steve liked "Carsten's Plan" because it was financed and he thought it would bring unity. Kramnik liked

the plan because Anand and Ivanchuk would be involved in the first cycle. Thus, there was a lot of confirming and reconfirming of points just to be sure that “Kramnik’s side,” were all in accord.

Before ending this “Get Out of Jail Free” section, I ought to add that March and April 2002 was a period of stark contrasts. At the very time when our new partner, Einstein TV, was proving itself a godsend by injecting enthusiasm and integrity into the chess world, Raymond Keene’s old Brain Games set-up was the subject of a devastating series of exposés about its financial dealings and practices, in the UK journal *Private Eye*. We were so lucky to have Einstein TV and Steve Timmins.

Some Players Go Home

One particular surprise was to witness the many strong players who had been knocked out of the tournament check out of the hotel and rush home. The Eurotel tournament invitation had been particularly generous, covering the players’ hotel stay through May 6th with daily pocket money for the meals as well. Our hosts, Bessel and Serge Grimaux, who were going well out of their way to bring about unity in the chess world, had created a convivial atmosphere for talks, yet players such as Leko, Shirov and Ivanchuk were scattering home. Didn’t they care? I don’t know how to answer this question and can only hope that they deeply care but that pressing business caused them to leave early.

For myself, this was a bit depressing. Especially Ivanchuk’s departure. For the last few months I had been writing his name so often that even with my poor typing skills I could accomplish it in two seconds flat. Too, hadn’t the FIDE President, for the last month, been insisting that Ivanchuk and Anand be included in any new cycle? It was strange that, with the most historic chess conference in recent memory upon us, Ivanchuk would simply leave. Ivanchuk had been highly motivated and focused upon the Eurotel tournament, I simply didn’t have a chance to talk with him while in Prague.

Kramnik: “A Players’ Champion”

Vladimir Kramnik at over 6 foot 2 inches tall cuts an imposing yet approachable figure. A youthful-looking 26 years old, Vladimir is surprisingly soft-spoken. Not only can he be pleased by a fabulous career to date, he has every reason to be considered the future of chess. We had lengthy discussions while in Prague.

I was quite surprised that Vladimir had cloaked himself with a new mantle: that of protector of the “rights” of the players. By this I mean that Kramnik took the position that while Dortmund was “absolutely fixed”, the FIDE side had to do more and to include more players in its “cycle.”

We went round and round in our discussions and I couldn't understand Vladimir at all. It was not his position to take responsibility and to “protect” the rights of the players. He was usurping FIDE's role and what it was hoped would become a role for the Chess Commissioners as well. Vladimir would counter that as the World Champion he has a responsibility to chess and its best players. I would then go on to ask if Anand had approached him to say, “Please, Vladimir would you fight for my rights?” To which he would laugh and say no but that, yes indeed, other players such as Grishuk had done precisely that. That he felt a genuine responsibility for helping his colleagues that weren't in the cycle.

I would then open up a new front and say that if he was so terribly worried about the rights of the players, why was Dortmund such an elite event? He would explain that Dortmund, or rather his Candidates' cycle, had indeed been planned to be as inclusive as possible and also had, like FIDE's cycle, included an Internet qualifier, that economics had dashed these plans and that, regrettably, he had to be satisfied with an eight-player qualifier. Even so, he pointed out that Dortmund was far more inclusive than just two players in a match.

Vladimir was insistent that FIDE's side had to “do more” than just set up a match between Ponomarev and Kasparov. While Carsten's Plan wasn't perfect either, it was financed and he was trying his best to help his colleagues. I couldn't persuade him that he was mistaken. His role was to win competitions, not *arrange* them.

If he was so concerned about his colleagues, why not then accept the proposals of “A Fresh Start”? The answer was like a predictable drumbeat: “I have a contract with Einstein TV and I have to honor it.”

I tried my final argument. “Vladimir, right now, with the two matches settled, we have chess unity,” I said. “This is far more important than any first-cycle justice. It paves the way forwards. It

gives you a clear chance to become the undisputed World Champion. If you were to win these two matches you could become a chess legend. Why not just state that you have made this a primary goal for the future of chess?" Vladimir's answer was quick: "I have to support the rights of my colleagues too and can't just be blind to them."

