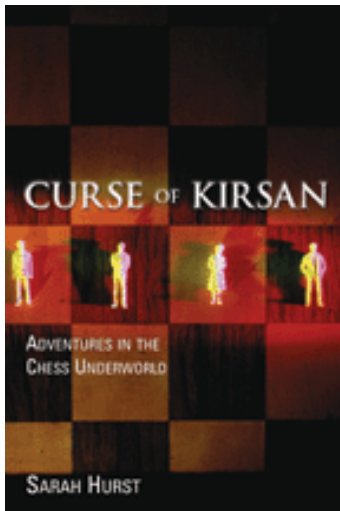




COLUMNISTS

Misha Interviews...

Misha Savinov



Interview with Vladimir Dobrov

Vladimir Dobrov. Born in 1984. International grandmaster since 2004. FIDE rating 2479. Graduated from the Sports University chess department. Currently a full-time chess trainer.

Let me begin with a lyrical digression. In 1998, I took part in my first FIDE rated tournament: the Russian championship quarterfinal. Of course, I was in awe of the other players, and honestly expected to score about 2½ points from 9 games. Astonishingly, after 8 rounds, I had reasonable chances of finishing in the money and qualifying for the next stage. My next opponent was a pink-cheeked boy with a very modest rating close to 2000. Unfortunately, his real strength was already much higher than that, but like me, he was inexperienced. He got the initiative in the middlegame with white, but I managed a reversal of fortune and ended up with an extra piece. However, he stubbornly kept playing, creating one trap after another, and the last trap cost me a rook. Quite understandably, I remember the boy's name: Vladimir Dobrov.

Misha Savinov: When did you begin playing chess?

Vladimir Dobrov: I could play at the age of six, but I did not attend a chess school until age 9½, which is quite late of course. In between I played with my father and brother, and observed plenty of blitz games in Terletsky Park.

MS: If you showed an early enthusiasm for chess, why did it take so long to study it?

VD: I was occupied with other sports, namely dancing and Sambo wrestling. I actually participated in a dancing world championship in Italy at the age of 12.

MS: I did not know that dancing was so popular.

VD: Yes. The championships were held in three age groups: under 12, under 16 and under 20. I was regarded as one of the most promising sportsmen in



the under-16 class. The trainers expected me to become a professional, but I stopped at grade C, with E being the lowest and A the highest.

MS: How would you rate it in Elo terms?

VD: About 2300. I still have some videotapes, which are quite funny actually. The championship had 512 participants, most of whom were stronger than me; however, I advanced nonetheless. So I was talented (smiles)!

MS: Why did you quit?

VD: I decided it was not for me. To be honest, my mother enjoyed it much more! However, the rhythm is still with me. I am a rare guest at discos, but I sometimes notice people stepping away in admiration (smiles). It is very funny!

MS: Okay, what about Sambo?

VD: I liked it very much. I consider it the best kind of wrestling. Very efficient. I also attended some boxing lessons, although there is no hitting in Sambo.

MS: Were you preparing yourself for the military?

VD: When I went to the enlistment office, they said I was ideally suited for the airborne troops. So I was prepared to go, but I didn't rush. When I am abroad, I tell everyone that I am a Russian spy (smiles).

MS: Did you quit Sambo because of chess?

VD: No. We trained very hard, but the doctors found an abnormality, so it was dangerous to continue.

MS: Do you have any pleasant memories from your wrestling days?

VD: One of my trainers gave me a book – *Fight to Win* – which I liked very much. It is about more than just wrestling – it covers many areas. It was very important and instructive for me in many ways.

I also remember winning a fight because of sheer will and determination. My opponent was a better fighter and ahead on points, but I saw fear in his eyes and I threw him across the mat the very next second. My opponent's trainer remarked: "Your Dobrov is indeed evil!" (A play on words, as "Dobrov" means good, kind man – M.S.)

MS: Why did you go to the chess school at Perovo, instead of the Pioneers

Palace or the Petrosian Club?

VD: It was just a 15 minute walk from home. Irina Perevertkina was my first trainer. Nowadays she is the director of the chess department. I quickly won my first two tournaments.



