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American GM Andy Soltis concludes his two-part article on the famous Zurich 1953 Tournament. Readers who may have missed part 1 will find it in the [ChessCafe.com Archives](#): www.chesscafe.com/text/skittles171.pdf.

Treachery in Zurich Part 2

by Andy Soltis

Reshevsky had also thrown away a half point in Round 24 by allowing Yefim Geller to draw - two pawns down in a rook and pawn ending - by way of a stalemate trick.

Both Keres and Reshevsky seemed to be self-destructing.

But what about Bronstein?

He still had a game to play with Smyslov in Round 26 that could affect first place.

This is where Bronstein's *64* account is most revealing: Following Round 24 the troika "decided to strike while the iron was hot."

That night they told Geller that he must lose to Bronstein the next day to further hinder Reshevsky's chances of winning the tournament. They added that Bronstein had "demanded" the full point from Geller.

At the time, the Ukrainian was tied with Szabo for next-to-last-place and presumably had no reason to have ambitions of his own.

"Then they called me to the lake and said: Geller already received an

order to lose to you!" Bronstein wrote.

"I tried to object but I made a mistake."

Instead of protesting against the basic unfairness of throwing a game he argued that it was not right to hurt Geller when he stood so badly in the standings, he wrote.

"You want to kill the guy completely?" he protested.

"No, no, he agreed, he's a patriot."

Bronstein added: "I pretended that I also agreed, but decided to use cunning" – and play for a draw, instead.

"This was my second mistake. I should have gone to Yefim's room and talked to him. But, remember, it was 1953..."

That year was politically charged, because of the Cold War, Stalin's death and the arrest and execution of Lavrenti Beria and others connected to the KGB.

During the tournament Bronstein was concerned about the fate of his close friend Veinstein, who had been an officer in the secret police and had served under Beria.

Veinstein hadn't been allowed to travel to Switzerland as Bronstein's second. (As a result, Bronstein was the only Soviet player without a second.)

But Veinstein had promised to "send some kind of innocent telegram" during the later stages of the tournament so Bronstein would know he hadn't been arrested.

Veinstein never sent the message, explaining to Bronstein later "I was afraid."

In any event, Bronstein wrote in *64*: "I naively thought that the conversation ended with Geller - but it hadn't."

"Here's how it is," Postnikov told him, while Moshintsev "sullenly"

walked next to him.

Bronstein had to make a quick draw with Smyslov, Postnikov insisted.

"But I have White!" Bronstein quoted himself as saying.

"What's the difference? We can't risk the American winning the tournament," Postnikov told him.

Bronstein argued that he still had a chance to win the tournament.

Postnikov responded, "I said: Draw - and quickly!"

He added: "We just received a telegram in cipher from (Sports Committee Chairman Nikolai) Romanov: 'Shorten the games of the Soviet participants.' Understand?"

Bronstein said he was "stupefied" by this.

He couldn't hide his feelings from Moshintsev. The KGB officer "didn't like my look" and blurted out: "Do you seriously think that we came here to play chess?"

Then Moshintsev gave him instructions: "Before the game with Smyslov you will go to his room and agree how to make a quick draw. All understood?"

"I hung my head," Bronstein wrote. "And they left me alone to contemplate the lake."

When Geller sat down to play the next day there was "nothing in his face" and Bronstein wondered to himself, "Did he really agree to lose?"

Only later did Bronstein discover that he'd become the victim of a remarkable double-cross. He wrote that Geller had gotten new instructions - "an order from Bondarevsky to win, to punish me for my 'greed!'"

Geller-Bronstein, 25th round**1.d4 e6 2.Nf3 Nf6**

Bronstein hinted at the situation in his tournament book: "More appropriate for playing to win is 2...f5; Black is in a peaceful mood, however."

3.c4 d5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nc3 c6 6.Qc2 Bg4 7.Bg5 Nbd7 8.e3 Bd6 9.Bd3 Qc7 10.0-0 h6

In the 64 article, Bronstein said he was playing for a draw, using the Russian adverb "tupo," which can be translated as "dully" or "stupidly." Simpler and safer - and perhaps duller - is 10...Bh5 and 11...Bg6.

