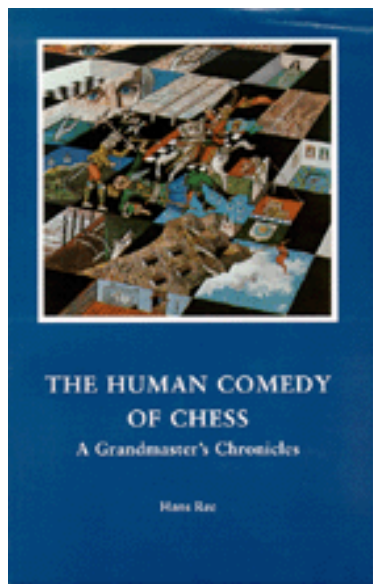




## COLUMNISTS

### *Dutch Treat* Hans Ree

#### *The Human Comedy of Chess*



## Chess in Paris

I was in Paris during the Olympiad and when the Netherlands was paired against France I considered it a good opportunity to visit the NAO Chess Club, like a soccer fan who prefers to follow an important match not at home, but in a bar with a TV. Maybe the club members would watch the games on the internet and unlike a soccer fan I wouldn't have to fear hooligans who would begrudge me rooting for the Dutch.

The NAO club in its present form is a young club but already quite famous. It is named after Nahed Ojje, daughter of the Syrian defense minister and widow of a Saudi arms dealer. Mrs. Ojje lives in France and has big plans to bolster French chess. Among her projects are a chess academy, resembling the old Botvinnik school in Moscow, and the introduction of chess as a subject in French schools. She has been involved, together with the British TV company Einstein, in what might be called the 'Kramnik leg' of the world championship.

The NAO club is the successor of the *Cercle Caissa* that had been run for many years by Chantal Chaudé de Silans, who, in the fifties and sixties, was the strongest French woman player and the first woman to take part in the "men's" Olympiad. After her death in 2001, the club was renamed after Mrs. Ojje. The daughters of Mrs. Chaudé complained that the club had not only sold its name, but also its soul. Others said that with her sponsorship, Mrs. Ojje had saved a nearly defunct club. Who is right, I cannot say. When I visited the old Cercle Caissa, it used to be quite lively, but that was some years ago.

Anyway, the club has gained some new, prominent members, not only top French players (among them Boris Spassky), but also foreigners such as Kramnik, Grischuk, Svidler, Adams and the new Spanish star Vallejo Pons. They didn't manage to win the

by Hans Ree



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European Club Championship this year, but they certainly haven't given up.

The club has moved to a new address, Avenue Foch 83, and from Avenue Foch 1, where I had arrived by bus, it proved rather a longer walk than I had expected, for this is the avenue where the richest Parisians live, in big villa's often hidden from view by blind walls. Fragile old ladies were walking their little dogs, attended by big, strong servants.

At the club one could still smell the paint, for they had only moved in a few months ago and the redecorating had not been finished yet. The premises are quite impressive, with many big rooms that would easily take in hundreds of chessplayers.

Not this day, however. I saw only four people, gathered at a little table and talking, not playing. They were quite old and must have been survivors of the Cercle Caissa.

Then, in another room, I found a long-time acquaintance, the Bulgarian grandmaster Nikola Spiridonov. I have known him since the student olympiads of the sixties. When I went there for the first time, to Cracow in 1964, I was informed by a more experienced team member that the Dutch team and the Bulgarian team were friends. How this had come about I was not told; it probably was a friendship based on compatible drinking habits. Anyway, I gladly conformed to the tradition.

Nikola has been living in Paris for about ten years, which I knew, for in past years I had met him by accident on Paris streets. We exchange the pleasantries of retired tournament fighters. "Are you still playing?" "Hardly, and very bad." "I am sure it can't be as bad as my own play ..." And so on.

He works as a trainer nowadays and he is giving a lesson to a boy of about ten years old. I am told that the boy is one of six NAO members that will take part in the World Youth Championships that are being held at the moment on Crete.

Nikola is treating the closely related subjects of the isolated pawn and the hanging pawns, using a game of Akiba Rubinstein from a book in Russian. Good. The boy is being prepared for real chess, not FIDE chess as it was recently described by Richard Forster.



