



SKITTLES
ROOM

ChessCafe readers may remember Mikhail Savinov as our on-location correspondent at last February's Aeroflot Open in Moscow. This time Misha returns with a fascinating interview with one of lesser known figures (at least in the West) in Russian chess, Genrikh Chepukaitis. Lesser known, as you will soon see, however, does not mean less interesting. (One of Chepukaitis' games was presented in Tim McGrew's latest Gambit Cartel column.)

Please let us know if you like features such as this. We are considering offering a regular monthly column focusing on chess personalities, particularly in Russia. Now, sit back and enjoy...

Chess Philosopher: Genrikh Chepukaitis

by Misha Savinov



Born on 14th of September 1935.

Master of Sport, USSR. Current FIDE rating 2396.

Leningrad Blitz Champion 1965, 1967, 1976, 1978, 1982. St.Petersburg blitz champion 2002.

Genrikh Chepukaitis is almost a legendary figure in Russia, and relatively little known outside. He has no international title, and his highest FIDE rating was 2420. He has had some good results in chess, but never performed consistently at the highest level. However, we are talking about chess with classical time control or "professional chess", to use GM Sveshnikov's terminology...



Is it correct to talk about professional achievements of someone who is not in fact a professional? Chepukaitis

did not belong to the group of state-supported chess players, young geniuses on a payroll. He has worked as an electric welder for most of his life, even now, when he turned 67.

And yet, once Rona Yakovlevna Petrosian strictly forbade her husband Tigran to take part in Moscow open blitz championship. "Tigranchik, maybe Korchnoi will win - this is fine with me. Maybe, Bronstein. But what if the winner will be this terrible Chepukaitis? No, you will not play there!"

Speaking of blitz, Chepukaitis was considered equal to Tal, Korchnoi, Petrosian and other similarly great players. Not bad for an amateur without any international title, no?

*Chepukaitis is a very interesting person to talk to; he equally likes to discuss poetry, literature or chess, has a keen sense of humor and his own views on various issues. But for **ChessCafe.com** we talked mostly about chess...*

The real story began in 1957, when I was sent to the Baku Military District for my military service. By that time I already was a chess player, something like first category. In Soviet times, you had two ways in the army - you either served or did something else there. It was useful to be musician, or football player, or at worst, chess player. Military districts had their own competitions. And the Army as a whole had its own competitions. For example, Leonid Stein's first major chess success was the title of Army champion. Same with me - I did not have a regular military career in the air force and never promoted any further than private; however, I did become three-time champion of the Baku Military District Officer's Club.

When I arrived in Baku, all I had was a roguish outlook and lots of self-confidence. A weak player, without any schooling or knowledge. I was surprised to meet the great Vladimir Andreevich Makogonov, a chess instructor at the Air Force Club. Soon it turned out that other soldiers and officers had absolutely no interest in

chess, preferring to spend their spare time drinking and sleeping - so for two years I was the only pupil of Vladimir Makogonov.



Svidler vs. Chepukaitis

I did not receive "lessons" exactly - I would refuse them right away. Instead, we talked chess, discussed various positions and approaches - a lot of general talk and absolutely no opening preparation or endgame shaping. I was not inclined to agree with the teacher on every point - there were heated arguments. Maybe I am naturally rebellious, but no other method would work for me... My sparring-partner in Baku was Vladimir Bagirov (you know him, a good grandmaster, he died recently at the tournament where he had to play despite his poor heart condition to make living... very sad). I could not wish for a better partner.

It was apparent, of course, that I was lacking a basic chess education. Even today I am still bad player, lots of weaknesses like endings or openings... So I had to develop a style that would at least retouch it and give some practical chances. In blitz it was particularly easy.