MS: What did you study during the first year?

VD: I don't remember, mostly tactics I think. There was a tragedy in our family – my father died at the age of 39 because of a heart attack. I came home with a win, and mother told me that he had died. I didn't understand it at first. I was just 10 ... So I do not remember much from that year, except the funeral. It was a difficult time, but maybe that is when I came to the decision to achieve something in chess. My father had once given me a very beautiful wooden chess set. I can't find words to express it. I still keep this set at home.

My first successes came mostly because of park preparation. At 11, I discovered the excitement of park blitz, and spent the whole summer observing and occasionally playing in the park, day after day, doing nothing but chess. This was a very attractive company. Everybody had their own jokes, their own language.

Once, after playing a game with an old man, he said he wanted to give me his chess library! He immediately gave me two volumes of Fischer's 744 games and said to come back with my mother for the rest. The next day we took 212 books, all in good condition. He is now he is 80 and like a grandfather to me. His name is Vladislav Isaakovich Uretsky. My tutor.

MS: Did you make a good use of the books?

VD: The Fischer books were my favorite, I studied them thoroughly. I also read *My System*, Tarrasch's *Three Hundred Games* and Botvinnik's 4-volume [set](#).

MS: This all seems very positional to me. There are also splendid books by Alekhine, Tal, Bronstein, Kasparov...

VD: Yes, now I am trying to fill the gap. At that time I was a big fan of Fischer, and just knew that there were two other, stronger guys – Karpov and Kasparov. I dreamed of playing Karpov, and I just recently did. We played rapid chess in Tallin. It was not my best tournament, but I met great players such as Karpov, Gelfand, and Shirov.

MS: Were you impressed?

VD: It was superb! I had a better position and strong time pressure against Karpov, say, seven minutes against one, with a ten second increment. The position was quite complicated, but Karpov played tremendously well. He drew effortlessly. I was very impressed, although I already had a 2500 rating and was quite confident in myself.

Another chess event that deeply impressed me was the 1996 Kremlin Stars. After this tournament I decided to start working on chess seriously. The atmosphere was magical and I recorded all the games of the final.

Another thing that motivated me during my early years was playing grandmaster Alexey Vyzhmanavin in a simul at our school. I was just 10, and of course I lost despite trying hard. Vyzhmanavin said – your position looks fine, but you have a weak square, and this spoils everything, and I ... really understood what he meant. This was very helpful to me, but I don't know why.



MS: When did you decide to become a chess professional?

VD: At 13, when I purchased [ChessAssistant](#) with a database and the [Strategy](#) program. I was very happy. I solved *Strategy* twice in two weeks, all 600 positions. First, I solved them slowly, trying to remember everything, and then I repeated the course with 10 seconds per position and 98% success. This made a big impression on my trainer, international master Vassily Gagarin.

MS: Did you already have a rating then?

VD: No, I had just become a candidate master. But I had a very good memory, unlike now. I could remember all the games I had played.

MS: Did you hesitate when enrolling in the Sports University?

VD: Absolutely not. In fact, I finished my last four school grades in a year and a half in order to concentrate on chess to get into the University. I enrolled it at 15, together with Kosteniuk, Grischuk, Potkin, etc. Belov and Pavel Smirnov tried to enroll the same year, but failed.

MS: Was it interesting to study there?

VD: Socializing was more interesting. However, I took my studies seriously, too, especially during the first two years.

MS: I was told that the chess department does not offer much by way of chess study, is that correct?

VD: Chess is quite seriously emphasized during the first years of study. We had lectures and seminars. One humorous anecdote involved IM Anatoly Shvedchikov, who was one of our teachers. Once, during a lesson on endgames, he asked: “what is the most important endgame principle?” Grischuk answered in the vein of centralizing the king. Upon which Shvedchikov replied that Grischuk had no clue about chess! The correct answer was – move your pawns towards the queening squares! Well, the last time I heard about this man, he was the state trainer of the Myanmar team. He was a colorful person ...



