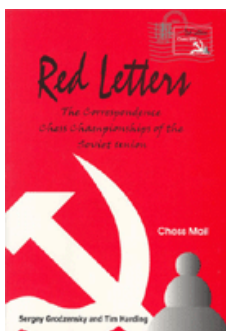




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Vasily Smyslov, The Career of a World Champion

Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov, who was world chess champion from 27 April 1957 to 8 May 1958, died on 27 March 2010, aged 89. Although he played three matches for the world championship in the 1950s, he is probably much less remembered by the chess world than Mikhail Tal, who was also champion for just one year, or David Bronstein, who tied the only championship match he played. The younger generation of chess players is perhaps not aware of Smyslov at all, or only because of the rook endgame treatise he wrote with Grigory Levenfish, and perhaps because Smyslov had a remarkably long career, reaching the 1984 Candidates final, which he lost to the rising Kasparov.

I first heard of Smyslov when I was about thirteen and my parents brought me to a bookshop in Oxford after Christmas to spend a book token I had received as a present. There was no great selection of chess books on offer, and I had already made the mistake of buying Hoffer's *Chess* the previous time, so I went for the most advanced-looking book on offer. This was *My Best Games of Chess 1935-57*, which Peter Clarke had translated for Routledge & Kegan Paul after Smyslov became world champion. It was based on Smyslov's 1952 Russian collection *Izbrannye Partii* ("Best Games"), which had sixty games played up to 1951, with some games dropped but more added. Clarke had Smyslov's permission to do this book, and he made use of the champion's own notes to the later games, as published in the magazine *Chess in the USSR*, and also began the book with an article about Smyslov's career by P. A. Romanovsky.



Vasily Smyslov

So I gradually played through the games in this book, although most of it was probably over my head. Smyslov's style and opening repertoire hardly influenced me at all, except that I did sometimes, over many years, play the Slav Defence with 5...Na6, one of Smyslov's patent lines. That was not because of the book but under the influence of a game I saw much later in a magazine.

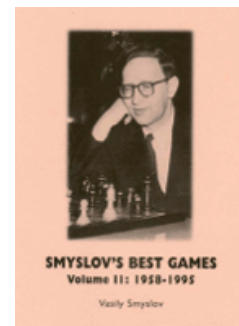
Julio Bolbochan - Vasily Smyslov

Mar del Plata 1966

Queen's Gambit, Slav Defence [D16]

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4 5 a4 Na6

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by Mikhail Botvinnik



[FEN "r1bqkb1r/pp2pppp/n1p2n2/8/P1pP4/2N2N2/1P2PPPP/R1BQKB1R w KQkq - 0 6"]

6 e3 Bg4 7 Bxc4 e6 8 0-0

If 8 Bxa6 bxa6 Black obtains the b-file and the bishop pair.

8...Nb4 9 Qe2 Be7 10 Rd1 0-0 11 h3 Bh5 12 Bb3 c5!

Black's typical freeing move in the Slav.

13 dxc5 Qa5 14 e4 Bxc5 15 e5 Nfd5 16 Ne4

According to Smyslov, White should have played 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 Bxd5 exd5 18 Be3.

16...Be7 17 Bd2 Rfd8 18 Ng3 Bg6 19 h4 h6 20 h5 Bh7 21 Qc4 Rac8 22 Qg4 Kh8 23 Rac1 Rxc1 24 Rxc1 Qb6



[FEN "3r3k/pp2bppb/1q2p2p/3nP2P/Pn4Q1/1B3NN1/1P1B1PP1/2R3K1 w - - 0 25"]

This threatens ...Nd3. White is obliged to give up the bishop-pair.

25 Bxd5 Nxd5 26 Qd4 Qb3 27 Qxa7 Qxb2 28 Qd4 Qxd4 29 Nxd4 Ba3!

Embarrassing for White, whose rook must leave the open file: if 30 Rc4 Bd3.

