

Misha Interviews...

Misha Savinov



Interview with Alexander Motylev

Alexander Motylev's greatest professional achievement is winning the 2001 Russian Championship. In 2004 he swept the Tomsk qualification tournament to advance to the Russian Superfinal where he surpassed expectations, at least in terms of his rating. The grandmaster from Yekaterinburg even drew with Kasparov after fighting back from a lost position. In 2005 Motylev shared first place at the Aeroflot Open. His current rating is 2680. Is he ready to make a new leap forward?

MS: You give the impression that you are very modest man and rather withdrawn, an introvert...

AS: I simply try to limit my conversation because I'm afraid to say something stupid. No, I'm kidding. I am indeed an introvert, but I am able to change when in the company of trusted friends.

MS: Does playing chess at a high level break one's character? Can one keep their personality intact, despite fighting at the board regularly?

AS: Chess certainly breaks one's character, like any other highly competitive sport. It also develops some character traits that are not always useful in ordinary life. For instance, people discuss the notorious "killer instinct" – saying, one is a good player, but if one doesn't possess it, he's hopeless. Bad luck.

MS: Could "prophylactic thinking" at the board develop into a general feeling of jealousy?

AS: Of course, one has to find the right balance. I like the title of Vassily Smyslov's book: *In Search of Harmony*. This phrase describes my own creative approach in the best way possible.

MS: Generally, how does chess affect the human mentality? Are there any common tendencies?



AS: I don't think that constant losses of nervous energy can affect one's mentality in a good way. The tendencies are, unfortunately, well-known.

MS: But you look like a benevolent and well-disposed man, although chess is supposed to encourage aggressiveness in people.

AS: I manage to hide my true personality well (smiles). It is not uncommon when a person is different at the board and in ordinary life.

MS: Which character traits are more natural for you?

AS: I'm afraid after this interview nobody will ask me anything again – why bother, if everything is written already (laughs)? Nevertheless, I'll try to answer. Positive ones are tolerance, steadfastness and sociability; negative ones – laziness, vainglory, and fickleness.

MS: Many chessplayers never miss a chance to mention their laziness. What do you do to overcome it, or do you just take it for granted? There is an opinion that laziness is a defensive reaction and overcoming it is just harmful...



AS: I did not know of such a nice definition. Before this interview I simply took it for granted, and now I am armed with scientific reasoning. I'll tell Peter Svidler (shown at left with Motylev) about it, too.

MS: Did you dream about becoming a chess professional when you started playing?

AS: I did not plan so far ahead. I just liked to play chess, and to win, naturally. Later I followed the principle: "Do what you must, and come what may." I am grateful to chess for allowing me to meet many very interesting people.

MS: You are known to be a very strong football player, even approaching a professional level. Is that true?

AS: I think I'm good only among other chess-playing football amateurs... I've never played against professionals.

MS: What other grandmasters are strong football players?

AS: Pavel Tregubov is good. In general, football is probably the favorite sport of chessplayers. For example, during the recent Russian team championship in Sochi we played football every day – and the lineup was quite strong.

MS: How did you develop your football skills?

AS: I just played with friends. I don't have any club preferences, I just enjoy watching good matches such as Chelsea – Barcelona, although playing is still more exciting. When I was a kid I liked football just as much as chess. I studied chess in a group for half a year and then dropped out. However, my first trainer, Anatoly Ivanovich Litovsky, suggested I return to the chess school after I defeated one of his pupils at a tournament. I strongly objected, but then he approached my physical training teacher, who was an authority figure, and asked him to reassure me. The teacher just came to me and said: "Sasha, you should study chess." And I said: "OK."

MS: And you didn't quit chess again?

AS: I started to enjoy it. It is also kind of a family tradition: my father is a candidate master, and my grandfather was also very interested in chess. My grandfather helped me a lot and he traveled to competitions with me; even though he was an invalid because of the war and needed a walking stick. My second trainer Anatoly Timofeyevich Terentjev greatly assisted my improvement.

MS: Are you ambitious? Do you dream of becoming world champion?

AS: It is not necessary for me to become a world champion to feel my potential is fulfilled. Therefore, I am probably not very ambitious. However, if there is an opportunity, I won't decline it.

MS: When you won the Russian championship in 2001, you said in an interview with Evgeny Atarov that the names of Najer and Lastin will soon be as familiar as the names of Svidler and Morozevich. Najer was your second during the 2004 Russian Superfinal. Do you think that he, Lastin and other players of your generation can still break into the elite?

