

Critical Theory

A Chess Biography of Isaak Lipnitsky

Mykola Fuzik and Alexei Radchenko

Contents

Index of Games	5
Introduction	7
Part I: Pre-War Childhood and Youth	10
The Early Years.....	10
The Birth of the Kiev Talent Mill	12
The Unforgettable Meeting with the Champion	15
Chess Is a Celebration!.....	22
Growing Mastery	26
Adult Life Begins	29
Part II: In Military Uniform	34
Tomsk: Life at the Boot Camp	34
The Tomsk Championship	37
Fighting on the Way to Berlin.....	39
Questions Instead of Answers	44
It's Time to Remember Chess Again	44
The Crushing Defeat of the Americans and the Enigmatic “Lieutenant D. Neckermann”	49
A Mysterious Visit.....	54
Part III: The Four Year-Long Path to the Top	57
The Roundabout Way Home	57
The Difficulties of Growth.....	59
Another Mystery	61
Master!	62
The Stellar Year 1950	66
Part IV: Per Astra Ad Aspera	79
So Far so Good... ..	79
“Crime”, Punishment and Consequences	82
The Triumph Never Repeated	87
Again a Runner Up, now with a Team	90
The First Literary Breakthrough	93
A Rough Patch	95
The “Bum Generation”	98
Working on a New Book and Team Trophies	101

The Book’s Difficult Path to the Reader	104
The Chess Master’s Everyday Life	107
The Last Bright Flash.....	108
Part V: The Aftermath	111
The Winding Path to Eternity.....	111
A Visit to the Protagonist	113
Part VI: Selected Games and Fragments of Isaak Lipnitsky	120
Appendix 1: Lipnitsky’s Tournament Results.....	238
Appendix 2: Attention – The a1-h8 Diagonal! (Isaak Lipnitsky).....	250
Appendix 3: The Unfinished Letter (Efim Lazarev)	259

Index of Games

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
1	Boris Ratner	Issak Lipnitsky	Sicilian Defense	1938
2	Issak Lipnitsky	L. Kanevsky	Fragment	1938
3	Issak Lipnitsky	David Bronstein	Queen's Gambit Declined	1938
4	Issak Lipnitsky	Kurt Richter	Fragment	1946
5	Kurt Richter	Issak Lipnitsky	Sicilian Defense	1946
6	Issak Lipnitsky	Michael Neckermann	Sicilian Defense	1946
7	Nikolay Kopaeв	Issak Lipnitsky	Ruy Lopez	1948
8	Issak Lipnitsky	A. Akshanov	Sicilian Defense	1948
9	Iosif Pogrebissky	Issak Lipnitsky	King's Gambit	1948
10	Evsey Polyak	Issak Lipnitsky	Four Knights Game	1948
11	Abram Zamikhovsky	Issak Lipnitsky	Fragment	1949
12	Vladislav Shiyanovsky	Issak Lipnitsky	Nimzo-Indian Defense	1949
13	Vladlen Zurakhov	Issak Lipnitsky	Ruy Lopez	1949
14	Issak Lipnitsky	Boris Ratner	Catalan Opening	1949
15	Issak Lipnitsky	Yuri Sakharov	Sicilian Defense	1949
16	Issak Lipnitsky	Alexey Sokolsky	Queen's Indian Defense	1949
17	Issak Lipnitsky	Yuri Kaem	Fragment	1949
18	Efim Kogan	Issak Lipnitsky	Ragozin Defense	1950
19	Issak Lipnitsky	Samuil Kotlerman	Sicilian Defense	1950
20	Mikhail Beilin	Issak Lipnitsky	Ragozin Defense	1950
21	Issak Lipnitsky	Ratmir Kholmov	Fragment	1950
22	Efim Stolyar	Issak Lipnitsky	Fragment	1950
23	Issak Lipnitsky	Alexey Sokolsky	Caro-Kann Defense	1950
24	Issak Lipnitsky	Vasily Panov	Alekhine's Defense	1950
25	Issak Lipnitsky	Igor Bondarevsky	Ruy Lopez	1950
26	Issak Lipnitsky	Alexander Tolush	Blumenfeld Gambit	1950
27	Issak Lipnitsky	Georgy Borisenko	Nimzo-Indian Defense	1950
28	Alexey Sokolsky	Issak Lipnitsky	Ruy Lopez	1950
29	Issak Lipnitsky	Lev Aronin	Sicilian Defense	1950
30	Viktor Liublinsky	Issak Lipnitsky	Two Knights Defense	1950
31	Issak Lipnitsky	Tigran Petrosian	Bogo-Indian Defense	1950
32	Issak Lipnitsky	Vasily Smyslov	Slav Defense	1950
33	Issak Lipnitsky	Efim Geller	King's Indian Defense	1950
34	Semyon Furman	Issak Lipnitsky	Ragozin Defense	1951
35	Zakir Khodzhaev	Issak Lipnitsky	Two Knights Defense	1951
36	Lev Aronin	Issak Lipnitsky	Ruy Lopez	1951

