

Lubomir Kavalek

Life at Play
A Chess Memoir

New In Chess 2022

Contents

Foreword by Irena Kavalek.	7
The world of gambits (1943-1964)	9
Grandmaster (1965-1968)	53
In the West (1968-1969)	77
On to America (1970-1972)	103
Reykjavik and the aftermath (1972-1978)	135
The organizer (1979-1987)	179
Training Odyssey (1988-1993)	205
Selected games	223
Appendix	331
Index of names	343
Explanation of symbols	349

Foreword

Some twenty years ago my husband, Lubomir (Lubosh) Kavalek, started working on a book of his memoirs. It was to be a story of his chess life accompanied by games or game fragments. He kept compiling stories and collecting games and the amount of material grew. In 2015 he started working with the well-known Czech-American writer Jan Novak. With Jan's help the text of the book started to take shape. Now the plan was to have perhaps a two-volume work with the games published in a separate volume.

On January 18, 2021, Lubosh died unexpectedly. Jan Novak compiled the existing text, without the games, and prepared it for publication. The book is to be published in the Czech Republic under the title *Rozehraný život*.

It seemed important to me to publish an abridged version of the book in 'the West'. I spent the rest of 2021 translating relevant parts into English. I omitted some vignettes of purely Czech interest and added a few paragraphs I found in Lubosh's notes. Some quotes are translations of translations.

While going through Lubosh's papers I found a list of games that he considered for inclusion in the book. My assumption was that those games, some probably annotated, resided somewhere in his computer or on one of the numerous USB flash drives scattered around his office. This presented a challenge since I know nothing about computers and even less about chess. To the rescue came Craig Saperstein who used to take chess lessons from Lubosh as a kid. Craig, now conveniently a software engineer, volunteered countless hours of his free time to look through Lubosh's ChessBase files trying to locate annotated games that could be included in the book.

Various lists I found in my husband's papers and the internet helped me to compile a timeline of his personal and professional highlights included as an appendix. Any mistakes of omission or commission are my own.

Several others helped as well. I owe a great debt of gratitude to John Donaldson for his careful reading of the text and his general help and advice throughout. My thanks to Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam for shepherding the project through to publication. Also thanks to my son Steven and his family for their moral support during this difficult year.

Life at Play

As a result of these combined efforts, *Life at Play* took the shape that was likely intended by its author.

It is my hope that Lubosh would have approved of the final result.

Irena Kavalek
Reston, Virginia
August 2022

FISCHER WANTS LIGHT

The official role of Thelen was to help us with adjourned games, but we knew better. Thelen actually confessed to me that he had been told by the state security apparatus that should my father show up, Thelen was supposed to tell him that if he tried to keep meeting with me, this would be my last tournament abroad. I would no longer be allowed to travel. Thelen was not happy with this assignment and asked me to tell my father myself. This I found to be an absurd suggestion I had to refuse. When my father did show up in Sousse, Thelen acted as if he were his long-lost friend, letting my father pay his bar bills and borrowing exile publications like *Svědectví*, a Parisian journal. The ultimatum could wait.

Our hotel, Sousse Palace, with its beach, pool, sailboat, donkey, and camel, was fun, but the biggest attraction was Bobby Fischer. After a five-year hiatus, he had decided to join the contest for the world title again. There were 23 of us vying for six qualifying spots. The winners would meet in individual matches to prevent the dealings of the tournament mafias. To avoid a repeat of Curaçao 1962, where the Soviets had played as a team against Fischer, the pairings were designed to have players from the same country meet in the first few rounds.

My game with Fischer was scheduled for the sixth round and I was looking forward to it. Nobody from our post-war generation had had a chance to play him yet. We kept running into Bobby in the hotel frequently because his room was between Hort's and mine. The walls were thin, and Bobby was an evening person who liked to listen to music late into the night. Hort was bothered and wanted revenge. He would turn up the radio's Arabic music station full blast and go downstairs to breakfast. It turned out that Bobby was a sound sleeper and never noticed.

We played on Sunday, October 22, and the auditorium was full. Bobby came late, as was his habit. We shook hands and started. The opening was the Poisoned Pawn Variation of the Najdorf Sicilian. I could see that when I selected the sharpest, most analyzed continuation, Bobby got antsy. He got up and requested our table be moved to another spot with better lighting. There was no problem with the light. Was he just trying to break my concentration? I didn't care where we sat, so the organizers moved our table. Bobby was still unhappy, however, and requested additional lamps. We sat surrounded by illumination and I felt like I was being interrogated.

During this phase of the game, it was important to come up with something unexpected, and Fischer attacked my most active piece, a knight, with his pawn. He assumed I would exchange it and that would give him control over the dark squares. He kept glancing at me and looked pleased. He was two pawns up and pushing me back from the center. I

calculated that retreating with the knight led nowhere and considered sacrificing it to complete my development. Bobby had only two heavy pieces in play so far and his queen was stuck at the edge of the board. He had already taken two poisoned pawns; was he going to take my knight as well?