It was a sensation in Leningrad when former first-category patzer returned and began to beat Korchnoi, Spassky, Furman, Taimanov... everybody - in lightning chess. Not head and shoulders above them, but Korchnoi, for example, was Leningrad blitz champion 7 times, and Chepukaitis - 5 times... And there were other

good players, too. No wonder that Leningrad chess gurus Furman and Borisenko decided that I was very talented and had bright prospects. They offered me training, and I worked with them for some time, but somehow it did not work out. After Makogonov, their approach was much too scholarly for me. No doubt, they both were most brilliant theoreticians and fantastic teachers, and my poor chess was calling for the scalpel of their encyclopedic knowledge, but we broke off. I continued on my own.

I played frequently in Moscow, winning several open blitz championships there, ahead of Tal, Bronstein, Averbakh, Vasiukov... People say I have an attractive style, tactical etc. No, I don't think so. I am mostly a strategic player.

Do you know the "Button theory of Chepukaitis"? It is very simple. In the endgame you play random moves as close to the clock's button as possible. It gains seconds. Also, I transfer the risk of making the decisions to my opponent. Chess is very deep game, and there is a chance that I might spoil my position playing a weak move after just one second thinking. So - I keep myself away from resolving particular positions, give my opponent the widest possible choice of opportunities and hope he marries the wrong woman. It is not important to play well, to play best moves.

(Here he smiled). You know, I wrote a book, *Sprint at the Chessboard*, but I don't think it makes sense to make it available to foreign readers. I would really like to introduce my ideas to them, but imagine a German perfectionist reading that one does not have to play good chess, that it is enough to make one's opponent play worse. He will not get it. We Russians can get it; our mentality permits such a thought.

Another thing, *Bishop-kamikaze*. It is not like Lasker's

desperado, a different concept. I want to play d4 on the first move, then to put my pawns on dark squares - c3, e3... With this plan I make my Bishop on c1 a *kamikaze*. I want him to die as soon as possible. So, I plan to bring it to g5, and I am happy when I can exchange it. When you have a plan, you save time.

Treat your position like a woman. Women like cosmetics, make-up. So, if you do the make-up to your position, it will be gracious to you. Do not forget about the career of your pieces. They all created equal, though different, and if you forget about the career of one of them, you will be punished. Very simple directives.

Remember, when the Nazis captured Stalin's son during the war, they wanted to exchange him for one of their imprisoned generals. Stalin said: "I do not exchange generals for foot soldiers". The same principle works in chess. When you get rid of your kamikaze Bishop, your other Bishop becomes a general. Do not exchange it or your light squares will fall apart.



And now my major hint. I once read a book by John Nunn. I respect him a lot, Nunn is very intelligent person and good player. He gave recommendations about how to defend bad positions: "Keep cool. Try to make your opponent's life harder. Disturb him." Great ideas - I would just extend their value to positions of any kind. I disturb my opponent, prevent his ideas, make him think, make him choose the path, preferably the wrong path. In unfamiliar, unusual position many people do that due to hand inertia and reluctance to think on their own.

Today computers have changed chess. Grandmasters reproduce themselves by division. Young players do not have time to think on their own, to understand principles, they only learn openings and tactics. Psychology has gone out of chess, and for me this is very sad. But my practice shows that psychology is still effective, especially against the computer-raised generation. Well, that is not really important - whoever has a weakness may be a victim of a psychology-armed opponent.

Now I have almost finished my second book, *Anthology of Careless Genre*. I hope everybody who is interested in chess will find it to be a good book to read. I discuss my principles with practical examples there. It is more extensive than *Sprint...*, better structured - I learned something when I wrote my first book. In game annotations I sometimes do not give the variations, but poetry instead. Surprisingly, these poems often have more value, both entertaining and instructive, than variations, because they bring deeper insight and ideas, and make the reader meditate.

I stress the importance of self-confidence. When playing a game, you have to understand very clearly who is the most intelligent person in the world. You are. Like Bogolyubov, who wins with White because he plays 1.d4, and wins with Black because he is Bogolyubov...