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
37	Issak Lipnitsky	Mark Taimanov	Queen's Indian Defense	1951
38	Issak Lipnitsky	Yuri Averbakh	English Opening	1951
39	Issak Lipnitsky	Evgeny Terpugov	Ruy Lopez	1951
40	Alexander Kotov	Issak Lipnitsky	Nimzo-Indian Defense	1951
41	Issak Lipnitsky	Yuri Averbakh	Nimzo-Indian Defense	1952
42	Issak Lipnitsky	Anatoly Lutikov	King's Indian Defense	1952
43	Issak Lipnitsky	Vladimir Saigin	Queen's Gambit Declined	1952
44	Issak Lipnitsky	Alexey Suetin	Nimzo-Indian Defense	1952
45	Issak Lipnitsky	Ilia Kan	Sicilian Defense	1952
46	Alexey Suetin	Issak Lipnitsky	Ruy Lopez	1952
47	Issak Lipnitsky	Mikhail Botvinnik	Ruy Lopez	1952
48	Issak Lipnitsky	David Bronstein	French Defense	1952
49	Paul Keres	Issak Lipnitsky	Caro-Kann Defense	1952
50	Vladimir Makogonov	Issak Lipnitsky	Queen's Gambit Declined	1953
51	Issak Lipnitsky	Alexander Arulaid	Fragment	1953
52	Issak Lipnitsky	Semyon Furman	Sicilian Defense	1953
53	Sultan Khalilbeili	Issak Lipnitsky	Colle System	1954
54	Issak Lipnitsky	Yuri Guskov	King's Indian Defense	1954
55	Issak Lipnitsky	Yuri Kolobov	Philidor Defense	1954
56	Issak Lipnitsky	Arkady Nogovitsyn	Sicilian Defense	1955
57	Issak Lipnitsky	Felix Ignatiev	Ruy Lopez	1955
58	Issak Lipnitsky	Mikhail Tal	King's Indian Defense	1955
59	Rem Romanovsky	Issak Lipnitsky	Ruy Lopez	1956
60	Issak Lipnitsky	Abram Khavin	Scandinavian Defense	1956
61	Issak Lipnitsky	Evsey Polyak	Ruy Lopez	1956
62	Anatoly Bannik	Issak Lipnitsky	Ruy Lopez	1956
63	Yuri Sakharov	Issak Lipnitsky	Nimzo-Indian Defense	1958

INTRODUCTION

(From myself and my coauthor)

This book is dedicated to the life and career of the talented Kiev¹ master Isaak Oskarovich Lipnitsky (1923–1959). It just so happened that neither during his life nor after his death was Lipnitsky honored by any comprehensive biography. There was a Russian-language book *Isaak Lipnitsky* (just 104 pages long), written by the former Kiev journalist Vadim Izrailevich Teplitsky (1927–2017), who was Lipnitsky’s close friend in his last years. It was scheduled for publication in the Moscow publishing house Fizkultura i Sport, however, due to the economic turmoil of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which coincided with its author’s emigration to Israel, that book was only published in his new homeland in 1993, and remained virtually unknown to the broader audience in the former Soviet Union.

We set a goal for ourselves to fill this hole, but without replacing Teplitsky’s book. These books were written in different times and by representatives of different generations, with different degrees of familiarity with the book’s protagonist. Indeed, Teplitsky will invisibly accompany us during the entire story – there are more than enough occasions to quote his work.

