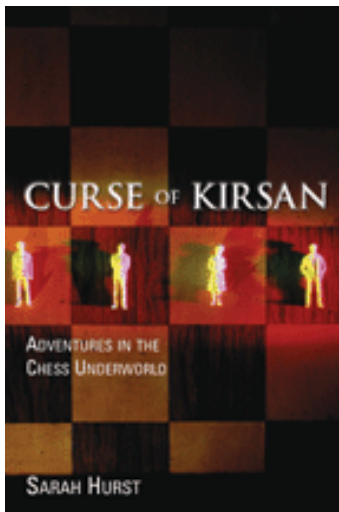




## COLUMNISTS

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Interviews...*

Misha Savinov



## Interview with Anatoly Bykhovsky

*Anatoly Bykhovsky. Born in 1934. International Master and International Arbiter. Current FIDE rating – 2364. Renowned chess trainer and organizer. Chairman of the Trainers' Council of the Russian Chess Federation since 2003.*

**Misha Savinov:** Could you say a few words about your first steps in chess?

**Anatoly Bykhovsky:** I started quite late, judging by modern standards. I learned the rules at the age of eight. Of course, there were no trainers during the war. When I returned to Moscow from evacuation, I came to the Pioneers' Palace, and studied chess together with Alex Nikitin and Ed Chaplinsky. Chaplinsky was an absolute genius – like Spassky. There was a traditional confrontation between Moscow and Leningrad, with Chaplinsky on one side, and Spassky on the other side. Our trainers were not chess professionals, they were candidate masters just returned from the war, and they passionately loved chess and teaching. I had some tournament successes, but choosing a chess career was completely out of the question at that time. So I attended Moscow Technical University, and then worked at a space research institute – classified stuff. I worked with the now world-famous Sergej Korolyov, and played in chess tournaments.



**MS:** Did you only play in your spare time?

**AB:** Yes. I became a master, and won the Moscow Championship in 1963. In 1965, I participated in the USSR championship final, where I was the only amateur player. The lineup was quite strong: Stein (the eventual winner), Polugaevsky, Keres, etc. I finished in the middle of the table, sharing tenth-twelfth with Korchnoi and Simagin. So I divided my time between science and chess, until the Sports Committee introduced a new position: trainer of the national junior team.

**MS:** The situation with junior chess was quite dire, as, after Spassky, nobody could win an international junior tournament!

**AB:** Absolutely right. The chess authorities were being criticized and they had to react in some way, so they introduced a new position and started looking for candidates. They found just two: Alex Roshal and me. Even though Petrosian strongly supported Roshal, I was selected. I still have no idea as to why; perhaps because Roshal didn't have a

university diploma. I began in 1967 and stayed in that position for twenty-five years.

**MS:** What were your responsibilities?

**AB:** There were many different things associated with junior chess, from organizing tournaments, such as *Belaya Ladja*, to arranging training sessions for young talents, and coaching during the World and European junior championships. It was an interesting job and I was very lucky. And not just me – I believe that my whole generation was lucky. Modern players may have better financial arrangements, but in my youth chess enjoyed immense popularity, and we all felt as if we were doing something good and important. Now I don't feel that the professions of chess player and chess trainer are respected anymore.

It is also a great feeling to have worked with three generations of outstanding players – Karpov, Kasparov, and Kramnik. Our juniors began dominating the international scene soon after I took the position, but that was just a coincidence. Young talents in chess appear in clusters, like mushrooms in a forest, who knows why... It was a very good job – nice kids were turning into great players before my very eyes.

**MS:** And when the Soviet Union broke apart?

**AB:** Exactly when I reached the pension age. (smiles)

**MS:** So you returned to practical chess?

**AB:** Yes, I started playing more. A friend of mine joked: “Tolya, you are so involved in chess, if I were in your shoes I'd finally learn to play!” So I became an international master. Many people consider me to be Grischuk's trainer, but I was more of an organizer for him. That's about it. I don't regret quitting science, as I had a good time in chess.

**MS:** I noticed that there are many trainers who previously worked in the scientific sphere – Nikitin and Lukin.

**AB:** And Boris Postovsky. The explanation is that these people had a habit of waking up at 7AM. They got used to going to work and were responsible. Of course, they also graduated from strong universities, worked with talented people, and had good backgrounds in both knowledge and social relations.

