



COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

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In the First Circle

When Yasser Seirawan began his campaign to unite the two World Championships, he referred to Dutch GM Jeroen Piket to indicate that there was something rotten in the kingdom of chess. Nothing wrong with Piket himself, on the contrary. A fine man and a gifted player who has received plenty of support in his native country. Nevertheless Piket announced recently that he will prepare himself for a different career. When even Piket cannot hope to sustain his family playing chess, the chessworld is in a bad state, reasoned Seirawan.

Ironically, as a surely unintended result of Yasser's successful campaign an even more prominent player felt forced to announce his retirement from chess: Alexander Khalifman, FIDE's World Champion of 1999. "I'll have to look out for another job," Khalifman sadly announced.

Indeed, the unification process has taken its victims: all those players who would have gladly competed in the 2003 FIDE championship and now have to wait for the cycle that will lead up to the championship of 2005. Khalifman said: "I am not among those that can count on invitations for the top tournaments, as I have never sought my friends among organizers. I need open tournaments."

I tend to take Khalifman's sad announcement with a grain of salt, but it is true that life is not easy for chessplayers outside the club of the select few. Their struggle for survival was once poignantly described by Dutch GM Genna Sosonko. He quoted Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who, upon arriving at his first labor camp, got advice from an old man: "Make sure you will not be part of the general workforce, cutting trees at minus 30 degrees Celsius, for then you will die. Do everything to get special work, in a kitchen or a library." This was a quote from Solzhenitsyn's book *In the*



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First Circle.

In Dante's *Inferno* the first circle is inhabited by virtuous pagans and the unbaptised. Poets like Homer and Ovid were there. Satan himself resided in the first circle of Hell. It wasn't so bad there.

The players in the Opens are the tree-cutters who will die. The elite is in the first circle. One has to join them at all costs.

That the privileged few are nevertheless in hell may be an indication of Sosonko's wry attitude towards professional chess.

Career Defining Moments

For the last few weeks the first circle's earthly residence was Dortmund, where it was decided who will challenge Vladimir Kramnik in 2003 for his "Classical World Championship".

Despite its victims - Anand, Ivanchuk, Khalifman and many others - I applaud the unification process. I am an observer nowadays, hardly a player, and we observers are in need of an event that is really "for death or glory", and "winner takes all".

All sports have an event that is far more important than all others. It may be the World Championship or the Olympics. For cycling it is the Tour de France, for tennis it is Wimbledon. For chess it can only be the undivided, generally recognized World Championship, which we have missed since 1993.

All other important events may gain luster, because we can speculate on their significance for the one and only top event. "Radjabov is doing well in Linares. Interesting. Next month he will play in the Candidates'. How far will he go?" This is the way we used to speculate in the old days, but lately we have lost interest.

The World Championship cycle provides the observer with what you might call "career defining moments" of the contenders. A career's make-or-break moments.

The observer is a cruel lover of blood-sports, or maybe it's just my own bad character that tends to highlight the negative career definers.

Bronstein in Portoroz 1958, losing in the last round to Cardoso and being out of the Candidates'. Taimanov and Larsen, losing 6-0 to Fischer in 1971.

Or Hort, playing a Candidates' match against Spassky in Reykjavik in 1977. Spassky fell ill during the match and Hort could have claimed victory, but sportingly agreed to a postponement.

A good deed never goes unpunished. After fourteen games, with two more to go, the score was equal. In the next game Hort was winning with black. There was a move that would force immediate resignation and Hort saw it. He had more than enough time left to execute it, but his hand trembled so much that he couldn't move the piece and he lost on time.

On a lower level I have known such a negative defining moment myself. I do not remember who was my opponent in that game, but I do remember a Dutch player avidly watching and undoubtedly realizing that this might be a career defining moment for him too, but in a positive sense, for after my miserable performance there would be a vacancy in our Olympiad team.

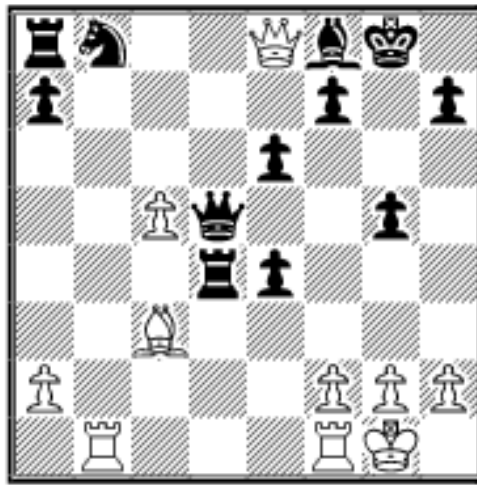
The Dortmund tournament had a rather strange format. First two groups of four, playing a double round-robin, the best two of both groups qualifying for the semi-finals, matches of four games. Then the final match, four games again. With two days reserved for tie-breaks this made for sixteen days in which the eight contenders could have played a full double round-robin, which would have been far more convincing.