On Crete, will the boy get the opportunity to apply the sound positional lessons, quietly aiming at Black's isolated pawn in the Tarrasch defense? I fear that more likely he will be machine-gunned by a Schara-Hennig gambit. But these are not matters for me to ponder and I move on to another room.

Until now I have seen six chessplayers and here I find two more, the manager Jordi Lopez and an assistant. I get coffee and pastry and a computer is set up for me to watch the Netherlands-France match.

We are ahead 1½-½, I see, but I worry a bit about Ivan Sokolov's game against Josif Dorfman and Loek van Wely seems to be lost against Etienne Bacrot. Later I will find out that my worries about Sokolov were unfounded, but Van Wely could not save his game.

“Usually there are more people here,” says Jordi and back in Holland I'll learn that he said the same thing the next day to another Dutchman. Back in Mrs. Chaudé's time there were always more people, I think, but I do not say this and anyway, it might have been unfair.

When I leave I get some copies of the club magazine, a well-produced monthly with game analyses by top French players and a history section that displays the frivolity of wealth, for games by Napoléon Bonaparte are printed without any mentioning that they are probably spurious.

I learn that the club is open Tuesday till Saturday from 3 pm till 10 pm. Can this be right? At the clubs I used to know, 10 pm was about the time when it started to become lively.

The club is certainly worth a visit, but when you want to play blitz in Paris the best thing to do seems to go to the chess corner in the Jardin du Luxembourg. They have no Kramnik there, but some of the regulars are quite strong.

**White *Loek van Wely* - Black *Etienne Bacrot*, Bled Olympiad**

**1. d2-d4 d7-d5 2. c2-c4 c7-c6 3. Ng1-f3 Ng8-f6 4. e2-e3 a7-a6 5. Bf1-d3 Bc8-g4 6. Qd1-b3 Bg4xf3 7. g2xf3** At this point the computer is squealing for 7. Qxb7 and it might be right, but no human has dared to play this move, maybe fearing the dubious

Exchange sacrifice 7...Bxg2 8. Rg1 Be4 9. Bxe4 Nxe4. 7...Qd8-c7 8. Nb1-c3 e7-e6 9. Bc1-d2 d5xc4 10. Bd3xc4 c6-c5 11. d4xc5 Bf8xc5 12. Nc3-e4 Nf6xe4 13. f3xe4 0-0 14. Ra1-c1 Rf8-d8 15. Ke1-e2 b7-b6 16. f2-f4 Nb8-c6 After the game Van Wely said that up to this moment his position had been quite comfortable. It seems a bit draughty to me, with his King in the middle and some empty space around it. His next move is a grave mistake. **17. Rh1-g1**



**17...Qc7xf4** A nasty surprise. After 18. exf4 Nd4+ Black wins quickly. **18. Rg1xg7+ Kg8-h8 19. Rc1-g1 Rd8xd2+** Visually a nice move, but 19...Qxe4 with terrible threats seems much stronger. **20. Ke2xd2 Qf4-f2+ 21. Kd2-c1 Qf2xe3+ 22. Qb3xe3 Bc5xe3+ 23. Kc1-c2 Be3xg1** Black has been satisfied with a very modest booty, just a

pawn. **24. Rg7xg1 Ra8-g8 25. Rg1xg8+ Kh8xg8 26. Kc2-c3 Nc6-b8 27. Kc3-d4 Kg8-f8 28. e4-e5 Kf8-e7 29. a2-a3 a6-a5 30. Bc4-b5 Nb8-d7** White has put up strong resistance and I am not sure if Black can win this. However after White's next all is clear. The pawn ending is winning for Black. **31. Bb5xd7 Ke7xd7 32. Kd4-c4 Kd7-e8 33. b2-b4 33. Kb5** doesn't help because of 33...f5 34. exf6 e5 33...a5xb4 34. Kc4xb4 f7-f5 35. e5xf6 Ke8-f7 36. a3-a4 e6-e5 37. a4-a5 b6xa5+ 38. Kb4xa5 Kf7xf6 39. Ka5-b4 Kf6-f5 40. Kb4-c3 Kf5-g4 White resigned.



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