30 Re1 Nb4 31 Bc3 Nd3 32 Re2 Bc5 33 Nb5 b6 34 Rd2 Ra8 35 Ra2



[FEN "r6k/5ppb/1p2p2p/1Nb1P2P/P7/2Bn2N1/R4PP1/6K1 b - - 0 35"]

35...Nxf2! 36 Rxf2 Rxa4 37 Nd6 Rf4 38 Be1 Bd3 39 Nf1 Kg8 40 g3 Ra4 41 Kg2 Bxf2 42 Kxf2

The outcome of the combination at move thirty-five is that Black has a rook and two pawns (one of them passed) against two discoordinated knights. The opposite coloured bishops are not drawish in this situation.

42...b5 43 Nd2 b4 44 Ke3 Ra3 45 Kd4 Bc2 46 N2c4

46 Kc4 fails to 46...Re3 47 Bf2 Re2 winning a piece.

46...Rd3+ 47 Kc5 b3 48 Kc6

48 Kb4 b2 49 Nxb2 Rb3+.

48...Re3!

Again the bishop is a target; if now 49 Bf2 Rxe5 50 Nxe5 b2.

49 Bd2

49 Bf2 Rxe5 50 Nxe5 b2.

49...Rxb3 0-1

White resigns as his pawns are all falling: 50 Kd7 Bd1 51 Ke7 Bxb5.

In 1979 a new book by Smyslov appeared in Russian, *In Search of Harmony*, which included his personal memoir from which I have quoted in this article. Ken Neat translated it, with a few extra games, as *125 Selected Games*, published by Pergamon Press in 1983. The decision to change the meaningful title to one merely descriptive of the contents was not particularly inspired: did it sell more books, or fewer? I doubt if it would have sold at all but for the happy coincidence that it came out in the year of Smyslov's 'Indian summer', or maybe they rapidly commissioned a translation when he reached the Candidates?

Neither book has very detailed tactical annotations but the newer one is of course more revealing of Smyslov's thoughts than the first.

Smyslov was fortunate in that he was born (in Moscow on 24 March 1921), into a sector of the small but growing post-revolutionary Russian technocratic middleclass that was probably not greatly affected by the revolution. From his father, Vasily Osipovich Smyslov, who had once beaten Alekhine in a St. Petersburg club tournament game in 1912, he inherited a strong musical and chess culture, and a fine singing voice. His father had a chess library of at least a hundred titles, so until he was fourteen he developed his chess skills just by playing with his father, receiving odds until he reached level standing, and then by studying all the classics from Morphy to Nimzowitsch.

Smyslov's obituary in *The Times* says that he was awarded the grandmaster title in 1950 - but that was the first year of FIDE awards. He already reached that standard a decade earlier and in his autobiography he wrote, "I am glad that I became a grandmaster during my father's lifetime (he died in 1943) and he could see that his efforts had not been in vain". The Soviet *Chess Encyclopaedic Dictionary* does not confirm this claim, but his top results (such as Moscow champion 1942) during the difficult war years show that he could have been considered a grandmaster had things been normal then. He had tied first in the 1938 tournament for first category players and since there was no Candidate Master grade then, he was certainly a master by 1939.

His first endgame compositions were also published before the war and in 1957 he was awarded the FIDE title of Arbiter for Chess Composition; i.e., a judge of international endgame study competitions.

Study by V. V. Smyslov, 1938

Shakmaty v S.S.S.R. study competition, fourth prize
White to play and draw



[FEN "r7/4p3/7K/p4p1P/6pk/5Pp1/PB4P1/8 w - - 0 1"]

1 Bf6+! exf6 2 f4 Rh8+

2...Rb8, playing to promote the a-pawn, does not work because of White's own queening plan: 3 Kg6 Rb2 4 h6.

3 Kg7 Rxh5 4 a4 Rg5+

Of course the rook cannot be captured.

5 Kh8!

Not 5 Kh6 Rg8 and Black will win by promoting his a-pawn. But now the black R cannot escape the box and without the assistance of the blockaded K, it is impotent.

5...Rg6 6 Kh7 Kh5

The K tries to escape.

7 Kh8 Rh6+ 8 Kg7 Rg6+



[FEN "8/6K1/5pr1/p4p1k/P4Pp1/6p1/6P1/8 w - - 0 9"]

9 Kh8!

Black can make no progress because 9 Kh7? would lose to 9...Rg5!, when White has to play 10 Kh8 permitting 10...Kg6.