My position reached the fight or flight stage. I was fighting for survival and decided to let the knight be, moving my king to safety. Bobby took the knight and created a pawn triangle – usually a weak formation, but his triangle controlled six important squares.

I don't look at my opponents much during games, but this time I could not resist. Bobby did not look happy. He had overlooked an attacking opportunity, and his position now looked precarious for a change. In the end he put my queen in a deadly pin, but with a pretty rook accordion on the seventh rank I could draw by perpetual check. It was a short but rich game with many intrigues behind the curtain. Bent Larsen wrote that my knight sacrifice was psychologically justifiable, but one could assume that Bobby had not analyzed it. The knight sacrifice in this variation became something of a fad and Garry Kasparov later said our game had influenced the development of this variation for many years to come.

I was happy with the outcome, and my father and I went for a walk on the beach afterwards. Suddenly I saw my afternoon opponent waving at me from across the street. I walked over and Bobby took out his pocket chess set, showing me how he could have won. We were standing under a streetlamp and I could barely see the pieces, but he never noticed. The analytical variation he showed me could be refuted with an exchange sacrifice, but Bobby was on the right track. With a little tweaking, Black could have won.

Bobby was playing brilliantly, and nobody could have foreseen that in a mere ten days we would be playing without him. In addition to his lighting complaints, he made it clear that he did not like being photographed during games, and protested the schedule, which had him playing five games in five days. The organizers ignored his verbal protests, so Bobby simply did not show up for his game against Aivars Gipslis, forfeited, and announced that he was leaving.

His next game was supposed to be against Sammy Reshevsky, who was already walking around with visions of an easy point, when Fischer stormed into the playing hall seven minutes before he would have forfeited again. He sat down to play, and after 28 moves, Reshevsky resigned.

Fischer then beat Robert Byrne but did not show up against Hort and lost another point. He was commuting between Sousse and the capital Tunis, making promises and threats in turn. The Soviets had enough at this point and announced that unless his antics ceased and the organizers

stopped making concessions to him, they would all leave. The organizers had great support in the chief referee Jaroslav Šajtar, and Bobby finally said that he would accept the two forfeits and play his next game, which was supposed to be against Larsen.

As it happened, it was the organizers and Šajtar who prevented him from continuing. They gave him twenty minutes to appear for the game, knowing full well that Bobby was 140 kilometers away in Tunis and there was no way for him to make it. The following day he flew home. He had been totally dominant in the tournament, winning seven out of ten games, with three draws. His goodbye message was clear – let the patzers fight it out among themselves.

HELPLESSNESS

My father was staying in a hotel only a few miles from ours and his vacation was coming to an end. Thelen liked to spend evenings there, and it was finally time for him to deliver the secret police's ultimatum. One evening I saw them walking on the pier when suddenly I saw my father lift Thelen up, ready to toss him to the fishes. Only my cries prevented a major disaster. It was a tragic situation, pitting two people against one another: the son of rich parents who had lost it all and had become a poor Communist versus the poor son of a seamstress and a housepainter who hated Communism. They basically liked each other and were able to have political debates without shouting or violence, but the order not to see his son was a step too far for my father.

For me, all that was left was to finish the tournament. Larsen and I drew a lively game, and Larsen went on to win the tournament. I lost to 15-year-old Henrique Mecking, also known as the Pelé of chess, and to Gligorić, Matulović, and Portisch. I won a few games, but any hopes of qualifying were gone.

On the last day, Hort, Thelen, Šajtar, and I were waiting in the hotel lobby for a taxi. A hotel employee ran up to Thelen and pressed a copy of *Svědectví*, a banned magazine, into his hand saying, 'Sir, you forgot this!' Thelen turned bright red and tried to push it back into the bellhop's hand. He knew Šajtar was watching.

COLLISIONS

The stormy year of 1968 started with a rollover. Janata and I were driving back from the European Team Championship when my trusty Renault went into a skid, and we ended up upside down. Fortunately, we were fine,

managing to turn the car right side up and continue driving on through the night. It was a fitting start to a year that turned my life upside down: the year of the Prague Spring.

Suddenly there was freedom wherever you looked: newspapers, books, clubs, theaters, political organizations. When I spoke to Thelen about the new climate, the old fox warned me, 'Remember that nobody gives up power for nothing.' For me, the most palpable sign of a new era was the fact that I was allowed to study journalism. It was interesting to see many faces of the old guard among my classmates, whose only qualification for their high editorial positions had been the Communist party card, and who were now trying to catch up on their lack of education. I was still working the night shift at the paper, but the work was not demanding. I was learning the trade, and my civic life was uneventful.

In March, the Federation dispatched me to a tournament in Sarajevo. Irena and I loved the old city, the food, the strong Turkish coffee, the sound of the morning prayers from the mosque. When it came to chess, it was not a memorable tournament for me. I ended up third, half a point behind Dragoljub Ćirić and Anatoly Lein.

