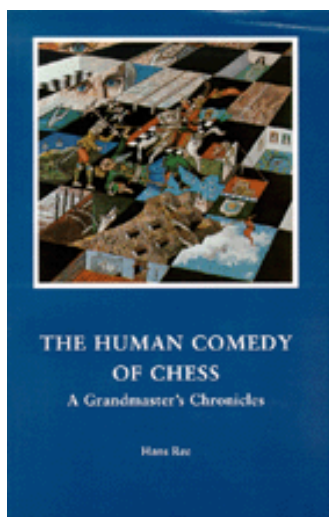




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy
of Chess*

by Hans Ree

100 Months with Hanon

How time crawls. Is this only my 100th column for ChessCafe.com? It feels as if the Cafe has been with me for a much longer time, but in fact it opened its doors only in 1996. It's already becoming a bit difficult to realise that once upon a time we had no chess websites and even no computers.

With some effort I can recollect the hardships of a chess reporter in the pre-computer age. Delivering a chess game to the newspaper by phone. Usually you got someone on the line who knew about chess notation, but not always. At worst you had to speak like this: one, dot, space, lower case edward two, hyphen, lower case edward four, space... That was 1. e2-e4. It could take some time, which was especially awkward when you reported from America and had to wait till at least 2 AM before you would get anyone on the line in the Dutch office. How to spend the hours between a hard day's work and phoning in the report? Unwisely one tends to grab for the bottle. "Please sir, can you speak a bit more clearly?" said the polite attendant on the phone who understood the reporter's plight.

My colleague IM Gert Ligterink was the first of the Dutch chess writers who was equipped with a computer to send in his articles. We called it the Miracle Machine. My own newspaper adapted to the new age a bit later, in 1986, which meant that the laptop I got from them was a bit more advanced. My screen showed 15 lines of text, while Ligterink's contained only 8 lines. Neither of our laptops had an internal source of light, which meant that we had to shuffle lamps and tables in our hotel rooms to have the screen lighten up. Sometimes we could only type in the bathroom. Getting a connection to the newspaper computer was an adventure in itself.

These days of heroic reporting were already over when I first met Hanon Russell in 1991. Technological progress had done its beneficial work, but I don't think that Hanon at that time was already contemplating opening his cybercafe.

In *New in Chess* I had written an article about the catalogue of his big collection of chess memorabilia. It provoked a lengthy answer by Hanon in which he put me right on a few things he thought I had gotten wrong and invited me to a guided tour of the collection itself, at his home in Milford, Connecticut. I gratefully accepted the invitation.

Hanon proved a lively, entertaining and generous host, but there was something which as a European I considered very quaint at the time. When I wanted to smoke I was directed outside to the porch. It was not the last time for me to notice that

Hanon tends to adopt a seignorial manner in his domain, be it the ChessCafe or his home.

Through the years, before and after my joining his ChessCafe, we kept meeting in person if there was an opportunity, and the last time was in April 2000 in New York. We walked the streets, me having some trouble catching up with Hanon's brisk pace, and paused a while on Times Square, where Hanon studied the lighted banners that showed the latest results of the stock exchange.

Maybe inspired by these figures he told me that he considered giving up his law practice to spend all his time on the chess business. I was shocked. To me giving up a successful law practice to publish and sell chess books seemed a sure way to self-destruction.

I refrained from saying so at the time, but I was reminded of a story from Arnold Denker and Larry Parr's book *The Bobby Fischer I Knew*. It was about the chess hustler George Treysman and the way he had lured a respectable and happily married shop owner called Jack Richardson into chess and to his doom.

Addicted to chess, Richardson came to lose his business, his wife and his respectable appearance. One day, when a ratty-looking Richmond slouched into the New York *Chess & Checkers Club*, better known as *The Fleahouse*, Treysman said proudly to a friend: "See that guy? I made him into a chessplayer!"

I wondered if I and my fellow ChessCafe columnists were doing to Hanon what Treysman had been doing to Richardson. Happily my fears proved to be entirely unfounded.

Later that afternoon we met Bruce Pandolfini. I knew he was a celebrity in American chess circles and a very successful teacher. After a pleasant walk in Washington Park, where Bruce was indeed greeted as a celebrity by the regulars of the chess corner, I dared to ask him a question that was burning in my mind: what were his rates?

The exchange that followed has been related by Hanon himself in his article *A Walk in the Park* in the Skittles Room. Bruce hesitated before he answered, so that I wondered if my question had been rude. Then he said: "Actually I am Jewish-Italian." What kind of answer was that?

Hanon rescued me: "Not your race, Bruce. Hans is asking for your teaching rates." The answer to that was quickly supplied: \$250 per hour, and many prospective pupils had to be disappointed, as he only wanted to teach for 15 hours in a week.

I was impressed. How did he do it, persuading people to spend such money on chess lessons? Bruce smiled and said "I think there is something in my manners that makes people say 'yes'."

This was probably true, as he was indeed a friendly and engaging character. I realised what I would probably say to someone who wanted lessons from me:

“Well, of course I realise that \$50 per hour is a lot of money and there is no guarantee at all that my teaching will do you any good, but if you really insist we might try.” There is something to my attitude that makes people say ‘no’.