Here is one of the games of the initial stage, in which Morozevich was extremely unlucky.

White: *Morozevich* Black: *Bareev*

1. e2-e4 c7-c6 2. d2-d4 d7-d5 3. e4xd5 c6xd5 4. c2-c4 Ng8-f6 5. Nb1-c3 e7-e6 6. c4-c5 Bf8-e7 7. Ng1-f3 0-0 8. b2-b4 b7-b6 9. Ra1-b1 b6xc5 After the game Bareev said that he got a terrible position in the opening and that here he should have played 9...a5.
10. b4xc5 Nf6-e4 11. Nc3xe4 d5xe4 12. Nf3-e5 Qd8-c7 13. Bc1-f4 Rf8-d8 14. Qd1-a4 14. Ng6 Qa5+ 15. Bd2 Qc7 16. Nxe7+ Qxe7 17. Ba5 would give White an advantage, but he thinks that there is more to be had. **14...g7-g5** The only move. Now 15. Bg3

f5 16. Nxf7 f4 is unclear. **15. Bf4-d2 Bc8-d7 16. Bf1-b5 Bd7xb5 17. Qa4xb5 Rd8xd4 18. Qb5-e8+** Commentator Vlastimil Hort indicated 18. c6, after which Black has to seek counterplay with 18...Rxd2 19. Kxd2 Bd6. **18...Be7-f8** Black's path has been full of dangers, but now he is in safety. White should have gone for a perpetual with 19. Ng4 Rxd2 20. Nf6+ Kg7 21. Nh5+. If Black tries to avoid it with 21...Kg6? he will be mated. **19. Bd2-c3 Qc7xe5 20. 0-0** There might still be a draw for White after 20. Rb7, when Black can force a perpetual in several ways, but also (as GM Yanick Pelletier indicates in *Schachwoche*) play on with a draw in hand by 20...Nd7 21. Qxa8 e3 22. Bxd4 exf2+ 23. Kxf2 Qxd4+ 24. Ke2 Qe5+ 25. Kd1 Nxc5. But White, having prepared the sequence 21. Bxd4 Qxd4 22. Rxb8, still thinks he is better. **20...Qe5-d5**



Only now the terrible truth dawns on White. He is lost, for the intended 21. Bxd4 is answered by 21...Nd7, winning White's Queen. **21. c5-c6 Qd5-d8 22. Qe8xd8 Rd4xd8 23. c6-c7 Rd8-c8 24. c7xb8Q Ra8xb8 25. Rb1xb8 Rc8xb8** The ending is quite lost for White, but he keeps on playing till Bareev has made the time control. **26. Bc3-d4 a7-a6 27. g2-g3 h7-h6 28. Rf1-c1 Rb8-b4 29. Bd4-e3 Bf8-g7 30. h2-h4 Bg7-d4 31. Be3xd4 Rb4xd4 32. h4xg5 h6xg5 33. Rc1-c5 Rd4-d5 34. Rc5-c4 Rd5-e5 35. Kg1-f1 Kg8-g7 36. Kf1-e2 f7-f5 37. a2-a4 Kg7-f6 38. Ke2-e3 Re5-d5 39. g3-g4 Rd5-d3+ 40. Ke3-e2 Kf6-e5** White resigned.

Playing to Lose?

A very strange aspect of the Dortmund formula was the tie-break that Veselin Topalov and Alexei Shirov had to play after they had both qualified for the semi-finals. Losing a game on purpose is rightfully considered a shameful deed, but in this case the Dortmund organisers were almost asking for it.

At stake in this tie-break was only the pairing in the semi-finals. The winner would meet Peter Leko there, the loser Evgeny Bareev. Who would be the most difficult opponent? With all respect to Bareev, I think it was Leko, who is almost unbeatable

even at the top level.

So what should Topalov and Shirov do? Playing to win, as a good sportsman should, and in case of success be rewarded with the most difficult opponent? Even a criminal on trial is not obliged to cooperate in his own conviction. For Topalov and Shirov, playing to lose might seem the most rational option.

But how to proceed then? I was reminded of a Dutch blitz tournament in which I played long ago. After some preliminary rounds the field was divided into several groups, based on the scores at that moment, and players took the points they had scored with them into the final rounds. For winning money, being low in group A was much worse than being high in group B.

In the last round of the preliminaries I offered a draw in a dead-drawn ending. "No, I refuse and resign," said IM Van Geet, who was aiming at group B.