And so it went on.

New Troubles or Old Troubles?

As well as our nightly discussions at the SAS Radisson bar, another favorite players' hangout was the VIP room at the Žofín Palace. Besides being well stocked with food and drink it was an ideal place to watch the Eurotel Trophy games in progress and get the expert – as well as elementary – explanations for the games in progress by GMs Lubomir Kavalek and Genna Sosonko. The room was always full of people, including visiting dignitaries, journalists, TV crews and players following the moves and offering helpful advice. One young lady, her first name is Johanna but I missed her last name, surprised us by correctly guessing a whole series of moves made by Karpov. Before too long she was also taking part in our "unity talks." "Don't forget about the women players," she sternly warned us. Groan. We were all so busy sorting out the mess in the male camp that we hadn't yet put on our thinking caps about how to insure a Classical Chess women's championship. Johanna was absolutely right. If chess unity could be achieved on one front, it should be doable with the women as well.

I pushed this question about "women's chess" to the back of my mind and privately wondered how exactly this issue was to be resolved. What I wanted for the future of chess was to put it into the hands – tender mercies – of market forces. Let the sponsors decide what formats were the most successful; match play, knockouts, classical or blitz, there would be a profusion of opportunities to back a preference. I thought about the Chinese, Georgian and Russian women players, the Polgar sisters and our American ladies. I'm confident that there are indeed commercial sponsors ready to support professional women players, but without unity, in my opinion, there would be nothing to discuss.

Yes indeed, that Grandmaster Steering Committee was going to be one busy group!

Eric Keyzer: Giving Attorney Jokes A Bad Name

I must confess a certain fondness for jokes about lawyers. In fact I have a fairly wide repertoire. Eric Keyzer, on the other hand, is precisely the type of attorney that makes the attorney jokes look misguided. Thoughtful, sincere, precise, brilliant and genuinely interested in the welfare of chess, he was the perfect person to play a key assisting role. He had been hired by Bessel Kok at the start of the World Chess Online project and was now in Prague on his own initiative “just” to enjoy the tournament. His spectator role lasted minutes and he was soon thrust into the thick of the negotiations to try and seek for a compromise.

Eric took on the role of the honest broker, shuttling between all the sides. He worked very hard to reintroduce Anand and Ivanchuk into the Dortmund event – despite knowing that Anand had refused such an invitation. In Eric’s view, it was perfectly all right that Anand would decline, but he deserved the proper respect of a formal, as opposed to an informal, invitation. Eric would also play a very helpful role in the peace conference.

Eve of the Conference

On May 5th, FIDE President Kirsan Iljumzhinov, FIDE Secretariat Emmanuel Omuku, FIDE Deputy President Georgios Makropoulos, and FIDE Grandmaster advisors Zurab Azmaiparashvili and Jaan Ehvest arrived, together with FIDE Commerce Director Andrey M. Orlov and the President’s translator Polina Tsedenova, in Prague for the Eurotel closing ceremony. Before and after the ceremony, Kirsan visited the VIP lounge of the Žofín Palace and met everyone there. In no time, Kirsan was in deep individual discussions with Vladimir and Garry. It was a busy evening for everyone. Tomorrow was the day!

Before leaving the Žofín Palace, I had a chance to congratulate Vishy on his fine victory and to talk about the next day. He asked about the unity plan on the agenda and I told him it would feature the two matches solution. That the meeting promised to be a tumultuous one, with a lot of discussion taking place, and that I was pessimistic about a solution. We talked about his attendance and he said that he would prefer to do some sightseeing; he had played chess the entire time! I told Vishy that his attendance would be most appreciated, that I had no idea what the outcome might be and that anything might happen. That he should be there

and that the future of chess could well depend on the outcome of the meeting. Sightseeing could wait!

Vishy didn't attend the meeting. I was quite surprised to read in a post-Prague interview that he was quoted as saying that he had not attended the meeting because it would be a mere "formality." Such a view would certainly surprise anyone who did participate. Again, I was confused by Vishy's decision not to attend. He was in Prague and he should have been in the meeting.