The Prague team flew to Moscow in April for its fourth Prague-Moscow match. At the Moscow airport one member of our group, Josef Pribyl, discovered that his suitcase, originally full of brand new shirts and pants, was half empty. The Russian customs officials of course claimed that it must have happened on the other end, in Prague.

We stayed at the Hotel Minsk and played in the gloomy chess club on Gogolevsky Boulevard. The former Palace was the home of the Soviet Chess Federation, the chess magazine 64, and the Central Chess Club. Its history recalled better times; it had once been a venue for concerts, opera, and theater.

Looking at history, how about some chess history: how long did it take for the Russians to take over the chess world? At the end of 1925, a strong international tournament took place in Moscow. Only the Russian emigrant Alekhine was missing. This tournament was won by Efim Bogoljubow, with Emanuel Lasker in second and José Raúl Capablanca in third place. This extraordinary event attracted various personalities from the art world, such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Vsevolod Pudovkin. Pudovkin used the opportunity to make the silent movie *Chess Fever*, which featured Frank Marshall, Rudolf Spielmann, Savielly Tartakower, Ernst Grünfeld, and Carlos Torre, with Capablanca in the starring role. The story tells the tale of a chess fanatic who neglects his fiancée. She cries, 'I hate chess!' and wants to swallow poison. Capablanca happens by and the movie caption reads: 'I know what you mean. When I meet a beautiful woman, I

hate chess, also.' The girl tosses the poison away, gets into the taxi with the Cuban dandy, and they go back to the playing hall. She suddenly discovers that chess is beautiful and falls back in love with her chess fanatic.

The Moscow tournament was the work of the great Bolshevik Nikolai Krylenko, who aimed to turn the USSR into a chess powerhouse. He established chess five-year plans, organized mass chess competitions with the slogan 'Chess for the Workers', and arranged for the best players to meet foreign competitors. Krylenko was a dangerous man: as the prosecutor general, he sent many innocent people to their death. Eventually Krylenko became a nuisance to Stalin, who accused him of spending too much time hiking and playing chess. Evidently his hobbies merited the verdict of high treason, and Krylenko was executed during the Great Purge. His chess seeds bore fruit, however, and in 1948, Mikhail Botvinnik became World Champion, starting the Soviet hegemony. From 1951 to 1971, all chess World Championship matches were played in Moscow.

I met Salo Flohr in person for the first time during our team match. He no longer played much; he was nearing 60 and mostly just wrote for the papers or acted as referee. Moscow won the match 13.5-8.5, but since I had the best result of our team, I received a beautiful samovar from the newspaper *Vechernaia Moskva*. The Russian comrades, in a magnanimous gesture powered by vodka, promised that they would bring another samovar for the winner of the Czechoslovak Championship, which was to start a month later.

The championship took place in Luhačovice and to this day is considered one of the strongest in history. Five of the participants figured in the first ten or twenty in the world at one time or another. In addition to the old guard of Pachman and Filip, who were in their forties, the post-war generation included Hort, Jansa, Janata, Trapl, Augustin, Kupka, Plachetka, and Smejkal. We played in the afternoon and we could hear the brass band from a nearby restaurant and the noise from the reception area in the playing hall. After six rounds, I was at 50 percent with one win, four platonic draws, and a loss to Augustin. Things improved after that, though, and I strung together nine wins interrupted by a draw with Filip. Smejkal was breathing down my neck, however, and I could not shake him off.

Smejkal was a merciless fighter. He always dressed neatly in a suit and tie and took equally good care of his chess career. He did not go for cheap tricks and his games were built on solid ground. He was strictly a positional player who liked to take his bishops for walks on the long diagonals. He was a specialist in the Grünfeld and believed strongly in Black's chances in the Ruy Lopez. With White he was an expert in the

Catalan. His downfall was time management. Thanks to his mathematical talent he was often caught up in long calculations and forgot about the clock. Chess clocks signal a loss on time with a little flag that drops down after the allotted time of 2.5 hours. It was almost like Smejkal enjoyed the battle with the clock as much as the game itself. There's no telling how far he would have come if it were not for the clock.

The pairings had us play three rounds before the end. It looked like our game would determine the tournament winner. Smejkal was White and controlled the only free flank. I tried to create counterplay by allowing an isolated pawn. An uneven battle ensued. He tried to control my isolated pawn, and I was simultaneously pushing a boulder up his outside flank. Everything was decided during time pressure when Smejkal took one of my pawns, I threw in another one, the isolated one, and suddenly the white king could not breathe. My attack, inspired by Alekhine, was so simple and powerful that Smejkal froze. He could have simplified but instead allowed a mating attack on his king. June 13 was a lucky day for me. In my last thirteen games I had collected twelve points. My first prize consisted of a diploma and a crystal vase. The Russian samovar never came.

