



## C O L U M N I S T S

*Dutch Treat*

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## Fenny Heemskerk, Almost Kidnapped in Moscow

A few weeks ago, on the 8th of June, the Dutch WGM Fenny Heemskerk died at the age of 87. She had been the most successful Dutch woman chessplayer of all time.

I'm not saying that she was the strongest woman player. I think the present Dutch woman champion Zaoqin Peng plays better chess. But one has to judge people in the context of their times. In her heyday Heemskerk, with very little support, was able to compete with the best Russian women players and threaten their crown.

Since the fifties, the period when she was at her best, women's chess has been elevated to a different level. It's just chess now, and even though the men are stronger, we do not think anymore that women chessplayers play a different game.

Compare Max Euwe's recommendation of women's chess in the introduction to a Dutch tournament book about the women's world championship in Moscow 1949/1950. Euwe wrote: "Most of the ladies in this tournament really play chess, not always so strong, but usually enterprising and lively. The games in this book are certainly worth playing over, there are no grandmaster draws without fight, no unfathomable positional games that will be a riddle to 99.9% of the chess lovers, it is all equally clear, the good moves as well as those that are not so good, and the reader will find many instructive things in this book."

This was meant as a compliment. To us it may seem a rather sarcastic put-down, but that was certainly not Euwe's intention. A patronizing compliment of women's chess like this would be unthinkable nowadays.

*Fenny Heemskerk*

Fenny Heemskerk had qualified to take part in that tournament. It was not a candidates' tournament, but a real tournament for the world championship, as the former champion Vera Menchik had died during a German bombing of London in World War II.

Nowadays the Dutch chess federation is far from rich, but in the years after the war it was worse. Though Fenny Heemskerk had qualified for the World Championship tournament, a lot of work had to be done to secure her participation.

The Dutch chess federation organized a collection to cover the expenses. In its magazine, under the heading 'Will Fenny go to Leningrad?' there was a monthly financial report on the proceeds. Apparently at that time the tournament was still scheduled for Leningrad, though eventually it was to be held in Moscow.

Euwe varied on the theme by writing "Fenny has to go to Leningrad!" Later the magazine could say: "Fenny goes to Leningrad" and finally with a sigh of relief: "Fenny is in Moscow."

We see a picture of her boarding the train to Moscow on Saint Nicholas day, when Dutch familial cosiness is at its height. The president of the Dutch federation and some of her family were at the platform, but when the train left she was on her own, because the money collection had not provided for a companion. At the time it was quite an adventure to travel to the Soviet Union. During the last months, when she finally knew that she really would take part in the championship, Fenny had studied some Russian.

In Moscow she took 8th place with a score of 8 out of 15. Against the four Russians, who took the first four places, she scored 2 points and in the game against the tournament winner Ludmilla Rudenko, which she lost, she missed an easy win just before the first time control.

It was a creditable result which would be far surpassed two years later in the Candidates tournament of 1952, again in Moscow. The winner of that tournament would play a match for the World Championship against Rudenko, the winner of Moscow 1949/1950.

This time Fenny Heemskerk had a second, the Dutch master Lodewijk Prins. Having played in the men's interzonal in Salztjöbaden, he arrived in Moscow a few days late, lamenting as soon as he stepped off the train about a fold in his trousers, an un-ironed shirt or similar matters. Fenny worried. Was this the man who was supposed to assist her, or should she mother him during the next weeks as an additional burden to her, she thought. But she was wrong, as Prins proved to be an excellent assistant.

She played well in that tournament, so well that the Russians got worried and thought of a way to stop her. As Fenny once told me, one day suddenly some paramedics entered her hotel room, telling her that they had heard that she might have caught a cold, but that it could be much more serious, one never knew and one shouldn't take any risk with a distinguished foreign guest. Fenny would have to be brought to a hospital at once, where the best Russian doctors would take care of her. Of course they couldn't say on what day she would be dismissed from the hospital, that would be for the doctors to decide.

Luckily Prins was also present in the hotel room and he proved his worth as a second. Like a true knight he made it clear that Fenny would only be taken away over his dead body. The attempt of kidnapping her did not succeed.

