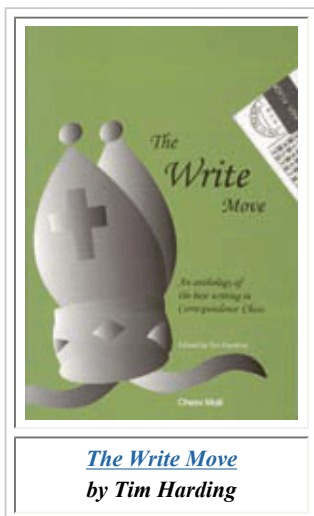




COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



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How Many World Champions?

After the Mexico City unification tournament, September-October this year, everyone can recognise that Viswanathan Anand is world chess champion, although the process of deciding who he must meet in the next year or two is ongoing. However, the question of who in the past should be regarded as world champion, and between what dates, remains undecided with competing views on the matter.

For example, in his column in *The Times* of London during October and early November, GM Raymond Keene ran a series in which he claimed there have been nineteen world champions. Others (including me) would disagree with the early names on his list and FIDE diehards would add the names of people who won FIDE's various contests after Kasparov 'resigned' to play Short outside the FIDE system.

The Kibitzer first looked at this question back in [April 1998](#), when I said that I "nobody has the incontestable right to be regarded as World Chess Champion". Around that time, the French magazine *Europe Echecs* described Anand as 'vice world champion' because he had lost matches to both the FIDE champion (Karpov) and the PCA champion (Kasparov). This of course was rather an absurd situation; since he had lost to both the Ks, did not that make him number three rather than number two?

Then in [September 1999](#), The Kibitzer asked whether Khalifman was the real world champion. This was just after the first of FIDE's knock-out world championship tournaments, in Las Vegas. Whatever some people thought about FIDE's previous attempts to contest Kasparov's claim to be champion, very few people gave credibility to a competition decided by a knock-out series of mini-matches with quick-play finishes. The fact that at this time Khalifman was in 45th place on the FIDE rating list with an Elo 2628 underlined the point.

The last time I discussed the topic was in [February 2001](#), in article entitled 'FIDE, the World Championship and the art of boxing promotion'. This article was not principally about the world championship, but dealt with various issues in FIDE politics, which I compared with the splits in the world of professional boxing. At this point, Anand was the current FIDE title-holder, which at least was an improvement, but the knock-out format and the absence of some leading players still lowered the credibility.

Recently I have noted there is a [website](#) dealing with the world chess championship as one chess fan sees the situation to which I shall be referring to occasionally.

One thing I like about this site is the way it divides the matter up into various time-slices, about some of which there is no dispute. This gives the following:

- Unofficial events (anything before 1886)
- Pre-FIDE official events (1886-1946)
- Undisputed FIDE world champions (1948-92)
- Non-FIDE champions (1993-2007)
- FIDE champions (1993-2007)

Note that there was an interregnum between the death of Alexander Alekhine on 24 March 1946 and the crowning of Mikhail Botvinnik when he won the world championship tournament (played in The Hague and Moscow) in 1948. There is no dispute about the identity of the world champions in the period 1886-1992, although occasionally one sees claims that certain matches played by the champions were not really for the world title. So the undisputed list is:

1886-94 William Steinitz, the first official world champion. He won the first title match versus Zukertort, defended successfully twice against M. I. Chigorin and once against Isidor Gunsberg, then lost to Emanuel Lasker and failed to recapture the title in a re-match in 1896-7.

1894-1921 Emanuel Lasker, although he went for long periods without defending the title. After the Steinitz matches, his next defences were against Marshall (1907) and Tarrasch (1908), then Schlechter and Janowski (1910). All these matches he won comfortably, except for the short match

with Schlechter which was tied, Lasker having to win in the final game. Because there were only ten games, and nobody could understand why Schlechter risked losing the last game when he was in a strong position, there were rumours that it was not a title match or that he had to win by two to take the title (though 'Assiac' once told me that it was for the title and a draw would have been enough for Schlechter). The originally planned 30-game title match could not be financed and that was why there was a shorter contest.

