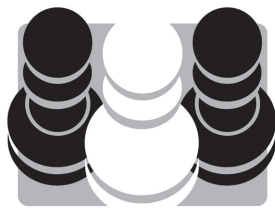


Boris Spassky's Best Games 1

By

Tibor Karolyi



Quality Chess
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Preface

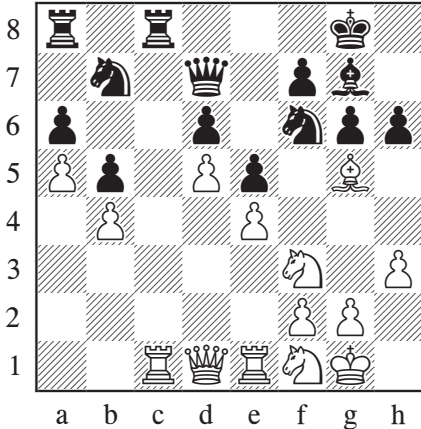
To become a World Champion is one of the most difficult things a person can achieve. In no field of human endeavour is this more true than it is for chess. After Wilhelm Steinitz became the first official World Champion in 1886, more than a hundred years passed with only twelve other players achieving the highest title in chess. My guess is that no other game or sport produced so few World Champions over such a timespan.

Few nations can boast of having a World Chess Champion. Those that can are rightly proud of them, and their inhabitants respect these champions a lot. Many of them are regarded as national heroes. In 1969, Boris Vasilievich Spassky became the latest in a long line of Soviet players who earned the highest title in chess, but he also became known as the World Champion who lost the country's title to Fischer, which came as such a blow to the pride of Russia as well as the wider Soviet Union. Thus, in my estimation Boris Spassky is the most underappreciated World Champion in all of chess history. I also believe playing style to be an important factor which affects the way that different champions are perceived by the chess public. Many World Champions had highly distinctive characteristics: Tal sacrificed wildly, Kasparov's dynamic attacks and opening preparation were lethal, Capablanca excelled at positional play, Botvinnik was a great strategist, Karpov is renowned for his endgame masterpieces, and so on. Spassky was a superb attacking player with a fluent and elegant style, but he never really became known as the ultimate paradigm of a particular style of chess in the way that many other World Champions did.

When I was analysing the games of my book *Fischer – Spassky 1972*, I came to appreciate what a great player Boris Spassky is. I hope that after reading my two books, the chess public will feel the same. There are some obvious game highlights that most players have already seen: for instance, Spassky's rook sacrifice against Larsen is one of the most famous combinations in the history of chess. However, Spassky also produced many gems which are nowhere near as well known as I think they deserve to be. Take the following example, which I did not find published in any other book about Spassky.

Boris Spassky – Ratmir Kholmov

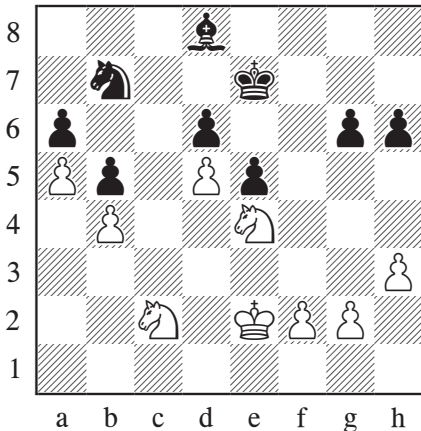
Yerevan 1962



23. ♖xf6!

Spassky begins a grand strategic concept with this surprising exchange.

Over the next twelve moves, Spassky systematically exchanged certain pieces until the following position was reached:



35. ♖a3!

The knight threatens to capture on b5, and Black has no good defence. Though I cannot be certain, I reckon Spassky visualized this stunning idea twelve moves earlier when he exchanged on f6 – and possibly even earlier,

when he placed his bishop on the g5-square.

You will, of course, find full details of this previously unnoticed masterpiece in this book, beginning on page 208.

How this Book Originated

My 2021 book *The Road to Reykjavik* documented Bobby Fischer's life and career up to the end of 1971. My next book, *Fischer – Spassky 1972*, covered the historic Reykjavik 1972 match, as well as the 1992 rematch, from both Fischer's and Spassky's perspectives. It therefore felt natural to begin *Fischer – Spassky 1972* with a proper introduction to Spassky. The problem was that I found so many brilliant games of his which I felt should be included, which meant that before I knew it, the "Introduction" on Spassky had grown far too big to include as part of the 1972 book. Fortunately, Quality Chess agreed with me that Spassky's beautiful games deserved to be treated as a separate project, which subsequently evolved into a two-volume work.

Overview of Spassky's Career

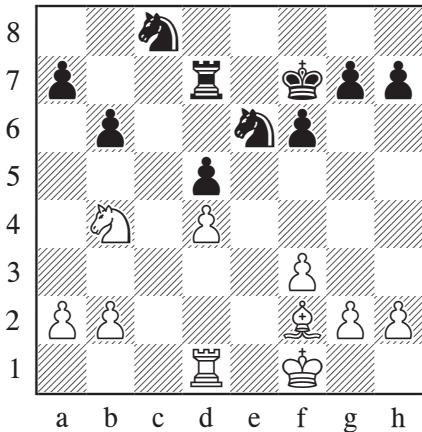
Although I have already written a book about it, I cannot discuss Spassky's unique career without touching on his 1972 World Championship match against Fischer. Played during the height of the Cold War, it attracted the greatest media attention of any event in all of chess history, as the representatives of the world's two superpowers clashed over the board. The extreme propaganda of the ruling communist party in the Soviet Union raised the stakes to an unprecedented degree. Fischer was under strain as well, but the pressure on the Soviet representative must have been even greater. Despite losing his title in Reykjavik, Spassky was the first World Champion to become truly wealthy through chess, as opposed to just financially comfortable.