11.Bh4 Bb4 12.Kb1 Bxc3

Najdorf criticized this move harshly but it makes sense if you realize Black's intent: He wants bishops of opposite colors.

13.Qxc3 0-0 14.h3 Bh5 15.Qc2 Ne4 16.Bxe4 dxe4 17.g4 Bg6 18.Nd2 Nb6 19.Nc4 Nd5?

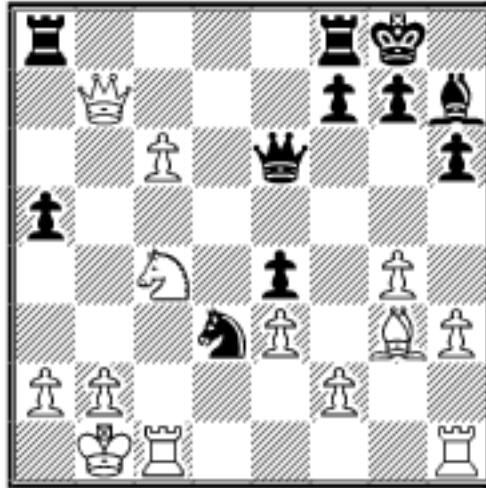
"Bronstein doesn't want to recognize the inferiority of his position and plays to win!" wrote Najdorf, who much preferred 19...Nxc4 20.Qxc4 Rac8. Indeed, that would be consistent with Black's previous play. In his tournament book Bronstein analyzed the game relatively briefly and said Geller exploited "his opponent's timid play."

20.Bg3 Qd7 21.Ne5 Qe6 22.Qb3 Bh7 23.Rc1 a5?

In the book Bronstein said he overlooked that White's bishop will control b8 when he made this blunder. Najdorf blamed the error on Bronstein's "obsession" with attacking.

He felt Black couldn't play 23...Qe7 24.h4 f6 25.Nc4 Rad8 26.g5!
but could do better with 23...Nb6. What was nearly an even position
becomes a lost one in a few moves.

24.Qxb7 Nb4 25.Nc4 c5 26.dxc5 Nd3 27.c6!



After 27...Nxc1 28.Rxc1 the c-pawn is too strong.

27... f5 28.gxf5 Bxf5 29.Rhg1 Bg6

Or 29...Nxc1 30.Be5!. Black now goes downhill fast.

**30.Rc2 Rac8 31.Bd6! Rfe8
32.Qd7 Qf6 33.c7 Bf5 34.Qb5
Bxh3 35.Bg3 Be6 36.Nd6 Nb4
37.Nxe8 Bxa2+ 38.Kc1 Qe7 39.Nd6 Nd3+ 40.Kd2 Rxc7 41.Qe8+**

If Geller had wanted to rub it in, he would have won a rook with
41.Qb8+.

41...Qxe8 42.Nxe8 Rd7 43.Rc7 Resigns

"Of course, when I lost, Postnikov announced that it was the stupid
willfulness of Geller and that he wouldn't tolerate such a disgrace,
that in Moscow Geller would have his full due," Bronstein wrote.

There was still one more act to the "cunning performance."

About noon on the day of Round 26 Moshintsev knocked on
Bronstein's hotel door.

"Have you been to see him yet?" he asked.

"No."

"Then let's go....Smyslov is waiting."

"And he literally took me by the hand to the neighboring room."

When they got to the room they found Smyslov and his second, Vladimir Simagin, sitting near the window. Smyslov greeted Bronstein while Simagin averted his eyes and looked out the window.

Bronstein said he began by talking about the weather.

"No, Devi," Smyslov said nervously, "Tell me, how we'll play."

Bronstein mumbled something but Smyslov repeated, "No, how will we play?"

Then, "unexpectedly", Smyslov said: "Well, Keres played for a win and lost."