At the end she shared second place with the Russian Olga Ignatieva. First place was for Elizaveta Bykova, who would go on to win the match against Rudenko and become world champion.

This was to be the greatest success of Fenny Heemskerk's career, never to be equalled or even approached. In the Netherlands she remained the best woman player for a long time, winning the Dutch championship • held only once every two years at that time – ten times between 1937 and 1961.

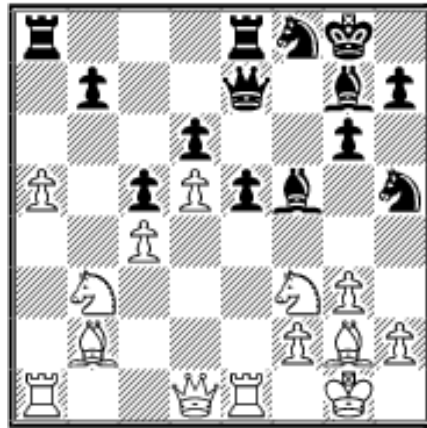
Until a few years before her death she kept playing chess at the two clubs in the Dutch town Amersfoort of which she was a member. This was a joy to all, because she was a very nice and warm-hearted lady.

Here is her game from that Moscow candidates tournament against the winner and future world champion.

**1.Ng1•f3 Ng8•f6 2.g2•g3 g7•g6 3.Bf1•g2 Bf8•g7 4.d2•d4 d7•d6 5.0•0 0•0 6.Nb1•d2** She wasn't a great opening expert and therefore avoids the main line, though later we'll see typical King's Indian positions anyway.

**6...Nb8•d7 7.e2•e4 e7•e5 8.c2•c3 Rf8•e8 9.Rf1•e1 Nd7•f8 10.d4•d5 Nf6•d7** Black prepares f7-f5, but in a rather unpractical way. I think 10...h6 followed by 11...N6h7 would have been better.

**11.Qd1•c2 Qd8•e7 12.b2•b4 c7•c6 13.c3•c4 a7•a5 14.b4xa5 Ra8xa5 15.Nd2•b3 Ra5•a8 16.a2•a4 c6•c5 17.Bc1•b2 Nd7•f6 18.a4•a5 Nf6•h5 19.Qc2•d1 f7•f5 20.e4xf5 Bc8xf5**



White has an obvious advantage and after simple moves such as 21. Nh4 Bd7 22. Nd2 Black would be in trouble. Instead White goes for a sacrificial attack which is totally unclear. For a long time it was to be characteristic for women's chess that wild aggression would be sought in situations where it was unnecessary.

**21.Nb3xc5 d6xc5 22.Nf3xe5 Qe7•d6 23.f2•f4 Bf5•d7** More prudent seems 23...Nf6, to move a piece in the direction of the queen's wing, where the action will be. **24.Qd1•b3** Though White has two pawns for the piece and aggressively placed pieces, Black has no reason to despair. One good defence would be 24...Bc8.

**24...Re8•e7 25.Qb3•b6 Qd6xb6 26.a5xb6 Ra8xa1 27.Re1xa1 Re7•e8 28.Ra1•a7 Bd7•c8 29.d5•d6** Now

Black's position is critical. One interesting line is 29...Rd8 30. Ra8 Bf6 31. Rxc8 Rxc8 32. Bxb7 Rb8 33. Bd5+ Kg7 34. b7, which seems very good for White, even though she is a rook down. **29...Nh5•f6 30.Bg2xb7 Bc8xb7 31.Ra7xb7 Nf6•d7** This loses quickly, but Black's position was already very bad.

**32.Ne5xd7 Bg7xb2 33.Nd7xf8 Kg8xf8 34.d6•d7 Re8•d8 35.Rb7•c7 Kf8•e7 36.b6•b7 Rd8•b8 37.Rc7•c8 Ke7xd7 38.Rc8xb8 Kd7•c7 39.Rb8•f8 Kc7xb7 40.Rf8•f7+ Kb7•b6 41.Rf7xh7 Kb6•a5 42.Rh7•b7 Bb2•c3 43.Kg1•g2** Black resigned.