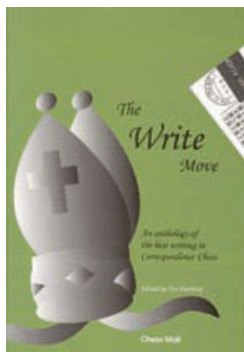




COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



CHESSTHEATRE

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Informator's First Hundred Volumes

A couple of months ago I intended to write about the century of volumes recently completed by *Sahovski Informator*, but Bobby Fischer's sudden death changed the agenda. Nevertheless, I think this is still an interesting topic, especially important for readers (probably the majority) who do not remember a chess world into which this series of game collections had not been born.

The first volume appeared in 1966 and was published then, as now, in Belgrade. From the start the covers bore the FIDE logo. (However, my copy of volume 1 is a 1974 reprint from Verlag das Schach-Archiv, Hamburg, 1974.) The chief editor was grandmaster Aleksandar Matanovic. He remained in the chair until volume 71 (1997/8) when his chief deputy (and present editor), Zdenko Krnic, took over, but Matanovic is still on the editorial board and is named as President. So there has been remarkable continuity with only two editors in over forty years.

Although *Informator* was much more modest in size than would later be the case, it was immediately recognised as a major novelty in chess publishing for several reasons. One was its completely international character and another was its aim to be a complete record of the best in master chess from the previous six months. At last there was a truly international chess periodical, albeit one slanted in its game selection towards chess played in Eastern Europe. The very fact that it, of course, used algebraic rather than the descriptive notation still generally in use in the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries, made this a great driver towards the adoption of algebraic by serious players, and eventually by nearly everyone, in Britain, North America, Spain and Latin-America.

Its use of symbols for the pieces (instead of KQBRN or the German KDLTS) was not new, but in those days there was much less use of figurine typefaces than we see nowadays. A definite innovation was its system of symbolic annotation: infinity for 'unclear' and the various combinations of equals signs, pluses and minuses to denote scale and direction of advantage.

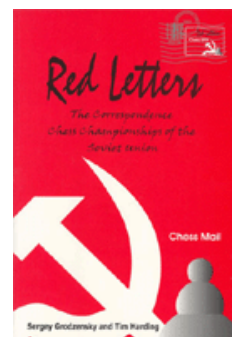
Some of the symbols used from the start were already standard (! for a strong move, for example) but one that really caught the imagination was 'TN' for 'theoretical novelty'. This phrase entered the vocabulary of all serious chess players worldwide, but in volume 4 *Informator* introduced 'N' and for a time both 'N' and 'TN' were used, leading to some philosophical speculation about what the difference between what was 'theoretical' and what was merely a 'novelty'. After volume 15, 'TN' was no more.

The first volume listed all symbols in one page, with explanations in six languages: Serbo-Croat, Russian, English, French, German, and Spanish. Now it takes three pages to explain them, because not only are there several more symbols, but Arabic, Chinese, Italian, and Swedish translations are included. The first two of those clearly reflect the increased globalisation of chess in the four intervening decades, for which I suppose (reluctantly) we must thank former FIDE President Florencio Campomanes, because it was especially Arabic and Third World votes that kept him in power.

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The other great novelty was the opening codification devised by Yugoslav master, Rabar, although as we shall see below, this ultimately proved flawed and was replaced by the ECO system used today. Both systems used initial letters and variation numbers from 00-99 but in the Rabar system, there were only three initial letters instead of five. A substantial section at the back of the first volume explained the classification with diagrams and move sequences. Naturally 'E' was for most of the 1 e4 openings, starting with the French (E00-E09), Open games (E10-E19), Spanish (E20-E49), with the rest devoted to the Sicilian. Equally naturally, the initial 'D' was reserved for the various forms of the Queen's Gambit and most of the Queen's Pawn games and Indian systems. The remainder, the first subsection in *Informator*, were grouped under the letter 'R' (for remaining openings?). This included the Reti, English, Dutch and Benoni, i.e. mostly the openings that later appeared in the A volume of ECO, but some of the half-open games (Pirc and Caro-Kann, for example) came under the higher numbers of A.