Hooper and Whyld, in *The Oxford Companion to Chess* (2nd edition) wrote cautiously that: 'The conditions of the abbreviated match were not published, and it is not known whether the title was in the balance'. They also say Capablanca challenged the world champion in 1911, but terms could not be agreed. The next people who should have challenged Lasker were Maróczy and Rubinstein, but they were unable to raise the money, and then the First World War broke out.

1921-27 José Raúl Capablanca, By 1921 he was clearly the world's best player and Lasker lost without much of a fight, but the first time Capablanca defended the title (because Rubinstein and Nimzovitch could not raise the stake money), he lost in an epic contest and never got a chance to win it back.

1927-35 & 1937-46 Alexander Alekhine, After defeating the Cuban, Alekhine had two successful defences against Bogoljubow, but then surprisingly lost the world title in 1935, regaining it in 1937. Then complications over who should be the challenger, followed by the Second World War, meant that he never defended it again.

1935-37 Machgielis Euwe, The only matches he played for the world title were the two with Alekhine: he won as challenger in 1935, lost as holder in 1937.

So there were five official world champions in the pre-FIDE era. Then the champions in the undisputed era of FIDE control were as follows:

1948-57 (also 1958-60 and 1961-3) Mikhail Botvinnik, although he never won a match as world champion! After winning the tournament, he retained the title in tied matches in 1951 (vs. Bronstein) and 1954 (vs. Smyslov) before losing the title twice, only to regain it the following year in rematches to which he was entitled under the rules then in force.

1957-58 Vassily Smyslov and 1960-61 Mikhail Tal therefore had the shortest tenures of the world championship. The rematch right was then abolished and Botvinnik ceded the title permanently when he lost a match once more.

1963-69 Tigran Petrosian, Many people at the time thought Petrosian rather an unworthy champion. His dour, defensive, manoeuvring style combined with his relatively poor form in tournaments was however balanced by a magnificent display in his title defence against Spassky in 1966.

1969-72 Boris Spassky, Spassky was successful at the second attempt, but then of course he lost the famous match in Reykjavik.

1972-75 Bobby Fischer, Fischer never defended his title because he demanded unacceptable terms and was stripped of it when he refused to defend on FIDE's terms against the winner of the candidates cycle. All the matches between 1951 and 1972 had been for the best of twenty-four games, but now the rules were changed to 'first to win six'. (Fischer wanted the first to 10 with the champion to retain the title if 9-9 was reached.)

1975-85 Anatoly Karpov, Karpov thus began his ten-year reign during which he had two successful defences against the exile Korchnoi followed by the 48-game unfinished match with Kasparov (1984-5). Campomanes controversially stopped that match and a rematch was held in November-December 1985.

1985-93 or 2000?? Garry Kasparov, The two Ks played five matches. Kasparov won the second one to take the title, but Karpov had the right of a rematch (part of the deal for stopping the 1984 event). This was played in London and St. Petersburg; Kasparov won again. Karpov then won through the Candidates cycle to earn a fourth match, played in Seville in 1987, which ended in a 12-12 tie, Kasparov having to win the final game to retain his title. The next candidates cycle was also won by Karpov, and Kasparov beat him in their fifth and final match (New York and Lyon 1990).

Then the problem started. In the following Candidates cycle, Karpov got a right from Anand and was then defeated by Nigel Short in the semifinal, who then beat Jan Timman in the final. Kasparov was now due to defend against Short in Manchester 1993 under FIDE rules, but they cut a private deal, 'defecting' from FIDE to raise a much bigger purse under the short-lived Professional Chess Association. FIDE declared Kasparov's title forfeit, hence the '???' above. If

you go with FIDE, Kasparov loses the title in 1993, but if you go with Kasparov, he remains champion until 2000, as will be explained below.

Either way, you have a count-back to 1993 showing eight FIDE world champions and in all thirteen world champions everyone can agree on to that date. Plus Anand now, making fourteen, so why does Keene claim (*The Times*, 9 November 2007) that there have been *nineteen* world champions? That is because, as we shall see, he also counts Kramnik (which FIDE does not) plus some people whom he regards as 'world champions' before the official series started. We'll return to that at the end, but first let us look at the period 1993-2007.

There are two ways of looking at it: the legalistic way and the 'apostolic succession' way. On the former view, whoever FIDE says is champion counts as a champion.