As usual, Carsten and I pulled another late-night discussion. We reviewed where things stood and it was clear: Vladimir was against the two-match unity proposal because it didn't do enough for his colleagues. Dortmund's line-up was untouchable. An expanded format for FIDE's side would mean either demotion for Ponomarev or no Kasparov. Complete unity was therefore unattainable. We were right back to square one: partial unity and "A Fresh Start." I was so tired by the time I went to bed that I was in that strange zone where because of exhaustion I couldn't sleep. The last thing I remember was how prettily the rays of the sun peeked through the curtains. Then the phone rang. It was an automatic wake-up call, and my eyes burned.

Coffee!

Although Yvette and I arrived early at the Four Seasons Hotel for the chess unity peace conference, Serge and his assistants, Katerina Tornerová and Lucie Boublíková, Kate and Lucy, were already there, making sure that everything was in perfect order. I staggered to the coffee mug. I couldn't believe it. For the last two months I had been thinking about the meeting, mentally visualizing the discussions. At moments of crisis I had imagined that I would make a particularly insightful salient point that would carry the day. Well, the day had arrived and I could hardly spoon sugar in my coffee.

From 9:00-10:00 Bessel, Kirsan and their advisors had a private discussion regarding the agenda of the meeting and its proper procedures.

At 10:00 all the grandmasters and others who were attending the meeting were in the conference room, also loading up on coffee and breakfast snacks. I noticed that both Kasparov and Kramnik looked exhausted. Obviously they hadn't slept much either. There were a number of journalists, TV crew members, staff and

interested persons filling the corridors. It looked like a packed house.

There were packages of folders for those at the meeting table, as well as for all the guest grandmasters attending. The folders contained five items: the agenda and four annexes. The agenda explained them all:

“Agenda May 6 Meeting

10.00 AM – 2.00 PM – Four Seasons Hotel, Room Karel A

1. Format of achieving a (one time) Unifying World Championship.

(see Annex A – Prague Unity Proposal)

2. Format of Future World Championship (post unification) including

Qualification System / Candidate Matches etc.

(see Annex B – Executive Summary Proposal)

3. Establishment of a Professional Chess Calendar 2002-2007

(see Annex C – Future Chess Calendar)

4. Proposal for the creation of a Chess Management Organisation

responsible for professional Chess Events to be agreed upon

(see Annex D – Proposal for a Professional Chess Management)

5. Discussion on Financing the various events, guarantees etc.”

Just prior to the start of the meeting I had a brief chance to ask Bessel how his meeting with Kirsan had gone. He was happy with

their discussion and while looking around the room I noticed that Einstein TV CEO Steve Timmins wasn't to be found. I asked Bessel why not and he explained that he had decided to keep the meeting "closed." This came as quite a shock to me. Einstein TV was clearly a full partner in the proceedings and Steve should definitely have been attending. Once more, if not for Steve's actions on March 15th in Seattle, there would have been no unity meeting at all! I protested to Bessel but he cut me off, explaining that there was also a representative from the International Management Group (IMG) and he would have to let him in, along with others too, who would want to be included. I again protested that Steve just had to be in the room; he had come all the way from London for this specific occasion. Bessel said that Malcolm Pein, as an International Master, was a compromise and that Malcolm would attend the meeting in his stead and that this had been agreed. This conversation was extremely unsatisfactory for me and I protested to Bessel for a third time.

Bessel, who had been under intense pressure for two whole weeks, stood by his decision and said, "Yasser, please, I have to be tough." In my view, this was a very serious mistake by Bessel. He had been a splendid host and I couldn't see any reason why Steve, and for that matter the IMG representative, couldn't attend the conference. Not allowing Steve to attend the meeting endangered the goodwill that existed. Indeed, it may have caused some harsh feelings, as I will point out later.

At around 10:20 the meeting got underway. There were opening speeches by the FIDE President and the meeting's Chairman, Bessel Kok. Their speeches were well polished. Bessel explained that the agenda wouldn't be followed exactly. Instead, we would start with point four. There began a nice discussion of what we all hoped the meeting would accomplish; an opportunity to put chess on a sound commercial footing. There was a good exchange of dialogue and we worked our way back and forth over points two, three, four and five.

As I've explained, while I had mentally rehearsed the meeting for months I hadn't counted on my tiredness. I spoke about the background, various things that had taken place, I thanked our hosts and so on. Afterwards I was dissatisfied with my small presentation. I hadn't been on my best form and knew it.

