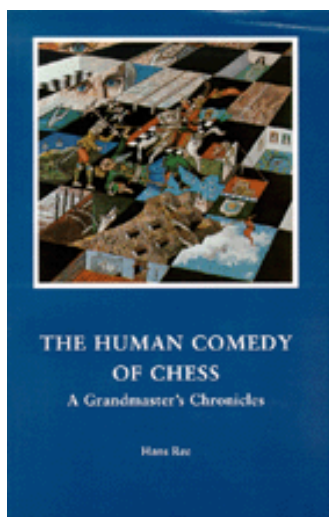




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree

*The Human Comedy
of Chess*

by Hans Ree

Golden Newspaper Days

Evgeny Sveshnikov's interesting article in the German magazine *Schach*, about which I wrote last month, got an amusing sequel in the next issue. In his original article Sveshnikov had made some disparaging remarks about top players who lacked original opening ideas themselves and profited from the novelties found by more creative spirits.

One example he mentioned was his game against Sergei Volkov at the Russian team championship in Togliatti in 2003, where he had shown how to handle Volkov's French defense by playing 7. b3! in the Advance Variation.

It is well-known that Sveshnikov is a campaigner for copyrighting chess games. In Togliatti he had managed to persuade the organisers not to publish the games, but unfortunately they were smuggled to the outside world anyway and found their way into the databases.

There Peter Svidler had found Sveshnikov's 7. b3 and made good use of it to win a brilliant game in the Russian championship against the same Volkov.

That's how Sveshnikov describes it, but his memory deceived him, for in fact Svidler had been on the same team as Volkov in Togliatti and had witnessed the game Sveshnikov-Volkov personally. To keep his novelty to himself, Sveshnikov should have forced the other players to be blindfolded as soon as they were approaching his board.

Moreover, one reader of *Schach* pointed out that the move 7. b3 wasn't Sveshnikov's intellectual property at all, because it had been played several times by other players. Sveshnikov's answer showed truly aristocratic self-confidence. Yes, of course he was aware of these earlier games with 7. b3. But by playing this move himself, he had stamped it with the quality mark "Sveshnikov" and that was the reason that Svidler had studied it.

Recently Svidler-Volkov was judged the best game of the last six months on the website www.worldchessrating.com, where it can easily be found, with analysis by Krasenkov.

I want to deal here with another aspect of opening theory, because a game that was recently played in the German championship reminded me of one of the funniest episodes of 20th century chess.

Whenever I browse through old Dutch newspapers I am astounded by the amount of space the chess reporters were given. It seems as if newspapers were much bigger then, which they were not, or that not much of interest was happening in the world outside chess, which wasn't true either.

As an example here is the beginning of a report that E. Straat wrote in 1955 for the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* about the 14th round of the interzonal tournament in Göteborg. It was reprinted in his book *Praatschaak 2 (Chess Talk 2)* that unfortunately has never been translated.

Under the heading "Bankruptcy of the System" Straat wrote:

"Long ago on a September evening I saw a shock troop of Germans, each one armed with a big book and loads of papers, march into the game room of the casino in Spa. As if on military orders, they spread over the many roulette tables, opened their books and hand-written papers covered with ciphers, and with deadly seriousness and frightful persistency they started to play on the 'transversaux de trois' the system they had worked out at home till the inevitable crash of the bank. One hour later they folded books and papers and the six Germans marched out of the room - not with the treasures they had imagined, but down and out, leaving with only their return railway tickets. The system had not worked."

Happy days when a newspaperman was allowed to start his daily chess report in such a leisurely manner. By the way, Evert Straat (1892-1972) was a very interesting character. He was a good player, who participated in a few master tournaments during the twenties, but he made his mark in many other fields too. After briefly practicing as a lawyer he became editor-in-chief of a sensationalist illustrated magazine that became very popular, he translated Greek tragedies and the New Testament and in the fifties he gained some national prominence as a jury member of a radio quiz who knew everything about every subject. As a chess reporter, he was able to write in a way that made chess accessible to non-chessplayers and he was an inspiration to Dutch chess writers of a later generation.

There is an anecdote saying that during the thirties Straat, who led a bohemian life and was often out of money, invented a Czech tournament and phoned his daily on-the-spot reports from an Amsterdam café to the newspaper office next door. I have never been able to verify this anecdote and hasten to say that this kind of reporting has not been my inspiration. One wouldn't get away with it nowadays.

