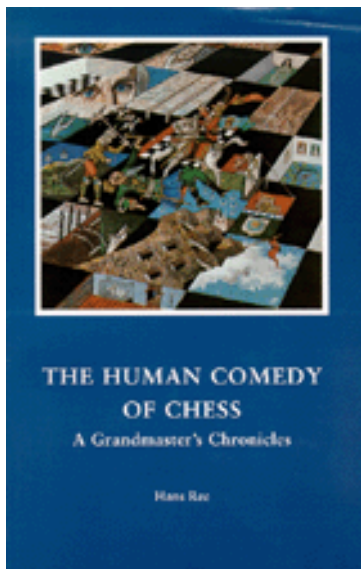




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy
of Chess*


by Hans Ree

Farewall, Jeroen Piket!

I have often dreamt about chess and chessplayers, but never about Jeroen Piket, until about a month ago. It was very crowded in Amsterdam, in that dream. On the Spui, a central square of the city, wooden galleries were erected and there I sat, waiting for the festivities to come.

A bit higher up I heard Jeroen Piket speaking with his father Joop, who in his prime used to be a player of near-master strength. They were analysing the Scandinavian opening. "That's a very open position indeed," I heard Jeroen say, enthusiastically but also a bit worried.

This is strange, I thought, preparing openings in the midst of a big crowd. But then I realised that a crowd was just the place where they wouldn't be conspicuous. Nevertheless, I didn't really like that they were preparing the Scandinavian. Jeroen had played it a few times during the 90s, with mixed results, but after all it was a rather dubious opening.

Then the Pikets invited me to join them. I looked at the position and refuted everything they had been looking at with one simple move. White castles and Black can resign.

It is difficult to shake off the power of superstition. When I woke up I wondered if my dream had been prescient. Maybe Jeroen had really included the Scandinavian in his repertoire again?

He wasn't playing much at the time, because he was preparing for a career outside the chess world, but he did still take part occasionally in the German *Bundesliga* for the *Solingen* team.

It was a Monday after a Bundesliga weekend. I checked on the internet and found that Piket had been Black against the Czech Vlastimil Jansa, who plays for the *Forchheim* team.



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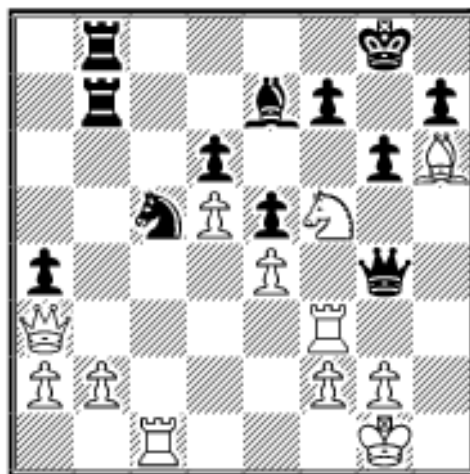
If Piket had really played the Scandinavian, I might have succumbed to delusions of grandeur, imagining myself a soothsayer, but luckily for me he had stuck to his trusted main line of the Ruy Lopez. It had been quite an interesting game.

White: Vlastimil Jansa Black: Jeroen Piket, Bundesliga 2003

1. e2-e4 e7-e5 2. Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3. Bf1-b5 a7-a6 4. Bb5-a4 Ng8-f6 5. 0-0 Bf8-e7 6. Rf1-e1 b7-b5 7. Ba4-b3 d7-d6 8. c2-c3 0-0 9. h2-h3 Nc6-a5 10. Bb3-c2 c7-c5 11. d2-d4 Qd8-c7 12. Nb1-d2 c5xd4 13. c3xd4 Rf8-d8 One of Piket's favorite lines. It has brought him some downfalls in the past, but now he knows everything about it. Best for White may be 14. b3, as Shirov has played against Piket.

14. d4-d5 Bc8-d7 This will be quite a difficult game, White operating on the King's wing and Black on the Queen's. For both sides it will be very hard to make substantial progress.

15. Nd2-f1 Rd8-c8 16. Bc2-d3 Na5-b7 17. Bc1-d2 Nb7-c5 18. Bd3-c2 a6-a5 19. Nf1-g3 Be7-d8 20. Nf3-h2 Qc7-b7 21. Qd1-f3 b5-b4 22. Nh2-g4 Nf6xg4 23. h3xg4 a5-a4 24. Bc2-d1 g7-g6 25. Bd2-h6 Bd7-b5 26. Re1-e3 Ra8-a7 27. Bd1-e2 Bb5xe2 28. Qf3xe2 Qb7-a6 29. Qe2-d2 Qa6-b5 30. Re3-f3 Qb5-d7 31. Qd2xb4 Qd7xg4 32. Ra1-c1 Ra7-b7 33. Qb4-a3 Rc8-b8 34. Ng3-f5 Bd8-e7



35. Rc1xc5 White, probably in time trouble, wants too much. He should have played 35. Rc4 and if Black unsuspectingly replies with 35...Nxe4, White wins by 36. Rxe4 Qxe4 37. Qxd6. After 35. Rc4 Qh5, the position would be about equal.

38. d6-d7 This loses quickly, but White was already in trouble.

38...Rb7xd7 39. Nf5-d6 Qe4-e1+ 40. Kg1-h2 Bf6-e7 41. Rf3xf7 Be7xd6 White resigned.