9...Kh6 ½-½

Stalemate. If instead 9...Rg5, then 10 Kh7 Rg6 11 Kh8 repeats the position.

There were very few tournaments for four years following the Absolute Championship of the USSR, in which Smyslov came third, because Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. Smyslov also won the title of Moscow Champion for 1943-44, finishing second behind Botvinnik who played *hors concours*.

After the war his opportunity for international play finally came and he was

one of the Soviet representatives in the great Groningen 1946 tournament and the 1948 Hague-Moscow world championship. The problem was that Smyslov was in effect understudy for Botvinnik and remained so throughout the 1940s and 1950s. A search of ChessBase's [Mega Database](#) 2009 finds 103 games played between the two men from 1940 and 1969. (I am not sure why ChessBase spell his first name "Vassily"; checking the Russian sources shows that there should be only one 's'.)

The database search shows Smyslov won sixteen and lost eleven with white, with twenty-six draws. When Botvinnik was white, there were twenty-six draws again, Botvinnik won eighteen but Smyslov won only six. It was not so much that Botvinnik was the greater player - his results were more uneven - but his more dynamic style and opening repertoire and his greater drive for success when he was really determined are probably what made the difference.

In the 1940s and in the 1950s the two Russian grandmasters also had to vie with the great Paul Keres who was at a serious disadvantage: he was Estonian and therefore less favoured by the Soviet establishment. He had a long run of second places in Candidates tournaments but Smyslov won two of them: the great Zurich tournament of 1953 and then again in 1956.

There is a bit of a mystery, however, about why Smyslov was eclipsed in the period 1949-52 when Bronstein and Boleslavsky emerged as the top challengers for the world title. Perhaps he put too much of his energies and time into his singing lessons, which he began in 1948. In the 1950 Candidates, Smyslov finished only third behind them; Bronstein won the play-off match and then famously failed only by the narrowest margin to vanquish Botvinnik in 1951. Smyslov would never have squandered the endgame opportunities as Bronstein did on that occasion; endings were arguably the area in which he was superior to Botvinnik.

The 1954 world championship match saw the younger man overawed at the start. Botvinnik won the first two games and also the fourth, so it seemed all over, but this was a match for the best of twenty-four games so there was time to fight back. After three successive wins in games nine through eleven, Smyslov was actually a point ahead but Botvinnik had white in game twelve to square things up at the half-way stage. Twice more Botvinnik took the lead and Smyslov clawed it back, with the fourteenth game being of particular interest for the two players' differing approaches to opening preparation, as Smyslov pointed out. Whereas Botvinnik studied his opponents' preferences and prepared to play the man, Smyslov was more inclined to play the board.

Mikhail Botvinnik - Vasily Smyslov

World Championship (14), Moscow 1954
King's Indian Defence [E68]

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 0-0 5 Nc3 d6 6 Nf3 Nbd7 7 0-0 e5 8 e4 c6

This position had occurred in games between Botvinnik and Bronstein so Smyslov studied it. Usually 9 d5 or 9 h3 had been the reply.

9 Be3

This move was prepared by Botvinnik in training, but Smyslov had anticipated it and found the refutation in advance.

9...Ng4 10 Bg5 Qb6 11 h3



[FEN "r1b2rk1/pp1n1pbp/1qpp2p1/4p1B1/2PPP1n1/2N2NPP/PP3PB1/R2Q1RK1 b - - 0 11"]

11...exd4!

Smyslov improves upon 11...Ngf6, which had been played in a 1952 Soviet master game.

12 Na4

The black N has no good retreat but Smyslov had found a tactical solution, involving an exchange sacrifice.

12...Qa6 13 hxcg4 b5! 14 Nxd4

If 14 Be7 Re8 15 Bxd6 bxa4 16 Nxd4 Ne5 or 14 cxb5 cxb5 15 Nxd4 bxa4 16 e5 Bb7.

14...bxa4 15 Nxc6

White has no time to consolidate so takes the material on offer.

15...Qxc6 16 e5 Qxc4 17 Bxa8 Nxe5

This central posting for the N was Black's key objective.