AS: It is too early to count our generation out. Although the number of strong young players increases, chess is a sport where one is able to keep improving for a very long time...

MS: I think you are the most polite grandmaster in the world! For instance, at the start of one of the rounds at the Russian Superfinal you stood next to your chair for a whole minute while a journalist took all the photos he wanted (see below). Imagine Kasparov or Karpov being in your position. Could this lack of egotism prevent you from being more successful?

AS: Well, what can I say? I think you underestimate me. I don't think that lack of egotism influences my chess ability. In any case, it is not a character trait I would like to change just for the sake of going up in the rating list.



MS: Mark Dvoretsky invented a formula of chess strength being a product of professional and personal skills. Where do you find the reserves to improve your play?

AS: There are plenty of issues to work on, for example, not to duck a struggle when playing Black and to avoid time trouble. I keep working in these directions. It is more complicated with the personal skills, as their drawbacks are less obvious. However, chess weaknesses are often determined by certain character traits.

MS: Are you satisfied with your opening repertoire? Is it adequate considering your place in the world rankings?

AS: At present I am generally satisfied with my openings. It would be great to add an aggressive opening as Black, to learn 1.d4 as White, to discover an advantage against the Sveshnikov, to hold the Petroff's, etc. The problems are always there. I am not very satisfied with my memory: opening variations are lengthy and sometimes I mix up the moves... That's why players mostly work on openings nowadays, although it is, naturally, not the correct approach to chess.

MS: What are your advantages?

AS: I don't want to reveal everything (smiles), but I think my main advantages are tactical vision and imagination.

MS: And what about fighting spirit, concentration?

AS: I am a fighting player, at least with White. Motivating me for a game is not a problem, but recently I started to experience some lapses in concentration.

MS: Did you have any doubts about playing in the FIDE championship in Libya? Could it have contributed to your unexpected loss against Hamdouchi?

AS: Of course, I had doubts whether to participate in such a dubious undertaking. However, I don't think there is any connection with my blunder against Hamdouchi. I decided that my refusal to play would hardly be noticed and I found it impossible to refuse to play in what would be the main tournament of the year for me. Many people came to a different decision and I respect them.

There is a lot of injustice in the world of chess – wild mixtures of time controls provoked by FIDE, shamefully organized European championships, disorder with the world champion title, etc. It is obvious that serious reforms must be undertaken. FIDE is unable to do it. Is there any other capable organization? Presently we have more questions than answers.

MS: Let me ask you about creativity in chess. What is it? What is an ideal game for you?

AS: Creativity means introducing something new, or a new look on a truism. An ideal game is, for example, a draw in a rook ending 3 vs. 2 in a principled opening variation. Both played ideally and a draw occurred. There are hundreds of such games. However, what people appreciate in chess is beauty and distinctiveness. For instance, in certain positions a knight could be stronger than a queen. You look at the board and don't understand why, and then you see the point and say: "Wow! That's beautiful!" This is the reason why we love chess.

MS: Korotylev said that you started as a combinational player, but have recently drifted towards positional play. Tell me about this evolution of your style, what is the reason for it?

AS: It's simple – before I only could play for a mate. Now I'm trying to play according to the position. If it demands sacrifices, I sacrifice, otherwise I play positionally. Nevertheless, I still prefer to sacrifice!

MS: Style is normally influenced by favorite players. Did you have any?

AS: Initially I liked games of Tal and Kasparov, later I added Petrosian and Smyslov.



MS: Is there a clear definition of “chess understanding”?

AS: Imagine two grandmasters play a game, and suddenly one of them realizes that his position is just hopeless. Or complications arise and one of the opponents is more prepared for them, because he knows better where to put the pieces. That’s it.

MS: Who was the most difficult opponent for you?

AS: I will answer this question when I retire (laughs)!

MS: Do you experience psychological difficulties playing against teenagers or women?

AS: Playing with women is pleasant – although my record is not very good. I don’t like to play against people who are in the habit of standing over the board, or holding their chair back when it is the opponent’s move.

MS: What do you think about women’s chess? Could it be an independent sport?

AS: Why not? But the prizes must be improved.

MS: There is a discussion about abolishing the youngest age groups from the junior championships – under 8, under 10, under 12, etc. What do you think about it?

AS: Soon there will be 10-year-old grandmasters, so how can we abandon the championships? However, for older generation it is difficult to imagine under 8 championships.

MS: When should one start learning chess?