There was another aspect that I had not considered in visualizing the meeting: A highly inebriated Jaan Ehlvest. Oftentimes while

the people at the table were making their presentations, Jaan would stand up and declare, “Yes, hello, Jaan Ehlvest from Estonia is speaking...” He would then make whatever point he felt was crucial and then resume his seat. It was remarkable and rather amusing. I can’t remember any of his points, just the way he introduced himself. Around the fifth interruption, by which time he had become more annoying than amusing, I asked Jaan to give others a chance to speak. It worked. For a short time.

A number of grandmasters, Gelfand and Yusupov amongst them, also spoke on various topics, including time-controls, the Grandmaster Steering Committee, its composition, its election, future cycles and so forth.

Thus far we had skirted around the issue of Jerusalem. That is Annex A. We were building towards the moment when we took our first break. It was a procedure we would repeat often. By this time, I was going through my sixth cup of coffee, it may have been more, and I was beginning to feel alive. During the break the discussions in the corridors were intense. Around this time I learned that Kirsan’s flight would depart at 15:00. That explained why the meeting was due to end at 14:00. He would miss his flight.

Annex A

The time had come to confront the plan for cycle one. After it was presented, Kramnik said why he could not support it. The meeting adjourned again. More intense corridor discussions. I spoke with Carsten, Malcolm and Steve. This time it was my turn to apologize to Steve. I told him I very much regretted that he wasn’t in the meeting and hoped he wasn’t angry. Steve had taken the decision with good grace explaining that he was doing work on the phone and didn’t mind. I felt a sense of gloom and couldn’t shake the feeling that his exclusion was a bad mistake. I spoke with Steve about the situation with Vladimir.

Shortly afterwards, back in the conference room, headway seemed elusive; Vladimir felt a responsibility to his colleagues and insisted that the FIDE side be more inclusive. This procedure went on for an hour or two until, at last, the thing I feared most happened: Garry got angry. He had heard enough. To paraphrase his comments: “Look, we are going nowhere. You claim that you want to help the players, fine, let us both begin right now. Let us begin at the Candidates’ stages (as suggested by “A Fresh Start”)

right now! You and I! Let's go, then everyone is involved!" Vladimir coolly responded that he couldn't do that as he was bound by his contract... It was time for another break.

The pressures of the corridor meetings were beginning to pay off. The whole conference had built up such expectations that it would be impossible for it to end without a unity agreement. The blame for such a failure would be intolerable. Kramnik had found a possible solution: in the joint unity declaration if it could be announced that FIDE supported the "principles" of the unity plan, combined with a clear, unequivocal statement that FIDE would take full responsibility for protecting the rights of the players, he would feel vindicated. Furthermore, Kramnik wanted the Dortmund tournament and his match against the winner to be outside of the Commissioners' purview, leaving the contracts and the staging of these events to Einstein TV as already planned. Eric Keyzer and Emmanuel Omuku, the two attorneys present, got busy together drafting a statement.

The meeting had been going on for some five hours, and there were jokes that it could be "adjourned." The response was that FIDE had abolished adjournments and that we would play "to a finish."

The meeting resumed. GM Michael Gurevich then made a speech, and I think it was one of the very best I've ever heard. He explained the great need for unity. That it was vital for the chess world and not only for today but for tomorrow. It was passionate and flowing. It hit all the right keys. It drew applause.

This was soon followed by a well-delivered speech by Kirsan. He explained that FIDE had been moving in a new direction for a number of years. That FIDE had been making chess a sport without special privileges for particular players, and this had included accelerating the time-controls. That FIDE had been presented with a unique opportunity to unite the chess world, which could not be ignored. That FIDE was willing to compromise and return to a Classical Cycle and a slower time-control for such a cycle, that it would be as inclusive as possible, with limited advantages to the Champion. That this was quite a compromise but one that FIDE would make if unity could be achieved. Furthermore, Kirsan made an unequivocal statement that FIDE represented the interests of all the players and that this was its duty and responsibility alone. It was quite a presidential speech. Serge, who was sitting next to me, was also very

impressed. Throughout the meeting, Kirsan spoke in Russian and his words were translated by Polina Tsedenova, who did a truly outstanding job.