After losing the world title, Spassky remained a top-ten player for two more decades. In these years he still produced some fantastic results, such as tying for first place with Karpov at the Bugojno super tournament of 1978. Spassky was overtaken in playing strength by younger stars like Karpov and later Kasparov, but he still produced more brilliant games than one might think.

In this book and the forthcoming companion volume, we will journey through Spassky's career, re-examining some well-known games but also enjoying many little-known masterpieces. One of the surprising things I discovered about Spassky's games is that he had a knack for making breathtaking knight manoeuvres, so you can look forward to some beautiful games in which he treated his knights brilliantly. The following position occurred against a great player in a Candidates semi-final match for the World Championship.

Lajos Portisch – Boris Spassky

Geneva (14) 1977



Would you believe that only nine moves later, the knight on c8 will land on b1, by which time Black will be winning? It happened without Portisch making any blunder or other glaring mistake. Full details can be found in the second volume.

This two-volume work covers Spassky's life and career, from childhood up until his last recorded game in 2009. It will include his World Championship matches of 1966 and 1969 (with minimal coverage of Reykjavik 1972, since I expect most readers will already have my book on that match), as well as Spassky's World Championship Candidates matches, Olympiad gold medals, Soviet Championship victories and many other ups and downs of his career.

By the way, Spassky is unique among the post-World War II World Champions, being the only one of them who did not publish at least one book of his selected games. Dear Reader, if you wish to learn more about an underappreciated World Champion and enjoy his amazing masterpieces, this biography of Boris Spassky is for you.

Tibor Karolyi
 Soltvadkert, Hungary
 July 2023



*Spassky analyses with Larsen at Beverwijk, 28 January 1967
See page 290 for the full game*

1955

Following his successful result in the semi-final towards the end of the previous year, Spassky took his place in the final of the Soviet Championship. The 1955 event was one of the strongest contests of all time. Botvinnik, Smyslov, Petrosian, Keres, Geller, Taimanov, Korchnoi and many other world-class players entered. Bronstein was the only Soviet chess star of the time who did not play. The national championship also functioned as the Soviet Zonal tournament, thus marking Spassky's first step in World Championship competition. This area of Spassky's career would last a total of thirty years, as his final World Championship event would be the 1985 Candidates tournament. Few players in chess history can rival Spassky's success or longevity at this level of competition. Spassky only turned eighteen a few weeks before the start of the championship but, despite his young age, I think he probably expected to be in contention for qualification to the Interzonal.

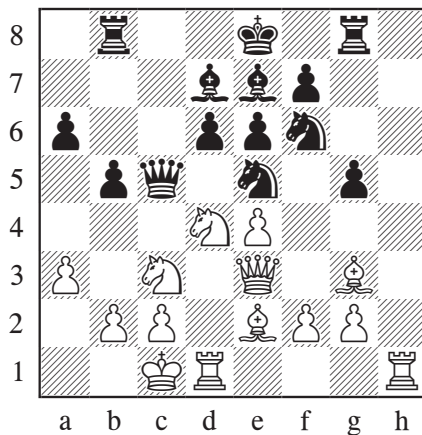
Spassky started well, with draws against Keres and Mikenas followed by wins over Antoshin and Shcherbakov. He then faced Petrosian, who at twenty-five years old had already established himself as one of the world's best players.

Game 14

Boris Spassky – Tigran Petrosian

Moscow 1955

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♚f3 h6 8.♙h4 ♗bd7 9.0-0-0
♗e5 10.♚e2 g5 11.♙g3 ♙d7 12.h4 ♚g8 13.hxg5 hxg5 14.♗f3 ♚c7 15.♚e3 ♙e7 16.♙e2 b5
17.a3 ♚b8 18.♗d4 ♚c5



19.b4!?

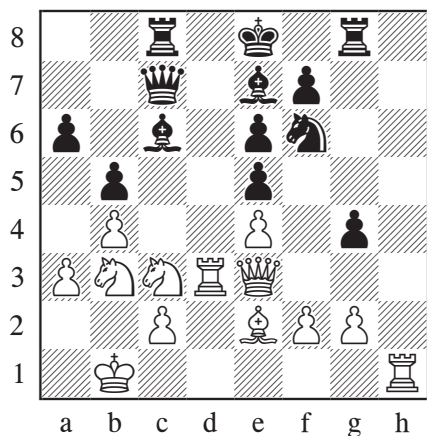
Spassky plays creatively. The position is objectively equal, but Black has to be a bit more careful due to the difference in king safety.

19...♖c7

19...♖b6!? is an interesting alternative which would prevent the plan used by Spassky in the game.

20.♗xe5!?

Spassky gives up the bishop pair to open the d-file and ensure that Black's king will not feel safe for a long time.

20...dxe5 21.♘b3 ♜c8 22.♞d3 g4 23.♔b1 ♙c6**24.f3**

Spassky tries to open the position.

24...g3 25.♖h6 ♘d7 26.♖h7 ♘f6 27.♖h6 ♖a7?