AS: Children should start playing at ages 3 or 4. The most important thing is whether a kid likes it!

MS: Should the parents work with their child if they can play at reasonable level, but have no teaching experience?

AS: The parent's level has no relevance to their teaching skill, and vice versa. The answer is different in each individual case.

MS: When did you start? What were your first official results?

AS: My father taught me the rules when I was 4½. At 6, I studied chess in a group for half a year, then quit, and returned the next year. I became a candidate master at the age of 11. My best official results were winning the Russian junior championships under 16 and under 18.



MS: What would be your advice for young players who choose a professional career in chess?

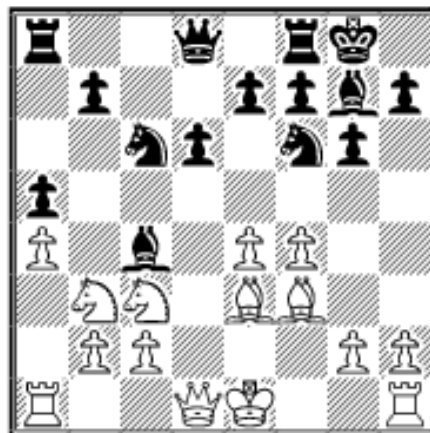
AS: That they do so only if they love it.

Alexander Motylev Annotates

My first Aeroflot Open was very unsuccessful, but this game outweighed my many losses.

Inarkiev,E (2500) - Motylev,A (2639)
Aeroflot Open, 2002 [B72]

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.Be2 0-0 8.f4 Nc6 9.Nb3 Be6 10.Bf3 a5 11.a4 Bc4!



Temporarily forcing the white king to stay in the center.

12.Qd2

12.Be2!?!; also better is 12.Nd2 Ba6
13.Nb5 (13.Be2 d5) 13...e5!?! with the idea 14.Nc4 d5.

12...Qc8! 13.Nd4

White could not castle because 13.0-0-0 is met with 13...Bxb3! 14.cxb3 Qe6.

13...Ng4

Black forces the opening of the b-file. Also interesting is 13...Nxd4!? 14.Bxd4 e5.

14.Nxc6

14.Bg1?! Nxd4 15.Bxd4 e5; 14.Bxg4 Qxg4-+.

14...bxc6 15.Bg1 Rb8

15...Qb7!? with the idea 16.b3 Qb4.

16.b3 Ba6 17.Rb1?

White still hopes to castle short. It was necessary to play the dangerous-looking 17.0-0-0.

17...f5!

Worse is 17...e5?! 18.h3 Nf6 19.fxe5.

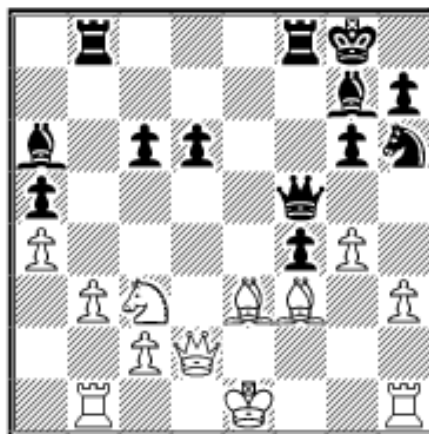
18.exf5 Qxf5 19.h3 Nh6 20.Be3

20.Bxc6? Qxf4 21.Qxf4 Bxc3+ 22.Qd2 Rf1#

20...e5!

20...d5?! 21.Ne2.

21.g4! exf4!!



The second exclamation mark is awarded for the aesthetic quality of this move. It would be a mistake to play 21...Qd7 22.f5 Nf7 (22...Nxf5!? 23.gxf5 Qxf5) 23.Ne4!; but Black kept the advantage after 21...Qc8!? 22.f5 Nf7.

22.gxf5 fxe3 23.Qxe3 Nxf5

Black has only a bishop and a pawn for the queen, but all his pieces are so well-placed that the deficit has no effect.

24.Qe6+

Other continuations are worse: 24.Qd2 Rbe8+ 25.Kd1 (25.Ne2 Ng3 26.Kd1 Nxb1 27.Ng1 Ng3 28.c4 Bc8-+) 25...Ne3+ 26.Kc1 Rxf3 27.Re1 Bh6-+;

24.Qa7!? Bxc3+ 25.Kd1 Nd4 (25...Ra8 26.Qb6! Nd4 27.Bxc6 Rf2 28.Qxd4 Bxd4 29.Bxa8) 26.Qxa6 Rxf3 with the idea 27.Rf1 Re8;

24.Qg5 Bxc3+ 25.Kd1 Rbe8 26.Kc1 Nd4-+.