KOTOV'S BANANAS

As an aging student of journalism, I was nominated to play the Student Olympiad in Ybbs, Austria. I therefore had an Austrian visa in my passport, which came in very handy, as it turned out. I was supposed to play the first board when I received an invitation from Amsterdam to play in their first-class IBM Tournament. During the chaos of the Prague Spring, all rules went out the window. People who had profited from their Communist party membership started to hedge their bets, not knowing where the country would end up. Suddenly I was allowed to play in Amsterdam, unaccompanied, and even in possession of a passport that not only had an Austrian and a Dutch visa, but also a transit visa for West Germany. I took advantage of this and stopped in Oberhaching to visit my father for the first time.

The patron of the Amsterdam tournament was the former World Champion Max Euwe, and the competition was rated 1A – the strongest tournament category. The Soviets sent David Bronstein and Alexander Kotov, the 1948 Soviet co-champion. As was my habit, I started with a zero against Bora Ivkov, but then followed with six straight wins, coming to land in the lead. My chief rival was Bronstein, who liked to corner me in the restaurant and dazzle me with a torrent of his chess ideas, complaining

that the young players liked to block everything and never let him put his ideas to use. To my surprise, when we sat down to play, he did exactly what he was objecting to: he blocked everything I tried to do. In a misguided attempt to show him, I sacrificed a pawn, added a knight, and quickly saw that my plan would backfire. He had me. He took my pieces and went on to win the endgame. It was my second loss to Bronstein, but both games were interesting and nothing to be ashamed of.

Kotov started slowly, but caught a second wind, making 4.5 points in the last five games. He arrived to the board for our game carrying three bananas, maybe one for each stage of the game. I was hoping he would not get to eat the third one, the endgame one. I chose the King's Indian, and he reacted aggressively with the Sämisch Variation. When he offered a draw, I refused. There was a chance for me to sacrifice a knight, but I thought better of it when I saw Bronstein draw, meaning that I did not need a win. We continued playing while the nervous organizers were pacing back and forth, eager to get on with the closing ceremony. Finally, when the board was almost bare, we agreed to a draw.

Kotov offered me the last banana and Bronstein came to congratulate me. I had won the tournament. It was my biggest tournament win to date, and because I had made the grandmaster norm again, I did not have to worry about it for the next five years – this was the required period for which you could 'validate' the title in order not to become a 'passive grandmaster'. When I mentioned this to Bronstein, he reminded me tactfully that he had made the norm seventy-five times in his career.

HOW TO LOSE WEIGHT

The last day of the Amsterdam tournament coincided with the beginning of the Akiba Rubinstein Memorial in Polanica Zdroj, a Polish spa. I had to deposit my father in Germany and pick up Irena in Prague. My other passenger was Istvan Bilek, who was also headed to Polanica. I took off into the rainy Dutch night. It poured most of the trip, and I felt like I was piloting a hydroplane. The relaxed Bilek was asleep in the back and my father kept up the conversation, dispensing driving advice, urging me to slow down. I changed the topic to politics.

Unbelievable things were happening. The editors of the Czech magazine *Student* had recently visited Munich and held interviews in the 'treasonous center of the ideological diversion', Radio Free Europe. I told my father that he would soon be without a job now that Czechoslovakia had a free press. My skeptical father was not worried, saying that the Russians were not going to tolerate this orgy of freedom. I did not argue. I was

not entirely convinced myself that things would continue to improve. The sudden political change was suspect. I said goodbye to my father in Nuremberg with the idea that we would meet again soon. Last year's secret service threat that we must never meet again seemed ridiculous at that point.

We got a few hours of sleep in Prague and picked up Irena. I stepped on the scale in Polanica and saw that I had lost ten pounds in the last two months. I was facing fifteen more game days and resolved that after this tournament I would take it easy and get some rest. It took me a few days to recover from my trek across half of Europe but in round eight, I faced a world champion for the first time.

Vasily Smyslov was a tall, pleasant Russian, who talked so languorously it was like being in a slow-motion movie. When it wasn't his move, he liked to stroll through the playing hall, his stride just as judicious as his chess moves. He relied mostly on intuition. By then he was 47 and the younger Soviet players quietly complained that he was finished, should hang it up, sit at home, and make room for the next generation. Smyslov kept winning, however, and later, at the age of 63, was still among the best three in the world, missing another match for the world title by only one Candidates' Match. I was able to play against him surprisingly well and had a better position with Black. When victory was within reach, I made a few imprecise moves, and so the game ended in a draw. In the second half of the tournament, Smyslov and I put some distance between us and the rest of the field: one of us was going to win. Nobody expected then that the greatest drama of the tournament would take place outside the chess board.