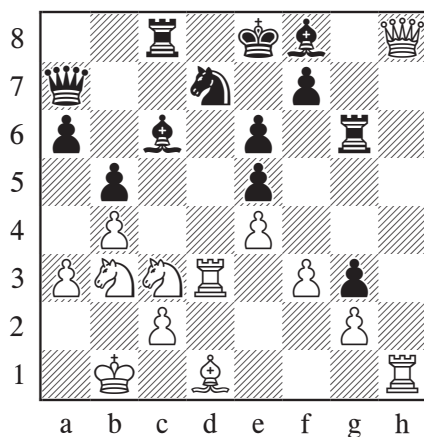
Petrosian risks too much by avoiding the repetition.

28.♙d1

Spassky was a wizard at knight manoeuvres but on this occasion he missed the opportunity for a nice one: 28.♙d1! ♘d7 29.♖h7 ♔f8 (29...♘f6 30.♖h3 ♘d7 31.♘e3 also favours White) 30.♘e3 ♙g5 31.♘g4 ♘f6 32.♘xf6 ♙xf6 33.♘c5 White keeps the upper hand.

28...♘d7 29.♖h7 ♞g6?

Once again Petrosian should have played 29...♘f6 and been content with a draw.

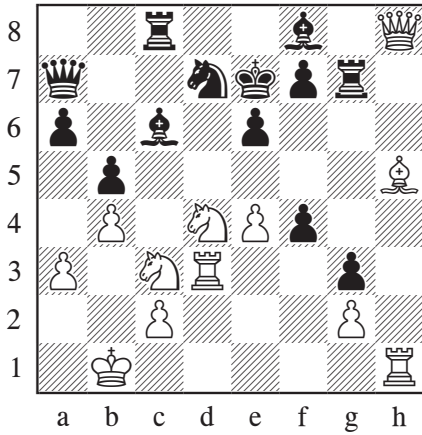
30.♖h8† ♙f8**31.f4!**

Spassky cleverly brings the bishop into the attack, while also freeing the d4-square for his knight.

31...exf4 32.♙h5 ♞g7

If 32...♞g5? then 33.♙d4! produces the terrible threat of ♘xe6, while the flashier 33.♙xf7†? ♔xf7 34.♞h7† also wins.

33.♙d4 ♔e7



34. ♖d5†!

Spassky opens up the black king.

34. ♖h6! is an equally powerful alternative. For instance, if 34... ♖g4 35. ♖xc6† ♖xc6 36. ♖d5† ♖e8 37. ♖f6† White wins.

34... ♙xd5

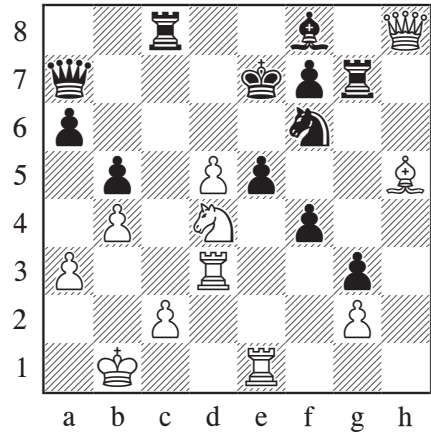
Neither 34... exd5 35. exd5 nor 34... ♖d6 35. ♖xc6 ♖xc6 36. ♖e7† gives Black any hope of survival.

35. exd5 ♖f6 36. ♖e1

Spassky's move should be more than good enough to win.

However, 36. dxe6! would get the job done in a more direct and forcing manner. The key point is that 36... ♖h7 loses to 37. ♖f5† ♖xe6 38. ♖e1†! ♖e3 (or 38... ♖xf5 39. ♖d5†) 39. ♖xe3 ♖xh8 40. ♖g4† and White soon forces mate.

36... e5



37. ♖c6†

Spassky's move does not spoil the win, but 37. ♖h6! ♖g6 38. ♖xf4 would have been immediately killing. Other more easily winning continuations include 37. ♖f5† ♖d7 38. ♖xg7 and 37. ♖xe5† ♖d6 38. ♖f5.

37... ♖xc6 38. dxc6 ♖c7!

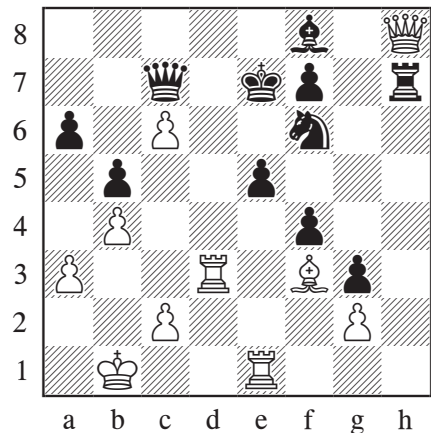
Petrosian was renowned for his defensive skills and he fights as hard as possible.

39. ♖f3

39. ♖ed1! is the simplest win.

39. ♖h6!? also works after 39... ♖h7 40. ♖d7† ♖xd7 41. ♖xe5† ♖e6 42. ♖xe6† fxe6 43. ♖xf4 and White wins.

39... ♖h7



40. ♖xh7?!

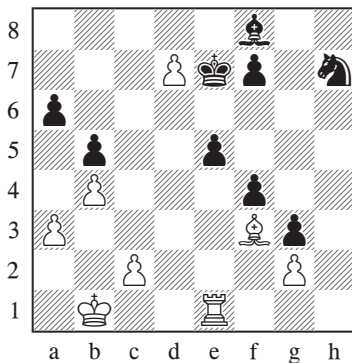
Spassky's last move before the time control looks fancy, but he overlooks 40. ♖d7†! ♗xd7 41. ♖xe5† ♗e6 42. ♖xe6† fxe6 43. c7! ♖xh8 44. c8=♗ with a fairly straightforward win.