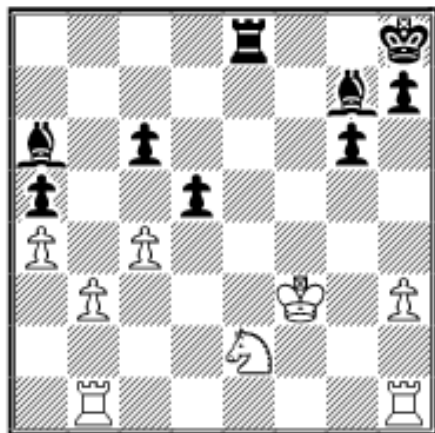
24...Kh8 25.Ne2

25.Bxc6 Bxc3+ 26.Kd1 Rf6! 27.Qe4 d5!-+; White could have tried 25.Ne4!? Nd4 26.Qd7 Nxf3+ 27.Kd1, and not 27...Nd4 28.Nxd6; or 27...Rbe8 28.Nxd6 Re2 29.Qa7 Bd3 30.cxd3 Rd2+ 31.Kc1 Bh6 32.Rb2 Rh2+ 33.Kb1 Rxh1+ 34.Ka2 Bg7, but 27...Bh6! with the idea Rb4, Rbe8 with a very dangerous attack, e. g. 28.Qa7 (28.Nxd6 Bf4!-+; 28.Ng3 c5) 28...Ra8 29.Qb6 Rfe8 30.Ng3 (30.Qxc6? Be2+) 30...Re3 (30...c5 31.c4) 31.c4 Rae8 (31...Rd3+ 32.Ke2 Rd2+ 33.Kxf3 Rf8+ 34.Nf5 Bc8 with an attack (34...Rxf5+ 35.Kg3 Bf4+ 36.Kf3)) 32.Kc2 (32.Qxa6 Rd3+ 33.Kc2 Rd2+) 32...Bc8! the white king doesn't get a break on the queenside either 33.Kb2 (33.Rbf1 Bf4) 33...Bf4! winning.

25...Rbe8 26.Qxe8?!

It was probably better to keep the queen: 26.Qd7 Bxe2 27.Bxe2 Ng3 28.Qxc6 (28.Rh2? Bc3+ 29.Kd1 Rf1+ 30.Bxf1 Re1#), although Black's attack is still dangerous after either 28...Rxe2+ 29.Kd1 Re3! or 28...Nxe2 29.Kd2 Bh6+ 30.Kd1 Re3!.

Less clear is 28...Nxb1 29.Qxb1 Bc3+ 30.Kd1 Rf2 31.Bb5 Rd2+ 32.Kc1 Rh2! 33.Qf1 Re1+ 34.Qxe1 Bxe1 35.Kb2 Bg3 36.b4!.

26...Rxe8 27.c4 Nd4 28.Kf2 Nxf3 29.Kxf3 d5!

The rook and knight are helpless against Black's powerful bishops.

30.Rbc1

30.Rhe1 dxc4 31.bxc4 Rf8+ 32.Kg2 Bxc4 with a practically winning position.

30...d4 31.Rhd1 c5 32.Rd3 Bh6 33.Re1

33.Rf1 Bb7+ 34.Kf2 Be4 35.Rg3 Bc2-+.

33...Bb7+ 34.Kg3 Kg8 35.h4 Re5 36.Kf2 Be3+ 37.Kg3 g5!

It would be wrong to allow White to simplify the position after 37...Rf5?
38.Rxe3 dxe3 39.Nf4.

38.hxg5 Rxc5+ 39.Kh4 Re5! 40.Kg3 h6!

Slowly extending the mating net.

41.Ng1

41.Rf1 Rg5+ 42.Kh4 Be4-+.

41...Rg5+ 42.Kh2 Rh5+

Repeating moves to gain time.

43.Kg3

43.Nh3 Bc8 44.Rxe3 dxe3 45.Rd8+ (45.Rxe3 Kf7 46.Kg2 Bxh3+ 47.Rxh3 Rxh3-+) 45...Kf7 46.Rxc8 e2-+.