On the latter view the championship (unless vacant as it was when Alekhine died), can only be won by defeating the former champion in a match or (exceptionally as this year) in a tournament.

On the "apostolic succession" view, which both Keene and I take – and which I think most knowledgeable senior players not involved in FIDE politics agree with – Kasparov did not cease to be world champion in 1993. He defended his title against Short and then against Anand, after which a match he was supposed to play against Shirov never happened. After several years without a title match, Kasparov finally lost, rather unexpectedly, to Kramnik in 2000, but he still considered himself world number one as he had the highest FIDE rating. Kramnik then held on against Leko (7-7 in 2004) and Topalov (see below), and so was world champion until he failed to win the unification tournament. Under the terms of that event, he has a chance to regain the title next year in a match with Anand.

On the other hand, if you take the legalistic FIDE view, the following was the case. After FIDE disqualified Kasparov and Short (who had just proven themselves the world's two strongest players) they arranged a match between Karpov and Timman, both of whom Short had just beaten in matches, and called that a match for the world championship, which is pretty much a contradiction in terms since a world championship contest is supposed to find the strongest player in the world. Since 1993 none of the events run by FIDE have done that, since at least one of the two strongest players, if not both, was always missing.

Not surprisingly they had trouble in arranging finance for a Karpov-Timman match, but eventually it happened, and was memorable for the high rate of errors. A few blunders less and Timman would have won it, which would have meant the fourth best player in the world was world champion. At least that was better than 1999 when the forty-fifth best player won the FIDE title.

Having 'reclaimed' the title, Karpov (on FIDE's view) defended it in matches against Kamsky and then Anand, after which Karpov at some point retired. Then we had the 'knock-out world champions': **Khalifman**, **Anand** (2000), **Ponamariov** (2001) and **Kasimdzhanov** (2004). This was getting ridiculous with three players out of those four not being credible world champions at all.

Moves towards a reunification at last began, to find somebody acceptable to represent FIDE against Kramnik. An eight-player double-round tournament was then held in 2005 with all reasonably credible candidates, plus Kasimdzhanov and Judit Polgar (who had been stronger a few years earlier). **Topalov** won this convincingly, unbeaten, a point and a half clear of Svidler and Anand with Morozevich, Leko and Adams also in the field. However, I do not believe that this victory entitled Topalov to call himself world champion although the book by Bareev and Levitov (mentioned below) does describe him as 'FIDE world champion'. Then in the controversial 2006 match described in Topalov's recent book (reviewed below) Kramnik ran out winner by a point in a 16-game match after being behind at one point.

The Mexico tournament, as you have doubtless read elsewhere, saw Anand return to his best form and go though unbeaten although his score of 9/14 was a point less than Topalov had managed in the previous tournament. This time Topalov was not involved, but he has the right to come in at the semi-final stage next year. Kramnik surprisingly lost a game to Morozevich to end on 8 points, level with Gelfand. The other players in the field were Leko, Svidler, Aronian (winner of the 2005 World Cup) and Grischuk.

Had Kramnik won in Mexico, he would have been obliged to play Topalov again, the winner of that match to meet the 2007 World Cup winner; however that is ancient history. What is supposed to happen next, since Kramnik failed to retain the title, is quite complicated. At the time of writing, the 2007 FIDE World Cup tournament (a 128-player knock-out series) was being played in Russia and is not due to finish until 17 December, so I cannot tell you the identity of the qualifier from that event. The winner is due to play an eight-game challengers match with Topalov during 2008 while, between May and September 2008, Kramnik should play a match with Anand. In an interview in *New In Chess* 7/2007, just after the tournament in Mexico, Anand called these privileges for

Kramnik and Topalov in the new cycle ‘outrageous’, but perhaps what will decide whether these matches actually happen is whether anyone will put up the money for them. If the matches do happen, then in 2009 all outstanding claims should be settled when the winners of those two matches play off for the world title again.

The Unofficial Champions

Before discussing Topalov’s book, there is unfinished business. Keene counted four players prior to Steinitz as world champions and also said Steinitz’s reign began in 1866 when he won a match with Anderssen in London. To my mind, this is unhistorical, but some of what he says makes more sense than others.

