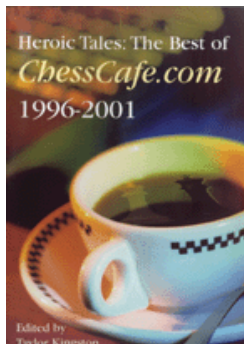




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The Patriarch

Mark Donlan

Botvinnik – Smyslov, Three World Chess Championship Matches: 1954, 1957, 1958, by Mikhail Botvinnik, New In Chess, 2009, Paperback, 288pp., \$33.95

Mikhail Botvinnik (1911 – 1995) was world champion 1948-57, 1958-60, and 1961-63. He first won the world championship in 1948 in a tournament to determine a new world champion following the death of Alexander Alekhine. He finished three points ahead of the field, with Vasily Smyslov placing second. In 1951, he retained his title by drawing his first world championship match against David Bronstein. In 1954 he kept his title by drawing with Vasily Smyslov in Moscow, +7 =10 –7. In 1957, he lost to Smyslov by 9½-12½; however, the rules allowed him a rematch in 1958, which he then won 10½-12½.



This book, edited and compiled by Botvinnik’s nephew Igor Botvinnik, is the story of his three matches with Smyslov. I. Botvinnik writes, “The majority of games are given with notes by Botvinnik, whilst in other cases ... the commentaries are by Smyslov or other well-known masters.” There are also footnotes provided by the editors at New In Chess as well as from translators Ken Neat and Steve Giddins. In addition, Botvinnik’s own original notebooks are included; these contain analysis of opening variations and “show just how diligently and systematically Botvinnik worked on chess.”

In fact, according to *Golombek’s Encyclopedia of Chess*, “Part of the secret of Botvinnik’s genius was his immense capacity for hard work. Every game he played was subjected to intensive analysis and he proved to be his own most severe critic, without a trace of self-deception.” Thus, he took professionalism in chess to a new level and set new standards for tournament and match preparation. In doing so he became known as “The Patriarch” of Soviet chess.

Botvinnik’s analyses and comments reveal his match strategy and his view on the strategic choices of his opponent. In the foreword, Smyslov writes, “we had differing views on certain aspects of chess, we both looked on the game not merely as sporting competition, but also as an art, and tried at the board to create finished works of art.” He further notes, “these matches gave the chess world many moments of great achievement. Of course these were accompanied by some serious mistakes, but these only serve to underline the extreme pressure of such matches.”

Botvinnik’s plan of preparation for the 1957 match was as follows:

- Collect all Smyslov games played since 1 March 1954.
- Make a card index of openings.
- Draw up overall characteristics, after studying games and card index.
- Look at Olympiad, Alekhine Memorial, theoretical bulletins, semifinals and finals (of Soviet Championships – translator’s note), etc, and pick out anything valuable.
- Prepare openings for 12 Black and 12 White games.
- Test these in two sets of training games – 1-15 January, 6 games, 1-15 February, 6 games. Total 12 games. Check the rest in home analysis.
- Physical preparation:
 - a) Spend not less than 4 days each week at the dacha, except for the periods 1-15 January and 1-15 February, when no. of days at the dacha should be no less than 6 per week.
 - b) Skiing, showers, salt-baths, ice-skating, walking, sleeping with window ajar, see dentist, exercises.

In his conclusions from the 1958 return match, Botvinnik writes, “The return match produced a rich collection of interesting endgames: the instructive opposite-coloured bishop ending in Game 4, queen endings (Games 1 and 17), some highly interesting rook endings (Games 5, 14, 16 and, partly, 18) and, finally, some multi-piece endings (Games 6, 18 and

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20).

“The reader may find a pawn ending in the notes (after White’s 43rd move) to Game 20.

“The reader can see Smyslov’s usual virtuoso endgame play in the 5th and, especially, the 16th game.

“Unfortunately, in some other games, Smyslov did not fully justify his reputation as a subtle endgame specialist. Insufficiently deep endgame play resulted in Smyslov missing chances in Games 4 and 14, and in Game 18, and maybe also in Games 6 and 17. Isn’t this rather a lot for one World Championship match, and isn’t this poor endgame play the main cause of Smyslov’s failure in the match?”