When we were recently looking for a trainer for our men's team, the Trainers' Council reviewed many candidates. I had one personal request: the man in charge must show up at work every day. Guess what – nobody accepted this condition! It was impossible to find someone ready to work on a daily basis. So should we be surprised about the recent mediocre results of the team?

Boris Postovsky was an excellent national manager. However, we used to call such people “trainers.” But Postovsky and Dvoretzky are people of different professions! Postovsky cannot help Bologan or Inarkiev to improve at chess. And Dvoretzky, possibly, should not be hired as a national squad manager, because he is a strict and strong man, and it makes it difficult to find a common language with other strong personalities. Or consider Kart, who was a weak player, but a great pedagogue who raised many outstanding grandmasters in Lvov. And Bondarevsky was a trainer of yet another type: he would take Spassky by the throat and force him to work.



**MS:** What kind of management does the national team need?

**AB:** The team needs a captain, an organizer. And Postovsky, before he moved to the U. S., was perfect in this role. We don't need a man who can teach such players as Svidler or Morozevich to play chess in seven days.

**MS:** How many all-Russian junior chess schools are operating now? Bareev and Khalifman each have one, are there more?

**AB:** Sveshnikov sometimes holds seminars, and I am not sure whether Panchenko continues to work with children – they are excellent teachers. We at the Trainers' Council wanted to have more than one all-Russian chess school, so that they could compete as they did thirty years ago. The schools of Botvinnik, Smyslov, Petrosian, Polugaevsky, and Panchenko, each had their own system, their students competed in national tournaments, and it was very exciting. Unfortunately, because of financial considerations we founded only one school: Bareev's. I think this is wrong.

**MS:** Bareev stated that he only wanted to work with very young players. Do you agree?

**AB:** I respect his point of view. However, I don't think that everyone above fourteen is unpromising. Leonid Stein became a master at twenty-seven, and then won three USSR championships and became one of the best players in the world. Okay, this is an old example, but what about Alekseev, Jakovenko, Inarkiev, and Tomashevsky? Two years ago they were generally considered to be approaching their limit, and now this is our elite; at least two or three of them will be invited to play for the national team.

The problem with 9- and 10-year-old children is that it isn't easy to distinguish between genuine talent and someone who just had an early start. So there should be a school for "older" boys and girls as well. Although, chess has changed so much that traditional chess pedagogy is a bit outdated.

**MS:** What do you mean?

**AB:** Chess has become much younger. Unfortunately, the career span of a chessplayer has decreased substantially. Botvinnik played championship matches after forty, but now a player of that age is over-the-hill. In other professions a man only begins to flourish at forty, because of all the knowledge and experience he has accumulated, while a chess

player has to look for a new job. Nowadays, players spend ten to twelve hours a day in front of the computer, and this is a luxury that only youngsters can afford. In return they get a huge amount of the most up-to-date knowledge, which gives them an edge over more experienced players. In Soviet times a student would meet with his trainer two or three times a week, while now they can do everything on their own. One can explore the database, play on the Internet, analyze with an engine, find annotated games, follow all the news, etc. Chess has become more intense.

**MS:** As with all sports.

**AB:** But chess has always been special! At the qualification for the Tal Blitz Cup last year, the organizers invited veterans such as Tukmakov and Balashov. Great names! However, with all that knowledge and experience, they didn't stand a chance against the young ones, who beat them soundly – and I feel uncomfortable saying that.

**MS:** Was time a factor?

**AB:** No, no, in real sound games. The game itself has changed, too. It has become more concrete and tough, and contains fewer abstract ideas. Suspicious-looking but deeply analyzed positions are played, and we see that there's something wrong with our perception, because they are completely playable. You know, when you play against the computer, it often seems that its pieces are badly coordinated and lacking protection, but then it turns out that they interact splendidly, only at some higher level of perception. And young players are learning this kind of chess.



**MS:** What remains for a trainer?

**AB:** The role of a trainer is still important, but in a different way. It is more organizational and psychological. The great players of the past were always associated with a trainer: Tal – Koblents, Karpov – Furman, and Kasparov – Nikitin.

**MS:** I could add Svidler – Lukin and Morozevich – Yurkov from my generation.

**AB:** Right. And what happens then? Who is Radjabov's trainer? Carlsen has Nielsen, who is a very nice man and a fine player, but not Dvoretzky, and not Nikitin. Plus, the top players don't just have a trainer, they have brigades!

