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Dutch Treat

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Lessons from Stanislavski

Among the video's that the French magazine *Europe Echecs* put on the web during the Tal Memorial in Moscow there was an interview with Yuri Averbakh, who had come to the tournament as a visitor. Not surprisingly at the age of 85 he looked a bit older than when I had last met him, five years ago, but he wasn't resting on his laurels yet. His latest project is a book about the early history of chess.

It is well-known that Averbakh has ideas about the origins of chess that deviate from the main lines of theory and ascribe a big role to the Greek army of Alexander the Great that went to the East. I would like to read the book when it comes out.

I'm even more interested in Averbakh's memoirs, about which he spoke in 2002 in the interview with Taylor Kingston that appeared here in the Skittles Room ([here](#) and [here](#)). Averbakh has served Soviet chess in many functions and he has certainly a lot to tell. I think this book of memoirs has appeared in Russian, but regrettably not in a language that I can read.



Yuri Averbakh circa 1955

In compensation there was an interesting article by Averbakh in the October issue of the German magazine *Schach* about the great candidates tournament in 1953 in Switzerland, where he was one of the participants.

We tend to think that Soviet chess life always was a well-oiled machine where nothing was left to chance, but from Averbakh's article one gets the impression that many things were handled in a way that seems decidedly amateurish.

His preparation for the tournament can certainly be called professional. He collected the games of his opponents – not so easy at that time as now – and of all players he made a file that documented their habits in the opening, the middlegame and the endgame. Then it occurred to him that his opponents would do the same and that it would be useful to find out how his own file would appear to them.

Making his own file, a self-portrait, Averbakh found that his main weakness was his uncertain play in double-edged positions which could not be calculated, but should be handled by intuition. He came to the conclusion that he should find a method to activate his subconscious, the source of many original ideas, at the right moment at the board.

When he spoke about this problem with an actor who had been a pupil of the famous director Constantin Stanislavski, the actor gave him Stanislavski's book *An Actor Prepares*. Here a method was described for the actor to evoke emotions and activate his subconscious by means of a special technique.

Averbakh tried to develop a similar technique for chessplayers, but he had no time to get it

right before the candidates tournament and later his endgame books occupied him too much to come back to the Stanislavski method.

A candidates tournament like that of 1953 would be impossible nowadays. It had 15 participants who met each other twice, so everyone had to play 28 games. It lasted almost two months.

The Soviet delegation consisted of 21 people, which may look a big number, but in fact was rather modest. There were nine players, eight seconds, (Bronstein didn't have one) a trainer, a chief of the delegation, a deputy chief and an interpreter.

The deputy chief and the interpreter were from the KGB, but according to Averbakh they didn't really trouble the players. The interpreter was a nice fellow who at the start had said to them: "Take care, boys, not a word about politics when I am around."

It was an iron law that everyone of the delegation should stay in the same hotel, and one would think that for such a big group reservations would have been made long in advance. But no, nothing at all had been done in this regard.

Arriving in Neuhausen the group had to find a hotel, which was not easy. They found one which was more or less suitable and close to the town, but it didn't really have enough rooms. The strongest players got a single room with a nice view of a waterfall. Others such as Averbakh had to share one with their second, without waterfall.

When at the half-way point the tournament was to move from Neuhausen to Zürich, Alexander Kotov and the interpreter were sent there as a reconnaissance party to find a hotel. They made a nice holiday trip of it, first going to a movie, so that it was already dark when they finally went searching for a hotel.

When the group arrived there, they were greeted by the hotel owner with the words: "I see that there are young people with you. Please note that they cannot bring in more than two girls per night."

The hotel was located in the middle of the red light district, just opposite a brothel, and was fittingly named *Das Goldene Schwert*, the Golden Sword. Only a few days later they were able to move to a more quiet neighbourhood.

It shows a rather pleasant amateurish sloppiness that nowadays would be unthinkable, but the Soviet players were so strong that they could afford it.

By the way, Averbakh only briefly touches the subject of Bronstein's accusations about collusion to help Smyslov win the tournament. A few years ago Andy Soltis and I had written about this on Chessscafe and my opinion was then and is now that this collusion didn't amount to much. Averbakh writes only: "If there is some truth to this, in any case it passed me by, I didn't notice anything about it."

As Averbakh writes, the most famous game of the tournament is his own loss against Kotov, in which Kotov lured his king into the open with a spectacular queen sacrifice. As a Dutch patriot I would like to show here another game, played by Max Euwe. It was played early in the tournament, when Euwe was still doing well. After the first leg Euwe had a very decent score of 7½ out of 14, which gave him an equal fifth place with Petrosian and Boleslavski. In the second half he added only four points to it. For a man who was 52 years old at the time, 28 games were too much.

Yefim Geller - Max Euwe, 2nd round

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 c5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 b6 7.Bd3 Bb7 8.f3 Nc6 9.Ne2 0-0 10.0-0 Na5 11.e4 Ne8 12.Ng3 cxd4 13.cxd4 Rc8 14.f4

White has to leave pawn c4 to its fate and relies on his kingside attack.

14...Nxc4 15.f5

Intending 16.f6 Nxf6 17.Bg5 with a winning attack.

15...f6 16.Rf4

White's attack is strong and Black has only one option: counterattack.

16...b5 17.Rh4 Qb6 18.e5

Further sharpening of the battle. White is threatening – after 19.fxe6 – to take on h7 and obviously 18...h6 is no defense because of 19.Bxh6, winning.

18...Nxe5 19.fxe6 Nxd3 20.Qxd3 Qxe6 21.Qxh7+

This may look like a big success for White, but in fact Black's king will be quite safe on f7.

21...Kf7 22.Bh6



White's attack seems to be in full swing, but now comes the move that made the game famous.

22...Rh8

He sacrifices a rook for his counterattack. Both Euwe and Bronstein were to write in their tournament books that the quiet 22...Rc4 would have been even stronger, but my Rybka is not quite convinced and gives as a main variation (after 22...Rc4) 23.Rf1 Qd5 24.Re4 Rxd4 25.Re2 Rd1 26.Nf5 Rxf1+ 27.Kxf1 Qd3 28.Bxg7 Bxg2+ 29.Kf2 Qf3+ 30.Ke1 Qc3+ with a perpetual.

23.Qxh8 Rc2

Suddenly White has to defend and the only way to do this was 24.d5 Bxd5 25.Rd1 Rxc2+ 26.Kf1 gxf6 27.Qxh6 with a more or less equal game.

24.Rc1 Rxc2+ 25.Kf1 Qb3

Now there is no defence against Black's mating attack.

26.Ke1 Qf3 0-1