One thing that was unpopular in Britain was their suggested English translation 'Chess Informant', because to native English speakers the word 'informant' does not have the neutral meaning 'something that provides information', which the Yugoslav editors probably found in their dictionary, to many people it has strong negative connotations such as police informer. Nevertheless, they continue to call themselves 'Chess Informant' on their website, which I find rather surprising. Most people preferred to refer to it, as I do here, by its Yugoslav name, *Informator*, although that is four syllables rather than three (all but the first stressed when spoken). Everyone in the chess world knows what that denotes.

A look at the first volume shows some surprises. Whereas volume 100 has 451 games, the first volume had 466 games! Notes, however, were extremely skimpy. Moves actually played were not distinguished in bold, as they are now. Annotators were unidentified (although they soon started to list them in the back). There are photographs of some players; we never see that later. Among the masters pictured were Petrosian (a full page at the front, since he was world champion), Forintos, Larsen, Tal, Uhlmann, and some Yugoslav masters.



In many ways, they started the way they meant to go on. Western players had to get used to unfamiliar spellings of Soviet names, not always authentic: 'Spaski', 'Petrosjan', 'Geler', 'Bronstejn', 'Korčnoj', 'Smislov', and 'Botvinik'. Accents and diacritic marks were included in names: accurate; we had to get used to that. Correspondence games were included, but there were no indications of the tournament in which these were played, and there is still none. Players were identified only by surnames; that is still the case except where there is more than one known player of the same name. Game 167 in volume 1 was Estrin-Nun. This was the Czech master Josef Nun, but there was also a Jiri Nun (not to mention John Nunn, whom some may have guessed at given those Russian transliterations with the second consonant dropped). So I give a black mark to *Informator* there.

Yakov Estrin – Josef Nun

5th Correspondence Olympiad, 1965
Two Knights Defence [C57]
[*Informator* 1/167]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 Bc5!? 5 Nxf7

A decade later, Estrin preferred 5 Bxf7+ against the same opponent and the game was drawn.

5...Bxf2+ 6 Kf1

Playing for a win (or a loss). *Informator* gave the variation 6 Kxf2 Nxe4+ 7 Kg1! Qh4 8 g3 Nxe3=.

6...Qe7 7 Nxe8 d5 8 exd5 Nd4 9 h3 Bg3 10 c3



10...Nf5

Informator gave this a !? but ?! (“dubious”) would be more accurate.

They pointed out 10...Ng4? 11 cxd4 e4 12 Ke2! Nf2 13 Qa4+ Bd7 14 Bb5 Nxe1 15 Bxd7+ Qxd7 16 Qxd7+ Kxd7 17 Nf7 Rf8 18 Ne5+ saying plus over equals, which when we were students at Oxford, my friends used to describe as ‘large

toasting fork to White’. (Equals over plus would be ‘small toasting fork to Black’.) Actually White is completely winning here.

11 d4

No alternative was given here, or in Estrin’s 1973 monograph on the Traxler (in Bulgarian). He used to play this line with either colour: 11 Qa4 + Bd7 12 Bb5 Qc5 13 Bxd7+ Nxd7 14 Ke2 Qxd5 15 Rg1 e4 16 d4 exd3+ 17 Kd1 Bf2 18 Rf1 Qxg2 19 Rxf2 Qg1+ 20 Kd2 Qxf2+ 21 Kxd3 0–0–0 and Black won in Kurkin-Estrin, Moscow 1966.

11...Bd7 12 Qe2?



Informator gave 12 Bg5! Qf8 saying it was unclear; in this wild variation, it is hard to be sure of anything without practical tests. Nobody seems to have tried 12 Bg5 but 12 d6 has been played several times. Your computer may tell you White stands well after 12...Nxd6 13 Qf3 Nxc4 14 Qxg3 0-0-0 15 Qe1 e4, but White, despite his temporarily large material advantage, has zero development and computers often

misjudge such positions.

12...Bh2! 13 Kf2 Ng3 14 Qe1 Nfe4+ 15 Kf3

Informator gave 15 Ke3 Nxe1 16 Qxe1 exd4+ 17 Kf3 Qf6+ 18 Kxe4 Bf5 + 19 Kf3 Bd3+ 20 Kg4 h5+ 21 Kxe5 g6+ 22 Kh6 Qh4+ 23 Kg7 Be5+ 24 Kg8 Ke7#.