Mercifully, the speech satisfied Kramnik. Within minutes the press was allowed in and the signing took place.

Link to [Annex B](#)

Second & Third Cycles

With the extremely important caveat that the Grandmaster Steering Committee will be thoroughly reviewing Annex B, I present here the plan that was in the folder for all to see. FIDE will also have to approve it.

Post Mortem

Maybe it is the nature of our sport, win, lose or draw, but following the completion of the meeting discussions began in earnest as to which side had “won.” While inevitable, such talk misses the broader point: the future of chess won big in Prague. Nevertheless, as such a discussion is inevitable, I’ll toss in my two cents.

FIDE was a big winner in Prague. It got everything it wanted: recognition of its status as the international body for chess and owners of the world championship titles. While it conceded a return to a Classical Chess world championship, such a new cycle will be far more sporting and inclusive than any previous traditional cycle.

FIDE President Kirsan Iljumzhinov is, in my view, the biggest winner in Prague. When elected to that post in 1995, he had promised unity. Seven years later he has delivered on that promise. When he seeks reelection later this year in Bled, Slovenia he will, I predict, win in the greatest landslide in FIDE’s Presidential history. Furthermore, Kirsan has been carrying an enormous financial burden for staging chess events since being elected in 1995. He will now have a professional management group seeking commercial sponsors, which will help relieve his financial burden. In terms of his general performance in Prague, he impressed everyone I spoke to. Many participants were truly surprised at how good he had been.

FIDE Champion Ruslan Ponomarev is also a huge winner. Prague confirmed his status as the official World Champion. Unity came at the perfect time for him. He now has the chance to face arguably the greatest player in chess history, Garry Kasparov, in a big-money match. Should Ruslan win this match, he has the opportunity for an even bigger payday and a showdown for the undisputed world championship title.

Garry Kasparov gets to rectify the biggest blunder of his life, made in 1993. He will have a chance in 2003, ten years later, to fight once again for the FIDE Classical Chess world championship. As important as this opportunity is to him, he is equally pleased that an opportunity to invite commercial sponsors, on a grand scale, has been made for the benefit of the chess world. It is a point that he has fought for throughout his whole career.

Vladimir Kramnik is also a huge winner. In a recent interview on Kasparov Chess Online he is quoted as saying that he made the most concessions. I don't see this at all. The Dortmund Candidates' tournament has been upgraded and is now officially recognized as part and parcel of a unity cycle. His match with the Dortmund winner will result in a unification match recognized by the whole chess world as the showdown. If he can win these two matches, it is the stuff that legends are made from. He'll earn millions in the process. He did make the key concession that for the unification match neither player will have draw-odds. He keeps his contract with Einstein TV entirely intact. Rejoining the official world of chess is a marvelous coup. As Carsten Hensel said to me after the conference, "Vladimir is a big winner. He is vindicated for doing the best for his colleagues that he could. He will play his match and if he wins, we have a fantastic opportunity to present top chess to the public. Einstein TV is a great partner. You will see, this was a great day for us." What Kramnik also conceded was that an obligatory defense of his title will be followed by a second obligatory defense. Changing from "voluntary" to obligatory, while getting paid very well, doesn't seem like the worse concession ever made.

The chess world, the federations, professionals, amateurs and fans were big winners. The chaos and confusion as to who is the real world champion will come to an end. A plethora of opportunities await the introduction of a Rapid and Blitz chess champion. Putting chess on a solid footing with a more sporting Classical cycle is fantastic.

With so many winners, there have to be some losers. It can be justly argued that this is likely the case – for the short term. For those players not in the first cycle, say the world's top 50 players and with Anand and Ivanchuk in particular missing the first cycle, sacrifices have clearly been made. A pity for all certainly, but again, in the short term only. The chess world didn't lose anything. As Serge Grimaux said, "The next FIDE championship is in December 2003. That cycle will still begin on time, for now we get to resolve the current mess." Serge is right. In 1994, I qualified for the FIDE championship and waited until December 1997 for the opportunity to compete.