MS: When did you begin playing in international tournaments?

VD: My first tournament abroad was in Minsk in 1998. It was an outstanding event! I played my first game onstage, and I lost without a fight as White against Berelovich. However, I played two very creative games, which I am still not shy about showing even now. Next I played in Romania: summer, sun, and fruits – my first event outside the former Soviet Union. And, of course, one of the most memorable was Budapest 1999. I played in the open together with Bu Xinagzhi, Hungarian talent Csaba Balogh and thirty other players. I lost a superior position to Balogh, but nevertheless scored 7 out of 9 and got my first IM norm, being rated just 2252.

MS: Do you enjoy a nomadic lifestyle?

VD: Well, I do not consider myself nomadic. When I played a hundred games per year, I enjoyed it. But now I mostly stay home and teach. I am much less a player these days.

MS: Do you give private lessons or teach at a school?

VD: Both. I lead two groups and teach two students on a regular basis.

MS: You became a grandmaster at the age of 20, why did you decide to become a chess coach?

VD: We needed the money, and I realized that I had to contribute, too. My brother went to war in Chechnya and our mother was ill.

MS: Was it difficult to find students?

VD: No, I had my university experience and good general knowledge. I started working with the groups in 2005, before that I only had individual students.

MS: Do you like teaching?

VD: It is very much to my liking, especially when it comes to teaching talented students. Right now I am trying to limit myself to teaching talented and ambitious individuals. I am not as interested in making as much money as possible, as I got tired of teaching students of little promise.

MS: What books do you recommend to your students?

VD: [*Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*](#) is one of the best and most useful modern books. Otherwise, [*Think Like a Grandmaster*](#) by Kotov, game collections by [Alekhine](#) and [Rubinstein](#), as well as other classics, in order to get acquainted with chess culture.

MS: What qualities does a good trainer need to possess?

VD: First, a trainer must have personality. Second, one must be eager, energetic and vivacious. Third, there are different kinds of trainers: for beginners, intermediates, and professionals. Plus, there are natural born trainers – this is impossible to explain, but one can sense it. Being a good psychologist is also important. When it comes to chess qualities, one needs understanding, the ability to correctly assess positions and erudition. Being flexible is very useful as well.

MS: How much do you work every week?

VD: I have three lessons with each group and two meetings with each student. I also give them individual work, which they have to do three or four hours a day. There are Internet lessons as well. By the way, one of my Internet friends invited me to a chess camp in Santa Barbara, CA at the end of June. There will be four days of lectures, seminars, and sports – which will make good training for the World Open. If I obtain the visa, I'll be there. I have no problem with English, as my mother is an English teacher.

MS: Do you have students abroad, too?

VD: Yes, I am hoping to help Wales gain its first grandmaster (smiles).



MS: Would you earn less by playing in tournaments? Or would your income just be less stable?

VD: It is only a matter of consistency. In order to earn money by playing chess, you have to work hard for a while without any reward. And I could not afford it, especially having started a family.

MS: How many tournaments do you play per year?

VD: Last year was disastrous for me – I played in five tournaments and lost fifteen points in each. Nothing worked! My next event is the Moscow Open, then I will probably play in the Cappelle-la-Grande.

MS: Do you play blitz on the Internet?

VD: Yes, it is very convenient. Some years ago we could not even imagine it possible. It is quite interesting, but people are generally cheekier there. They tend to be rude without reason, and flag you being a rook down, etc. I played many games with Short (at least 62 -- M.S.), who is a very strong player, of course, and his style is very original. I also played blitz with Carlsen from Norway at the end of 2005.

MS: Is it possible to combine teaching and playing?

VD: I always look for interesting material for my students, while improving and expanding my chess in the process. Of course, I know I have to work much harder if I want to keep playing actively. However, my free time is limited and it is hard to do both.

MS: Do you regret not becoming a professional player?

VD: Well, I still consider myself a chess professional. I just made a change that I consider to be useful. But we'll see.