18 Rc1

18 Qxd6 was another possibility; in the Clarke book, 18...Be6 is given as the reply, but in Smyslov's later book he gives 18...Qxg4 "with dangerous threats on the kingside", while if; 18 Be7 Bxg4 19 Qd5 Re8 The Clarke book gave 19...Qc8. 20 Bxd6 Rd8 21 Qxc4 Nxc4 and one of White's bishops is lost.

18...Qb4 19 a3 Qxb2 20 Qxa4 Bb7!



[FEN "B4rk1/pb3pbp/3p2p1/4n1B1/Q5P1/P5P1/1q3P2/2R2RK1 w - - 0 21"]

This eliminates White's main kingside defender, and in reply Botvinnik makes a serious error.

21 Rb1?

21 Bxb7 Qxb7 22 Rc3! h6 23 Bf4 Nf3+ 24 Rxf3 Qxf3 25 Bxd6 Rd8 26 Bc5

and "the game is almost level" says Smyslov's book.

21...Nf3+ 22 Kh1 Bxa8!

Black now obtains three minor pieces for the queen - a winning advantage here as the white king is exposed.

23 Rxb2 Nxb5+ 24 Kh2 Nf3+ 25 Kh3 Bxb2



[FEN "b4rk1/p4p1p/3p2p1/8/Q5P1/P4nPK/1b3P2/5R2 w - - 0 26"]

26 Qxa7 Be4 27 a4 Kg7 28 Rd1 Be5 29 Qe7 Rc8! 30 a5

30 Rxd6 fails to 30...Rc1 and mates.

30...Rc2 31 Kg2 Nd4+ 32 Kf1 Bf3 33 Rb1 Nc6 0-1

However, it was only in Game Twenty-three that scores were restored to level. Botvinnik had White in the last game, which was drawn in twenty-two moves, Smyslov clearly deciding to settle for the honour of a tie with Botvinnik retaining his title again. It was a disappointment after his great fight-back but in his book Smyslov wrote: "this result convinced me that I was capable of winning the chess crown".

In the 1956 Amsterdam Candidates tournament, there were ten players, to be met once each with white and black. The only real threat to Smyslov would come from his Soviet rivals. Szabó (Hungary), Filip (Czechoslovakia), Panno and Pilnik were there to make up numbers. Smyslov was able to beat the dangerous tactician Geller twice; only Spassky won a game against him. With Keres, Petrosian and Szabó he made two draws each, while against Bronstein, Filip and the Argentines he made one win and one draw. It was enough, but only just. With three rounds to go he was level with Keres in the lead, with Geller and Bronstein chasing while Spassky and Petrosian were a full point behind. At this point Smyslov scored his crucial win against Bronstein, which he followed with a draw against Spassky and then the win against Pilnik.

The following game was not included in Clarke's book but is Game 48 in the later collection.

Vasily Smyslov – David Bronstein

Candidates Tournament (16), Amsterdam 1956
English Opening [A34]

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 Nc6 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 Nc3 Nf6

Because of the decisive importance of the game, both players (Smyslov wrote) aim for a complicated struggle from the very start.

7 0-0 e6 8 b3 Be7 9 Bb2 0-0 10 Rc1 Qa5 11 Na4 Rd8 12 Qc2 Nb4 13 Qb1 Nfd5 14 a3 Na6 15 e4 Nf6 16 Bc3 Qb5 17 Rfd1 c4



[FEN "r1br2k1/pp2bPPP/n3pn2/1q6/N1p1P3/
PPB2NP1/3P1PBP/1QRR2K1 w - - 0 18"]

"An ingenious defence. Black sacrifices the pawn that has been causing him trouble, and obtains counter-play. The retreat of the queen to e8 would have been too passive."

18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Rxc4 Qa5 20 e5! Be7

20...Bxe5 21 Nxe5 Qxe5 22 Rxc8 Raxc8 23 Bxb7.

21 Nc3 Bd7

Smyslov analysed the alternatives:

a) 21...Qxa3 22 Ne4 Qa5 23 Neg5 g6 24 Rh4 Bxg5 25 Nxg5 Qxe5 26 Nxf7! Kxf7 27 Rxh7+ Kf6 28 Re1 and Black has no defence.

b) 21...Bxa3 22 Ra4 Qc5 23 Ne4 Qe7 24 Nfg5 also with a very strong attack.

22 b4

Retaining the initiative is more important than the pawn.