More than a bit jealous I managed to say that I was quite pleased to find that there was so much money in chess and that Bruce's ability to make it flow his way was an encouragement to us all.

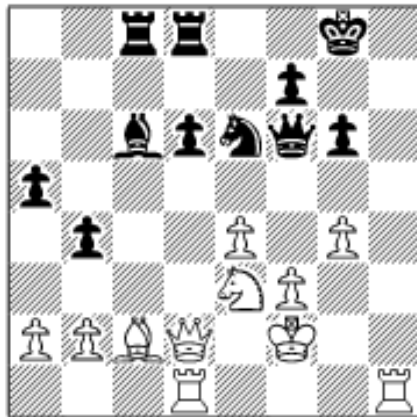
Of course this was the simple truth. There is more money in chess than I sometimes imagine. In later years I was to find that my fears that Hanon would go the way of Treysman's Richardson had been ridiculous. The ChessCafe is a flourishing enterprise and I am proud and happy to be part of it.

A few days ago Hanon e-mailed me to suggest that I might elaborate a bit on things discussed in the interview – that is now posted in the Skittles Room – and present my game against Leonid Stein which I mentioned there, with some good notes.

A flattering and pleasing proposal, but while playing over that old game I realised that it hardly needs notes. A Sämisch King's Indian, White opens the h-file, makes the thematic sacrifice of a Knight on f5 and the thing is done. It's self-explanatory, as Bobby Fischer used to say. I do still like the game, so here it is anyway.

Hans Ree -Leonid Stein, Amsterdam IBM I, 1969

1. c2•c4 g7•g6 2. Nb1•c3 Bf8•g7 3. d2•d4 Ng8•f6 4. e2•e4 d7•d6 5. f2•f3 b7•b6 6. Bf1•d3 e7•e5 7. d4•d5 Nf6•h5 8. Ng1•e2 0•0 9. Bc1•e3 Nb8•d7 10. Qd1•d2 a7•a5 11. Bd3•c2 Nd7•c5 12. g2•g4 Nh5•f4 13. Ne2xf4 e5xf4 14. Be3xf4 Bc8•a6 15. h2•h4 Ba6xc4 16. Bf4•h6 Bg7xh6 17. Qd2xh6 b6•b5 18. h4•h5 Qd8•e7 19. Qh6•e3 b5•b4 20. Nc3•d1 c7•c6 21. d5xc6 Ra8•c8 22. Qe3•d4 Bc4•b5 23. Nd1•e3 Bb5xc6 24. Ra1•d1 Nc5•e6 25. Qd4•d2 Qe7•f6 26. h5xg6 h7xg6 27. Ke1•f2 Rf8•d8



28. Ne3•f5 g6xf5 29. g4xf5 Bc6•d7 30. Rd1
•g1+ Ne6•g7 31. Bc2•b3 a5•a4 32. Bb3•d5 b4
•b3 33. a2xb3 a4xb3 34. Bd5xb3 Kg8•f8 35.
Rh1•h8+ Kf8•e7 36. Rh8•h6 Ng7•e8 37.
Rh6xf6 Ne8xf6 38. Rg1•g7 Bd7•e8 39. Qd2
•d4 Rc8•c5 40. f3•f4 Nf6•h5 and as the time
control had been made, Black resigned.

However, it is more in the spirit of this column to present a game by a different player. Some visitors to ChessCafe.com may have wondered how good a chessplayer the proprietor is

himself. In some café's this is a closely guarded secret. It is not absolutely necessary that the boss plays well himself, but in fact ours does. Here is a game played in a weekend tournament in July 2003 against FM David Vigorito. Note the brisk pace of the attack, as resolute as the way he walked the New York streets.

Hanon Russell -David Vigorito, US 2003

1. Ng1•f3 d7•d5 2. g2•g3 Ng8•f6 3. Bf1•g2 c7•c6 4. d2•d3 Nb8•d7 5. 0•0 e7•e5 6. e2•e4 d5xe4 7. d3xe4 Bf8•c5 8. Qd1•e2 0•0 9. Nb1•c3 b7•b5 10. a2•a3 a7•a5 11. Bc1•e3 Bc8•a6 12. b2•b4 Bc5•d6 13. Rf1•d1 Qd8•e7 14. Qe2•d2 Bd6•c7 15. Nf3 •h4 g7•g6 16. Be3•h6 Rf8•d8 17. Nh4•f5 Qe7•e6 18. Qd2•g5 Nf6•h5 19. Bg2•h3 f7•f6 20. Qg5•h4 Qe6•c4 21. Rd1•d3 Nd7•f8 22. Ra1•d1 a5xb4 23. a3xb4 Rd8xd3 24. Rd1xd3 Ra8•d8 25. Rd3•f3 Qc4xb4



26. Nf5•g7 Qb4•e7 27. Ng7xh5 g6xh5 28. Rf3xf6 Bc7•d6 29. Bh6•g5 Qe7•g7 30. Rf6•h6 b5•b4 31. Rh6xh5 Nf8•g6 32. Bh3•e6+ Kg8 •f8 33. Qh4•g4 b4xc3 34. Bg5•h6 Qg7xh6 35. Qg4•f5+ Kf8•g7 36. Qf5•f7+ Black resigned.


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