Vladimir Dobrov Annotates

Dobrov, V (2492) – Neverov, V (2550)

Saint Petersburg (9), 2003 [D85]

This game was played during the last round of the Chigorin Memorial and was voted as the “Game of the Week” at the now defunct KasparovChess.com. Curiously, I often play highly satisfactory games in this city, especially in the last round.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 Nxc3 6.bxc3 Bg7 7.Nf3 0–0 8.Rb1 c5 9.Be2 b6 10.0–0 Bb7 11.d5 Bxc3 12.Qb3!



A fashionable line of the Grünfeld Defense. This last move is a novelty, suggested by Vladimir Belov during our home preparation. White sacrifices a pawn for an overwhelming position in the center. White has no immediate threats, but the position is tough for Black to handle.

12...Bg7 13.Bf4 Nd7

Black has alternatives in 13...Qc8 and 13...Ba6, but White enjoys strong practical compensation regardless.

14.Rfe1

14.e5 is also interesting, but I stick to the prepared plan. It is difficult for Black to generate any ideas.

14...Nf6 15.Bc4

This is why I needed a rook on the e-file.

15...Nh5

15...Ne8 would be weak, as after 16.e5, Black's position is dire.

16.Be3

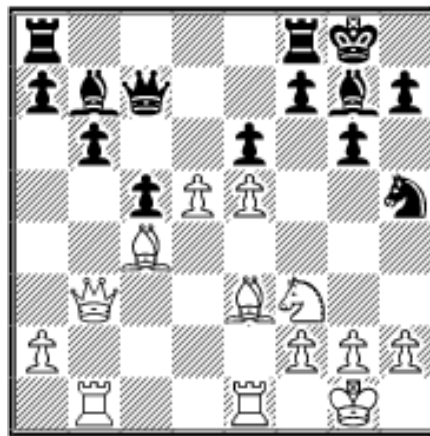
Another option is 16.Bd2. I would probably revert to it if Black redeployed the knight to f6: 16...Nf6 17.Bf4 Nh5 18.Bd2. Capturing on c5 has its advantages and disadvantages, so I prefer to keep the position more complex.

16...Qc7 17.e5!

White threatens g4, trapping the knight.

17...e6

Black was beginning to experiencing some time pressure. Neverov likes to think and is notoriously prone to *zeitnot*, but that is when he often outplays his opponent.



18.dxe6!

18.d6 is not an option – I was sure that grandmaster Neverov, being an experienced Grünfeld player, would be happy in that case. The text is much stronger as well.

18...Bxf3 (18...fxe6 19.Ng5±) 19.exf7+ Kh8 20.e6!

I played this prepared move instantly. Of course, 20.gxf3 Qxe5 is heaven for Black.

20...Bc6

Threatening mate in one does not do much for Black: 20...Bb7 21.Bg5 Qc6 22.f3±.

21.Bg5

The e6-e7 threat forces Black to revert to tactical measures.

21...h6 22.Bh4 g5?

A mistake! Valery had to find 22...Qf4! to remain in the game: 23.Bg3 Nxc3 24.hxc3 Qf5 25.e7 Bd4 26.Re2 Kg7 27.exf8Q+ Rxf8. This position is difficult to assess. White is an exchange up, but Black certainly has compensation.

23.Bxg5!

Perhaps Black missed this move. Now the white queen suddenly joins the attack from h3 and White's position is objectively winning.

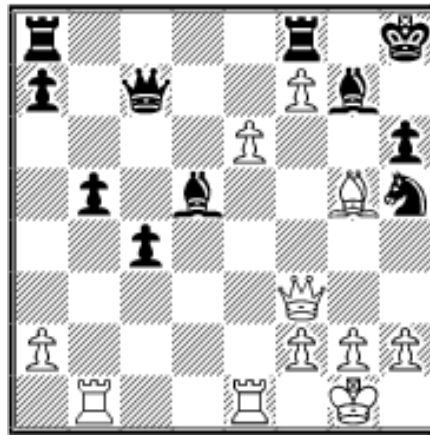
23...b5 24.Bd5

Better is 24.Qh3!, and after 24...Nf4 25.Qf5! bxc4 (25...hxg5 26.Bd3!) 26.Bxf4 Qe7 27.Be3 wins, although the text-move is not a mistake ... yet.