At that moment, "It became clear to me that he knew from the very start all about this damnable performance," Bronstein wrote.

" 'Okay," I answer. 'We'll play something like...' And I quickly left. Moshintsev awaited me at the door. 'You agreed?' 'Yes.' And he left."

When the game began Smyslov answered his 1.e4 with 1...e5. Bronstein hesitated a few minutes but concluded he had no way out.

He recalled having these thoughts:

"Even if I win, nothing will change... Somebody else will compensate Smyslov with this half-point, or even 'gift' him with a full point."

"And in Moscow there will be new troubles for me. In addition – or first of all? - I was sure that Veinstein had already been arrested for his long-ago work under Beria, and my stubbornness would turn out badly for him."

So he played the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez. It was "the least offensive variation of the Ruy Lopez," wrote Najdorf, who expressed wonder at the selection.

So apparently did Reshevsky.

After 4. Bxc6 he passed by the table where Bronstein and Smyslov were playing. Bronstein said the American stopped and "expressively cleared his throat.

"To this day I hear this sound because the shame hasn't passed," he added.

At the end of the day, following their 21-move draw, the standings showed:

Smyslov 16 points (and a bye); Reshevsky 14½; Bronstein 14; Keres 13½ (and a bye);

The rest was anti-climax. In the remaining rounds Smyslov drew with Gligoric in 21 moves, then with Taimanov in 22, with Najdorf in 11 and with Tigran Petrosian in 13.

He finished with a score of 18-10, followed by Bronstein, Keres and Reshevsky at 16-12 and Petrosian at 15-13.

Geller, reinvigorated, followed his victory over Bronstein by beating Gligoric, Taimanov and Najdorf, and finished in a tie for sixth place with Najdorf, with 14½-13½.

As a result of his victory, Smyslov won the right to challenge Botvinnik in 1954. In a bit of irony, that match ended with the same score as the Botvinnik-Bronstein match of 1951 - a 12-12 tie.

What can we make of this remarkable article?

Of course, Bronstein gives one view of events - his.

But his account is so rich in detail that it cannot be dismissed.

Until now suspicions about Soviet chicanery at Neuhausen-Zurich have been rare.

For example, the Alexander Munninghoff biography of Euwe states: "The initial fear that the Russians would try to help one another and

at some stage band together to ensure final victory for whichever of their players had the best chances, turned out not to have been justified."

(Munninghoff cites as evidence the defeat of Smyslov by Kotov in Round 21. But anyone looking at that game can see that Smyslov, in a good position, was playing to win when he forced matters and blundered horribly - "inexplicable" wrote Najdorf. If Kotov had failed to win the game, by overlooking how to exploit the blunder, it would have been highly suspicious.)

The Bronstein article also raises many questions. Among them: What would have happened if Reshevsky had not blundered in the knight endgame against Kotov in Round 23? Or if he hadn't fallen for Geller's swindle in Round 24? Or misplayed the late middle-game against Smyslov in Round 25? Would there have been other acts to the performance"?

Also, were there similar "performances" at the 1956 and 1959 Candidates Tournaments?

And how does the image of the defiant and independent Keres of 1953 fit in with the conspiracy-theory view of his role in the 1948 World Championship Match-Tournament?

Bronstein wrote in "64" that it was now Smyslov's turn to expand on or correct his account of Neuhausen-Zurich.

The seventh world champion has had relatively little to say about the tournament that propelled him to the world championship.

For example, in *125 Selected Games*, English edition 1983, he wrote:

"My performance in the 1953 Candidates Tournament in Zurich proved successful. I not only took first place, but also felt fine after the 28 games. And yet I had to overcome such brilliant grandmasters as Paul Keres, Samuel Reshevsky, David Bronstein..."

Bronstein concluded in *64* that the fault for what went on in Switzerland lay not in Smyslov "but in the very system that ruled then in Soviet chess."

He added that he and Smyslov, now 80, recently met at a gathering, and he suggested it was "time to tell about the behind-the-scenes machinations at Zurich."