40... ♖xh7 41. ♖d7† ♗xd7 42. cxd7

This was Spassky's sealed move, and they agreed to a draw without resumption.

½–½

The final position could be dangerous in practice for either side, but with best play Spassky could still have won. Let's see how the game might have ended if they had played it out:



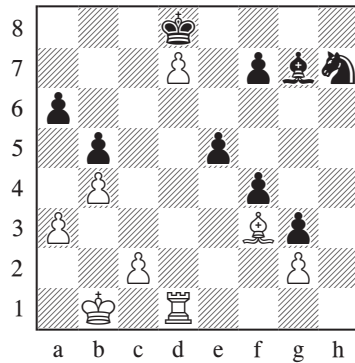
42... ♗g7

Black has no choice, as trading the e5-pawn for the one on d7 would cripple Black's kingside majority and leave White with an easy win. White's next move is critical in determining the final result.

a) 43. ♖d1?

This natural-looking move should only lead to a draw.

43... ♖d8



44. ♖b7

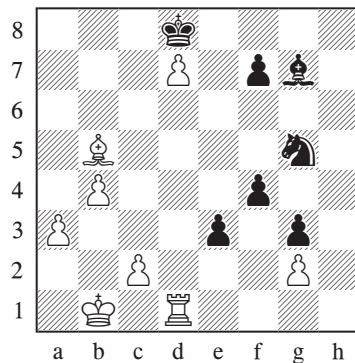
44. ♖c6 ♖g5 45. c4! bxc4 (45...e4!? should also lead to a draw with best play.) 46. a4 Shaposhnikov ended his line here, presumably with the implication that White is winning, but 46...e4 47. b5 axb5 48. a5 e3 49. a6 ♖d4! 50. ♖xd4 e2 51. a7 e1=♗† 52. ♖c2 ♗f2† 53. ♖b1 ♗e1† results in perpetual check.

44... ♖g5!

44...f5!? 45. ♖xa6 f3 46. gxf3 ♖g5 47. ♖xb5 ♖xf3 48. ♖f1! e4 49. c4 leads to a draw in a much more complicated way. The text move is more natural.

45. ♖xa6 e4 46. ♖xb5 e3

Threatening ...f3.



47. ♖f1

47. ♖e1?! ♖c3 48. ♖g1 ♖e6 49. ♖h1 f3! 50. gxf3 g2 51. ♖g1 ♖f4 would be dangerous for White.

47...f3 48.gxf3 ♖c3 49.♔a2!

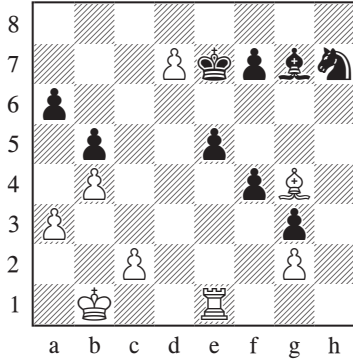
Without this, White would be in trouble.

49...g2 50.♙xg2 e2 51.♞b1 e1=♚ 52.♞xe1 ♙xe1

Black holds.

b) A major improvement is:

43.♙g4!



As far as I am aware, this move has not been mentioned by any other commentator.

43...♔d8

43...♔f8 44.♞d1 ♔d8 45.♞d6 is hopeless for Black.

44.c4!

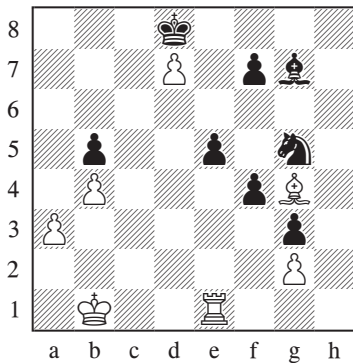
44.♞d1 ♔f6 45.♙f5 e4 gives Black enough counterplay to hold.

44...♔g5

44...bxc4 loses to 45.a4 ♔f6 46.b5! axb5

47.a5! when the pawns are too fast.

45.cxb5 axb5



46.♞f1!!

A beautiful move, preventing ...e4.

46...♙f6

If 46...♔e6 47.♙xe6 fxe6 48.♔c2 the king walks to e4 and Black can do nothing.

47.♔c2

White is winning.

It would be interesting to know what each of the players looked at during their adjournment analysis.

In the next round, Spassky faced another world-class opponent.

Game 15

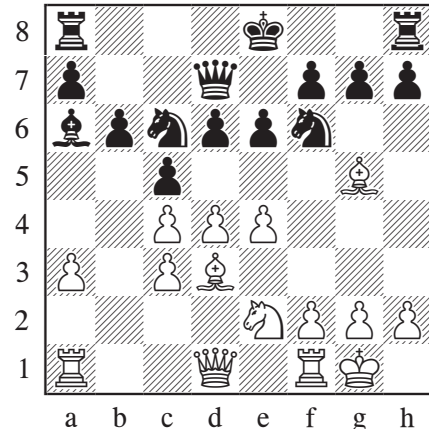
Efim Geller – Boris Spassky

Moscow 1955

1.d4 ♔f6 2.c4 e6 3.♔c3 ♙b4 4.a3 ♙xc3† 5.bxc3 c5 6.e3 ♔c6 7.♙d3 d6 8.♔e2 b6 9.0-0 ♞d7?!