Our situation had its own advantages, which especially manifested when we were writing the chapter on Isaak Lipnitsky’s military service. Thanks to many documents being declassified, we got an opportunity to reconstruct, at least partially, Lipnitsky’s activities during the war.

As the era known as the Golden Age of chess moves further away, the number of publications on that era is growing. And even though Lipnitsky’s name appears less frequently than he deserves, the recollections of his contemporaries allow us to better understand the time and conditions of his life and work. Some of these recollections have made it into our book.

Conversations with Isaak Lipnitsky’s friends – his contemporary and Kiev Young Pioneers Palace peer Lyubov Yakir (who still went by her maiden name Kogan in those infinitely distant years), and the maestro’s younger colleague and pupil (both chess- and literature-wise) Efim Lazarev – were a true revelation. Moreover, it turned out that not everything they remembered and told us in our conversation had made it to the pages of Teplitsky’s book. They also shared lots of interesting archive materials – photos as well as newspaper and magazine articles.

¹ In this book we use the spellings “Kiev” and “Odessa” to refer to the pre-independence period and “Kyiv” and “Odesa” to refer to the post-independence period

Part I

Pre-War Childhood and Youth

The Early Years

Isaak Oskarovich Lipnitsky was born on 25th June 1923 in Kiev, in a humble accountant's family. Unfortunately, not much is known about Lipnitsky's early life. Vadim Teplitsky, who became a close friend of the protagonist in the last years of his life, wrote in his book, *"Isaak Oskarovich did not like talking about his family, almost never recalled his childhood, which was not particularly happy before 1927, because his family half-starved and lived in very cramped conditions."*

In addition, English Wikipedia claims, without citing any primary sources, *"Isaak was a son of Oscar [Oskar] (d. 1975) and Sima (d. 1958) and had one brother (Don)."* The elder brother, who emigrated from the USSR, was also mentioned by the six-times Ukrainian women's champion Lyubov Yakir in our conversations. In late 2023, former Kiev resident Galina Yusupova (now living in San Francisco), who knew the Lipnitsky family well, found me online and, among other things, explained that Lipnitsky's brother and his family settled in Toronto, Canada.

Some time ago, one of the authors of this book was approached by Grandmaster Igor Berdichevsky, the author of the fundamental work *Jewish Chess Encyclopedia*, who asked to clarify if Lipnitsky's father was indeed named Oskar, pointing out that it was, "quite a strange name for a Jew in the 1920s." And then we remembered that one of the commendation lists found in the archive (more on that in the next section) listed his father's name as Lipnitsky Usher Nukhimovich in the box "Home Address of the Award Recipient and the Address of His Family", which prompted the *Jewish Chess Encyclopedia* author to amend his article for the next edition, "Lipnitsky Isaak Oskarovich (Usherovich)." However, Lipnitsky himself is recorded in that same commendation list as "Oskarovich" – probably simply in accordance with his passport.

Not long before I finished the English edition of this book, Lipnitsky's distant relative Stella Berestetskaya found a Don Usherovich Lipnitsky on the site podvignaroda.ru, born in Kiev on 22nd June 1921 and awarded the "For Battle Merits" medal as a sergeant. Moreover, Stella found data on Nukhim (b. 1864) and Haya (Nukhim's wife), both executed at Babyn Yar, in the online database of Holocaust victims. *"It's possible (and very probable) that these documents were filled out by Lipnitsky's father Usher (Oskar), and I think his Israeli address was given there too. There's some evidence that Nukhim had several children. There are*



Дата рождения	22.06.1921
Место рождения	Украинская ССР, Киевская обл., г. Киев
Дата призыва	22.06.1943
Воинское звание	сержант ; старшина ; б/зв.
Воинская часть	<u>1911 легкий артиллерийский полк</u>
Награды	Медаль «За боевые заслуги»

Don Usherovich Lipnitsky (site podvignaroda.ru)

Date of birth: 22.06.1921

Place of birth: Ukrainian SSR, Kiev region, city of Kiev

Conscription date: 22.06.1943

Army rank: sergeant; sergeant-major; without rank

Army unit: 1911th light artillery regiment

Awards: Medal “For Battle Merits”

similar documents for the executed Klara and Sonia Lipnitskaya, sisters of Usher (Oskar), filled in by him as well, and his brother Avrum.” In other words, Usher Nukhimovich Lipnitsky probably filled out these documents after emigrating to Israel. If his older son Don emigrated together with him, he could have later settled in Canada as well. Unfortunately, the available genealogical data on our protagonist is sketchy, and this topic would require further research.