If one is going to speak of unofficial world championships, then naming **La Bourdonnais** as the first does make some sense. In 1834 he defeated the British (actually Irish) challenger Alexander McDonnell in a series of matches in London and this was the first time a series of recorded matches had been played and published. The other leading French player Deschappelles having retired, and there being no players of any not in other countries, it could be said that La Bourdonnais was ‘world champion’, he was probably the strongest player the world ever saw up to that date (not excepting Philidor), as the quality of some of his best games shows, but he died in 1840.

The next person named by Keene as world champion is **Howard Staunton**, on account of his winning a match at the end of 1843 with the Frenchman, Saint-Amant. This is preposterous; some people might even argue that he was not even of grandmaster strength, but there are similar problems trying to identify who could be regarded as a grandmaster before the twentieth century. Calling Staunton a world champion is just part of the propaganda campaign that Keene and others ran when the ‘English school of chess’ idea was being promoted in the 1970s and 1980s. Keene and Coles subtitled their book on him ‘the English world champion’; that was a marketing ploy, not a statement of fact. Saint-Amant was a class below La Bourdonnais in skill and Staunton was just a bit stronger at the critical time. It is impossible to know who the world’s strongest player was in 1843, because at this time many promising players were emerging in other European countries, but they did not meet. There were strong players in Berlin (the Pleiades) and one or two in St. Petersburg but probably the strongest player in the world around 1842-5 was **József Szén**, the Hungarian, who led the correspondence consultation team when Pesth (half of the modern Budapest) crushed Paris 2-0. Nobody, except maybe some Hungarians, has ever said he was a world champion, but he had the reputation of being exceptionally strong in the endgame.

Staunton probably was the best player in England for a few years, from roughly 1843-50, but he avoided testing himself against some rivals by insisting on giving odds. When Staunton made himself really unpopular, some tried to argue that Buckle, the historian who won the 1849 tournament at the Divan chess café, later said he wanted to remain friends with Staunton so he accepted pawn and move when they played. However, Captain Hugh Kennedy who played many games with both (receiving odds) wrote in the *Westminster Papers* that Staunton would probably have won a set match between the two, chiefly because Staunton was the steadier player and especially because he was physically much the stronger man and so able to endure a long tough contest.

In the 1851 tournament, when Szén was probably a bit past his best, he met Anderssen in the second round and twice took the lead in their match before collapsing. After winning two play-off matches, he took fifth prize.

J. Szén – A. Anderssen

London 1851

Sicilian Defence [B44]

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e6 5 Nb5!

The early popularity of the Sicilian Defence declined partly as a result of this novelty, which Staunton and Wormald attributed to the Hungarian master; normal in those days was the defensive 5 Nc3. Until this move was found, White was often reluctant to play what is now known as the open Sicilian (i.e. with a quick d4).

5...d6 6 Bf4 e5 7 Be3 a6 8 N5c3 Be6 9 Nd5 Bxd5 10 Qxd5?!

Staunton’s notes in the tournament book correctly indicate the pawn capture was preferable.

10...Nf6 11 Qb3 d5 12 Qxb7?

Very risky but in keeping with his earlier play and the spirit of the times. “Treble hazardous” was Staunton’s comment.

12...Nb4 13 Na3 Nxe4 14 c3 Rb8 15 Qa7



15...d4?!

Staunton's notes fail to indicate Black's correct plan, which is 15...Qc8!, because if 16 cxb4? Bxb4+ 17 Kd1 Bxa3, the white king is terminally exposed, whereas now White gets some counterplay.

16 Bc4 Nd6 17 cxb4 Nxc4?

17...dxe3 "looks promising" said Staunton, rightly noting that White should perhaps castle at once since 18 Qxe3 Nxc4 19 Nxc4 Bxb4+, followed by ...0-0 is dangerous.

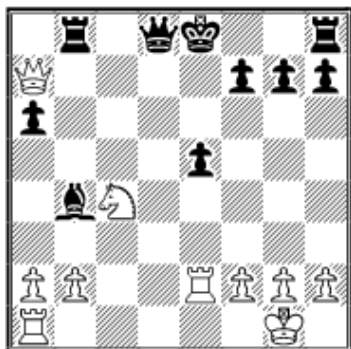
18 Nxc4 dxe3 19 0-0! e2?

19...Bxb4 is better, to ensure castling.

20 Rfe1

20 Nxe5 is also strong.

20...Bxb4 21 Rxe2



21...f6??