24...c4

Black makes the only moves, but his position does not get any better.

25.Qf3 Bxd5



26.Qxd5?!

Unfortunately, I missed a neat winning continuation: 26.Qxh5! Bxe6 27.Bf6! – this is the move I overlooked at the board.

26...Nf6

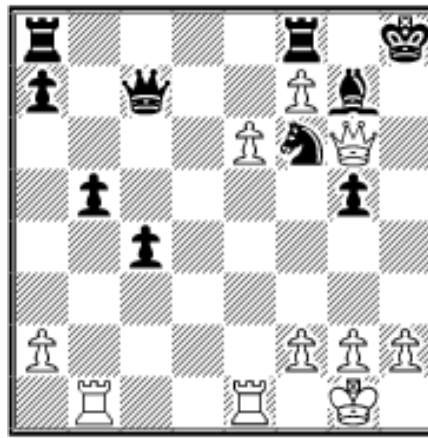
Better is 26...hxg5! 27.Qxg5 Nf6 28.Qg6 (it is important to keep the f7-pawn) 28...Qf4 29.Re3 Bh6 30.Rf3 (30.Rh3

Ng4! and Black suddenly regains the initiative) 30...Qg5 31.Rxf6 Qxg6 32.Rxg6 Kh7 33.Rg3. I leave the assessment of this position to those who enjoy analyzing complex endgames. White is certainly better, but to what extent?

27.Qf5?

An attempt to finish the game nicely brings a serious error. Stronger is 27.Bxf6! Bxf6 28.Rxb5. I expected the game continuation, but it was not best.

27...hxg5 28.Qg6



28...Qe7

Black had about 15 seconds left on the clock, and there was no increment, so the outcome of the game was clear no matter what. But for the sake of objectivity I must admit that after 28...Ng4! 29.Qh5+ Nh6 30.e7 Rxf7 31.e8Q+ Rxe8 32.Rxe8+ Kh7 33.Qxg5 Qb6, Black would have turned the table.

29.Re3 g4 30.Rxb5 1-0

Here Black's flag fell, but he is lost anyway.

Hauchard, A (2483) – Dobrov, V (2515)
Gausdal Open (8), 2005 [A11]

Magnus Carlsen had already secured first place, so the main struggle was for second place. I had just won two games in a row and needed to win another to improve my chances. Hauchard is a solid player, who is tough to beat, and it is hard to win as Black on demand. This game is far from perfect, but I like it nonetheless.

1.c4 c6 2.Nf3 d5 3.e3 Nf6 4.Nc3 a6 5.b3 Bg4 6.Be2 Nbd7 7.h3

Correctly challenging the bishop; 7.Bb2 allows 7...e5, when Black seizes the initiative.

7...Bxf3 8.Bxf3 Ne5

This is the first interesting move of the game, which sets practical problems for my opponent to solve. Yet, he was able to find good solutions for a long time.

9.Be2

If 9.d4 Nxf3 10.Qxf3 e5!, and the bishop goes to b4 with a good game for Black. The text is a typical move for a positional player who feels comfortable with having a small advantage.

9...e6 10.Bb2 d4

A responsible decision, but I felt that after 10...Bd6 11.d4, White has a very comfortable plus thanks to his bishop-pair. So the pawn push is nearly a must if I want to play for a win.

11.Na4

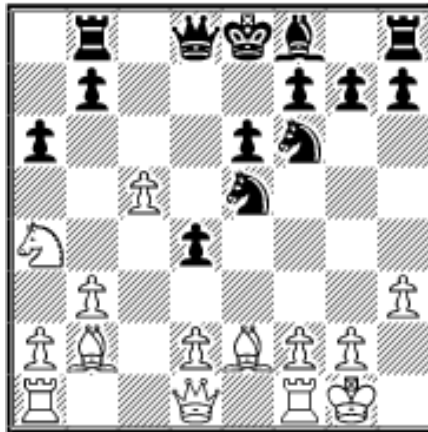
If White takes, Black is just fine.