15...Nd2+! 16 Nxd2

Informator had no note here. If 16 Qxd2 Qf6+ 17 Qf4 exf4 18 Rxe2 g5.

16...Qf6+ 0–1

Two other things are very noticeable when comparing the first volume to the hundredth. One is that in the early volumes, game fragments are not given in notes; there are only suggested moves and symbols. Subsidiary references to game fragments appeared for the first time in volume 15. Before that there were some references to the volume and game numbers of previously published games; this was useful to orient readers in the opening stage. The subsidiary games were a good way of increasing the amount of information on opening ideas, as it was not unusual for an interesting novelty to be played in a game marred later by mistakes or dull play.

The other thing I have noticed, with some annoyance, is that whereas all games (except those in notes) used to be given complete, in recent years they have taken to truncating many of the main games, for example numbers 295-301 inclusive in *Informator 100* are all without their conclusions. This 'feature' (though I would rather call it a 'bug') began as soon as Krnic took over in volume 71, so it was evidently his idea. I think this is a very bad feature of *Informator*. Perhaps if they did not do this, the volumes would contain fewer games, but I don't really understand the thinking of including something as a main game if it is not to be given complete.

Do they think everyone is downloading the complete game from somewhere? If so, I think they are mistaken. Occasionally I have obtained the complete record of correspondence games that were included as fragments in *Informator*, or found the finish as originally published differed from what *Informator* gave. It should always be a fundamental principle, as it was in Matanovic's day, that one can tell what moves were played and what is analysis.

Team Ojeh – Team Nataf

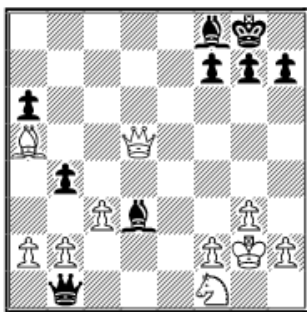
SMS-match France, 2002-3

Spanish Marshall [C89]

[*Informator* 89/319]

This was one of two experimental correspondence games between teams of French OTB masters, played by SMS text messaging and publicised on a now defunct French Internet site. The games later appeared in volume 89.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Rxe5 c6 12 Re1 Bd6 13 d3?! Bf5 14 Qf3 Re8 15 Rxe8+ Qxe8 16 Nd2 Qe1+ 17 Nf1 Bg6 18 g3 b4!N 19 Bxd5 cxd5 20 Qxd5 Rd8!= 21 Bg5 Qxa1 22 Bxd8 Bf8 23 Ba5 Qb1! 24 Kg2 Bxd3



25 Qa8

The finish here is as on the French website. Strangely Nataf gives a different finish in *Informator*: 25 Nd2 Qc2! 26 Qa8 Qxd2 27 Bxb4 h5! 28 Qxf8 + Kh7 29 Qxf7 Qe2 30 Qf4 Qf1+ 31 Kf3 Qe2+ 32 Kg2 Qf1+ 33 Kf3 Qe2+ 34 Kg2 Qf1+.

25...h5 26 Qxf8+ Kh7 27 Qxf7 Qxf1+ 28 Kf3 Qe2+ 29 Kg2 Qf1+ 30 Kf3 Qe2+ 31 Kg2 Qf1+ 1/2-1/2

To have one of your wins published in *ECO* was prestigious. Two of my games appeared: one over-the-board and one by post (in *Informators* 17 and 25 respectively). After that I never had any urge to try to get more games published. Here they are, with minimal notes.

N. J. Holloway – Tim Harding

Cambridgeshire v Kent, Charlton 1974

Dutch Defence [A84]

1 c4

This game was also published in *Chess* (March 1974). Keene annotated in *Informator 17* using some of my comments; he said he liked the play all over the board. It was certainly a very complex struggle that I shall not attempt to re-analyse.

1...g6 2 Nf3 Bg7 3 g3 d6 4 d4 f5 5 Bg2 Nh6!?

The Leningrad Dutch was not well known in England in those days, and this idea of Basman's was even less so.