For the players out of the first cycle, the feeling was that there had to be a *quid pro quo*. They have shown a willingness to make a sacrifice in order to regain an organized unity cycle featuring both Kasparov and Kramnik. With a fragile goodwill blossoming, their feeling was clear: "1993 cannot be repeated." If we were going to have a new Classical Chess world championship cycle, the players would have to commit themselves to firm guarantees under severe financial penalties if they failed or withdrew from their obligations to a new unity cycle. The chess world cannot allow a player, and especially a top player, to leave a cycle after making such a firm commitment.

Perhaps the above post mortem doesn't sufficiently satisfy. Too many winners and someone just has to get stuck with the bill. This is indeed true. While I don't want to pin the term "loser" on Bessel Kok, the Chess Commissioners and the new professional management group, it would be fair to say that here we have the biggest risk-takers. Bessel has the opportunity to prove the commercial value of chess, and if anyone can do it he is more than capable. There is a lot of pressure on him: he has 90 business days to submit a business plan, which the FIDE Executive Board will have to vet and approve. In turn, the FIDE General Assembly will also have to give its approval. Rectifying the sins of the chess world will not be an easy task.

FIDE Reforms

The Prague Spring witnessed the chess world taking a giant step forward. It is a joyous occasion but there is clear trouble ahead. The foundation for a new chess world very much relies upon a smoothly functioning FIDE. In my view, FIDE has to undergo fundamental reforms in two critical areas and *now* is the time. Only a very popular President will be capable of enacting

wholesale restructuring, which will inevitably raise FIDE's future status. These areas are voting rights and openness.

For a long time it has been obvious that something is wrong in the state of FIDE. With all due respect to FIDE's smallest national federations, their voting power should not be identical to that of the largest federations, such as Russia, Ukraine, England, Germany, China and the USA. The voting rights of the largest chess nations have to count for more. A committee of experts in the area of international organizations should be set up with a view to reforming FIDE's governance. This might include a so-called "security council" or another suitable innovation. Without some fundamental voting reforms, FIDE will atrophy into endless vote-swapping and backroom political maneuvers. It will miss its proper role as a vibrant world organization and fail to live up to its enormous potential.

FIDE has to become a far more open and transparent organization. The simplest and most direct solution nowadays is to make comprehensive, accurate reports of General Assembly meetings freely available on FIDE's website. All interested persons should be able to read what was discussed, how the votes tallied and how our delegates voted. Furthermore, minutes of the FIDE Committees should also be posted on the FIDE website. Committee Chairpersons' reports should also be available on-line for inspection. A key part of FIDE's new open policy would be to publish its balance sheet with appropriate auditor notes. By following the money trail, it will be very easy to judge which goals FIDE is pursuing and whether the money is being spent in a proper proportion to the goal at hand. Such openness would be like a breath of fresh air and help restore FIDE as a proper governing body. Such changes would have an initial financial cost, but the rewards far outweigh it.

With every expectation of winning reelection, Kirsan should institute such sweeping reforms now for the good of FIDE. The choice is clear: FIDE can continue to be a closed organization indulging in unsavory political machinations or it can become an open organization, tolerant of dissenting views and open to the input of others. The choice is as stark as that, and FIDE will be a much better organization by carrying out these reforms.

I've written my views plainly here, and I hope everyone will realize that I have done so out of a wish to see FIDE reform itself, and quickly. I have set out some concrete ways of achieving that,

and FIDE should welcome further positive and constructive suggestions. Positive and constructive should be the watchwords, i.e. the very antithesis of the approach of those fanatical FIDE-bashers who are utterly negative. FIDE needs to be strengthened and improved, not dismantled.

Professional Chess Management Organization

The Prague agenda referred to the “Professional Chess Management Organization.” Not exactly a name that rolls off the tongue. Obviously, this is just a working title for the moment until something more suitable is found. The Prague meeting left a number of questions open about its precise roles and responsibilities.

FIDE resisted the idea of a “Chess Commissioners’ Office.” FIDE has to check its statutes and understand just how such an office would properly function. In any case, appropriate internationally-recognized titles should be issued. Empowering individuals working for the benefit of chess will be fundamental to its success.

In a future cycle, the PCMO will clearly be responsible for the financial guarantees and the staging of these events. It is highly likely that the PCMO will encourage bids from local and national organizers. This will lead to a situation with organizers on one side and players on the other. There should be a buffer office between them, to which each side can direct its comments and complaints. The Chess Commissioners’ Office, in my view, provides for just such an ideal buffer.