Smyslov replied:

"Devi, why spoil a good tournament?"

POSTSCRIPT:

Two issues after Bronstein's account appeared in *64*, Smyslov gave the magazine a response, saying he would never be writing it if it weren't for Bronstein's charges.

Reading that introduction, you might expect Smyslov, one of most forthright of the Soviet-era GMs, to rebut Bronstein point by point, denying the quotations attributed to him and giving his own version of what happened that September and October 49 years ago.

But much of his response is devoted to reminiscences about other events -- from the Moscow internationals of 1935 and 1936, to the 1956 Candidates Tournament at Amsterdam, to the 1983 showdown between FIDE and the Soviet Sports Committee over Candidates matches.

When he does acknowledge Bronstein's charges, Smyslov responds mainly in general terms -- and hardly mentions Reshevsky.

He dismisses Bronstein's account of the tournament as "scandalous material" designed to enhance his own reputation and "blacken the time and generation of our brilliant grandmasters!"

At another point, Smyslov writes: "It is improper to write that way about colleagues."

This is a rebuke, of course. But it isn't a denial.

Smyslov makes his own accusation -- that Bronstein is an ingrate because he denounces the same Soviet system that helped make him

a world championship challenger.

To back that up, Smyslov provides a new twist to the story of the 1950 Candidates Tournament.

He contrasts Bronstein's complaint -- about being "tossed to the side of the road" by the Soviet authorities in 1953 -- with the plight of "the remarkable and modest chessplayer" Isaac Boleslavsky, who, he says, was "tossed" aside at Budapest 1950.

What has been previously written about Budapest is that Boleslavsky agreed to draw his final two games to give Bronstein a chance to tie him for first place. (Bronstein did catch up and then won a playoff match from Bolsleslavsky that enabled him to challenge Botvinnik.)

But in *64* Smyslov hints that Boleslavsky agreed to the draws after bowing to pressure from Veinstein, the head of a GULAG department and "an influential man in the country." Veinstein wanted to make sure Botvinnik was defeated, and he knew Boleslavsky didn't have a good record against the world champion.

Smyslov recalled the final round at Budapest when Boleslavsky drew his final game, as White in a promising position against Ståhlberg, while Bronstein was beating Keres in a brilliancy.

Boleslavsky, who was notoriously laconic, then approached Smyslov and said only one word -- "Woe."

This new detail about 1950 is intriguing, in both senses of the word.

But again -- it's not a denial of what Bronstein wrote about 1953.

The closest Smyslov gets to contradicting the specifics of Bronstein's allegations is when he recalls how Bronstein came to his hotel room two hours before their game in Round 26.

"I was unpleasantly surprised," he wrote. (Bronstein had said Smyslov was waiting for him.)

But the biggest difference in their accounts is that Smyslov claims it was *Bronstein* who wanted a draw.

"I understood he was tired and didn't want to take risks," Smyslov wrote. "What could I answer at that moment?"

Bronstein evidently wanted to hear that Smyslov was ready to draw at any point, he added.

Smyslov said a draw was in Bronstein's interest because it would help him secure second place and guarantee a spot for him in the next Candidates Tournament. (But he doesn't address the crucial point -- that a Bronstein victory might help him win the tournament.)

Smyslov concedes that the Soviet authorities may have wanted to see a draw in the Bronstein-Smyslov game.

This is the closest he comes to acknowledging Bronstein's central theme - that there was a coordinated Soviet effort to stop Reshevsky.

But, Smyslov added, it may be that the wishes of the authorities and the wishes of Bronstein just happened to coincide that afternoon.

Smyslov summed up his article by saying Bronstein wrote an excellent tournament book which described the great creativity of the Candidates of 1953.

"But now, it turns out, nothing of that happened," he added sarcastically.

Bronstein, he said, is trying to "rewrite history."

But if this is all Smyslov has to say about what went on in Zurich then perhaps history *should* be rewritten.



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