STUPID PEOPLE

In the evening of August 20, 1968, Irena and I drove our friend Slava 'Standa' Hajek to the border crossing between Poland and Czechoslovakia in Beloves. He was visiting Polanica to watch the tournament. We used to play chess together when I lived in Hronov. His mother worked in a Benedictine monastery in Broumov, where they later lived when the Communists confiscated their house. Standa had had polio as a child and had trouble walking, but never complained; on the contrary, he took advantage of his handicap and smuggled religious literature from Poland. The customs officials would just wave him through, probably thinking, what could this guy, who can barely walk, be carrying? I still don't know what Standa was carrying, but in every village we passed, we saw a good number of soldiers. 'They are here probably on vacation,' joked Standa, but

nobody was laughing. Between the village houses here and there we could see the barrel of a tank. On our return drive it was dark, and the soldiers and their tanks had disappeared into the scenery.

The next morning the Russian chess player Vladimir Simagin was pacing up and down the hotel hallway, looking worried. When Irena passed by him, she heard him mutter 'stupid people, stupid people', in Russian. He then told her that during the night, Russian tanks had invaded Czechoslovakia. Irena ran to our room, 'Get up! It's war!' I was sure it was just another one of her tricks to get me out of bed.

It was no trick. From then on, when I was not nailed to the chessboard, Irena and I were glued to our transistor radio. There was gunfire at the National Museum in Prague because the Russians thought it was the main radio station. When they found the right building, the shooting continued. There were casualties. The tanks were crushing cars that stood in their way. We followed the broadcasts describing the cat-and-mouse game of how radio broadcasters managed to keep reports on the air by moving secretly from studio to studio. Sometimes we changed the station to Radio Free Europe and waited to hear the voice of my father.

In my free time, I kept chasing Smyslov. I beat the East German Werner Golz in a game full of hate and anger. The Soviets were joined in their invasion by the armies of the Warsaw Pact, which included Poles and East Germans. In the penultimate round I played Simagin, who often coached others, including Smyslov. I knew him as a modest and pleasant person who knew a lot about chess and came up with original ideas. He often played unusual opening set-ups. I realized that this well-read, decent person had nothing to do with the attack on our country. After a few moves there was not much left on the board. I had a rook, Simagin had a knight, and we kept pushing the pieces and the kings around the board. The Poles were loudly kibitzing for my rook as I smacked it against the board. It was my only weapon against the Russian tanks, a flimsy piece of wood, a symbol of helplessness and fury, surrounded by 460,000 soldiers and thousands of tanks. In Liberec, equally frustrated citizens pummeled the Russian tanks with tomatoes, with equal effect.

Suddenly Simagin became unwell; I had no idea that he had a weak heart. We quickly adjourned and decided to look at the chess literature to see if we could find anything about our endgame. All the experts agreed that my position was not winnable, and the game ended in a draw. About a month later we got the news that Simagin had died of a heart attack while playing in Kislovodsk. He was 49 when he made his last move.

YOU CAN GO

In Polanica Zdroj, chaos reigned. The Poles were apologetic and tried to make it up to us. They quickly arranged a large simul for me in Wroclaw so I could make some money. After the tournament, they moved us to the empty villa of a well-known Polish actor. When the last flag on the last chess clock fell in the tournament hall, the chief arbiter collected the scoresheets and took off for home. Tired, he fell asleep on the train and woke up just in time to get off at his stop. The briefcase with the scoresheets was left on the train. It was never recovered, and neither were our games, disappearing forever. The tournament bulletin was never published, and so in the history of chess, a gap remains.¹ Unfortunately, I did not win this unrecorded, and therefore non-existent, tournament. Smyslov ended up ahead of me by a whole point. The organizers gave me 15,000 zloty for second place.

In the beginning we shared the beautiful villa with Jansa, glued to the transistor radio, but after three days he left and returned to Prague. I had the opposite feeling; I sensed that I should not go back. I feared that everything there would only get worse and that the chess bureaucracy would be rejoicing. I felt that I must get away for good.

Such a decision is never purely rational. There are too many unknowns – one must trust one's intuition. Suddenly everything became clear to me. I called my father in Munich and told him I was leaving Czechoslovakia. He wasn't surprised. I asked him to call my mother, who was on vacation in Yugoslavia, to tell her not to go back to Prague and wait for my call. I then wondered aloud how I would get into West Germany without a visa. My father reminded me that I had an Austrian visa for the upcoming Student Olympiad, which I had completely forgotten about in the endless chaos – a stark reminder that I was making important decisions in a state of mental fog.

The simultaneous exhibition in Wroclaw was arranged in haste, and Irena and I left Polanica Zdroj on August 31. The commute to the next job was about 100 kilometers and as soon as we left, a guy on a motorcycle started tailing us. He kept waving at me, motioning for me to stop. I ignored him for a while, but then I stopped. I rolled down the window, and he ran up to the car, yelling 'I hate Dubček!' and took off. We looked at each other in disbelief. Evidently the Prague Spring was not uniformly popular. We soon reached Wroclaw, a university town on the confluence of four rivers with a long chess history. Here, Adolf Anderssen, one of

¹ Thankfully, over many years and primarily due to the players who had kept their scoresheets, 92 of the 120 games have been rescued.

the greatest chess players of the nineteenth century, had been born, had studied, lectured in mathematics, and died. I would have liked to walk the city to trace his presence and pay my respects, but there was no time for sentimental tributes. More than twelve hundred chess pieces were awaiting me in the local chess club.