**MS:** But there are only a few such players...

**AB:** I believe most of the top players have many helpers. Kramnik, Leko, Aronian... One person is responsible for one part of the opening encyclopedia, while another explores the next volume, etc. In Botvinnik's time there was a single man responsible for all the analysis, including adjourned games.

**MS:** Who introduced this "brigade" method to chess? Karpov?

**AB:** No, it appeared much earlier! Strangely enough, it was introduced by a "man of great modesty" David Bronstein. He had the best brigade in the history of chess! Boleslavsky, Furman and Konstantinopolsky! These three are among the top ten outstanding trainers I have ever met in my life.

**MS:** How did he attract them?

**AB:** It is commonly believed that Botvinnik represented the State, while Bronstein was a man from the masses. In reality, David had good support from the KGB (via his friend Vainstein), good money, and influential supporters. So they arranged this team. Yet, David still complained in his memoirs! His writings are often controversial.

Petrosian also had a brigade: Geller, Suetin and Averbakh. However, Karpov took it further. He is the smartest of chess players, the most organized, like an A-student, who analyzes everything and picks out the best. He did not just choose the best analysts, but strengthened his team with a cook and a masseur. He acted like a skilled manager. Karpov brought many innovations to chess. He has always been a smart kid.

**MS:** Many say that the new chess era starts with the Karpov-Kasparov matches.

**AB:** Their rivalry was unprecedented, or maybe Karpov-Korchnoi was equivalent. Before that there were just small clashes. Botvinnik demanding two envelopes and things like that.

**MS:** Two envelopes?

**AB:** When the game was adjourned and he sealed the move, he demanded the scoresheet be put into two envelopes – a single envelope could jeopardize the secret. A trifle, judging by our standards; however, at the time Botvinnik was considered to be a highly dishonest man, only because he was capable of thinking about such things! (laughs)

**MS:** So an ambitious player must have big results early to receive sponsorship or state support for hiring a group of helpers?

**AB:** This would help, but look at Aronian – he didn't show excellent results or obtain the required support until his twenties.



**MS:** Do you think rising stars, such as Jakovenko and Alekseev, should consider the “brigade” method as well?

**AB:** I actually have my own opinion on Jakovenko. Many times I told him: “Mitya, you are very talented man, and you can prosper in many different areas.” He either had to concentrate on his university studies – which is correct in my opinion – or focus solely on chess. The times have changed. Today a different gifted youngster wins the first prize of a strong open on a monthly basis. What’s the point of pursuing this chess lottery?

**MS:** Well, chess is addictive.

**AB:** Yes, one needs to love chess passionately. However, I noticed that players such as Svidler, Anand, Bareev, and Grischuk all seem very tired of chess. It’s the same tournaments, the same opponents, the same positions, the Petroff and the Slav – I barely can look at those positions! Their motivation declines, and why do they play? Grischuk tells me he can make more at a poker table, so he isn’t playing much chess. This is very sad. Sasha is a wonderful talent, surely not less talented than Topalov, but with better nerves and innate objectivity. I tell him that the chess goddess does not like disloyalty! Two more years of semi-absence, and you’ll regret your missed opportunities for the rest of your life. Let’s see how he does in the candidates matches; I am looking forward to it, although I am very worried.

**MS:** Grischuk favors speeding up chess. What do you think about this notion?

**AB:** I can’t understand it. Can you imagine children playing these one-hour time limit games, and then qualifying for a world cycle event, where they have to switch to a completely unfamiliar seven-hour time control? The time limit makes it a different game!

This is actually a topical question. I asked the chief arbiter at the Russian Junior Championships what we would do if the World and European Junior championships were held under the new system, and he said “We’ll still use the classical control.” But we can’t do that, we can’t preserve our chess.

I could understand it, if it was followed by a significant achievement, such as joining the Olympic family or appearing on television. Otherwise, I don’t like the idea.

**MS:** It doesn't seem as if chess can realistically join the Olympics, and do you really believe chess could be on TV?

**AB:** I am sure it could be popular in Russia, where we have so many people playing chess. One could just sit two charismatic people in front of each other, say, Korchnoi vs. Kosteniuk, and let them play a 10-minute game with good commentary. This seems extremely exciting to me, but alas...

**MS:** Your views on the future of chess seem rather pessimistic – or am I wrong?

**AB:** Well, maybe this is just the talk of an old man who doesn't like changes. The advances of one generation may be seen as a decline by another. It's fine if chess really evolves, rather than declines. However, I'm afraid that the Golden Age of chess has departed; I'm just glad to have witnessed and participated in it.

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