How and when the little Izya Lipnitsky learned to play chess was revealed many years later by his older colleague and friend, Kiev master Boris Ratner (who probably learned it from Isaak Oskarovich himself): *“The 8 year-old boy learned the rules of chess even before starting school – everyone in the family played – and he often played against his father and elder brother.”* (20th Soviet Chess Championship bulletin, No. 14, 1952.) Moscow chess literature collector Vladislav Novikov helped to find the primary source.

Another story on the same topic (probably also recorded from Lipnitsky’s narration) is found in the *Sovietky Sport* newspaper (25th November 1950), on one of the first days of the 18th Soviet Championship:

“Many years ago, an 8 year-old boy was sitting with his father at the Kiev stadium. The soccer field was divided into identical squares, and unusual pieces stood on them. Riders on horses, warriors with halberds, fantasy-land towers... They moved once in a while, and the spectators excitedly discussed every move.

‘Daddy, what is this?’ the boy asked his father, who was watching the game closely. ‘It’s chess.’

‘What is chess?’

And the father told the boy about that ancient game.

One year later, when the boy finished 2nd grade, his father asked him what gift he would like for his good grades. Without hesitation, the boy answered, ‘A chess set.’

That’s how Master of Sports I. Lipnitsky started playing chess 18 years ago.”

The Birth of the Kiev Talent Mill

After the Council of People’s Commissars of the Russian SFSR passed a bill “On the Rollout of Extracurricular Activities Among Children in 1933” on 26th December 1932, a lot of extracurricular institutions sprang up in all corners of the Soviet Union – not only Russia – including Young Pioneers Houses and Palaces. In 1934, the Young Pioneers Palace opened in Kiev, and the chess and checkers circle opened there the following year. Izya Lipnitsky was one of the first to sign up.

Ratner: *“In autumn 1935, a chess and checkers circle was organized in the Kiev Young Pioneers Palace. The circle did not have a permanent place and ‘migrated’ from room to room, and when winter came, it moved to the warming room near the skating rink. Activities in the young collective were sporadic – the circle worked quite poorly and was soon under threat of closure. However, the circle teachers were surprised by huge interest shown by young chess and checkers players. The membership was growing, and new operating formats became necessary.*

And so, in April 1936, the Soviet Union’s first children’s chess and checkers club opened. It had about 60 members at the time of foundation. Only two school kids had third category, and a few managed to obtain fourth and fifth categories. Some members that were there at the start still remain in the club: Kiev girls’ champion Klara Kovaleva, Master Izya Kuperman, 1st category player Rafa Gorenstein. All three of them had no qualification when they joined the club, and their combined age was 36...” (From the book *Five Years of the First Children’s Chess and Checkers Club*.)

This miraculous transformation of a dying circle into a powerful club was spearheaded by its principals, masters Semyon Natov (checkers) and Alexander Konstantinopolsky (chess). In later years, Alexander Markovich Konstantinopolsky’s brilliant coaching talent truly came to fruition (unfortunately fate didn’t provide Natov with the same opportunity – he would die in battle in 1944 during World War II, at the age of 34). But back then, all his successes were still ahead of him. Here’s how events unfolded in 1935.

Isaak Romanov: *“The legendary chess club of the Kiev Young Pioneers Palace, established by Konstantinopolsky, became a template for other talent mills all around the country.*



Late 1930s, Young Pioneers Palace (site bigmir.net, “Special Project: Old Photos of Kiev”)

*When Konstantinopolsky first set foot in the Palace in 1935, he saw a huge pile of kids, with his predecessor as the circle principal underneath them all. He was a strong and knowledgeable chess player, a future master (evidently Iosif Pogrebissky, the first principal of the circle – **Author**), but he was completely useless as a pedagogue. In place of Konstantinopolsky, many would have walked straight back out. But he didn’t. Together with the checkers master Semyon Yakovlevich Natov, he quickly turned the club into one of the biggest and strongest chess and checkers collectives in the country.*

An innate pedagogic talent was discovered in Alexander Markovich.