The simul started soon after our arrival and Irena's assignment was to spend our *zloty*. She said it was like in the old fairy tale: the more she spent, the more *zloty* she seemed to have. When I came back after the simul with another wad of *zloty*, we decided to spend it all in the hotel bar. We bought bottles of Polish vodka at hotel prices from the stunned barman. We kept only enough money to buy gas, loading our tinkling investment in the car, and went to bed. On Sunday, September 1, we got up at 5 A.M. and started on our long drive to Prague. It occurred to us that September 1, 1939, also around 5 A.M., the Germans had invaded Poland and started WW II. There was no time to contemplate world history, however; we had enough of our own small, personal history that seemed equally earth-shattering, to deal with.

We reached the Polish-Czech border in Beloves near Nachod driving on almost empty roads. The customs official just looked at the load of vodka on the back seat and waved us through. In Hradec Králové, I turned to follow the signs to Prague, then hesitated because something did not make sense. I turned around and continued in the opposite direction. The turned-around road signs were the only evidence of the Soviet invasion we came across that day. The citizenry had tried to confuse the invading armies by turning around road and street signs. Ten days after the invasion, we did not see a single tank.

We reached Prague around noon. I parked the car, and we climbed the five floors to my apartment. My mother was still in Yugoslavia, and the apartment was stuffy and very quiet. I looked around. An unmade bed, a table with a chessboard and pieces, cupboard, bookcases, a record player. Should I raid the wardrobe full of stuff stashed there 'for better days'? What should I pack? I could not think of anything better than to just throw in some clean shirts and shoeboxes with my scoresheets. They contained some 850 of my games, only some of which worth looking at. The phone rang, who could it be? I let it ring. No time to chat. I didn't even look out the window – why look? The view of the trees in the Olsany cemetery was imprinted on my brain. What else to pack? Some chess books? A tennis racket? A chess set? No, nothing. I had enough. Irena and I ran down the stairs. Goodbye. *Auf Wiedersehen. Dosvidanya.* I took Irena home. There was no time for long goodbyes. Irena was scheduled to travel to Amsterdam with her university group in October. There were no tears;

there was no time. I got in the car. Should I stop at the Chess Federation to return my exit permit as was required? Idiot. How would I be able to leave?

I was headed south, to Austria, and then what? I tried to imagine where it was I was headed, what was really happening to me, where I would end up. It was late afternoon when I reached the Austrian border. The border patrol was just as accommodating as their Polish colleagues.

‘You are going to Yugoslavia via Austria?’

‘I am going to Yugoslavia?’ I asked, confused.

‘That is what it says on the exit permit.’

‘Oh, yes, yes, that’s true,’ I said.

‘Okay, you can go. Have a good trip.’

And so I went.

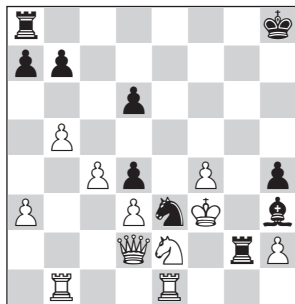
29... ♖g2+!!

The queen sacrifice leads to a deadly king's hunt, forcing mate. It is the shortest way to win, preferred by today's computers.

'The beautiful final stroke was not really necessary,' wrote IM Moshe Czerniak in the Olympiad book. 'A mere 29... ♕g2 was all that was needed. But how could a true chess artist miss such a glorious opportunity?'

29... ♖af8 30. ♗xd4 ♖xf4+ 31. ♗f3 ♖g7 is slower.

30. ♕xg2 ♖xg2+ 31. ♔f3



31... ♖e8!

'The king is given no chance to escape. Black threatens 32... ♕g4 mate' – Czerniak.

32.f5

Forced, and the only way to give the king walking space.

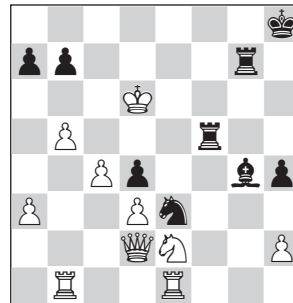
32... ♕g4+ 33. ♔f4 ♖f2+ 34. ♔g5 ♖g8+ 35. ♔f6

'Otherwise he would be checkmated by the knight. Kavalek has calculated his combination very precisely' – Czerniak.

35. ♔xh4 ♗xf5#

35. ♔h6 ♗xf5#.