In 1992, at age of 57, my Elo was 2245. My peak was 2420 in 1998; now it is a little bit down, but I have to admit I never really worked on chess. All the progress I made was only made due to playing speed chess. You know, to win in blitz you have to be a cut above your opponent, otherwise you take the chances. My school was playing blitz with three generations of Leningrad players... I won the last St. Petersburg blitz championship, ahead of Valery Popov - he is very serious GM and good speed player (3100+ on ICC - M.S.). There were other GMs and IMs playing, including Sakaev - nevertheless, I am 67 and I won. I still can learn and improve.

As for classical chess, I compete in St. Petersburg opens on a regular basis. In 2000 I decided to qualify for the St. Petersburg city championship - just to test myself against the best young players. I was the oldest

participant, the only non-titled player, and the only one with a rating below 2400 – but I still took 7th place with 5S-5S, 4 wins and 4 losses. It could be a GM norm, but, of course, there were only players from Russia...

Let me invite you to the board as I defend some of my ideas. The following game was played against a computer, a strong program, one of the major ones.

1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5

Here comes my favorite bishop-kamikaze in the only opening I employ with White, the only opening I know. Generally, one should not care about the "objective" value of the opening. There are only openings one knows and those one does not. The former are good, the latter are bad.

2...Ne4 3.Bh4 g5 4.f3 gxh4 5.fxe4 e5 6.e3 Qg5!

This plan was Boleslavsky's suggestion with the evaluation: "White can not defend the dark squares".

7.Kf2

Back then it was my humble innovation - White cannot defend the dark squares without help from his King.

7...Bh6 8.Qe1 exd4 9.exd4 Qc1

The greedy computer sees a weakness on b2 and attacks it.

10.Nc3 Qxb2 11.Bd3

I do some make-up for my position.

11...Bd2!

Computers are so good in tactics! Now I have to give

up the Exchange.

12.Qxd2 Qxa1 13.Nf3

And a Rook. What's wrong - I could not bring my pieces out without sacrificing it.

13...Qxh1 14.Qg5

Threat is simple - Qe5+. The naive attempt to protect this square with 14...d6 costs Black the game after 15.Nd5! Nc6 16.Bb5. So the computer creates a burrow for his King and gives back some of the material.

14...c6 15.Qe5+ Kd8 16.Qxh8+ Kc7 17.d5

With cheap idea of d5-d6+.

17...b6 18.d6+ Kb7 19.Qd8 Na6

I terrorized the machine with mating threats, but it parried them all. What shall White do now?

20.Bf1

And suddenly White leaves Black's King alone and traps his Queen. There is no defense against the threat Qxh4 and Nc3-e2-g3. The game was over in a couple of moves.

But the story is not over, as there was a grandmaster who witnessed this game and after consulting with his computer decided that White's play was not entirely correct. He matched me (in the internet), and our game followed the same path until Black's 14th move, when he deviated with



14...Nc6

I have an attack, so I just continue attacking.

15.d6 Ne7 16.Nb5

Time to think. 16...Kd8
loses to 17.Qe5 Rg8
18.Qxc7+ Ke8 19.Nd6+

Kf8 20.Qd8+ Kg7 21.Qxe7. The grandmaster found the best reply.

16...Rg8 17.Nc7+ Kd8?

But when I gave him another opportunity to choose between good and bad, his choice was in my favor. He could prolong the struggle with 17...Kf8 18.Qh6+ Rg7 19.Ng5 Kg8 20.Ne8 Qa1 21.Nxh7 Rxh7 22.Nf6+, and the greedy Black Queen falls, but the game goes on.

18.d6

This active pawn move, leaving Queen *en prise*, was probably a surprise to my opponent. It took a minute for him to resign.

This was the tactical side of Chepukaitis. Still, I refuse to have the label of "brilliant tactician". Partly because I see much more gifted people. In my games combinations appear like strength appears when one is followed by a bear in the forest or by a shark in the sea...

