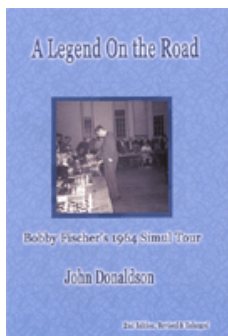




COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree



CHESSTHEATRE

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Autograph Hunters

The most amusing story that I know about autograph hunting involves the writer Truman Capote. Unfortunately I can't remember where I read it. Anyway, Capote was sitting in a restaurant when a couple entered, a man and woman, both a bit vulgar and more than a bit inebriated. The woman recognized Capote as a famous writer and asked him if he would put his signature on her naked belly. Capote reluctantly obliged.

Her companion didn't like this. Angrily he fetched his dick from his trousers, put it in front of Capote and snarled: "Do you want to sign this too?"

Capote looked at it disapprovingly. As everyone who has ever watched him on TV knows, he had a very peculiar voice. The voice has been described by his colleague Norman Mailer, after Capote had badly upstaged him on a TV talk show: "That voice, so full of snide rustlings and unforgiving nasalities; it was a voice to knock New York on its ear. The voice had survived; it spoke of horrors seen and passed over; it told of judgements that would be merciless."

Capote's judgement was indeed merciless. Disdainfully looking at the object in front of him he said: "I'm afraid an autograph will be impossible. But I might be able to initial it."

A gentler scene occurred years ago in the press room of the Corus tournament in Wijk aan Zee. I wasn't present when it happened, but I trust the eyewitness reports.

Vasili Ivanchuk had given a press conference. Afterwards one of the journalists, the American Robert Huntington, put a question to him, with a notebook in hand to write down Ivanchuk's answer.

At the time Huntington was working for the Associated Press, but sadly in 2003 he informed the chess world in an open letter that AP had decided to stop covering chess on a regular basis, partly to cut down on expenses, but also because of the mess that FIDE had made of top-level chess, capriciously cancelling important events that had been announced long ago.

So this was in the good times, when AP was still interested in chess. Huntington has a speech defect. It wasn't really difficult to understand what he was saying, except when you met him for the first time and were not used to it.

For Ivanchuk it was the first time. He didn't understand Huntington's question. Huntington repeated his question, but still Ivanchuk didn't really get it. What to do? To oblige the questioner he walked towards him, took his notebook out of his hand and kindly gave him an autograph, to Huntington's great consternation.

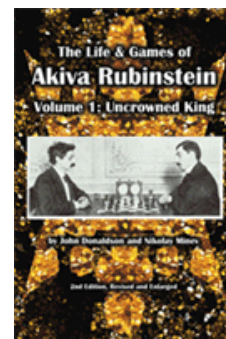


Hou Yifan

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The most endearing autograph hunter was the Chinese girl Hou Yifan. She was twelve years old when she played in the C-group of the Corus tournament in 2007 and approached Vladimir Kramnik, still World Champion at the time, to ask for an autograph.

It doesn't happen very often that a player in a tournament asks another participant for an autograph, even when that other player competes in a higher group. Some people understood immediately that Kramnik should have asked for Hou Yifan's own autograph in return, for it was bound to become valuable, later when she would be the Women's World Champion or, who knows, World Champion of all chessplayers.

Earlier this month she won the Ataturk Masters in Istanbul, a strong women's tournament, with the score of 7 out of 9, one point ahead of Pia Cramling. During the first half of the tournament the main point of interest was that former World Champion Zu Chen started with 0 out of 4. Later she recovered and she finished with 4 out of 9.

Hou Yifan, just turned 14, had a TPR of 2674. If she keeps this level it would make her 45th on the world ranking list, but of course it is more likely that she will improve.

Here is a game from another recent tournament, this year's Aeroflot Open in Moscow. Her opponent is Czech GM Viktor Laznicka, rated 2595.

Hou Yifan - Viktor Laznicka

Aeroflot Open, Moscow 2008

Ruy Lopez, Berlin Defence [C67]

1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3.Bf1-b5 Ng8-f6 4.0-0 Nf6xe4 5.d2-d4 Ne4-d6 6.Bb5xc6 d7xc6 7.d4xe5 Nd6-f5 8.Qd1xd8+ Ke8xd8 9.Nb1-c3 Nf5-e7 10.h2-h3 Ne7-g6 11.Bc1-g5+ Kd8-e8 12.Ra1-d1 Bc8-e6

This is how Vladimir Kramnik, great defender of the Berlin Wall, played it a few times.

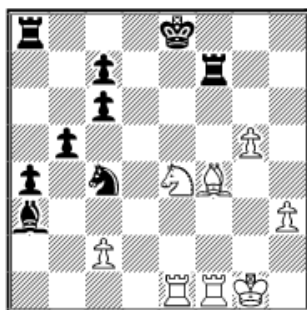
13.a2-a3 h7-h6 14.Bg5-e3 Bf8-e7 15.Nf3-d4 Ng6xe5

Black could have played 15...Bc4, but there was no compelling reason not to accept White's pawn sacrifice.

16.Nd4xe6 f7xe6 17.Be3-d4 Ne5-c4 18.Bd4xg7 Rh8-h7 19.Bg7-d4 e6-e5 20.Bd4-e3 Nc4xb2

Again Black chooses the most ambitious move, and he is right, for after the meek 20...Nxe3 21.fxe3, White would be somewhat better.

21.Rd1-b1 Be7xa3 22.Nc3-e4 Rh7-f7 23.Be3xh6 b7-b5 24.f2-f4 e5xf4 25.Bh6xf4 Nb2-c4 26.g2-g4 a7-a5 27.g4-g5 a5-a4 28.Rb1-e1



28...Ba3-e7

It would have been better to play 28...Kd7 to activate the other rook. After 29.Nf6+ Kc8, White's pawns wouldn't run as fast as in the game.

29.h3-h4 a4-a3 30.g5-g6

Now there is an exciting race of pawns where White has the better chances.

30...Rf7-f5 31.Ne4-g3

31.h5 would have been very strong, as 31...Rxh5 wouldn't be possible because of 32.Nf6+.

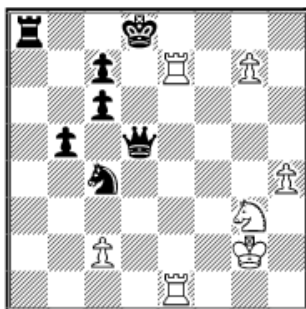
31...Rf5xf4

This exchange sacrifice wasn't really necessary. After 31...Rd5 32.h5 Kd7, the outcome of the fight would be open.

32.Rf1xf4 a3-a2 33.Rf4-e4

A more simple way to victory would have been 33.g7 Kd7 34.h5 a1Q 35.Rxa1 Rxa1+ 36.Kh2.

33...a2-a1Q 34.Re4xe7+ Ke8-d8 35.g6-g7 Qa1-d4+ 36.Kg1-g2 Qd4-d5+



Even after allowing Black to make a queen White is still winning, but here she should have played 37.Kh2.

37.Kg2-h3 Nc4-d6

Now with White's king on h3, Black could have put up a stiff resistance with 37...Kc8 38.Re8+ Kb7 39.Rxa8 Qd7+, with a more or less equal position. In this line 38.Rf1 may be stronger, but also in this case after 38...Kb7 39.Rf8 Nd6, it would be a hard

fight.

38.Re1-e6

Now it's over. White is winning.

38...Qd5xe6+ 39.Re7xe6 Kd8-d7 40.Re6-g6 Ra8-g8 41.h4-h5 1-0

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