Presumably Spassky rejected 9...♙a6 because he found the prospect of 10.♞a4 annoying, but Black is doing fine after 10...♞c8 followed by ...0-0. Still, we will see that Spassky has something else in mind for his king.

10.e4 ♙a6 11.♙g5



11...0-0-0!?

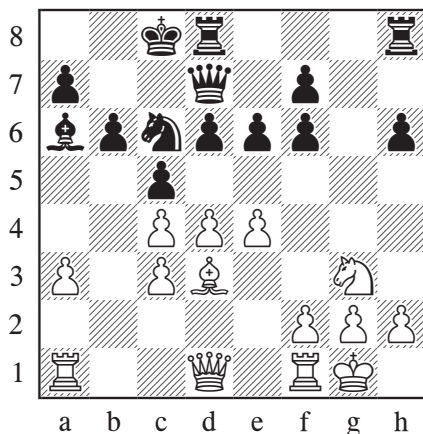
I wonder if anyone had ever castled long in the Sämisch Nimzo-Indian prior to this game. The whole scheme is objectively dubious, but surprise value counts for a lot in high-level chess.

Incidentally, after writing books about the careers of both Fischer and Spassky, I noticed that the American only rarely castled queenside, whereas the Russian did it slightly more often. Spassky also left his king in the centre somewhat more often than Fischer. The difference is mostly to do with the fact that Spassky played the Leningrad Variation against the Nimzo-Indian and the Sämisch Variation against the King's Indian.

12.♠g3!?

White should play on the queenside at once with 12.♠c1!, as Geller showed in a subsequent game against Georgy Lisitsin, in round 16 of the same tournament. That game continued 12...♠a5 (12...♙b7 13.a4 and 12...cxd4 13.cxd4 ♠xd4 14.a4 also look highly dangerous for Black) 13.♠b3 ♖a4 14.♠xa5 ♗xa5 15.♗c2 h6 16.♙d2 when Black was already in a desperate situation due to the misplaced queen in Geller – Lisitsin, Moscow 1955, and Geller went on to crush Lisitsin.

Lisitsin was also from Leningrad, so he and Spassky almost certainly prepared this variation together, but it was far too optimistic to repeat the same dubious variation against Geller when he'd had ample time to prepare for it.

12...h6 13.♙xf6 gxf6**14.♠h5!?**

White could have kept some advantage with 14.a4, or with 14.d5 followed by ♠h5.

14...cxd4 15.cxd4 ♠xd4 16.♠xf6 ♖e7 17.♗a4?

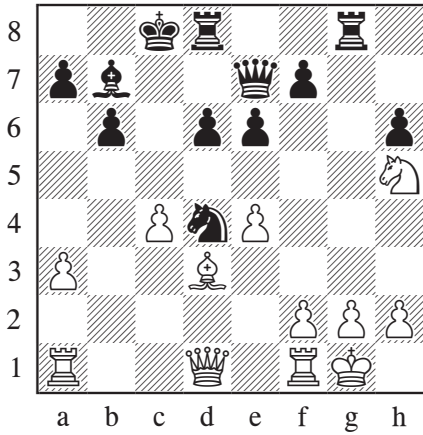
White can't afford to pull the queen so far from the defence of the king. It was necessary to sacrifice with 17.♠d5! exd5 (17...♗d7? 18.♙b1 or 17...♗h4? 18.g3 ♙dg8 19.a4 would leave Black in trouble) 18.cxd5 ♙b7 19.♗a4 ♠f3† 20.gxf3 and the position would be balanced.

17...♙b7 18.♠h5

It is too late now for 18.♠d5 as 18...♗h4 would be strong.

18...♙hg8 19.♗d1

The queen comes back too late. White would also be in serious trouble after 19.f4 f5 or 19.♠g3 ♠b8 followed by ...h5.

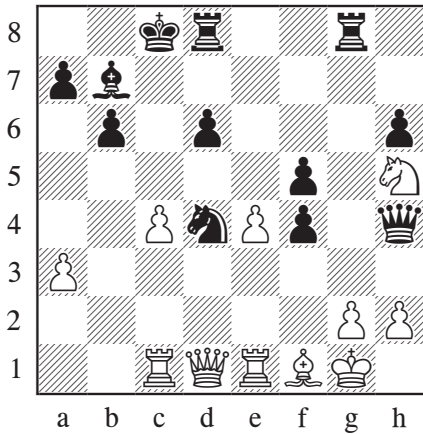


19...f5!

Now the volcano erupts, and White's position will be swept away.

20.♖e1 ♜h4 21.f4 e5! 22.♞c1
22.fxe5 fxe4 would win.

22...exf4 23.♙f1

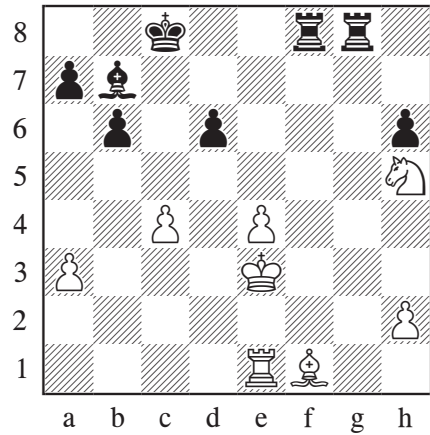


23...♞xe1!

Black wins an exchange while keeping a strong attack. Geller could already have resigned.

23...fxe4 or 23...♞e6 would win as well.