Once Mikhail Tal offered me to play "a couple of speed games" in his hotel room. When I knocked, there was a tall middle-aged man whom I did not know. He said: "Misha is away on some business, but he will be back soon, and asked me to let you in. Please, wait here, if

you don't mind. We could play some blitz, too."

I knew that Misha sometimes travels with his uncle Robert, so I thought it was he. Of course I stayed, and generously (so I thought) accepted the invitation to play to pass the time. I was crushed in the first game, in which I did not pay much attention, but when I lost four more games, I almost began to panic. It was very rare for me to lose in such style, going down in flames like the Russian ironclad in Tsushima in 1905. I could accept being crushed by Tal himself - but his uncle?.. With great effort I managed to even the score, and when Misha finally arrived, my opponent let him play, saying: "Beware, I warmed him up for you!"

Maybe the guy was right, because on that occasion I beat Tal something like 8-1, restoring my self-confidence and reputation. "Hm, said Misha, - Rashid Gibyatovich warmed you up indeed. Come tomorrow, and I hope to gain my revenge!"

And this is how I met Rashid Nezhmetdinov - one of the greatest combinational geniuses of all times. By the way, next day Tal won our return match by an even greater margin...

In the following game, my opponent was Russia Senior Champion, IM Karasev. I am very proud of this game, and I think it represents the strategic basis of my style very clearly.

Chepkaitis-Karasev

1.d4 d6 2.e4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.Bc4 Bg7 5.Bb3

I consider this move to be useful, so it falls under the make-up category.

5...0-0 6.Nge2 c6 7.a4

With c6, Black plans b7-b5. Why should White stay still and let his opponent carry out his plans? Prevent

his plan, scramble his thoughts! This is why I played 7.a4. Not much of a success, you might say. Wrong! I prevented the planned move, and Black's next idea turned out to be poor.

7...a5

Strange as it may seem, but the weakness on a5 will later cost Black the game!

8.0-0 e5 9.dxe5! dxe5 10.Qxd8 Rxd8

I like this simplification very much. It could have given Black a false sense of security and it is also strong positionally, as without Queens, White can play against a5 with greater effect.

11.Be3 Nbd7

Protecting b6 but impeding the light-squared Bishop

12.Rad1! Re8!

We compete for d-file. White has won it temporarily, but Black can continue the struggle for the file after he finishes his development.

13.h3!

A necessary preventive move.

13...Nf8 14.f3 Be6 15.Nc1!

I cannot avoid exchanging my good Bishop, but should do so only with my Knight on b3.

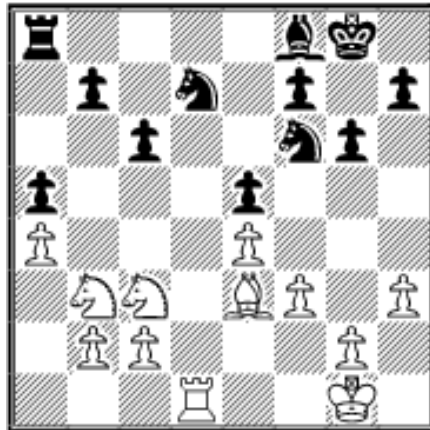
15...Red8 16.Rxd8! Rxd8

Now Black has temporarily won the d-file, but after White's next move it becomes clear who has the advantage.

17.Bb6 Ra8 18.Rd1 N8d7 19.Be3 Bxb3 20.Nxb3 Bf8

On 20...b6 I planned to continue 21.g4! and if 21...Ra7 then 22.g5 Ne8 23.Nxa5 wins. 20...Bf8 is no better. After only 20 moves, Black is hopelessly lost.

DIAGRAM



**21.g4! h6 22.h4 g5 23.hxg5
hxg5 24.Bxg5 Bb4 25.Bh4!**

The final move of the sequence. Black loses a piece.

**25...b5 26.axb5 Bxc3
27.bxc3 cxb5 28.g5 Nxe4
29.fxe4 Nb6**

From now on I was in rather frisky mood, and turned down several more practical alternatives. In my defense I can say that I probably chose the shortest win in the position.