22...Qxa3 23 b5 Nb4 24 Ng5 Bxg5 25 Qxb4 Qxb4 26 Rxb4

White has a superior ending, his spatial advantage and commanding bishop being the key factors.

26...Be8 27 d4 Rac8 28 Rb3 b6 29 d5 exd5 30 Nxd5 Kf8 31 Ra1



[FEN "2rrbk2/p4PPP/1p6/1P1NP1b1/
8/1R4P1/5PBP/R5K1 b - - 0 31"]

31...Bd2?

31...Rc1+ 32 Rxc1 Bxc1 was the correct defence. The next few moves, according to Smyslov, were played in a severe time scramble.

32 e6! Bg5

If 32...fxe6 33 Rf3+ Bf7 34 Rxa7 or 32...Rd6 33 e7+ Kg8 34 Rd3 Ba5 35 Nf6 + Rxf6 36 Rd8 and wins.

33 h4 fxe6

33...Bf6 34 Rxa7 fxe6 35 Nxf6 gxf6 36 Rxh7.

34 Rf3+ Kg8 35 Bh3 Bd7 36 Rxa7 exd5 37 Rxd7 Bf6 38 Be6+ Kf8 39 Rf7+ Ke8 40 Rb7 Rc1+

Black has made the time control but 40...Rb8 might have given better drawing chances: 41 Rxb8 Rxb8 42 Bxd5 when bishops of opposite colours give more hope of salvation after the exchange of one pair of rooks.

41 Kg2

Smyslov wrapped up the point in the second session of play:

41...Rd6 42 Bf5 g6 43 Bd3

Black has weak pawns and cannot preserve material equality much longer.

43...Be7 44 Re3 Rd7 45 Rxb6 d4 46 Rf3 Bd6 47 Ra6 Ke7 48 Ra8 Bc5 49 Rh8 Kd6 50 Rc8 Kd5 51 h5



[FEN "2R5/3r3p/6p1/1Pbk3P/3p4/3B1RP1/5PK1/2r5 b - - 0 51"]

51...Rc3

If 51...gxh5 52 Rf5+ Kd6 53 Rc6+ or 51...Rd6 52 Rc7.

52 hxg6 hxg6 53 Rc6 Rb7 54 Rxg6 Rxd3 55 Rxd3 Kc4 56 Rd1 d3 57 Rc1+ 1-0

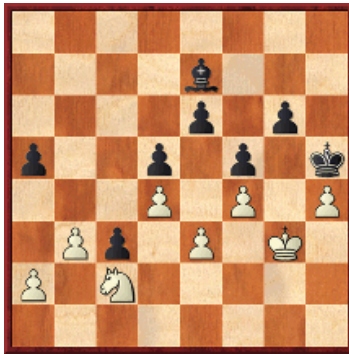


Smyslov - Botvinnik

In 1957, Smyslov took the lead with the first game and the only time in the match he fell behind was after game five, after which he immediately restored parity. In Game Eight, Smyslov took the lead and never relinquished it. There were thirteen draws in this match of twenty-two games, with Smyslov showing the depth of his endgame play in Game Seventeen, which restored his two-point advantage.

Mikhail Botvinnik - Vasily Smyslov
World Championship (17), Moscow 1957

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 g3 g6 3 c4 c6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 d4 0-0 6 Nc3 d5 7 cxd5 cxd5 8 Ne5
b6 9 Bg5 Bb7 10 Bxf6 Bxf6 11 0-0 e6 12 f4 Bg7 13 Rc1 f6 14 Nf3 Nc6 15
e3 Qd7 16 Qe2 Na5 17 h4 Nc4 18 Bh3 Nd6 19 Kh2 a5 20 Rfe1 b5 21 Nd1
b4 22 Nf2 Ba6 23 Qd1 Rfc8 24 Rxc8+ Rxc8 25 Bf1 Bxf1 26 Rxf1 Qc6 27
Nd3 Qc2+ 28 Qxc2 Rxc2+ 29 Rf2 Rxf2+ 30 Nxf2 Nc4 31 Nd1 Kf7 32 b3
Nd6 33 Kg2 h5 34 Kh3 Ne4 35 g4 hxg4+ 36 Kxg4 f5+ 37 Kh3 Bf6 38 Ne1
Kg7 39 Nd3 Nc3 40 Nxc3 bxc3 41 Ne1 Kh6 42 Nc2 Be7 43 Kg3 Kh5