Hardly the move of a world champion! This spoils the game. Why didn't Anderssen castle?

22 Qxg7 Rf8 23 Qxh7 Qd5 24 Qh5+ Kd8 25 Rc2 Ke7 26 Ne3 Qe4 27 Rc7+ Ke6 28 Rc4 Qb7 29 Rd1 f5 30 g4 f4 31 Nd5 1-0

Probably everyone will agree, if one is going to recognise 'unofficial' world champions, that **Adolf Anderssen**, earned the right to be recognised as such by winning the 1851 London tournament, although some of his moves in

that game are unimpressive and at the time some people felt that he was not even the strongest player in Germany. (As when Liverpool FC won the UEFA Champions League in 2004-5 although results in the Premiership – where they finished below Everton – showed they were not even the best team on Merseyside.) Anderssen's victory in London was no fluke as his best results showed over a period of years, though sometimes his form was weaker, especially in the late 1850s and early 1860.

If we admit 'unofficial' world champions, Anderssen is the second of them (the third by Keene's reckoning) and the next, and the least disputed, is **Paul Morphy** who defeated him in their Paris match at the end of 1858. After that, you can look at it two different ways. You can say that while Morphy lived (though he hardly played again) nobody was willing to have a 'world championship' contest, so that the question did not arise until the end of 1884, and duly in 1886 Steinitz challenged Zukertort (winner of London 1883) to what has always been recognised as the first official title match.

Late in his life, Steinitz counted his tenure of the world championship back to his 1866 match victory over Anderssen (taking the view that Morphy had retired) and that is how Keene looks at it, but it is not the way that it was seen when Morphy was still alive. It is rather the case that in later life Steinitz liked to retrospectively award himself a longer reign, and this is typical of elderly people getting grandiose ideas and is no evidence. (Similarly Porterfield Rynd lamented in his column in 1913 that his defeat to O'Hanlon that year spoiled his chance of holding the Irish champion title for fifty years – conveniently overlooking that firstly the tournament he won in 1865 was not at the time stated to be an Irish championship and that there had been two official championship tournaments in the 1880s that he did not contest.)

When preparing this article, I looked at the reports printed in 1866 about the match between Anderssen and Steinitz; the word 'championship' was never mentioned. Admittedly, it was also not used in connection with the British Chess Association gold cup event, won by De Vere, which is often counted as the first 'British championship'. However, there is more justification in

retrospectively awarding a national title (because there is a reasonable expectation that any strong player who wished could have entered), as in the De Vere and Rynd cases, than there can be in contesting a 'world championship' that the rest of the world has been given no chance of competing for.

On 18 August 1866, after Steinitz had beaten Anderssen, George Walker stated, in his *Bell's Life in London* column, that Steinitz was the strongest player in England. (Of course he had not played in the BCA cup, not being British.) Steinitz, he recognised, 'has attained the honourable rank of first player in this country' and offers to meet 'any foreign player who may wish to redeem Anderssen's laurels'. The last statement is most significant. It means Steinitz at that time was certainly not claiming he was world champion, although maybe the thought is in his mind. (By now it was fairly clear Morphy would not play chess again, but nobody could be sure, and conceivably there were others out there...)

The idea of a 'world championship' in a way contains a contradiction, unless you talking about deciding who would represent the human race in a challenge from Mars or some alien race from beyond the stars. The idea of a world championship had in fact originated with boxing, but, transport and communications being what they were, no genuinely representative international contests for world championships were being held in any sport in the 1860s.

Edward Winter has for some time been collecting early references to a 'world chess champion'. The earliest he has found seems to date from 1845 when the Earl of Mexborough, chairing that year's meeting of the Yorkshire Chess Association (with Staunton in attendance) referred to the latter as '...the Chess Champion of England, or, as he might truly call him, the Champion of the World'. Then in 1850 at least two writers, including Captain Hugh Kennedy, previewing the proposed 1851 London tournament, supposed that the winner might claim to have won the Championship of the World. In 1857, a poem to Morphy by Edwin J. Weller of Boston interestingly suggested that it was not Staunton or Anderssen who needed to be conquered but Von der Lasa before he could claim to be Champion of the World. However, Von der Lasa never played Morphy, though he is supposed to have done well against Staunton.