Here’s what Botvinnik had to say about the position after White’s forty-third move (43.Rb1-a1) in Game 20:



“Here Black had three possibilities:

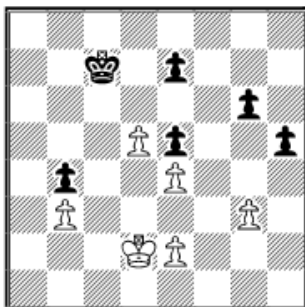
“A) the endgame rook and knight against rook and knight, i.e. the continuation chosen in the game;

“B) a rook ending;

“C) a pawn ending (which White can avoid if he wishes).

“The rook ending after 43...Ne5 44.Nxe5+ dxe5 45.Ra7+ Ke8 (45...Rc7 46.Ra4; or 45...Kd6 46.Ra6+ Kc5 47.Rxg6 Rxb3 48.Re6) 46.Ra8+ Kf7 47.Ra7! (threatening d5-d6-d7-d8Q) 47...Kf6 48.Ra6+ (48...Kg5 49. Re6) does not pose serious problems to White. who has sufficient grounds to count on a draw.

“However, White can create difficulties for himself, if in the line 43...Ne5 44.Nxe5+ dxe5 45.Ra7+ Rc7 he exchanges rooks by means of 46.Rxc7+ Kxc7.



“The pawn ending is so interesting that I decided in any case to analyse it before the resumption. At first, it seemed to me that White has an easy draw after 47.g4 hxg4 (else g4-g5 and e2-e3, with a fortress) 48.Ke3 Kd7 49.Kf2 Ke8 50.Kg3 Kf7 51.Kxg4 Kg7 52.Kg5 Kh7 53.Kh4 Kh6 54.Kg4 g5 55.Kf5 Kh5 56.Kxe5 g4 57.Kf4 Kh4 58.e5 g3 59.Kf3 Kh3 60.d6 exd6 61.exd6 g2 62.d7 g1Q 63.d8Q. However, at the last moment, I found that Black can do better: 48...Kd6! (after 47.g4 hxg4 48.Ke3) 49.Kf2 Kc5!! 50. e3 Kd6 51.Kg3 Kd7 52.Kxg4 Ke8 53.Kg5 Kf7 54.Kg4 Kg7 55.Kg5 Kh7 56.Kh4 Kh6 57.Kg4 g5 58.Kf5 Kh5 59.Kxe5 g4 60.Kf4 Kh4 61.e5 g3 62. Kf3 Kh3 63.d6 g2 64.dxe7 g1Q 65.e8Q Qg2+ 66.Kf4 Qg4#!!.

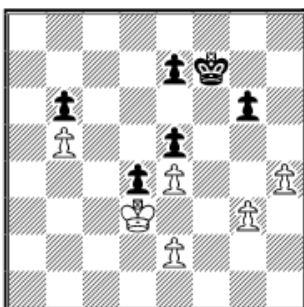
“At the end of the match, I showed this pawn ending at an evening meeting in the Central Chess Club. Flohr, who was present at the club, told me the following day that after a painstaking analysis, he had found a draw for White; he just needs to keep his pawn on g3.

“I went back and checked this method of defence. Initially, I thought that the following line was enough for a draw: 47.Ke3 Kd6 48.Kf3 e6! 49. dxe6! Kxe6 50.Kf2 Kf6 51.Kg2 g5 52.e3 g4 53.Kh2 Kg5 54.Kg2 h4 55. Kh2 hxg3+ 56.Kxg3 Kh5 57.Kg2 Kh4 58.Kh2 g3+ 59.Kg1!. However, Goldberg then pointed out a simple win here: 59...Kg5! 60.Kh1 Kh5! 61. Kg1 Kh4.

“Only a month after the match did I finally unearth a draw for White: after 51...g5 he must reply 52.g4!, whilst in the event of 51...Kg5 52.Kh3

Kh6 53.Kh4! (53...g5+ 54.Kh3 g4+ 55.Kh4), Black can also achieve nothing.

“By an insignificant change in the position, I was able to exclude this drawing line, and complete a small endgame study on this theme, which is shown in the following diagram. It was published in *Shakhmatny Bulletin*, 1958, no.8. Of course, the reader will be able to solve it without great effort!



“In the game, Black chose the first possibility, and refrained from the exchange of knights.”

To again quote from Smyslov, “this book will be of interest both to lovers of chess history, and to those who are seeking to improve their own play.” The only possible criticism to this title is, apart from the cover, the absence of historical photos. You owe it to yourself to take advantage of the opportunity to benefit from the Patriarch’s diligence, insight and wisdom.

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