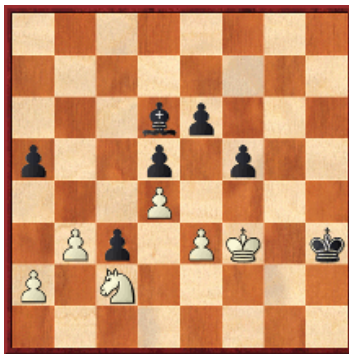
[FEN "8/4b3/4p1p1/p2p1p1k/
3P1P1P/1Pp1P1K1/P1N5/8 w - - 0 44"]

In the introduction to his book, Smyslov writes that Black's chances are better because he is winning the h-pawn and the passed c-pawn restricts the defending knight. White must try to achieve a blockade.

44 Kf3 Kxh4 45 Ne1 g5 46 fxg5 Kxg5 47 Nc2 Bd6 48 Ne1

Waiting, but Smyslov was more worried about White creating his own passed pawn by 48 a3 Kh4 49 b4 a4 50 b5 Bc7 51 Ne1 with fair drawing chances.

48...Kh4 49 Nc2 Kh3



[FEN "8/8/3bp3/p2p1p2/3P4/
1Pp1PK1k/P1N5/8 w - - 0 50"]

50 Na1

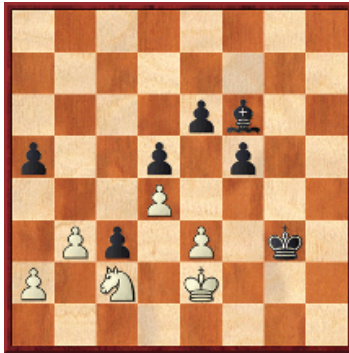
50 a3 Kh2 51 Kf2 Be7 52 b4 axb4 53 axb4 Bh4+ 54 Kf3 Kg1 55 Ke2 Kg2 and as in the game Black makes progress with his king, putting the defender in a critical situation.

50...Kh2 51 Kf2 Bg3+ 52 Kf3 Bh4!



[FEN "8/8/4p3/p2p1p2/3P3b/
1Pp1PK2/P6k/N7 w - - 0 53"]

53 Nc2 Kg1 54 Ke2 Kg2 55 Na1 Be7 56 Nc2 Kg3 57 Ne1 Bd8 58 Nc2 Bf6



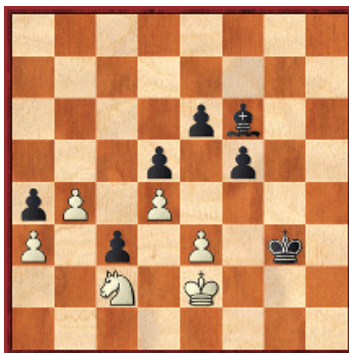
[FEN "8/8/4pb2/p2p1p2/3P4/
1Pp1P1k1/P1N1K3/8 w - - 0 59"]

White is in zugzwang, since if the knight retreats Black has ...f4 while if 59 Kd3 Kf2 60 Na1 Ke1 61 Nc2+ Kd1 62 Na1 Be7 63 Nc2 Bd6 64 Na1 Kc1 65 Kxc3 Bb4+ 66 Kd3 Kb2 67 Nc2 Kxa2 The king reaches the end of his journey and forces the win, thanks to his a-pawn.

59 a3 Be7 60 b4

60 a4 Bd6 61 Ne1 e5 62 dxe5 Bxe5 63 Nc2 when Smyslov demonstrated the elegant solution (or 63 Kd3 d4 also creating a very dangerous passed f-pawn.) 63...d4! 64 exd4 Bd6 65 Ne3 f4 66 Nf5+ Kg4 67 Nxd6 f3+ and one pawn or the other must queen.