11...c5 12.0-0 Rb8

I did not find my position promising, but I had to play on in a straightforward manner.

13.exd4 cxd4 14.c5

White is once again up to the task.



This is the first critical position of the game. White threatens f4 with a big advantage. So my next move is designed to prevent it.

14...g5 15.Re1 Ng6 16.Rc1 Bg7 17.Rc4 Nd5

Black is crushed after 17...e5 18.Bd3.

18.Bxd4 Bxd4 19.Rxd4 Qf6

Here White could take on d5, followed by Nb6. The exchange sacrifice is just temporary, as I would return the material with compensation for the pawn. However, my opponent moved very quickly.

20.Re4 Rd8

Keeping everything under control for the moment.

21.c6 bxc6 22.Bxa6

It becomes clear that the only option for Black is to attack the king.

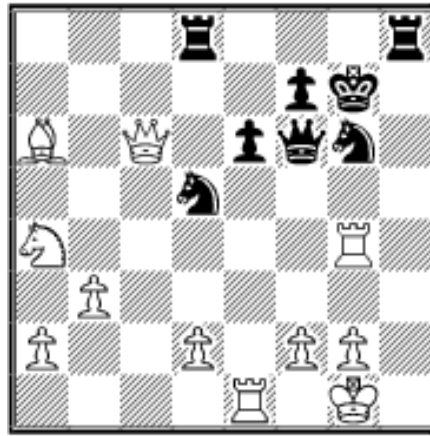
22...h5 23.Qc2 g4 24.Qxc6+ Kf8

Here White has 25.Nc5, with the idea Nd7, and it is curtains for Black. However, he played it two moves too late.

25.hxg4 hxg4

Adding some mating motifs along the h-file.

26.Rxg4 Kg7



Black creates his first major threat in the game – 27...Rh1+!

27.Nc5

White defends by creating the opportunity for the counterblow: Nxe6.

27...Ndf4

Adding the idea of Qf5-h5 and mates.

28.Ne4

The position is objectively unclear, despite White's three extra pawns, because the pawns are backward and do not take part in the play. The light-squared bishop is rather misplaced, too.

28...Qe5 29.Qc3 Rd4

Threatening both 30...Ne2+ and 30...Qh5 (and if 31.Qxd4+, then just 31...•5).

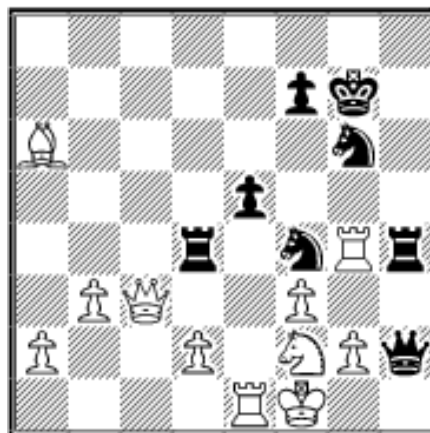
30.f3

It is never easy to find defensive moves, but here White began running short of time! I found the correct redeployment.

30...Nd5 31.Qa1 Qh2+ 32.Kf1 e5 33.Nf2 Ndf4

Now 34.Rxe5 Qh1+! 35.Nxh1 Rxh1+ gives Black good winning chances.

34.Qc3 Rh4



The second critical position. It looks nearly hopeless for White, but he has a miraculous saving sequence: 35.Rxe5! Rxc4 36.fxc4 Qxc2+ 37.Ke1 Qg1+ 38.Bf1 Ne5 39.Qxd4, and Black draws by 39...Nd3!, with the idea of perpetual check.

35.Bb7

The logic behind this move is that White protects g2, but this is a decisive error.

35...f5

The last soldier has entered the battle and Black wins.

36.Rg5

Actually, the last soldier is still to come.

36...Kh6!

Stressing the fact that the outcome of the game was decided on the kingside.

37.Rxg6+ Kxg6 0-1

In the last round I drew with Burmakin to finish second.



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