*He cares about his pupils both in the chess class and outside it: in school, on the streets, in the family, he is able to find the keys to everyone’s hearts. Even decades later, his pupils are grateful to their mentor – and he’s proud of his pupils, including Grandmaster D. Bronstein, ICCF Grandmaster A. Khasin, Masters I. Lipnitsky, A. Bannik, K. Muchnik and many others.” (From the book *Alexander Konstantinopolsky* published by Fizkultura i Sport, 1985, edited by B. I. Turov.)*

And here’s a lovely echo of times past: in 2014, the website e3e5.com published a heartfelt article by Moscow master Sergei Rosenberg called “The Great Davy” to mark 90 years since David Bronstein’s birth. Among other items, it featured a photograph from 1970 that literally begs for the caption “‘Born’ in the Kiev Young Pioneers Palace!” It depicts the coach and three of his former pupils. The article’s author and site editor Alexander Kentler graciously allowed us to print the photo in our book. Sadly, Izya Lipnitsky was long dead by 1970...

The club’s entry test devised by Alexander Markovich was described by David Bronstein in his book *200 Open Games* (1970).

“In autumn 1936, I got lucky – I was accepted into the children’s chess club.

The admission rules were strict: every novice had to answer a number of questions. But I drew a lucky examination card, so to say.

The examiner looked at me strictly and asked, ‘Which books have you already read?’



"Born" in the Kiev Young Pioneers Palace: Abram Khasin, Alexander Konstantinopolsky, David Bronstein, Khanan Muchnik, 1970 (from S. Rosenberg's archive).

I surmised that he meant chess books, so I said, 'Sozin, What Everyone Should Know About the Endgame.'

'Excellent! Get a king and give me a king and a pawn. And now be careful: I'll attack, and you defend!'

I tried hard. Very hard. I even held my breath, and it seemed to me that the spectators who surrounded us in a tight circle did too. A move, a cunning move, attention, reply, move, reply, move, don't hurry, think, reply.

The examiner smiled.

'Good, come to the lesson tomorrow, but don't be late.'

I breathed a sigh of relief..."

We can't help but mention another club instructor who was well-loved by his pupils. David Ionovich Bronstein wrote the following warm words in the same book: *"In the Kiev Young Pioneers Palace, there was a chess club instructor, a man of rare kindness, a strong chess player and great storyteller. Semyon Abramovich Sauskan was already an old man and did not play in serious tournaments anymore, but he was eager to play three-minute games with us."*

Other chess and checkers players were also invited to work as coaches in the club. Small wonder: the club was growing steadily, *"and in late 1940, the*



Yerevan, July 1939. Kiev Young Pioneers Palace team. Standing, left to right: Tolya Bannik, Izya Lipnitsky, Nabatnikov (checkers player), Rafa Gorenstein; sitting, left to right: Khanan Muchnik, Lyova Morgulis, Klara Kovaleva (checkers player), Semyon Natov, Lyuba Kogan, Davy Bronstein (from Lyubov Yakir's archive).

was not always tight enough. Sometimes we would just quickly look through the homework and then start playing chess.

*The collective in the club was very tight-knit. The camaraderie was especially evident on the days when our team played. Only ten players were selected for the team, but still everyone came. The Palace team took many first places in the city and Ukrainian competitions, it was praised by the Ukrainian SSR People's Commissariat for Education and the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Komsomol." ("Club Over the Dnepr," *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, No. 11, 1967.)*

Shortly before the war began, the jubilee book that we mentioned earlier *Five Years of the First Children's Checkers and Chess Club* was published. Its press run was 1,000 copies, but it almost immediately became a bibliographical rarity because most of the copies were destroyed during the war (we would like to thank the late American bibliophile David Nudelman who gave us the opportunity to read it). Short recollections by coaches, young chess and checkers players, their parents, and club guests recreate the club's aura. The book also lists the



Lipnitsky giving a simultaneous display to Soviet Army soldiers in Berlin (from Lyubov Yakir's archive).

gravestone, there's another headstone, "*Leschinskaya Lyalya Markovna. 29th April 1923 – 23rd June 1984.*"

Alas, this marriage didn't bring Lipnitsky joy...