35... ♖xf5+ 36. ♔e7 ♖g7+ 37. ♔xd6



37... ♖fg5! 0-1

'The final touch; 38... ♖d7 mate cannot be averted. A delightful stroke of art' – Czerniak.

Game 9 King's Indian Defense

Lubomir Kavalek

Wolfgang Uhlmann

Mariánské Lázně 1965 (1)

'Hort dreamed of meeting the IGM norm, Jansa dared to at least meet the IM norm, and Kavalek, of course, wanted to be at least second in the tournament. Many of us expected a better sporting performance from Luboš Kavalek than what he finally showed in the international tournament in Mariánské Lázně. The main obstacle to his performance was the unevenness he showed in individual games. In some we saw exceptional talent and ability, in others little perseverance or incorrect assessment of the situation on the board. But his game with Uhlmann, which was rightly awarded as the best game of the tournament and for which Kavalek

was rewarded with a special prize, shows that he can play even against the strongest opponents – and precisely against them’ – Opocensky.

1.c4 g6 2.♘c3 ♖g7 3.d4 d6 4.g3 ♜f6 5.♙g2 0-0 6.♜f3 ♝c6 7.0-0 e5



This system was one of several weapons used by my opponent in the Interzonal Tournament in Stockholm in 1962. I knew he had worked it out, so I wondered where to leave the beaten track. The next two moves are logical. That’s why I immediately performed them.

8.d5

‘Only in this way can White hope to retain the initiative resulting from the first move. After taking on e5, his advantage would disappear in a few moves’ – Opocensky.

8...♞e7 9.e4 ♞e8 10.♙e3

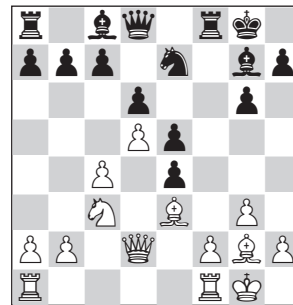
White postpones play on the queenside and tries to take advantage of the poor positioning of the knight on e7 and the bishop on g7. 10.♞e1 f5 11.♞d3 is the most common continuation, when White can combine play on the queenside with the f2-f4 thrust.

10...f5 11.♞d2 ♜f6 12.♞g5 ♞xe4

He wants to gain space for the knight on e7.

12...♞g4 13.♞ad1! (an important zwischenzug before the knight jumps to e6; 13.♞e6?! ♙xe6 14.dxe6 f4 15.gxf4 ♞xh2! 16.♞xh2 exf4 17.♙d4 ♙xd4 18.♞xd4 ♞c6 19.e7 ♞xe7 20.♞d5+ ♞h8 21.♞h1 ♞e5 22.♞g1 f3 23.♙h3 ♞g5+ 24.♞f1 c6=) 13...♞xe3 14.fxe3 ♙h6 15.♞e6 ♙xe6 16.dxe6 fxe4 17.♙xe4±; 12...h6 13.♞e6 ♙xe6 14.dxe6 and White’s pawn on e6 would prevent Black from harmoniously developing his pieces.

13.♞gxe4 fxe4



14.♙g5!

A very important insertion, because otherwise the e7-knight would have reached the key square d4 via f5.

14...♙f6?

‘It turns out that exchanging the dark-squared bishop weakens the defense of Black’s kingside position’ – Opocensky.

14...♞e8!? 15.♞xe4 ♜f5 16.c5±;

14...♙f5 was better.

15.♙xf6 ♞xf6 16.♞xe4 ♞f8 17.f4!

Now that Black’s bishop has disappeared, White’s attack on the kingside is fully justified.

17...exf4

17...♟f5 18.g4 ♘d4 19.fxe5 dxe5
20.♞xf8+ ♝xf8 21.♞h6+ ♝g8 22.d6
cxd6 23.♞f1 ♚e2+ 24.♝h1 ♘f4 25.♘g5
♞e7 26.♙d5+ ♙e6 27.♘xe6 ♘e6
28.g5 ♝h8 29.♞f6 ♘f8 30.♞f7+-.

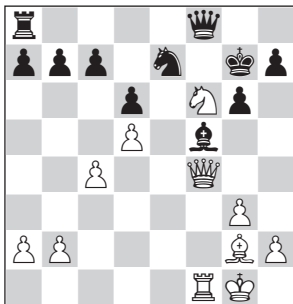
18.♞xf4 ♞xf4 19.♞xf4 ♞f8

19...♘f5 20.g4 ♘g7 21.♞f1 ♞e7
22.♘f6+ ♝h8 23.♞h6.

20.♘f6+

The start of a precisely calculated combination.

20...♝g7 21.♞f1 ♙f5



22.♘d7!

That's the point of White's attack.

22...♞d8

Taking the knight loses the queen:

22...♙xd7? 23.♞d4+.

23.♞d4+

Only now it becomes clear how dangerous the incursion of the white knight is.