60...a4 61 Ne1 Bg5 62 Nc2 Bf6



[FEN "8/8/4pb2/3p1p2/pP1P4/
P1p1P1k1/2N1K3/8 w - - 0 63"]

63 Kd3

It was zugzwang again. If the N moved then ...f5 while if 63 b5 Smyslov's book gives a very long winning variation beginning: 63...Bd8 64 Ne1 Ba5 65 Nc2 Kg4! 66 Ne1 Bc7 67 Nc2 Bb6 68 Nb4 f4 69 exf4 Bxd4.

63...Kf2 64 Na1 Bd8 65 Nc2 Bg5 66 b5 Bd8 67 Nb4 Bb6 68 Nc2 Ba5 69 Nb4 Ke1 0-1

White resigned, for if 70 Nc2+ Kd1 71 Na1 Kc1 while if 70 Kxc3 his N is in a self-pin and Black wins by 70...Ke2.

Smyslov reached +3 after twenty games. Botvinnik effectively resigned the match at that point. Two draws, of thirteen and eleven moves apiece, then led to the crowning of the new champion; Smyslov had won by the convincing margin of 12½-9½. Botvinnik, however, could look forward to a return match under the rules.

In 1958 the bad start of 1954 was repeated. Despite having white in the odd-numbered games, Smyslov went 0-3 down against a determined opponent. After that Smyslov could never get back to a better situation than -2, which was partly due to illness during the contest but probably mostly due to the two player's different motivation. Smyslov was content to have been world champion; Botvinnik was not content - and keenly wanted to be champion again.

A win in the eighteenth game put Botvinnik four ahead. This was an irretrievable situation, but a tie would have retained the title so Smyslov fought. As Botvinnik became cautious, the champion won the nineteenth and twenty-second games but it wasn't enough. Botvinnik won by 12½-10½.

Few expected Smyslov to show any interest in competing for the world championship in later years, but he tried. Tal, Petrosian, and Spassky came, held the title awhile, and then departed the scene. Geller eliminated Smyslov in 1965 with a 3-0 win (and five draws) in the new Candidates match-system. Yet in 1983 he was back, meeting Robert Huebner and drawing 7-7, after which a tie-break out Smyslov through. In the semi-final matches, played in London, Smyslov convincingly defeated Zoltan Ribli of Hungary. That was the second and last time I saw Smyslov play. Nobody expected him to overcome Kasparov in the final, and he could not win a game, but for a man who was almost sixty-three it was remarkable he had got so far.

The first time I saw Smyslov in action was in Monte Carlo in 1968, where he made a steady +4 in the grandmaster section, a typical Smyslov result for his later years. In the first round, played in a hotel because the Open events had not yet begun, Botvinnik had white and they played a fifteen-move draw. It seems the two champions only met seven times after their third match, and Smyslov never beat Botvinnik again. Five of these occasions being Soviet team events which were usually hard-fought; Botvinnik won two of them, perhaps because the team required an effort. Palma de Mallorca 1967 was the only other international tournament where they met, and that was a grandmaster draw too.

Once the Monte Carlo tournament really got under way, Smyslov beat the two French representatives (Zinser and Letzelter) who were far too weak for the company, and towards the end he beat Padevsky and Forintos in successive rounds. Few of the grandmasters made any real attempt to beat him (or vice versa); even Larsen (who was usually guaranteed to play for a win with White) agreed a draw in twenty-one moves. There was much respect, perhaps too much. Energy was better expended against somebody else; why disturb the sleeping lion?

Here is a game against a top grandmaster which the Russian encyclopaedia chose to illustrate Smyslov's later career.

Vasily Smyslov – Jan Timman

Moscow 1981

English Opening [A39]

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 g3 c5 4 Bg2 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Bg7 6 c4 Nc6 7 Nc3 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 0-0 9 0-0 d6 10 Qd3 Bf5 11 e4 Be6 12 b3 a6 13 Bb2 Nd7 14 Qd2! Nc5

14...Qa5 15 Rad1 Rfc8 would now lose a pawn after 16 Nd5! Qxd2 17 Nxe7+ Kf8 18 Bxg7+.

15 f4! Rc8?!

15...f5 16 exf5 Bxf5 was necessary, with an inferior but defensible position. Timman evidently had not foreseen White's seventeenth move.

