



COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree



The Euwe Variation

We all know him, the guy that accosts you on the merest pretext to tell you his latest heroic feats in an endless flow of words, and even if you like him and appreciate his deeds, when you see him on the horizon you quickly disappear into a shop so that he can find another victim. We want to hear about our own heroic feats, not about those of others.

Eduard Gufeld, who used to live in Georgia and now lives in Los Angeles, fits the type. He tugs at your jacket and because he is big and strong there is no escape. "Listen, my friend..." There he goes again, not this time about his Mona Lisa against Bagirov from 1973, but there are always new heroic feats. His enthusiasm is boundless and it cannot be denied that his games are often brilliant and his stories funny.

Yasser Seirawan's recent proposal for a fresh start in chess politics reminded me of a Gufeld story that can be found in his book *Chess: The Search for Mona Lisa*, on the kasparov.com website and no doubt in many other places.

Gufeld tells that he went into a bar and was forced to eavesdrop on a heated discussion between a few



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gentlemen.

"You haven't reckoned with Steinitz; Spassky is no match for him," said one. Someone ventured that Petrosian might have a good chance for first prize, to which another replied that Alekhine would leave both Fischer and Kasparov far behind.

Capablanca was mentioned, Ruy Lopez, Botvinnik, Euwe, who regrettably had died in quarantine, and Lasker, who would have been unbeatable, had he not broken his leg and been executed.

The conversation in the bar had been about horse racing and about the stable of the Chinese-Malaysian businessman Dato Tan Chin Nam, who has named all his racehorses after chess champions and chess openings.

We know that Dato Tan has done a lot for chess in general and especially for chess in Asia. The role of commissioner, a middleman between players and organizers, that Seirawan has given him in his "Fresh Start" proposal, he will without doubt fulfil fairly and capably, if it ever comes to that. But still, these chess horses bother me a bit.

They remind me of a story told by Reuben Fine in his book *Lessons from My Games*. After the Olympiad in Folkestone in 1933 the American team was invited to visit their colleague Sultan Khan. Sultan Khan had come to Europe as a servant of an Indian maharaja, Sir Umar Hayat Khan, and with his natural talent he soon became one of the top players. At the end of that year he

was to follow his master back to India and that was the end of his chess career.

According to Fine, Sir Umar welcomed the Americans by saying that it was a great honor for them to meet him, because normally he only conversed with his dogs. Then the Americans were served at the table by their colleague Sultan Khan, which they found embarrassing. I don't think they would have felt more comfortable had the dogs been called after chess champions.

By the way, I am not sure that this story is completely true. The Dutch chess writer Maarten de Zeeuw convinced me that it is more likely that Fine misunderstood Sir Umar, who probably wanted to say that the American's visit was a big honor for him, but mishandled the English.

But to come back to the Gufeld story, what shocked me most was of course that Euwe was mentioned as having died in quarantine. Poor Euwe, so often underestimated nowadays outside his own country. Now and then on the internet newsgroup *rec.games.chess.misc* there is a discussion about Euwe, but never about his heroic feats, always about the way his name should be pronounced.

Though Euwe was a diligent opening theorist, in his youth a pioneer of the Sicilian Scheveningen and the King's Indian and later of the Slav Defence, there is no real Euwe variation in opening theory. It's true that *The Oxford Companion to Chess* mentions three Euwe variations, but these

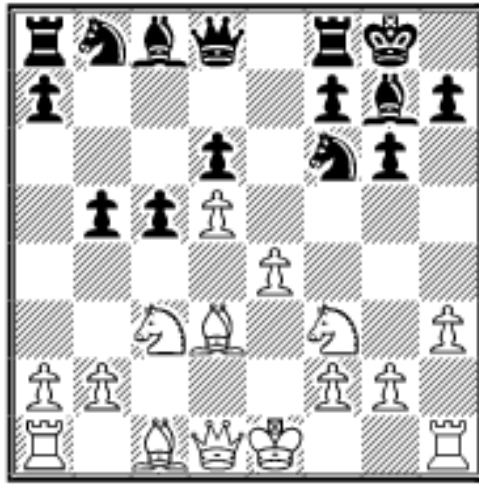
are single moves rather than systems and anyway, hardly anyone knows that these moves are connected with the name Euwe.

