

Misha Interviews...

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Interview with Yuri Drozdovsky

Yuri Drozdovsky. Born in Odessa, Ukraine, on 22 May 1984. Became FIDE Master at age of 12. Now - International Master. European Junior Champion in 1996 and 1997.

Yuri Drozdovsky made an impact quite early in his chess career - in 1996 and 1997 he won two consecutive European championship titles - a remarkable achievement repeated only by Teimour Radjabov. However, winning these championships did not fully convince the young Ukrainian to become a chess professional. Our meeting took place a few days before the New Year's celebration and we talked about Yuri's career and the difficult choices that any young sportsman has to make.



MS: Yuri, when you learned the rules of chess how old were you?

YD: I was already 6. It is considered a bit late to begin at 6 these days! The initiative to teach me belonged to my elder brother. By the way, he quit chess right after I started - perhaps his mission was accomplished! After that I woke up early every morning and played chess on my own. Upon noticing such shocking things, my parents had to bring me to the chess school.

MS: You did not have any competition at home?

YD: No, of all my family only my father could play - on an ordinary amateur level.

MS: What were your first impressions from the chess school?

YD: First of all, it turned out that my regular morning practice paid off - I already played at 4th category strength, the first official category given to each newcomer for beating 60% of other newcomers. My first teacher was Lyudmila Vassilyevna Vassilyeva. A brilliant pedagogue and psychologist, she could praise a winner and console a loser in a way that motivated both enormously to learn more about chess and apply it in practice.

Unfortunately, the reality of our epoch did not allow her to continue teaching. Back in the early 90s a chess instructor in Odessa earned about \$15 USD, and it was impossible to make a living. In principle, a teacher's situation is quite complicated today, too, but now there are more opportunities to give private lessons.

MS: In a resort city like Odessa it must be difficult for a child to stay concentrated on chess? Beaches, football, basketball and such distracted many of the chess fellows of my youth...

YD: Personally I never experienced such problems. I was totally obsessed by chess. Every spare minute I had was spent at the board or with my first chess book.

MS: What was that?

YD: It was *Chess Encyclopedia* – a thick and expensive (15 rubles!) volume that contained brief biographies and sample games of all the outstanding players. I played the games over and over...

MS: OK, so what happened after your first teacher left the school?



1996, versus Gagunashvili (r)

YD: I was assigned to a new one when I was 8. Igor Iosifovich Trimbashvsky taught me most of the things I know. He is an extraordinary trainer. Two of his pupils, Tishin and Baranyuk, were successful in European competitions, the latter succeeded in the "under 7" age group (!). He can be a difficult person, but I have no doubt that his future pupils will be no less successful than we were.

MS: When did you start playing competitive international chess?

YD: In 1996 I qualified for the Ukrainian U12 championship final. In the first two rounds I scored a half-point, meeting, to put it mildly, not the

strongest possible opposition. After the slow start I bolstered myself and conducted a decent tournament middlegame and endgame. The final silver medal made me eligible for the European championship. During the last days of that event my trainer Trimbashvsky did not feel well. The emergency doctors did not find anything serious and said it's just a cold. Igor Iosifovich returned home from the train station and decided to visit a local hospital for a second opinion, because he still felt unwell. He stayed there for quite some time! That's the effect of a pupil's irregular performance; do not believe those who say that being a trainer is a safe business.

MS: After that unfortunate accident you began to collaborate with another teacher, right?

YD: After the Ukrainian championship Trimbashvsky said that he had taught me everything he knew, and recommended another man. I prepared for the European championship with Alexander Albertovich Pichugin. He is one of the best trainers in Odessa, an International Master.

Anyway, the European Junior championship in Slovakia was my first serious chess tournament abroad. My result was "not too bad for the first time", as one of my colleagues put it. I finished first. Three of my competitors have already become grandmasters: Naiditsch, Riazantsev, and Miton. Three others are IMs: Smeets, S. Gashimov, and Matyushin.