One unresolved question is exactly how and why Kramnik and the Einstein TV Company wanted to run their own Dortmund cycle and the match between Kramnik and the Dortmund winner. In a sense this puts the new PCMO in competition with the Einstein TV group. At least for the short term. Certainly, this can’t be in the best interests of everyone. In that case, instead of parity in the prize money of each match, there will be a lot of prestige attached to outbidding one another. So why begin with rivalry? I don’t have the answer but I look back at the Einstein TV or Carsten Unity Plan. I note the “taxes” on the players’ prize money is lower and that, furthermore, under this plan, Ruslan Ponomarev would be granted draw-odds. I would surmise that Kramnik would prefer to keep draw-odds in his match with the Dortmund winner and avoid any taxes (FIDE, players’ health and benefits fund, Commissioners’ Office) that would be payable on the prizes for

these events. Hopefully, there is a better explanation than this crass perspective. If this speculation is correct, and I don't know if it is or isn't, it is penny-wise but dollar-foolish. Einstein TV is a fine company, run by a very capable staff, but it isn't in the professional chess management business; nor for that matter should it be. It should focus on its expertise. If there is rivalry, the matches will not have parity in the prize funds, a prospect which is sure to cause hard feelings for the reunification match. This situation should be properly resolved through negotiations between Einstein TV and PCMO sooner rather than later.

Another simpler explanation than the speculation above is to go back to the May 6th meeting. Einstein TV's CEO Steve Timmins was not allowed to attend the meeting. The reaction may have been that if Einstein TV wasn't to be treated as a full partner in a unity agreement it would rather arrange its cycle on its own. If this is the case, then feathers have been unnecessarily ruffled and amends should be made quickly. The Prague meeting produced a lot of goodwill and this should be kept throughout the unity cycle.

Health and Benefits Fund

Another nice proposal in "A Fresh Start," and one that I was pleased to see adopted, was the funding of a players' health and benefits fund. The idea here is to make sure that players have health and dental insurance to protect them in the case of dire need. Many players go without such insurance and this is definitely a major risk to themselves and their families. I note, with admiration, that Kirsan has quietly assisted legendary players privately.

Grandmaster Steering Committee

This group will have a very serious role to play in the period ahead. There are many questions to be answered. How should this Committee be elected? How long should its members serve? How many members should there be? Besides these, the issues that they will have to resolve are paramount and include:

- Time-controls for Classical, Rapid and Blitz, both for electronic and mechanical clocks.
- The number of games for the next cycle of Candidates' matches and world championship matches.
- Tiebreaks for these matches.
- Women's chess.

- Seeding players by rating.
- Format for rapid chess championship cycle.
- Format for blitz chess championship.

Once these decisions are made, should they be approved and re-approved? If so, by whom?

Before us lies a New Jerusalem: Drug testing and possible inclusion in the IOC Games. This whole topic needs a new spirit of understanding and discussions. The players should be properly informed of what is at stake. Let us also remind everyone that Beijing will be the host of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games and the success of the Chinese ladies is sure to impress the hosts when tabulating the gold medal tables. Moreover, does drug testing make any sense? Have we explained the sport of chess well enough to IOC officials for them to understand that drugs and chess just do not co-exist?

Call to Arms

I will close this three-part essay with some final thoughts. Prague was the easy part. The real work now begins. As exemplified by the “Chess Oscar” night initiative, a new spirit exists in the world of chess and this should be seized. Players, officials, organizers and fans need to find a better way to cooperate with one another more effectively. Bessel Kok and the other proposed Commissioners are going to need a lot of help. They are sure to develop a website that will encourage input and bids for particular events. I would urge organizers around the world to consider what events they would like to stage. I’m sure bids would be appreciated!

The agreement reached in Prague has given me great hope that chess professionals will have many fresh opportunities to practice their craft. There exists a new feeling of goodwill between the parties at Prague. A win-win-win situation has been created. It has to be nourished and supported as much as possible. If it is, perhaps players like Jeroen Piket will reconsider their decision and return to chess. I certainly hope so.

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