Nevertheless, it was high time to return to chess, which Lipnitsky did in his new position. He organized a chess circle in the SVAG Central Club, and his approach was most serious. The club regularly held tournaments, with hundreds of chess-playing SVAG employees taking part. The club's qualifications committee frequently issued norm-awarding or norm-confirming certificates to the participants. A chess theory workshop was also organized, staffed by candidate masters and first-category players and open to everyone interested.

Lipnitsky the chess player was not alone in Berlin. Moreover, he met worthy opponents there. In spring 1946, the first SVAG Championship was played. Candidate Master Major Boris Naglis (a future master and long-term Moscow Central Chess Club director) took first place, first-category player Lieutenant Monastyrsky finished second. In a similar tournament played in July-August of the same year, Lipnitsky was much more successful, but the 11.5/13 score was only enough for second place – Candidate Master (and future Master) Rashid Nezhmetdinov scored half a point more. According to *Shakhmaty*

Part VI

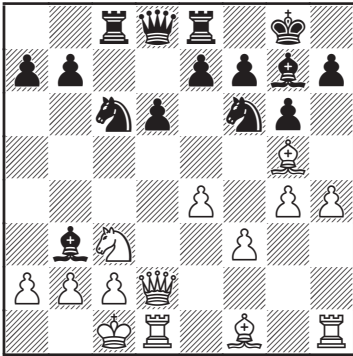
Selected Games and Fragments of Isaak Lipnitsky¹

No. 1

Ratner – Lipnitsky

Burevestnik Sports Society
Championship, Kiev 1938
Sicilian Defense B70

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♙g5 ♙g7 7.f3 ♘c6 8.♘b3 0-0 9.♚d2 ♙e6 10.0-0 ♚e8 11.g4 ♜c8 12.h4 ♙xb3.



Many years later, in Questions of Modern Chess Theory, Isaak Oskarovich showed this position (tactfully refraining from mentioning the players' names) as a textbook example on the subject "Concrete Approach to a Position." Let's give him the floor.

"How to play in this position?"

1. A superficial, dogmatic decision: you should capture towards the center 13.axb3, because 13.cxb3? exposes the king, which is standing on the same file as the black rook. Moreover, if all pieces are exchanged after 13.cxb3?, black will get an easily won pawn endgame.

Thus, 13.axb3!

2. A concrete and creative solution: the main defining principle of the position is swift attacks on opposite flanks. After 13.axb3? ♘b4!, threatening ♚d8-a5, black gets a devastating attack. After 13.cxb3!, however, it's very hard for black to develop his attack, even though the king is X-rayed by the rook (for instance, 13...♘b4 14.♚b1!).

White, on the other hand, is able to continue his kingside attack successfully, and black's extra pawn in the center doesn't mean much.

Therefore, the correct move is not 13.axb3?, but 13.cxb3!

It's easy to see that (...) the move 13.cxb3! is not just a concrete and creative solution to the problem, but also a solution that complies with a chess principle that plays the main role here and can be expressed in the

¹ Uncredited annotations in *italics* were written by the authors of this book.

following way: when sharp attacks happen on opposite flanks, success depends on the ability to combine your own attack on one flank with necessary prophylactic measures on the other.”

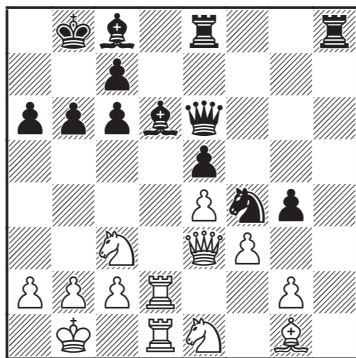
The subsequent battle (which, however, didn't last long) illustrates the aforementioned point quite well. We should point out that the computer also disapproves of white's next move.

13.axb3? ♘b4! 14.♙d3 ♚a5 15.♚e3 ♘xg4 16.fxg4 ♜xc3 17.♙d2 ♜xd3+ 18.cxd3 ♘d5+. White resigned.