The following year, in Estonia, I managed to repeat my success, winning the U14 European championship. Future GMs Roiz, Izoria and Zubov were among my chief rivals for the title. In the second round I lost to the Russian Sergey Grigoriants, which is not a good way to start a 9-round Swiss. However, my 6 consecutive wins in rounds 3-8 allowed me to secure first place with a draw in the final round.

By the way, before that nobody was able to win two European championships in a row, so my second title was a serious achievement.

MS: Did you compete for a third one in 1998?

YD: In Austria, 1998, I made a good start - 4 out of 4, then 5 out of 6. Maybe it is better for me to record a loss somewhere in the beginning of the tourney? In round 7, I lost to my fellow Ukrainian Efimenko, and drew with Riazantsev (who actually won the championship on tie-break) from Russia in the 8th, and then again lost a decisive game with the Georgian Izoria.

As for World junior events, I participated in the U14 in 1997 and 1998, and finished among the top 10 in both.

MS: After you became European champion, did you notice any "magic-of-the-title" factor affecting your opponents' performances against you?

YD: Well, people certainly know who you are, and they're affected, but it works both ways. One may feel doomed from the start and lose without much of a struggle, but another only becomes more concentrated and motivated.

MS: It seems as if the Ukraine is experiencing something of a chess boom - there are so many strong grandmasters now, one even won the FIDE championship title! Have you met all of them at the board?

YD: As for Ponomariov, our first encounter was in the 1995 Ukrainian U12 championship. I had an easily won position with an extra exchange plus a passed pawn, but went into time trouble for no particular reason and misplayed it so badly that I even lost. Our next meeting took place in 1999, when he was a grandmaster about 300 ELO points above me, and I lost in 28 moves. In general, I have played all of the strongest young players from the Ukraine: Moiseenko, Eljanov, Korobov, Kovchan, Efimenko, Areschenko, and Zubov.



With Ponomariov

MS: A great number of young Ukrainian stars now live in Kramatorsk. What, in your opinion, makes them so successful? Is it great chess talent, or favorable conditions (training, etc) provided by local sponsors, or something else?

YD: Well, it is difficult to measure talent and expressing opinions on that is not ethical, I believe. However, it is obvious that one should not underestimate "conditions" in Kramatorsk. Primarily, they have more opportunities to take part in stronger tournaments. And all of them have something very important in common, namely; diligence and a remarkable capacity for work.

(Photo)

MS: I've heard you were just one step from the grandmaster title?

YD: In 2003 I finally made all the necessary norms, and my new rating in 2004 will meet the 2500 requirement (2508). So I've sent the documents and look forward to becoming a grandmaster soon!

MS: Tell us more about your last two tournaments, qualifying for a GM norm.

YD: They were annual "Autumn" tournaments in Alushta. The competition is quite strong, because many young Ukrainian players consider these tournaments as their only chance to fight for norms, since not everyone can afford the travel and living expenses in similar European events (like the First Saturday tournaments in Budapest). This autumn, by the way, I had to compete with two other IMs from Odessa - Tishin and Sumets.

For most of the first tournament I balanced between achieving a norm and missing it by a half point. A key game was the 7th round encounter with grandmaster Kovalev from Belarus. He is a well-known King's Indian specialist and I offered him a draw while playing White, but he declined, which strongly motivated me. I managed to squeeze the full point in an ending with Bishops of opposite color. Then after beating an outsider in the 9th round I was able secure a norm with draws in the last four games.

The second tournament also wasn't an easy task, as one needed to record a huge "+7" in 15 rounds for the norm. So even my starting with 6 out of 7 did not promise definite success. After I lost to Rogovski in the 13th round, the situation became critical. I was obliged to win my two final games. In round 14, I took the risk of changing what I usually play as Black. In the French Defense, a cornerstone of my opening repertoire, White has easy ways of equalizing the position; so I played a Philidor Defense and won a tense battle in 40 moves. In round 15, a remote passed pawn brought me a victory in 43 moves, and a second grandmaster norm!

MS: How would you describe your playing style?

YD: I guess it is "solid positional". Therefore, from time to time I produce results like +4 =7 as in a recent competition in Kiev. Perhaps such a playing style is more suitable for all-play-all events.