Americans did tend to claim by the end of 1858 that Morphy was world champion, but we have to discount nationalism, as with Staunton, and say that if there was no overseas recognition then the title cannot claim to be validly assigned. (That is my opinion, not Winter's.)

Winter points out that in 1866 he could find no reference to the Steinitz-Anderssen match being described by any term such as 'world championship match'. He goes on to consider cases in the 1870s and early 1880s where the topic came up, and various references after the Zukertort match, when Steinitz started to back-date the championship. The full Winter article can be found [here](#).

It is really impossible to arrive at a list of unofficial world championships that everyone can agree with, because an unofficial world championship is not a world championship. One may as well say that Ruy Lopez, Paolo Boi, Greco and Philidor in their time were world champions when they patently were not. They were just strong players for their day who managed to defeat some strong (or just weak) players from other countries, but who never had the opportunity to test themselves against all the best players who may have contemporaneously existed in other countries. Even in the first half of the nineteenth century one cannot truly say La Bourdonnais was world champion because he only played against Frenchmen and Englishmen and a few foreigners who happened to visit Paris.

Staunton did not prove any superiority against non-residents of England, other than Saint-Amant, and in particular he never played Szén nor got the better of Von der Lasa. His proposed match with Anderssen in 1851 after the tournament never came off because Staunton wanted weeks to prepare and Anderssen (who was willing to play if they could arrange it quickly) had to return to Germany. Morphy never played Von der Lasa and only played Anderssen on terms highly favourable to himself. Only Anderssen in the pre-Steinitz era met most of the acknowledged masters of his day, but he was more successful in tournaments (notably London 1851 and Baden 1870 – a fantastic spread) than in matches, and he does seem to have been weaker in the late 1850s and most of the 1860s than he was in his youth and in his late burst of form. Steinitz was a better match player than tournament player and was probably inferior to Zukertort in the late 1870s and up to 1883. After his narrow win after a the play-off at Vienna 1873, it was many years before Steinitz produced a world-class result, concentrating on his writing and possibly suffering bouts of ill health.

At the time of Zukertort's visit to Dublin in early 1879, the *Irish Times* noted that:

'Since Mr Morphy gave up playing public chess, and since Herr Steinitz refused to engage in tournaments, Herr Zukertort is entitled to the rank of chess champion of the world, having taken first prize at the Paris tourney last year.'

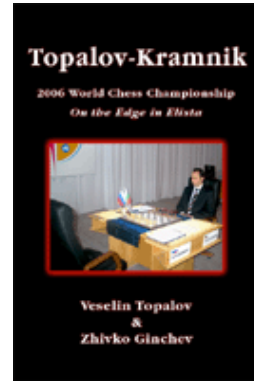
So we have to judge by the record. My conclusion is that there have been fifteen world champions,

not nineteen. Steinitz's reign began in 1886 not 1866 and none of the FIDE champions between 1993 and Anand's recent success count.

Books about the recent matches

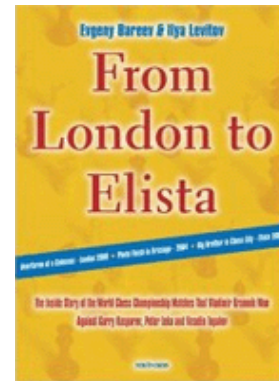
Veselin Topalov's book, co-authored by journalist Zhivko Ginchev, about his match with Kramnik in Elista has now appeared in English as [*Topalov-Kramnik - 2006 World Chess Championship: On the Edge in Elista*](#) (Russell Enterprises, ISBN 978-1-888690-39-2).

Topalov has written the introduction (in which he gives the background to the world championship) and the notes to the games; editor Taylor Kingston has incorporated transcripts of the various statements made during the match to do with Kramnik's numerous lengthy toilet breaks which made the match controversial.



If you want to go into the details, you can read the book. I do not propose to go into great detail as I found this book a rather depressing document although people who enjoy the details of disputes and politics may relish it. Basically Topalov claimed that Kramnik cheated by using a computer to analyse the games in the toilet, the only place he could go where there was no video surveillance. Others may feel differently on this question, but personally I have no interest whatever in endless discussion about something that can never be proved either way. Topalov is trying to 'convict' Kramnik on circumstantial evidence. Fortunately, since Anand has now won the title, it does not matter.