24.♞xe1 ♞f3† 25.♙f2 ♞xe1 26.♞xe1 f3
27.gxf3 fxe4 28.fxe4 ♞df8† 29.♙e3



29...♙xe4! 30.♙h3† ♙f5 31.♙xf5† ♞xf5

Geller had a bad day, but it was a fluent attacking game by Spassky.

0-1

Spassky lost with White to Kotov in the next round, then drew as Black against the World Champion, Botvinnik, in a combative game. There followed a draw with Kan, wins over Averbakh and Simagin, and a quick draw with Smyslov. With twelve games played, Spassky had scored eight points: a fantastic tally against world-class opposition.

Spassky stumbled in the next round, losing to Furman, then drew against Flohr and Ilivitzky. In Round 16 he faced Mark Taimanov, another leading player from Leningrad and one of his rivals near the top of the tournament.

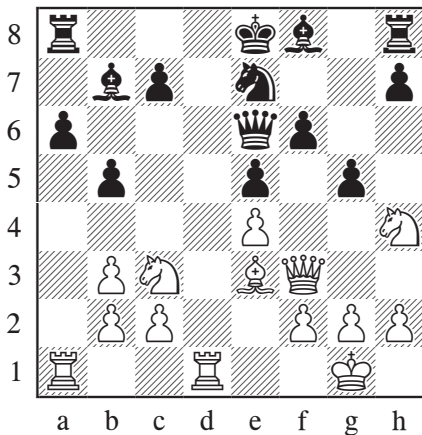
Game 16

Boris Spassky – Mark Taimanov

Moscow 1955

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 b5
5.♙b3 ♘a5 6.0–0 d6 7.d4 ♘xb3 8.axb3
f6 9.♘c3 ♙b7 10.♘h4 ♘e7 11.dxe5 dxe5
12.♚f3 ♚d7 13.♞d1 ♞e6 14.♙e3 g5?

In a tricky position Taimanov tries to solve his problems in a forcing way, but he should have preferred either 14...g6 to complete development or 14...h5!? intending ...♚g4 to trade queens.



15.♘xb5!

A brilliant combination which Taimanov surely missed.

15...axb5

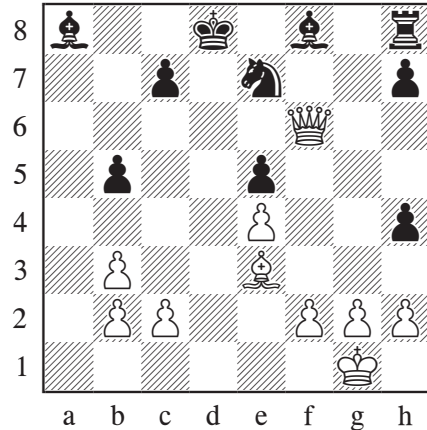
After 15...♞c8 16.♚h5† ♚f7 either 17.♞d8† or 17.♘xc7† would win in a similar way as in the game.

16.♚h5† ♚f7 17.♞xa8† ♙xa8 18.♞d8†!

Spassky wins the queen. Black gets a rook and two minor pieces for it, but White picks up far too many pawns.

18...♙xd8 19.♚xf7 gxh4 20.♚xf6

Spassky already has two extra pawns and will soon pick up more. The rest is easy.



20...♞g8 21.f3 h3 22.g3 ♙e8 23.♚xe5 ♞g6
24.♚xb5† ♙c6 25.♚b8† ♙f7 26.♚xc7
♞f6 27.♙g5 ♞e6 28.b4 ♙g8 29.♚b8 ♘g6
30.♙f2 ♘e5 31.b5 ♙e8 32.♙e3 ♙d6 33.♚c8
♙f7 34.b6 ♞f6 35.♙f4 ♙d7 36.b7 ♙e6
37.♙xe5 ♙xe5 38.b8=♚ ♙xc8 39.♚xe5
1–0

In the next round Spassky was beaten by Borisenko. In the penultimate game he faced Korchnoi. Spassky's fellow Leningrader was not doing well in this this event, yet surely it was a vital clash. We will skip ahead to the critical phase of the game.

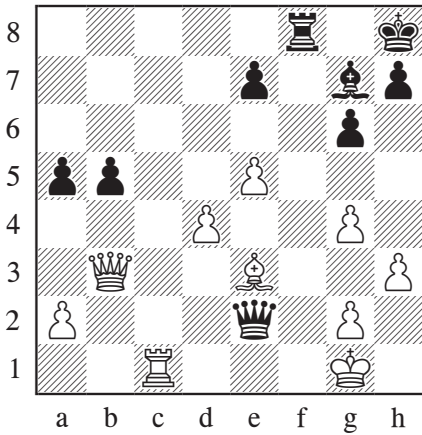
Game 17

Boris Spassky – Viktor Korchnoi

Moscow 1955

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5
5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 c5 7.♙c4 ♙g7 8.♘e2 cxd4
9.cxd4 ♘c6 10.♙e3 0–0 11.0–0 ♙g4 12.f3
♘a5 13.♙xf7† ♞xf7 14.fxg4 ♞xf1† 15.♙xf1
♚d7 16.h3 ♚e6 17.♚d3 ♚c4 18.♚d2 ♚a6
19.♚c2 ♘c4 20.♚b3 ♙h8 21.♙g1 ♘d2

22.♙xd2 ♖xe2 23.♙e3 ♜f8 24.e5 b5 25.♞c1 a5



26.♙g5?!