MS: Of the great masters of the past, whose games do you like most?

YD: I like the games of Botvinnik and Petrosian the most.

MS: Do you believe that chess style is affected by the personality of a player?

YD: Certainly, the style of play depends primarily on one's personality. And

it changes, following transformations in a person's character. It is very rare to find a cheerful, buoyant, active man who plays a strictly positional game, or a withdrawn, no-nonsense man playing daring attacking chess.

MS: Do you like chess and travel? Which countries have you played in so far?

YD: I mostly played in European countries: Spain, France, Switzerland, Austria, Greece, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Russia. It was especially appealing to visit Switzerland – really beautiful views and nice friendly people...



2002, Playing Mamedyarov (1)

MS: The intensity of chess competition increases swiftly. It is important now to start playing at age 4, and remain highly concentrated later on. I would like to talk about the tradeoffs that you experienced as a chess prodigy. How do you distribute your time between school, general activities, and chess?

YD: School is a problem for every young sportsman. In fact, at some point one has to make a choice to either:

1) leave school and keep a low profile communicating with friends in order to free more time for training. This approach narrows the mind, but contributes to a quick growth in chess strength. Such a person will *inevitably* become a very strong player, the only exception being if he or she is naturally unqualified for chess,

2) to continue ones education and develop alongside ones companions. In this case one has a wider range of interests and less time for chess training, thereby risking missing out on greater competitive successes.

I have chosen the latter path. Today I study psychology at the university. It is not my intention to become a professional sportsman. It would be more interesting to combine two of my "professions" - psychology and chess. It is

strange, but the psychology of chess remains a mostly unexplored area.

MS: What kind of psychological research in chess do you think about?

YD: Well, for instance, I consider classifying chess players by types. Each type has its own advantages and disadvantages, and it should be possible to exploit them in a game. There are also many other ideas...

MS: These days you are a regular at Internet chess. When did you start playing online, and what are your impressions of it?

YD: I have played online for about a year. It is mainly 3-minute blitz, with an increment of time added per move. It is important to have one or two extra seconds for a move in order to keep playing chess. Otherwise it would be a more flag-oriented game. I have defeated Short, Georgiev, Ulf Andersson, Volkov, McShane, Tregubov, Fressinet, Kharlov and other famous players – it is hard to recall everybody. I am glad to have a positive score against some of them. Internet blitz is not only an entertainment, but also a valuable opportunity to test and learn certain opening variations.

MS: Apart from chess and psychology, which may be considered your professions, what are your other favorite pastimes?

YD: I like books. Right now I read mostly modern Russian literature: Poliakov, Lipskerov, and Pelevin. My favorite is the classic *1984* by Orwell and my favorite movie is *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Football is another passion. Naturally, I support our local team (*Chernomorets Odessa*, which is currently number 5 in the Ukrainian league). As for major championships, I am a fan of *Chelsea FC* from London.

MS: I wonder if it has anything to do with the fact that "Chelsea" recently became a property of a Russian financial tycoon.

YD: (Laughs) No, indeed, I started to support "Chelsea" in the mid-90s. They always play attractive football, plus Zola, Vialli, Flå, Poyet and other wonderful players have shone for years, before Abramovich bought the club and so many superstars.

Also I am interested in betting on various sporting events. Therefore, I try following NBA games, although it is sort of a problem in the Ukraine because of the very limited coverage and the time difference. My favorite team is the Portland Trail Blazers.

MS: You are a young man living an active social life, meeting many people outside chess circles. My question is: what is their view of chessplayers'? What kind of a reputation does our sport have? For example, would you tell

your new girl friend that you are an International Master? We discussed similar issues with Olga Alexandrova some time ago and her opinion was quite pessimistic.

YD: Well, most people I've met consider professional chess players to be smart and educated. And girls, in general, also appreciate it. The critical thing is to avoid becoming "too smart", or esoteric. So, I see no real problem for chessplayers so far!