No. 2

Lipnitsky – Kanevsky

Training tournament featuring first-category players, Kiev 1938
Annotated by Isaak Lipnitsky



24.♜xd6 cxd6 25.♚xb6+ ♙b7 26.♘a4 ♜h7 27.♚a7+ ♙c8. If 27... ♙c7, then 28.♙b6+ ♙c8 29.♙a5! followed by ♘b6+. The idea of white's combination lies in the maneuver ♙g1-b6-a5 with the subsequent ♘b6+.

28.♙b6 ♚c4 29.b3 ♚e2 30.♙c1 ♜c7. Black tries to placate his opponent with sacrifices. But white continues his maneuver.

31.♙a5 ♙d7 32.♘c5+. Now this check is winning.

32...♙e7 33.♙xc7 dxc5 34.♚xb7. Black resigned.

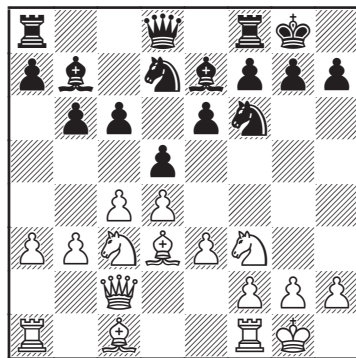
(From the book *5 Years of the First Children's Chess and Checkers Club*)

No. 3

Lipnitsky – Bronstein

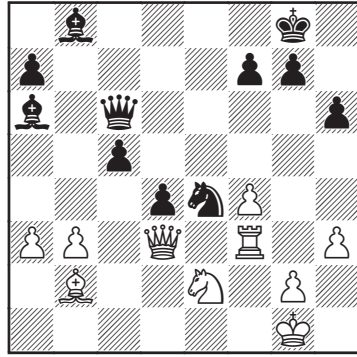
Training tournament featuring first-category players, Kiev 1938
Queen's Gambit Declined D45

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c6 4.e3 ♘f6 5.♘f3 ♙e7 6.♚c2 ♘bd7 7.a3 0-0 8.b3 b6 9.♙d3 ♙b7 10.0-0



10...c5 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♙b2 ♜c8 13.♜ad1 ♙d6 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.♙f5. Serbian master Zoran Petronijevic points out in the Megabase that 15.♘xd5!? ♙xd5 16.e4 c4! 17.bxc4 ♙b7 18.e5 was worth considering.

♔c6 25. ♖f2 ♘e4 26. ♖f3 ♙a6. 26...
♜c7.



In 1946, Lipnitsky played several training games in Berlin against the

33.♙d5 ♖b4 34.a4! Black resigned.

No. 38

Lipnitsky – Averbakh

19th Soviet Championship,

Moscow 1951, round 1

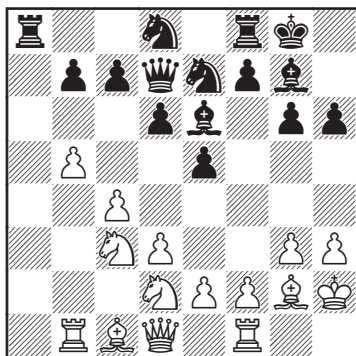
English Opening A26

Annotated by Salo Flohr and Isaak Lipnitsky

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♗f3 g6
4.g3 ♕g7 5.♖g2 ♗ge7 6.0-0 0-0
7.d3 d6 8.♖b1. The position looks
like a Closed Sicilian with colors
reversed. The white pawn's march to
b5 increases the g2 bishop's pressure
along the long diagonal. Interestingly,
another representative of Ukraine,
E. Geller, used a similar idea in his
game against Smyslov.

8...a5 9.a3 ♗f5. The black
bishop will later retreat to e6, so it
might seem that he should have put
it there immediately. However, in
this case white gets an advantage in
development after 9...♗e6 10.h3 ♖d7
11.♘g5 ♗f5 12.g4.

10.h3 h6 11.b4 axb4 12.axb4 ♖d7
13.♖h2 ♗e6 14.b5 ♘d8 15.♗d2.