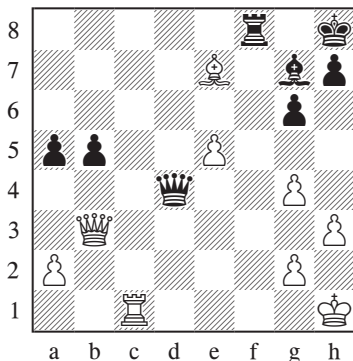
Spassky's move is almost winning, but it has a flaw.

If 26.♖h1 then 26...b4 would give Black a playable position.

The calm 26.a3! would have kept White in full control. For instance, 26...h5 (26...a4 27.♞c3 gets nowhere for Black) 27.gxh5 gxh5 28.♖h1 and White keeps a big advantage.

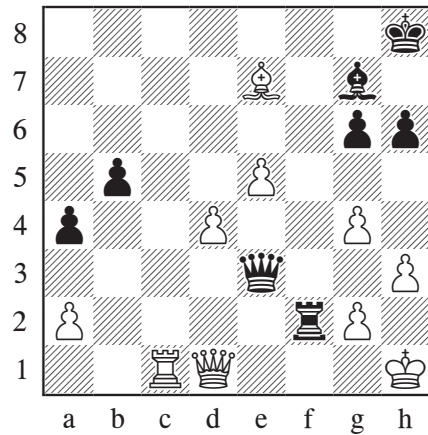
26...h6?

Korchnoi misses a brilliant tactic which would have rescued the game: 26...♞f2! 27.♖h1 ♞xd4! 28.♙xe7 (28.e6 ♞d6 is nothing for White.)



28...♙xe5!! Moving the rook from f8 would be hopeless, but both players overlooked that Black can leave it hanging. 29.♞e1 (29.♙xf8?? is impossible because 29...♞f4! threatens both mate and the c1-rook.) 29...♞c3! Black is fine and White needs to take care to avoid being worse. (29...♞d2!? is also good enough to hold.)

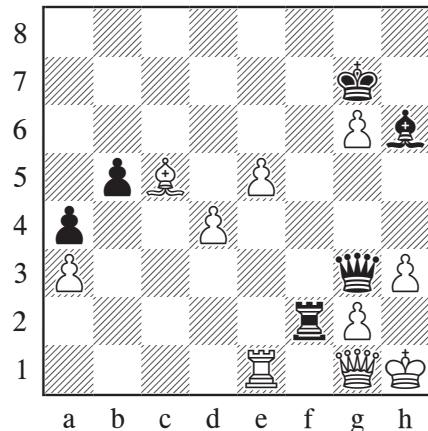
27.♙xe7 a4 28.♞d1 ♞e3† 29.♖h1 ♜f2



30.♞g1!

Before pushing the e-pawn, White must defend his king.

30...♞f4 31.a3 ♖h7 32.♙c5 h5 33.gxh5 ♙h6 34.hxg6† ♖g7 35.♞e1 ♞g3

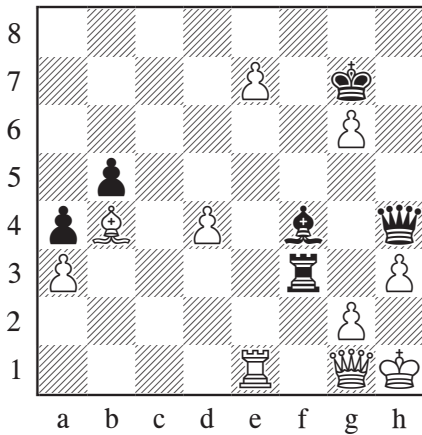


36. ♖b4!

Spassky defends the rook, avoiding the premature 36.e6? ♜xg2! when Black forces perpetual check.

36... ♖e3 37. ♜h2 ♜g5 38.e6

After taking the e7-pawn, it took Spassky eleven more moves to push the passed e-pawn.

38... ♖f4 39. ♜g1 ♜h4 40.e7 ♜f3**41. ♜h2!!**

Spassky finds a stunning way to neutralize the enemy attack, which generated Korchnoi's resignation.

1-0

There is another spectacular winning line: 41.e8=♖†! ♜g8 (41... ♖h6 42. ♖f8† ♜xg6 43.gxf3† or 41... ♖h8 42.g7† ♜g8 43. ♖f6† would win as well.) 42. ♖f6† ♜g7 43. ♖g4 Black runs out of attack and loses.

In the last round Spassky faced Lisitsin and fell into serious trouble, but Lisitsin failed to finish him off and the game was eventually drawn.

Spassky finished the championship with 11½/19, which gave him a share of 3rd-6th

places with Botvinnik, Petrosian and Ilivitzky. Geller and Smyslov finished half a point in front, with Geller eventually becoming Soviet Champion after winning a decisive play-off game.

At just eighteen years of age, Spassky had achieved a huge success in finishing near the top of an incredibly strong tournament. He scored seven wins and nine draws, with only three defeats. He also qualified to the Interzonal tournament of the World Championship qualifying cycle.

Once again, it's interesting to compare Spassky's outstanding results with those achieved by Fischer at a similar age. According to Chessmetrics, Spassky's 61% in the 1955 Soviet Championship was achieved versus 2651-rated opposition, making his performance rating 2719. Coincidentally, Fischer also played in his national championship at around the same age. The 1960-61 US Championship took place a few months before Fischer turned eighteen. He scored 7/9 (78%) versus 2595-rated opposition, for a 2715 performance rating.

Spassky's next event was the Student Team World Championship in Lyon, France. Boris played on Board 2, behind Taimanov. He achieved a superb score of 7½/8, with the lone draw coming against Forintos of Hungary.