Yuri Drozdovsky Annotates

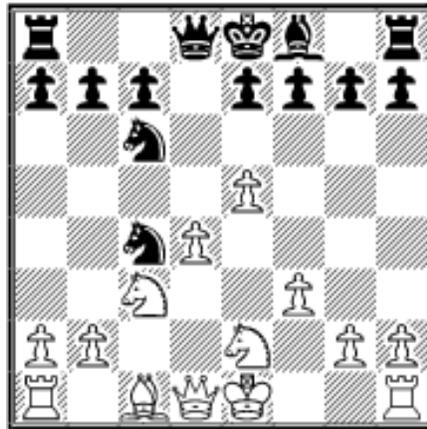
Kanep, M (2470) - Drozdovsky, Y (2455)

Queen's Gambit Accepted

Autumn I, Alushta UKR (6), 2003

This game was played in the 6th round of a GM-norm tournament in Alushta. My opponent is a young Estonian IM (born in 1983), who drew with two GMs in the first rounds, but scored only 1 out of 3 against other IMs. Naturally, he was in an aggressive mood.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e4 Nf6 4.e5 Nd5 5.Bxc4 Nb6 6.Bd3 Nc6 7.Ne2 Bg4 8.f3 Be6 9.Nbc3 Bc4 10.Bxc4 Nxc4



This occurred in the Ivanchuk - Ponomarev match for the FIDE title in 2001. Ivanchuk continued with 11.0-0, and restrained from any e5-e6 idea. It is also possible to play 11.Qb3 followed by 12.e6, as Volkov did against me in St.Petersburg, 2000, or to sacrifice a pawn right away.

11.e6 fxe6 12.0-0!

A more usual reaction is 12.Qb3 Nb6 13.Qxe6 Nxd4 14.Qe4 Nxe2 15.Kxe2!?, followed by 16.Rd1 with some compensation for the pawn, as in Volkov - Kharlov, 2000. However, I think that 12.0-0 is stronger.

12...Qd7

I decided to be principled and protect on e6, also preparing for castling long. 12...g6 13.Qb3 Nb6 14.Qxe6 Qd7 15.Qxd7+ Kxd7 16.d5 Nb4 17.Rd1 Bg7 18.a3 Na6 19.Be3 was played in Comas Fabrego - Markowski, Istanbul, 2003.

13.Qb3 Nb6 14.Be3 0-0-0 15.a4 Na5

On 15...Nd5 White plays 16.Ne4, and I must move the Knight to the edge with 16...Na5 anyway, since 16... Nxe3 is not an option in view of 17.Nc5.

16.Qc2 Nd5 17.Bf2 g6 18.Ne4 Bh6

This diagonal is more influential than the a1-h8 one.

19.Nc5 Qc6 20.Rfb1

20.b4 looks attractive: 20...Ne3 (of, course, not 20...Nxb4? 21.Qc3 Qb6 22.Rfb1) 21.Bxe3 Bxe3+ 22.Kh1 Bxd4? 23.Nxd4 Rxd4, and 24.bxa5? could be met by 24...b6, but White has the simple and strong intermediate move: 24.Qc3, winning. However, after 22...b6 the position remains approximately even.

20...b6 21.b4 Ne3 22.Qc3 Nd5 23.Qd3?!



Perhaps 23.Qe1! is stronger: 23...bxc5 24.bxa5 c4 25.Nc3, with the idea to bring the Knight to c5, pressuring Black's King. Another interesting idea is 25.Rb5.

23...bxc5 24.bxa5 c4 25.Qe4 Kd7

It is time to think about King safety.

26.Rb5 Rb8 27.Rc5?!

It was time to stop the direct attack and force positional gains: 27.Rab1! Rxb5 28.axb5 Qd6 29.Qc2 a6 30.Qxc4, with advantage for White. Now the tables begin to turn.

27...Qa6 28.Bg3 Rb7 29.Be5 Rhb8 30.f4 Rb3 31.h3 R8b4 32.Rc1 c6

I evaluate this position as much better for Black. In the next few moves White gambled on a direct attack via the e-file.

33.Re1 Ke8 34.Nc1 Rb1 35.Kh1 Ra1 36.Bg7!?