30.g6 fxg6 31.Kf2 Kf7?! 32.Rd6 Nc4 33.Rd7+ Kg8

The King must return.

34.Ke2!

The final preventive move.

**34...a4 35.Nc5 a3 36.Ne6 a2 37.Rg7+ Kh8 38.Bf6
a1Q**

If my King were on f-file, this Bishop could be pinned

39.Ng5!

Black resigns, unable to defend the various mate threats.

A purely positional effort, and a nice fortissimo in a coda... I hope you can see now why I call myself a strategist.

Well, perhaps, this game has too much of classical look for my reputation. Take a look at another strategic effort of a different sort, played with my only Black opening. Ujtelki defense, or Scorpion defense - you can call it anything, no matter what you say. Some people say it is unsound, bad etc. I know Spassky employed it twice in his world championship match against Petrosian, and the world champion did not find flaws in Black's position. It is not the opening that loses, it is the player who handles it badly.

My opponent here is Yuferov, good international master, well-aware of positional principles, as you will see in the game.

Yuferov,S (2430) - Chepukaitis,G (2310) [B06]
RUS-Cup1 Chigorin mem St Petersburg (5), 1996

1.d4 g6 2.e4

Most classically taught people prefer to go in for the Pirc Defense instead of a King's Indian when there is a choice. I don't know why, and I don't really care - my plans are the same in each of these openings.

2...Bg7 3.Nf3 d6 4.Nc3 a6?!

White has developed both Knights and enjoys nice pawn center. On the other hand, Black makes apparently stupid moves. But since it is a master playing Black, he must have meant something with a6? Yuferov prevents b7-b5. Just in case.

5.a4 b6

Otherwise White may want to push a5

6.h3

Once again - just in case

**6...e6 7.Bg5 Ne7 8.Qd2 h6! 9.Bf4 Bb7 10.Be2 Nd7
11.Rd1**

White did not dare to castle Kingside, as he was worried about the g6-g5 plan. Take your time about Black's plan here. I think Black's position is better! Vladimir Makogonov taught me that when all you pieces are well-placed, look for active pawn moves. I have placed all my pieces fairly well, and there is a good and active pawn move that brings me the initiative - what else can one ask from a position?

11...g5! 12.Be3 f5!

White's setup has one major flaw that could be noticed by Philidor. His f- and c-pawns, natural supporters of the pawn center, are impeded by Knights. Now Black wins the struggle for the center.

13.exf5 Nxf5 14.Qd3

The master likes his Bishop, and tries to save it even despite losing some time. However, ask yourself, what is stronger, the black Knight on f5, or the white Bishop on e3? Hint: also compare Bb7 and Nf3. And now the correct answer, copyrighted by Chepukaitis. If your piece can *eat*, and can not *be eaten* by one in comparison, your piece is a better piece! Therefore,

14...0-0 15.Bc1 c5! 16.dxc5 Nxc5



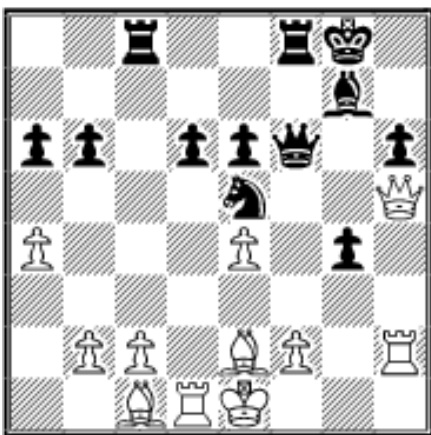
This is a dream position of Ujtelki defense, deserving a diagram. Black deploys his forces almost symmetrically, and there is a great beauty and power in his formation. Just think for a second: Black controls both long diagonals with his Bishops, the two semi-open

files with his Rooks, all the center squares with pawns and Knights, and keeps the Queen as a main reserve. The rest of the game is Manchester United playing against a conference team.