This may have been one of the last serious games of Piket's career, for not much later he announced what seemed to be a definitive

break with chess. The career he had been preparing for turned out to be that of a close assistant to Joop van Oosterom, the Dutch chess patron (and a top correspondence chess player) who has spent millions on chess. Among many other things he sponsors the yearly Amber tournament, the twelfth edition of which is being held now (until March 27) in the French town Roquebrune. Piket is not playing there, being busy moving with his family to Monaco, Van Oosterom's homebase.

Someone was asking Piket if his new career meant that he wouldn't take part in the Dutch championship in the near future. "You can say never again for all time," said Piket. He could smile; and murder our hopes while he smiled.

Ah, I still see in my mind the fifteen-year old Jeroen Piket of 1984, playing in an open in Amsterdam, his legs not reaching the ground when he was sitting at his board. Now I feel as if I am already writing an obituary of him.

Piket's new boss, Van Oosterom, was seeded last year on a list of richest Dutchmen as #11, with an estimated fortune of \$1 billion. This may seem not bad at all, but compared to one year earlier, \$300 million had vanished. Maybe Jeroen Piket can reverse this trend in the future.

We certainly can say that Van Oosterom has attracted a bright mind to his stable and that the Piket family will not have to fear poverty, but the Dutch chess world is mourning a grave loss.

Piket was not only a fine player with a beautiful classical style, he was also pleasant company, lively and friendly, not susceptible to the egocentric mannerisms that sometimes deform a chessplayer's character.

In the U.S. and in Britain some grandmasters have preceded him into the world of finance. They are not doing badly there and when occasionally they show their face at chess events, they do not seem to be unhappy. But still, I couldn't help thinking of a saying of Max Weiss (quoted in *Lasker's Chess Magazine*, Volume III): "The poorest chessplayer is more to be envied than the most favored servant of the Golden Calf."

Let's hope that one day this conviction will come to be shared by Piket. In the meantime we will sorely miss him.

Here is one game that brought both Piket and his Dutch fans great happiness.

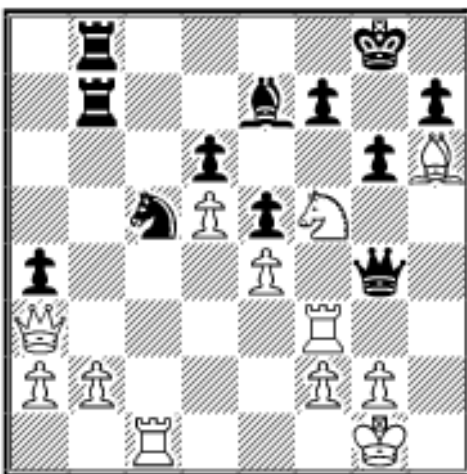
White: Jeroen Piket Black: Garry Kasparov, VSB tournament, Amsterdam 1995

1. d2-d4 Ng8-f6 2. c2-c4 g7-g6 3. Nb1-c3 d7-d5 4. Ng1-f3 Bf8-g7 5. Qd1-b3 d5xc4 6. Qb3xc4 When checking what Piket wrote in *New in Chess* in 1995, I was pleased to find: "This so-called Russian system was taught to me by Sosonko and Ree when I was still a youngster."

7...0-0 7. e2-e4 Nb8-a6 8. Bf1-e2 c7-c5 9. d4-d5 e7-e6 10. 0-0 e6xd5 11. e4xd5 Rf8-e8 12. Rf1-d1 Bc8-f5 13. d5-d6 h7-h6 14. Bc1-f4 Nf6-d7 15. Rd1-d2 Na6-b4 16. Qc4-b3 Bf5-e6 17. Be2-c4 Nd7-b6 18. Bc4xe6 Re8xe6 19. Nc3-a4 This was a new move. In Karpov-Kasparov, World Championship match Sevilla 1987, White allowed 19. a3 Nd3!

19...Re6-e4 The modest 19...Nxa4 20. Qxa4 Nc6 was stronger.

20. Bf4-g3 Nb6-c4 This leads to complications that will favor White, but there was nothing better.



21. Na4xc5 Nc4xd2 22. Nf3xd2 Re4-e2

Piket considered 22...Rd4 23. Nf3 Rxd6 24. Nxb7 Rd3 to be a better chance, though he indicates that White would have a pleasant choice between 25. Nxd8 and 25. Qxb4

23. Qb3xb4 a7-a5 24. Qb4xb7 Re2xd2 25. d6-d7 An Exchange

down, White is much better because of this passed pawn.

25...Rd2xb2 26. Qb7-d5 Rb2-b5 27. Ra1-d1 Bg7-f8 28. Bg3-d6 Bf8xd6 29. Qd5xd6 Ra8-b8 During the post-mortem it was briefly thought that 29...Qf8 might have saved Black, but then Piket, Kasparov and his second Dokhoian found 30. Ne4! Qxd6 31. Nxd6 Rbb8 32. Rc1 and White is winning.

30. h2-h3 Rb5-b1 31. Rd1xb1 Rb8xb1+ 32. Kg1-h2 Rb1-b6 33. Qd6-e5 Kg8-f8 34. Qe5-h8+ Kf8-e7 35. Qh8-e5+ Ke7-f8 36. f2-f4
Now Black is almost in Zugzwang.

36...h6-h5 37. Qe5-d5 h5-h4 38. Qd5-e5 g6-g5 39. Qe5-h8+ Kf8-e7 40. Qh8-e5+ Ke7-f8 41. f4xg5

Commenting on this move, Piket wrote: "And here Kasparov temporarily made me the happiest guy in the world. 41...Rg6 42. Kh1! is clearly hopeless. Black resigned."



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