15...f5. Averbakh spent about forty
minutes on calculating the lines that
occur after the tempting 15...e4 and
got into time trouble because of that.
Indeed, after 15...e4 neither of the
knights can capture the pawn because
of f7-f5, winning a piece. White can
meet 15...e4 with either 16.♗b2 or
16.d4.

16.♗d5. White needlessly decided
against the natural move 16.♗b2,
since 16...f4 can be simply met with
17.g4.

16...♗f7. The trade on d5 would
have allowed white to exert strong
pressure on the c7 pawn and give
the important c4 square to his
knight.

17.♖c2 ♘c8! Averbakh maneuvers
inventively to regroup the poorly
placed knights.

18.♗b2 ♗e6 19.♖a1 ♘b6.
Perhaps 19...♖b8 was better, settling
for a cramped, but solid position.
Now white could weaken the black
queenside pawns with the trade on
b6.

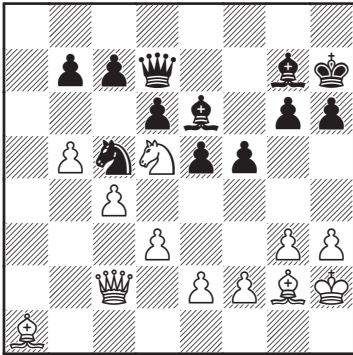
20.♘b4. A poor move. White
didn't consider his opponent's
reply.

20...♘c5 21.♗b3 ♗ba4. 21...
♖fb8, preparing 22...♗ca4!, was
stronger, because it's not good for
white to capture on c5 after that.
After 22.♖xa8 ♖xa8 23.♖a1 ♖xa1
24.♗xa1, white maintained the
initiative.

22.♗xc5 ♗xc5 23.♗d5 ♗e6
24.♗c3 ♖h7 25.♖xa8. White
decided against 25.♖a2, since black

got serious counterchances on the kingside after 25...♖xa2 26.♜xa2 f4, threatening, for instance, 27...f3.

25...♖xa2 26.♜a1 ♖xa1 27.♙xa1.



27...♙xd5. Black cedes the bishop pair advantage to his opponent, since the centralized d5 knight gave him a lot of trouble. For instance, 27...e4 was met with 28.♘f6+! (if 28.♙xg7, then 28...exd3 29.exd3 ♜xg7. *Instead of 29.exd3, white immediately won here with the unexpected 29.♙b2!! dxc2 30.♘f6+ ♔g7 31.♘xd7+ ♔f7 32.♘xc5 ending up with an extra piece*) and a subsequent attack along the a1-h8 diagonal.

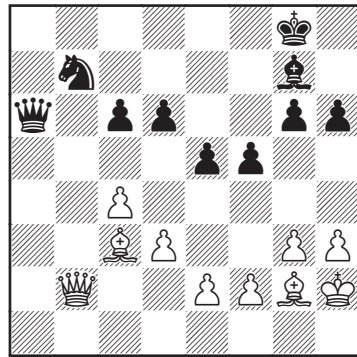
28.♙xd5 c6. 28...e4 was still bad due to 29.♙xg7 exd3 30.exd3 ♜xg7 31.♜e2! with an advantage for white.

29.bxc6 bxc6 30.♙g2 ♜a7 31.♜b1 ♜a6. Averbakh made all his last moves in severe time trouble. He should have played 31...♘e6.

32.♙c3 ♘b7. Preventing the white queen's invasion on b8.

33.♜b2! ♔g8. The threat f2-f4 should have been parried with 33...

♙f8, even though white's chances are still clearly better in this case. Now black loses material by force.



34.f4 ♘c5 35.♜b8+ ♔h7 36.♜xd6 ♘b7 37.♜e7 ♔g8 38.♙xe5 ♙xe5 39.fxe5 ♜b6 40.e6 f4 41.♜f7+ ♔h8 42.♜xf4. Black resigned.

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No. 39

Lipnitsky – Terpugov

19th Soviet Championship,

Moscow 1951, round 12

Ruy Lopez C70

Annotated by Yuri Averbakh

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♙e7. There are some chess players who don't like going down well-trodden paths. E. Terpugov is one of them. Black goes for an original development plan involving transferring the bishop to f6 and the knight to e7.

5.0-0 b5. 5...♙f6 is met very strongly by 6.d4!