The reason for the lack of a really important Euwe variation must be the fact that it was Euwe who wrote the opening books and baptised the variations. He must have been reluctant to introduce an abundance of Euwe variations in his own books. But we can make up for his modesty.

In latest *Yearbook* of New in Chess (#82) the Dutch opening theorist A.C. van der Tak writes about his search for an old Euwe game, played in 1929 in a 100-board encounter between the Netherlands and the German province Rheinland-Westfalen. He finally found the game in an old newspaper clipping and was surprised to see that Euwe had played what nowadays is considered one of the main lines of the Benoni:

White: *Ludwig Engels* Black: *Max Euwe*, The Hague 1929

**1. d2-d4 Ng8-f6 2. Ng1-f3 g7-g6 3. c2-c4 Bf8-g7
4. Nb1-c3 0-0 5. e2-e4 d7-d6 6. h2-h3 c7-c5 7. d4-d5 e7-e6 8. Bf1-d3 e6xd5 9. c4xd5 b7-b5**



Nowadays White's set-up is considered one of the two systems that are most dangerous for Black in the Benoni. The other one, the Four Pawns Attack with Bb5+, is so dangerous that Benoni players tend to prefer the move

order 1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 c5, avoiding the Benoni in favor of the Nimzo-Indian in case White plays 3. Nc3.

As far as I know, the latest verdict of modern opening theory on 9...b5 is that 10. Bxb5 Nxe4 11. Nxe4 Qa5+ 12. Nfd2 Qxb5 13. Nxd6 Qa6 will eventually lead to an endgame that Black can draw, but only with considerable effort and accuracy. Nevertheless 9...b5 is probably objectively the strongest move, which means that the diagram represents a crucial position of the modern Benoni. Of course in 1929 Euwe, with 9...b5, was playing for a win, not for a slightly inferior endgame. The game went on:

**10. 0-0 c5-c4 11. Bd3-c2 b5-b4 12. Nc3-e2 Rf8-e8
13. Ne2-g3 Nb8-d7 14. Bc1-e3 a7-a5 15. Rf1-e1
Qd8-c7 16. Nf3-d4 Nd7-c5 17. f2-f3 Nf6-d7 18.
Ng3-e2 Bc8-a6 19. Ne2-f4 Nd7-e5 20. Qd1-d2
Bg7-h6 21. Kg1-h1 c4-c3 22. b2xc3 Ne5-c4 23.
Qd2-f2 Nc4xe3 24. Qf2xe3 b4xc3 25. g2-g3 Qc7-
d8 26. Qe3xc3 Bh6xf4 27. g3xf4 Qd8-h4 28. Kh1-
g2 Qh4xf4 29. Qc3-e3 Qf4xe3 30. Re1xe3 Ra8-**

b8 31. Nd4-b3 Re8-c8 32. Kg2-g3 Nc5-d7 33. Bc2-d1 a5-a4 34. Nb3-d4 Nd7-e5 35. Bd1-e2 Ba6xe2 36. Re3xe2 Rb8-b4 37. Ra1-d1 Rc8-c3 38. Re2-d2 Kg8-g7 39. h3-h4 h7-h5 40. Rd1-a1 a4-a3 41. Rd2-c2 Rc3-d3 42. Nd4-c6 Rb4xe4 43. Nc6xe5 Re4xe5 44. Rc2-c6 Re5xd5 45. Rc6-a6 Rd5-d4 46. Ra1-c1 Rd4-g4+ 47. Kg3-f2 Rg4-f4 48. Rc1-c7 Rd3xf3+ White resigned

Up till now the stem game of the 9...b5 line was considered to be Tolush-Aronin, Soviet Championship 1948. I think that after Van der Tak's find, it is only fair that the line should be called the Euwe Variation from now on.

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