6 Nc3 c6 7 0-0 0-0 8 e4 Na6 9 Re1 Nf7 10 Be3 Kh8 11 Rcl fxe4 12 Nxe4



12...Qa5!?

Basman's idea was ...d5 in such positions, fixing d4.

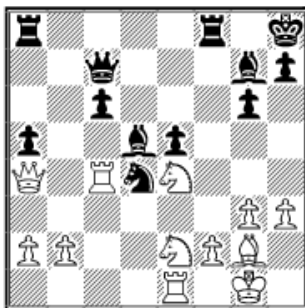
13 Nc3 Qh5 14 Ne2? e5 15 dxe5 dxe5 16 Nd2 Ng5! 17 Bxg5 Qxg5 18 Ne4 Qe7 19 Qc2?

Now I can pin his blockading knight and start to get excellent piece play.

19...Bf5 20 Rcd1 Nc5 21 N2c3 Ne6 22 Qa4 Nd4 23 h3 a5!

Threatening ...b5 in some situations.

24 c5 Be6 25 Rd3 Qc7 26 Nd6 b6 27 Ne2 bxc5 28 Ne4 c4 29 Rc3 Bd5 30 Rxc4



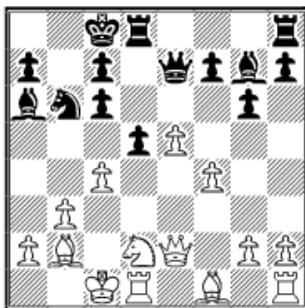
Trying to buy the white squares, but Black is not fooled.

30...Qf7 31 Nxd4 exd4 32 Rc2 Rae8 33 Qxa5 Qf5 34 g4 Qf4 35 f3 d3 36 Rd2 Bd4+ 37 Kh1 Bxe4 38 Rxe4 Rxe4 39 fxe4 Be5 0-1

Tim Harding – Gennady P. Zhivodov
ICCF master class EU/M/GT113 corr, 1976

Scotch Game [C45]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 c4 Ba6 9 Nd2 Nb6 10 b3 g6 11 Bb2 Bg7 12 0-0-0 0-0-0 13 f4 d5



This move had been recommended by GM Larry Evans, who said the continuation 14 exd6 Bxb2+ 15 Kxb2 Qxd6 gave Black 'a strong bind'. However I had been working with IM George Botterill on a Batsford book on the Scotch and he found 14 Qe3!. The book had not yet been published when this position arose in my game.

14 Qe3 dxc4 15 Bxc4! Bxc4

Now I was on my own. Botterill's analysis ended 15...Nxc4! 16 Qxa7.

16 Nxc4 Nxc4 17 bxc4

17 Qxa7? does not work here because of 17...Nb6.

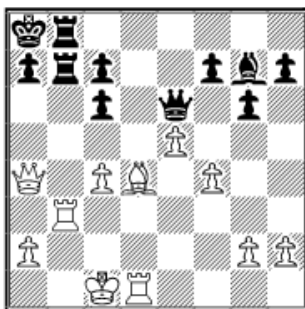
17...Kb7 18 Qb3+ Ka8 19 Bd4 Rb8 20 Qa4 Rb7 21 Rd3 Qe6

He should have preferred ...c5, but Black's position is miserable.

22 Rhd1

Fritz said at first that I should have played 22 Rb3, but there is no defence to this.

22...Rc8 23 Rb3 Rcb8



24 Bxa7 1-0

It always felt good in those days to beat a Russian.

ECO also published FIDE rating lists, a practice that has been discontinued for some time, probably because the lists became too long and the Internet is a better way of making them available.

Looking at the early volumes, it can be

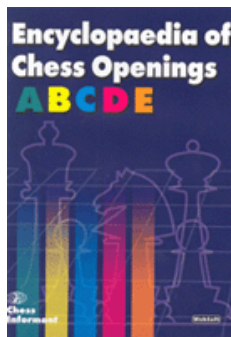
seen how few players had ratings in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Initially, *Informator* had no competitor, but in 1971 Tony Gillam of Nottingham launched *The Chess Player*, which concentrated on giving complete master tournaments and had more games from the West. The title was borrowed from a little magazine started in London by Kling and Horwitz in 1851. Gillam's periodical followed *Informator's* use of figurine algebraic and symbolic annotations, but did not use its opening code, perhaps because that might have been seen as a breach of copyright. *The Chess Player* (later *The New Chess Player*), also had openings articles. After these ceased, *Informator* held the field alone.