But back to round 14 of the Göteborg interzonal. Fate had it that four Argentines had to play four Soviets with black and like the Germans in the casino, the Argentines had worked out an infallible system in the Sicilian Najdorf, which was quite popular at that tournament. The system has become known as the Göteborg variation.

Indeed, in three out of these four games the variation arose on the board and how the Argentine system stood up will already have become clear from Straat's

introduction.

Geller-Panno, Spassky-Pilnik and Keres-Najdorf, Göteborg 1955

1. e2-e4 c7-c5 2. Ng1-f3 d7-d6 3. d2-d4 c5xd4 4. Nf3xd4 Ng8-f6 5. Nb1-c3 a7-a6 6. Bc1-g5 e7-e6 7. f2-f4 Bf8-e7 8. Qd1-f3 h7-h6 9. Bg5-h4 g7-g5 10. f4xg5 Nf6-d7 11. Nd4xe6 The Argentines had correctly presumed that the Soviets wouldn't be able to resist the temptation to sacrifice a piece. The first one who dared to jump into the complications, after thinking for a quarter of an hour, was Geller. Spassky and Keres were waiting to see how he would be doing. Very soon they would be able to follow Geller's example confidently.

11...f7xe6 12. Qf3-h5+ Ke8-f8 13. Bf1-b5



This last move by Geller had not been foreseen by the Argentines. The diagram position appeared in all three games. Panno played 13...Ne5 against Geller and lost quickly. After having seen that, Pilnik and Najdorf played 13...Kg7, but they didn't last much longer.

In the fourth Soviet-Argentine encounter Petrosian beat Guimard brilliantly - though after quite a different opening - to complete the Argentine disaster.

The Göteborg system seemed bankrupt after its first appearance, but in Portoroz 1958 it was rehabilitated by Bobby Fischer, who played 13...Rh7 against Gligoric and made a draw after having stood better.

Flirting with death, some others kept practising the Göteborg system as Black and achieved reasonable results, maybe because they were specialists in a system that came as a surprise to their opponents.

In 1998 Dale Kirton published extensive analyses in *New in Chess Yearbook 48* to prove that White is winning after the piece sacrifice 11. Nxe6. Whether or not he was correct is not for me to judge.

One man who apparently was not convinced by Kirton, or hadn't read the yearbook, is Peter Enders. In the recent German championship, won by Alexander Graf, his enduring faith in the death-defying Göteborg variation was not rewarded.

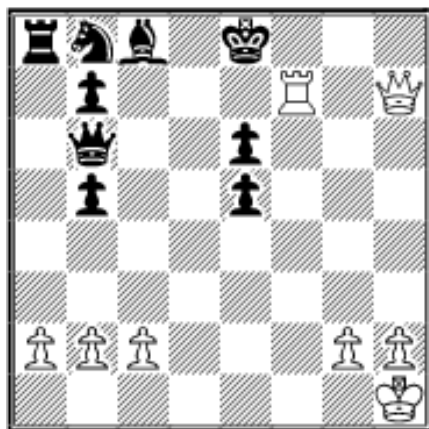
Naiditsch - Enders

Up till the position of the first diagram all moves were as in the stem games of 1955 and there then followed:

13...Rh8-h7 Fischer's move.

14. 0-0+ Kf8-g8 15. g5-g6 Rh7-g7 16. Rf1-f7 Be7xb4 17. Qh5xb6 Rg7xf7 18. g6xf7+ Kg8xf7 19. Ra1-f1+ Bh4-f6 20. e4-e5 Kirton's very complicated analysis went on with 20. Qh7+. After 20...Kf8 he wanted to play 21. e5 dxe5 22. Be2 and after 20...Ke8 he proceeded with 21. Qg6+ Kf8 22. e5 dxe5 23. Ne4, similar but not quite identical to the actual game.

20...d6xe5 21. Nc3-e4 a6xb5 22. Qh6-h7+ Kf7-f8 23. Qh7-h8+ Kf8-e7 24. Qh8-h7+ Ke7-f8 25. Ne4xf6 Qd8-b6+ 26. Kg1-h1 Nd7xf6 27. Rf1xf6+ Kf8-e8 28. Rf6-f7



The final position is truly a warning sign to intrepid piece-snatchers. Black resigned.

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