17.Qc4 Rc8 18.h4 Bxf3!

Winning material.

**19.gxf3 Nxh4 20.Qg4 Ng6 21.Ne4 Ne5 22.Qh3 g4! 23.Qh5 Nxe4
24.fxe4 Qf6 25.Rh2**



25...Rxc2!

Here I calculated a long forced line that occurred in the game. Black sacrifices almost all his forces, but the remaining Knight brings victory.

**26.Bxh6 Rxe2+ 27.Kxe2 Qf3+
28.Ke1 g3 29.Bxg7 gxh2 30.Qh8+
Kf7 31.Qxf8+ Kg6 32.Kd2 Qxf8
33.Bxf8 Nf3+ 34.Ke3 Ng1** White resigns.

I am against computers in chess, because I value improvisation. I can sacrifice material for the sake of spectators' interest...

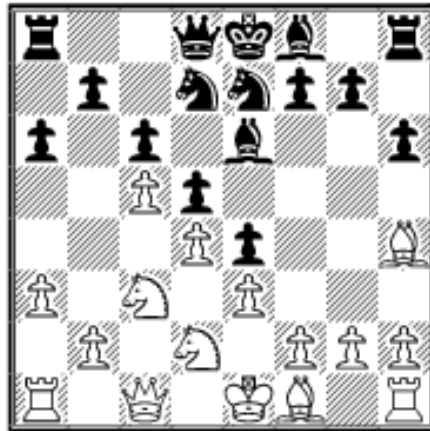
***Chepukaitis, G (2330) - Galkin, A (2540) [D00]
RUS-Cup01 Chigorin mem St Petersburg (9)***

The last round of a large open. My opponent is young a grandmaster, a typical representative of what might be called the "computer generation".

1.d4 d5 2.Bg5 c6 3.e3 h6 4.Bh4 Qb6 5.Qc1 e5 6.Nf3 e4 7.Nfd2 Be6
8.c4 Nd7 9.Nc3 a6

All this is book. Now White plays a move that does not make sense but does not spoil his position. Its main advantage is that it gives the opponent a priceless opportunity to make an error! After 10.a3 Galkin fell into deep thought and found the worst move.

10.a3 Ne7? 11.c5 Qd8



12.Ndxe4!

There was a crowd of grandmasters around our table envying White's last move. With his sacrifice White gets better chances, because it is much easier for him to find moves.

Unfortunately, I did not succeed in winning, partly due to fatigue from the tournament. Credit should be given to my young opponent, who continued to defend like a robot. The game was drawn on the 78th move.

This is what I am and what I think about the game. I like the opportunity to be introduced to people who know little or nothing of me. Players like Smyslov or Karpov know me well - because I have played blitz with virtually every Russian Grandmaster, but I am unknown to, say, Van Wely, Morozevich and the younger generation. Maybe this interview will change all that...

Genrikh Chepukaitis still has a chance to become a Grandmaster - by winning World Seniors Championship. After this interview he had to rush home and then take a train to Moscow to participate in Russian Seniors Championship. If he wins it, he will get free ticket to World Championship and living expenses from Russian Chess Federation. However, these championships are very competitive - even the seniors now travel with laptops and download TWIC bases every week. Genrikh Chepukaitis is one of the few chess amateurs, chess enthusiasts, who never wanted to become professional, even when the opportunity arose. He simply loves to play. Even when he competed with Tal for the unofficial title of best speed player in the Soviet Union, he considered himself to be simply a lucky guy with a "roguish hand".

In our happy days of the internet everybody can watch Chepukaitis playing countless blitz games on ICC. His handle there is SmartChip, and he is always available for a challenge. He also gives lessons in Khalifman's GMChess school. And he rarely misses the opportunity to teach his younger opponents improvisation and psychology. Chepukaitis is a natural born fighter, and looks for every chance to win at the board, even if only a miracle can save his King - miracles happen more often than you think, especially if you deserve it! This is his chess philosophy.

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