The volumes and depth of notes became bigger and bigger, until they were heavy and unwieldy. The thickest volume on my shelves is number 34 (1982), which had 745 games, but number 44 had 754 games. Perhaps around that time they began to think of publishing *Informator* more frequently. After fifty volumes, they switched to three volumes a year in 1991, which explains how 100 were produced in 42 years.

Statistical information on the back cover says they have published 101,033 games along with 3,128 combinations, 2,503 endings and 108 studies. The Sveshnikov Sicilian was the most popular opening variation: with 1,498 games in *ECO* code B33. They are now planning a book with the best ten games from each volume, including a 'golden' winner from each book.

In the early 1970s the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings* project began, and for this a new openings code system was launched. For several volumes, *Informator* ran the two side by side, and gradually switched over. This was done in stages. Volume 24 (1978) began the process, with the *ECO* codes as well as the old ones being mentioned at the head of most games, but the old sequence was maintained. For example, the French Defence and open games preceded, not followed, the Sicilians. For example, in *Informator* 29 and 30 (1980), the order of



openings was according to the *ECO* system, but *ECO* codes were printed in roman type in parentheses; the old Rabar codes followed in bold type. In volume 31 (1981) the new sequence of openings was followed. *ECO* codes were now primary and printed in bold type, but the Rabar codes, although now in parentheses, did not disappear for a while. Volume 39 in 1985 was the last issue to carry them. The new system was used exclusively from number 40, which celebrated twenty years of publication by including 773 games.

In the pre-ChessBase era, when *Informator* was the best reference work for both opening ideas and opponents' opening preferences, bringing them to tournaments was a back-breaking exercise. Some members of the

1984 Irish Olympiad team shared the weight of lugging several volumes to Greece. I did not carry any. Already in 1983, before ChessBase, I was beginning to use a computer to compile files on the opening variations I played; carrying printouts of those files was much easier than heavy books.

Informator faced a crisis in the years of the Yugoslav civil war and the sanctions on trade with Serbia in the mid-1990s. Somehow they managed to continue; probably they were providing too big a service to the chess world for anyone to want it to stop.

One procedure that has worked unevenly for *Informator* over the years is their way of collecting and selecting games. Of course they include the best of top-level grandmaster chess, but these games are widely available from other sources. Therefore it is important for them to have good-quality notes to those games, and to select the best of the rest of chess played around the world in each four-month period. I am far from convinced they do this. They rely on games submitted by national agents, some of whom (notably their Brazilian contact) seem to see this as a licence to send in their own games. They certainly do not, and never have included the best of correspondence play. Occasionally there is a game by a 2600+ rated correspondence grandmaster, but most of the ones that do get into print are of no special merit. In the years when I was publishing a specialist correspondence chess magazine, *Chess Mail*, we annually published maybe fifty games that were of higher quality and had more important opening novelties than almost any of the correspondence games in *Informator*.

Informator always has been, and always will be, a publication for advanced players. Novices and average club or tournament players need verbal explanations of the critical points in games, and they do not need sophisticated openings innovations at move twenty, as a rule. How much longer the advanced players will continue to need such a journal, I cannot guess. At the end of the 1990s, *Informator* and *ECO* had to enter the electronic publishing market, with e-books. Few people wanted heavy printed *ECOs* any more and people did not want to have to key all the games that interested them into ChessBase; they wanted to get the games on disk or as a download. They now have a very wide range of electronic and print publications. In the U.S. these are exclusively sold through USCFSales.com.

Personally, having completed my set of the first hundred, I was seriously thinking of cancelling my subscription, but I shall probably keep it on a while longer in case I decide to make a come-back when I am qualified to play in senior events. I have a lurking feeling that I shall then find it indispensable. You can find out more about the company and its work on its [website](http://www.informator.com).

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