This might be the way for Topalov and Shirov, but waiting for the endgame would be risky, as the other man might have the same idea.

No, like two competitors in a game show, hurrying to be the first to provide the quizmaster with the right answer, both players would have to shout eagerly and in unison "I resign!" already at the first move. But this would definitely make a bad impression on the spectators.

So the wisest and most honest policy would be to play the tie-break secretly in a hotel room and then later on the stage play the same games, but with reversed colors, so that the loser of the unofficial tie-break would be forced to win the official one.

I am not saying that Topalov and Shirov did this, just that it seems the most rational method to me.

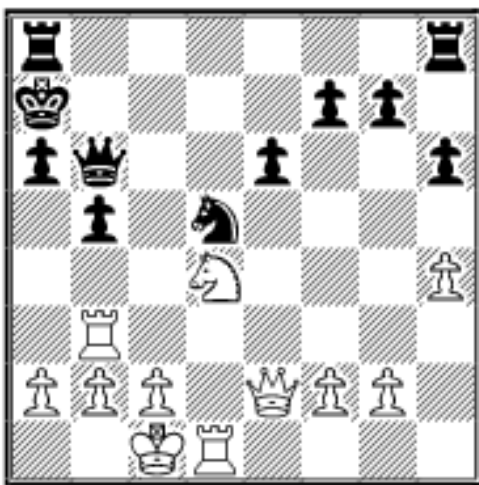
Whatever happened, Shirov won the tie-break and was duly punished for it by losing his semifinal against Leko with the score $2\frac{1}{2}-1\frac{1}{2}$

The other semi-final, Topalov-Bareev was very exciting. No draws and at 2-2 another tie-break was played, but this time

winning was really advisable.

White: Topalov Black: Bareev, second and decisive tie-break game. 25 minutes + 5 seconds per move.

1. e2-e4 e7-e6 2. d2-d4 d7-d5 3. Nb1-c3 Ng8-f6 4. Bc1-g5 d5xe4 5. Nc3xe4 Nb8-d7 6. Ng1-f3 Bf8-e7 7. Ne4xf6+ Be7xf6 8. h2-h4 c7-c5 9. Qd1-d2 c5xd4 10. Nf3xd4 Topalov had had this in the past against Van Wely (who by the way was his second in Dortmund) and Shirov, who both played 10...0-0. Though this seems safer than Bareev's move, they both lost. **10...h7-h6 11. Bg5xf6 Nd7xf6 12. Qd2-b4** A new move, preventing Black from castling. 12. 0-0-0 had been played. **12...Nf6-d5 13. Qb4-a3 Qd8-e7 14. Bf1-b5+ Bc8-d7 15. Bb5xd7+ Ke8xd7 15...Qxd7 16. Rd1** wouldn't be easy for Black either. **16. Qa3-a4+ Kd7-c7 17. Rh1-h3 a7-a6 18. Rh3-b3 Qe7-c5 19. 0-0-0** Now seems the time for Black to solve most of his problems with 19...Nb6. After an exchange of Queens the worst is over for Black and the piece sacrifice 20. Nxe6+, to keep the Queens, does not seem correct. **19...b7-b5** But after this Black's condition is critical. **20. Qa4-a5+ Qc5-b6 21. Qa5-e1 Kc7-b7 22. Qe1-e2 Kb7-a7**



Now comes a nice finish. First a sacrifice of a piece, then of an exchange. **23. Nd4xb5+ a6xb5 24. Rb3xb5 Qb6-c6 25. Rd1xd5 e6xd5 26. Qe2-e7+ Ka7-a6 27. Rb5-b3** Black resigned. To avoid mate he has to give his Queen playing 27...Qb6 28. Ra3+ Qa5, but this hopeless.

As all visitors to ChessCafe.com surely know, Leko beat Topalov in the final 2½-1½. So he is going to play Kramnik for what they will call "the Classical World Championship", presumably in April next year. A few months later the winner of that match will play the winner of Ponomarev-Kasparov for the unified title.

But wait a minute. This is indeed what Kramnik has promised to do if he wins the match. But what if Leko wins? He hasn't promised anything. Would he be willing to put his title at stake only a few months after winning it?

If Leko and Kasparov both win their matches, Leko might say:
“Dear Garry, you are now the Fide champion, a title you held in such low esteem during the last ten years. I am, to paraphrase your eloquent words, the 15th champion in the venerable line that started with Steinitz; the real champ. No doubt I will find a worthy challenger in due time, but you will understand that the times demand that I will look for him among the younger stars. You were a great player and good luck to you.”

Would he really? Well, he might, if only for a laugh.

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