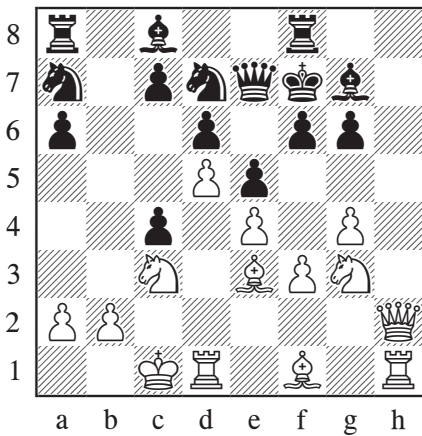
Next came the World Junior Championship in Antwerp. Spassky won the preliminary with six wins and one loss, with no draws. In the final he started well, beating Schweber and Portisch before drawing with Mednis. He then faced the Dutch representative, who would go on to become a billionaire and sponsor of the Melody Amber event in Monaco.

Game 18

Boris Spassky – Joop van Oosterom

Antwerp 1955

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 0-0 6.♙e3 e5 7.♘ge2 ♘c6 8.♚d2 ♘d7 9.0-0-0 a6 10.d5 ♘a7 11.g4 b5 12.♘g3 bxc4 13.h4 f6 14.h5 ♖e7 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.♚h2 ♔f7



17.♘f5!

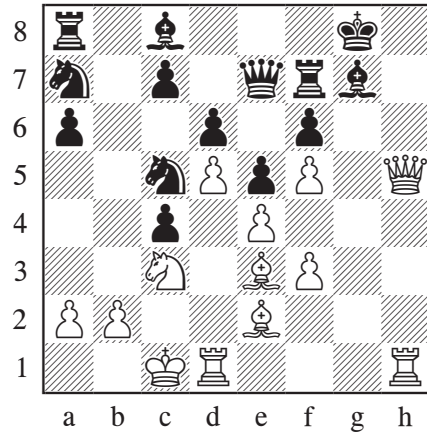
The young Dutch player has handled the opening poorly and Spassky could have won prosaically with 17.♙xc4, but he finds a more lethal and stylish way to end the game.

17...gxf5

Black has no choice, as 17...♚e8 18.♘xg7 wins.

18.♚h5† ♔g8 19.gxf5 ♚f7 20.♙e2 ♘c5

20...♔f8 21.♘dg1 ♚e8 would have survived a little longer, but 22.♚h7 followed by ♙h6 or ♘xg7 ends things easily enough.



21.♘dg1 ♚d7 22.♚h8#
1-0

Spassky won the rest of his games until the final round, when, with his overall victory already secure, he took an early draw. He thus became World Junior Champion and earned the grandmaster title. At the time, he was the youngest ever to achieve it. Krogius suggests that at that time there were around twenty to twenty-five players in the world with the highest title in chess.

According to Soltis, Spassky asked certain questions of the accompanying Soviet people which might have led to serious problems for him had Stalin still been alive. As it was, the questions were still reported to the KGB, and from then on the Soviet authorities kept a closer eye on him.

Gothenburg Interzonal

Spassky played with mixed success in most of the Interzonal, a gruelling event which started in mid-August and lasted for five weeks, for a total of twenty rounds. After sixteen games Spassky had only 50%. He lost five games, which was too many. However, in Rounds 17 and 18 he scored excellent wins over Filip and Stahlberg respectively; both games were

featured in the commentary of Spassky's win over Tal – see Game 12 in the previous chapter, on page 63. Spassky drew the final two games, which was just enough to qualify for the Candidates tournament which would take place in 1956. His final score of 11/20 was enough to finish in joint 7th-9th place, and nine players qualified. Spassky achieved his primary aim, but he was unable to repeat his most impressive play of the Soviet Championship.

In the autumn of 1955, the Soviet authorities gave the Spassky family an apartment within a house in the historical part of Leningrad, close to the Petropavlovsk (Peter and Paul) Fortress. Previously, Spassky's mother and her three children had lived in a much smaller one-bedroom apartment. The new apartment would be worth roughly 400,000 Euros today. The authorities showed their trust, believing that Spassky would become one of the very best players in the world and that to produce results at the highest level requires a certain quality of living conditions.

This is the first year of Spassky's career in which all his results are well documented, so we can give a more thorough summary and statistical breakdown. 1955 was a fantastic year for the eighteen-year-old Boris. He finished equal third in one of the strongest Soviet Championship events of all time. He achieved a huge score at the Student Team World Championship, which helped his team to win the gold medal. He became World Junior Champion, as well as the youngest grandmaster in the world. Finally, despite not being at his best in Gothenburg, he still qualified for the Candidates tournament on the road to the World Championship.

1955 Results

Soviet Championship, Moscow (3rd-6th place): 11½/19 (+7 =9 –3)

Student Team World Championship, Lyon (Board 2): 7½/8, Team Gold (+7 =1 –0)

World Junior Championship Preliminary, Antwerp (1st place): 6/7 (+6 =0 –1)

World Junior Championship Final, Antwerp (1st place): 8/9 (+7 =2 –0)

World Championship Interzonal, Gothenburg (7th-9th place): 11/20 (+7 =8 –5)

Total 69.8% (+34 =20 –9)



Mayor of Amsterdam A.J. d'Ailly meets the participants from the 1956 Candidates tournament, 4 October 1956. Boris Spassky is nineteen years old at the time. Behind them, Vassily Smyslov faces the camera.