16 f5 Bd7



[FEN "2rq1rk1/1p1bppbp/p2p2p1/2n2P2/2P1P3/1PN3P1/PB1Q2BP/R4RK1 w - - 0 17"]

17 f6! exf6

If 17...Bxf6 18 Rxf6! exf6 19 Nd5, and White seizes the key square f6 for his attack.

18 Nd5 f5 19 exf5 Bxf5 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Qd4+ f6 22 g4! Be6

If 22...Ne6, then 23 Qd1! wins the bishop.

23 Nxf6! Rxf6 24 g5+- Bf5 25 Rad1 b5 26 cxb5 axb5 27 gxf6+ Qxf6 28 Qxf6+ Kxf6 29 Rxd6+ Ne6 30 Rb6 Rc5 31 Re1 1-0

Black resigns as b3-b4 will win further material.



Vasily Smyslov

Nor was this the end of his career, as the database shows Smyslov still winning rated games as late as 2001, and playing in several of the Veterans versus Women matches.

Sofia Polgar - Vasily Smyslov

Schuhplattler Veterans vs Ladies, Munich 2000

Ruy Lopez [C60]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 g6 4 c3 a6 5 Bc4 d6 6 d4 Bg7 7 0-0 Qe7 8 dxe5 Nxe5 9 Nxe5 dxe5 10 b3 Nf6 11 Ba3 c5 12 Bd5 0-0 13 b4?!

This fails so 13 c4 would have been better.

13...Rd8! 14 bxc5 Nxe4



[FEN "r1br2k1/1p2qbp/p5p1/2PBp3/4n3/B1P5/P4PPP/RN1Q1RK1 w - - 0 15"]

15 c4

15 c6 looks strong at first sight but 15...Qc7 16 Qb3 Nf6! solves Black's difficulty; e.g., 17 cxb7 Bxb7 18 Bxb7 (18 Qxb7 Nxd5 19 Qxc7 Nxc7) 18...Rab8.

15...Qc7

Not 15...Nxc5? 16 Bxc5 Qxc5 17 Bxf7+ Kxf7 18 Qxd8 e4 19 Nd2 Bxa1 20 Nxe4.

16 Re1 Bf5!



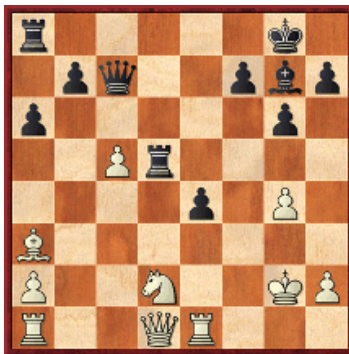
[FEN "r2r2k1/1pq2pbp/p5p1/2PBpb2/2P1n3/B7/P4PPP/RN1QR1K1 w - - 0 17"]

Now Black is ready to play ...Nxc5 so White tries for complications.

17 g4 Nxf2!

This well-judged piece sacrifice breaks open the centre and exposes the white king.

18 Kxf2 e4 19 Kg2 Be6 20 Nd2 Bxd5 21 cxd5 Rxd5



[FEN "r5k1/1pq2pbp/p5p1/2Pr4/4p1P1/B7/P2N2KP/R2QR3 w - - 0 22"]

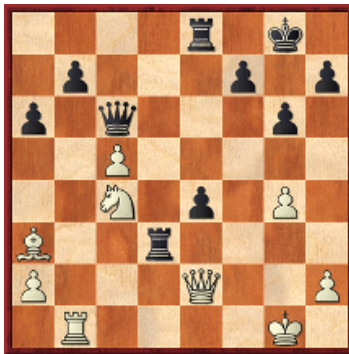
22 Qe2

Or 22 Rc1 Qf4 followed by ...Rad8 and then ...e3 or ...Be5 according to the reply.

22...Bxa1 23 Rxa1 Re8 24 Nc4

If 24 Nxe4 Rde5 25 Nf6+ Kh8 26 Qf3 Re2+ 27 Kf1 R8e3 and Black wins.

24...Rd3 25 Rb1 Qc6 26 Kg1



[FEN "4r1k1/1p3p1p/p1q3p1/2P5/2N1p1P1/B2r4/P3Q2P/1R4K1 b - - 0 26"]

26...Rxa3! 27 Nxa3 Qxc5+ 28 Qf2 e3 0-1

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