43...Rg5+ 44.Kh2 Bf2! 45.Rf1 Rg2+ 46.Kh3 Bxg1 47.b4 cxb4 48.c5 Be3 49.Rf6 Rg1 50.c6 Bc8+ 51.Kh2 Rc1 52.Rb3 Kg7 White resigns

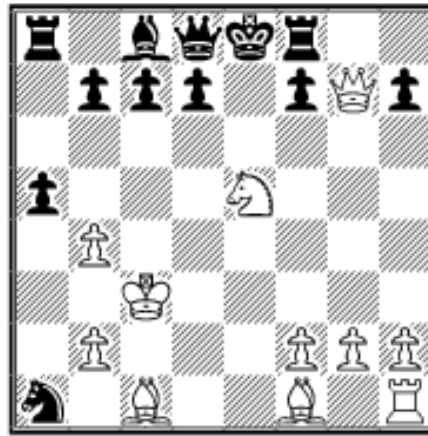
The next game was played at one of my first international tournaments. I did not have a title and my opponent was an experienced Romanian IM.

Motylev,A (2280) - Dumitrache,D (2515)
Romania, 1995 [C47]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.d4 Bb4 5.Nxe5 Nxe4

Even then this line was considered dubious and now it has vanished from practice. I suspect the Romanian was aware of its objective value, but he wanted to trick his inexperienced opponent.

6.Qg4 Nxc3 7.Qxg7 Rf8 8.a3 Nxd4 9.axb4 Nxc2+ 10.Kd2 Nxa1 11.Kxc3 a5



Less explored is 11...Qe7.

12.Bg5?

Much stronger is 12.Bc4! with the main line 12...Qe7 13.Re1 d5 14.Bb5+ c6 15.Nxc6! Qxe1+ 16.Bd2 Qe4 17.Nb8+! which refutes this system. But I was already out of theory somewhere around move ten.

12...f6?

It was necessary to play 12...axb4+! forcing White to interfere on the important diagonal of his light-squared bishop 13.Kd3 (13.Kd2? Nb3+ 14.Ke3 f6) 13...f6 14.Be2 Qe7 15.Bh5+ Kd8 16.Nf7+ Rxf7 17.Bxf7 Qd6+ 18.Ke4!! fxc5 (18...Qe5+? 19.Kf3 Qf5+ 20.Bf4) 19.Qg8+ Ke7 20.Qe8+ Kf6 21.Qh8+ Kxf7 22.Qxh7+ and a draw.

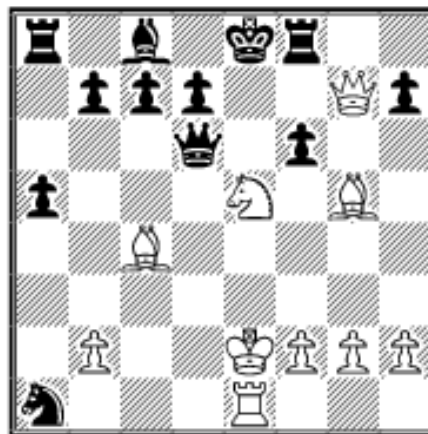
13.Bc4 Qe7 14.Re1!

All the pieces join the attack!

14...Qxb4+

In case of 14...fxg5 15.Nd3 axb4+ 16.Kd2 Qxe1+ 17.Kxe1 White has enough pieces to mate the black king, and the cooperative 14...Qxg7 gives White a choice of mates: 15.Nf7# and 15.Nc6+ Qe7 16.Rxe7#

15.Kd3 Qd6+ 16.Ke2!



Not accepting a draw after 16.Kc3 Qb4+.

16...fxg5

Other moves also could not save Black. For example, 16...Nc2 17.Bf7+ Ke7 18.Bf4!! I remember I was very proud when I found this move in my analysis, while any modern chess program shows it in a second. 18...Qc5 (18...Qb4 19.Bg6+ Kd8 20.Bxc2) 19.Bg6+ Kd8 20.Kf1 hxg6 21.Nd3, winning. Or

16...Qxe5+ 17.Kf1 Qxe1+ 18.Kxe1 fxc5 19.Be2! Nc2+ (19...Rf5 20.Bh5+ Kd8 21.g4 Nc2+ 22.Kf1+-) 20.Kd1 Rf5 21.Bg4!+-, and Black loses most of his pieces.

17.Kf1 Kd8 18.Qxg5+

And here my opponent resigned because of 18...Qf6 19.Nf7+ Rxf7 20.Bxf7 Qxg5 21.Re8# This encounter is reminiscent of the games of the old masters!



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