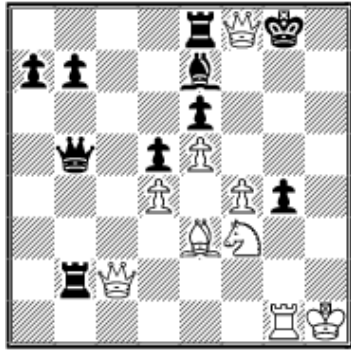
Just as I was completing this column, the postman brought another relevant book. **Evgeny Bareev** and **Ilya Levitov** are co-authors of *From London to Elista* (New In Chess, ISBN 978-90-5691-219-2). The first thing I do not like about this book is the subtitle: 'The inside story of the world chess championship matches that Vladimir Kramnik won against Garry Kasparov, Peter Leko and Veselin Topalov.' That is a 'terminological inexactitude', a lie in other words. Kramnik did **not** win a match against Leko; he managed to retain the title by salvaging a tied match in the last game. Of course this was the match where Kramnik had thrown away a game in the Marshall notoriously by trusting his seconds' preparation and their computer. One reason why people have been unimpressed with Kramnik as champion is the very small number of games that he wins, or where he even makes much effort to win; yet in that game, as this book shows, it was his desire to break a run of draws that caused him to play like a patzer.



The other thing I do not like about the book is purely technical: the right-hand page running heads throughout have the names of the authors when it would be much more useful to the reader if they had (as is normal with book) headings of chapters or some other information relevant to the content.

Otherwise, this book makes a good counterweight to the Topalov; in fact I strongly advise you not to read one without also reading the other, because either on its own will be sure to give you a biased view of the row. It is also possible to compare the annotations for the games. From a technical point of view they are similar, in that the same moves are mostly criticised or praised, similar alternatives given. On the whole, the games were more interesting than the games with Leko. Despite making some serious errors early in the opening games, Kramnik took a 2-0 lead. Games three and four were drawn, but Topalov's team were working hard on their match policy: documenting Kramnik's toilet breaks and liquid intake. Kramnik did not accept the consequent ruling, as it was contrary to pre-match agreements, and consequently did not turn up to play. Game Five was defaulted making the match score 3-2. It may be recalled that in the 1972 Fischer-Spassky match, the player who defaulted a game still won the match. The Bareev book has a picture of Topalov's manager Silvio Danailov with the ironic caption 'the winner of game five'.

Where Topalov's book talks about Russian and FIDE politics, the Bareev book talks almost entirely about the chess; most readers will, I think, prefer that. The incident managed to obtain global bad publicity for chess, for which we mostly have to thank the Bulgarians. Bareev and Levitov point out that Topalov had missed wins (one of them very easy), so their claim that he was losing the match because Kramnik was allegedly using a computer is not very convincing. Kramnik played some bad moves that a computer would certainly not have allowed him to make, especially in this case of mutual blindness from the second game. In the diagram position, White's pawn from g7 has just taken a black knight, promoting to a queen and giving double check. What would you play?



Kramnik should have played 31...Kxf8 but thought it lost to 32 Qg6 Qe2 33 Qxg4, not seeing the defence 33...Bg5!!, which Topalov says he had spotted.

Kramnik actually played 31...Bxf8?? whereupon Topalov played 32 Qg6+?, which should have won in the end, but he eventually lost after further mistakes. Both players in the heat of battle overlooked that after 32 Rxf4+ Bg7 there is 33 Qc7!, upon which Topalov could have finished the game very quickly with a mating attack.

The match ended with a rapid play-off. The time-limit for these games was thirty minutes each plus ten seconds

added for each move made. The idea of rapid games to decide a world championship is anathema to players of my generation. This devaluation of chess is something that has been fairly rapidly accomplished by FIDE, especially since Ilyumzhinov became president. However, Topalov supports the idea; in his introduction he writes scornfully that the old method of the champion retaining the title in the event of a drawn match. So he can have no complaints about losing the play-off. Nobody comes well out of this story. Let us hope Anand, or someone of comparable probity, remains world champion until both Kramnik and Topalov are out of the picture.

Happy Christmas, if you celebrate it, and a successful new year!

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