23...♝h6

23...♝g8 24.♘f6+ ♝f7 25.♘xh7 ♞h8
26.♘g5+ ♝g8 27.♞f4 ♞e5 28.♞xe5
dxe5 29.♞e1+-; 23...♝f7 24.♞f6+
♝g8 (24...♝e8 25.♘f8+-) 25.♞e1+-.

24.♘f6 c6

Black suddenly has no reasonable defense.

25.g4 ♞b6

This is the only way Black can prevent an early checkmate, but it costs a piece.

26.♞xb6 axb6 27.gxf5 ♞xa2 28.♘g4+ ♝g5 29.f6 ♘f5 30.f7 ♞a8 31.♘e3

The fate of the game is thus decided. Black has only one pawn for the piece and could resign now.

31...♞f8 32.♘xf5 gxf5 33.dxc6 bxc6 34.♙xc6 ♞xf7 35.♙d1 ♞f6 36.♝f2 ♞h6 37.♙g2 ♝f4 38.h3 ♝e5 39.♙d5+ ♝e6 40.♞b5 1-0

Notes in Československý Šach 10/1965 p. 158; Opocensky in Rude Pravo. This game earned me the prize for the best game of the tournament. After Halle 1963, this was already a second prize against the German grandmaster.

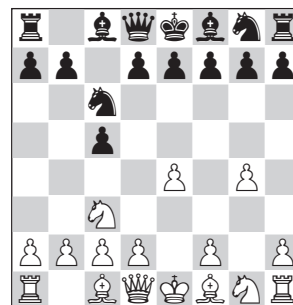
Game 10 Sicilian Defense

Lubomir Kavalek

Jan Erik Westman

Sinaia student of 1965 (2)

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.g4

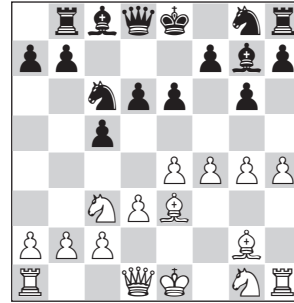


The 'Czech Double-Punch', as it was called by the Soviet grandmaster and theoretician Alexander Konstantinopolsky because it was also played by Michael Janata in

the same match against Sweden. We named the line 'The Vinohrady Variation', after a district in Prague where we'd both gone to school. The spiritual father of the variation was Jaromir Kubicek, another member of our school team and a romantic player with a passion for the King's and other gambits and for various unusual openings. Janata was the best player on our school team and he later went on to tie for first at the 1963 World Junior Championship with Florin Gheorghiu. Our school won the Prague scholastic championship several times. During the 1965 Student Olympiad in Sinaia, Romania, Janata and I were roommates. When we decided to introduce the Vinohrady Variation to the international scene on the same day on our boards, it caused a huge stir in the tournament hall. Kubicek's idea influenced other players from Prague. The variation took off after I published comments to this game in the Czechoslovakian monthly *Československý Šach*, and other Czech players began to use it.

From the 1965 comments: 'The move 3.g4 can't be easily refuted and it provides a good opportunity for an opening surprise. The main idea is to grab space and save a tempo in the attack from the usual slow build-up with 3.g3. The disadvantage could be the weak dark squares f4 and h4, but that is not easy to exploit. For example, after 3...e5, White can play 4.♖c4!'

3...g6 4.d3 ♖g7 5.♙e3 d6 6.♙g2 ♜b8 7.f4 e6 8.h4!



'Black played the opening rather passively, allowing me to gain space on the kingside and have a more comfortable game.'

8...♘ge7 9.h5 b5 10.♚d2 ♜a5

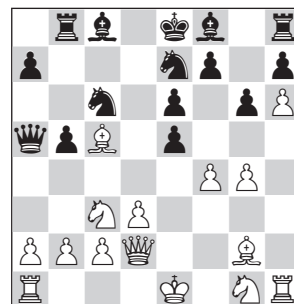
'Black plans to strike with 11...b4 and 12...d5, but White prevents it with a little combination that keeps the black king in the middle.'

11.e5! dxe5

'Black is curious to find out what White really means. Otherwise he would have played 11...d5 although after 12.♘ce2 White is still better.'

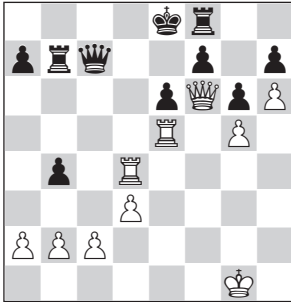
12.h6 ♙f8 13.♙xc5

Ed.: 13.fxex5!+-.



13...♜c7

Allowing a sharp combination. The queen exchange 28...♙xf6 loses fast: 29.gxf6 ♖d7 30.♙xb4 ♖d8 31.♖b7 ♖d7 32.♖eb5+-. Also after 28...♖d7, 29.♖c4 wins.



29.♙xe6+! fxe6 30.♙xe6+ ♙e7
31.♙c8+ ♔f7 32.♖f4+ ♔g8
33.♙xf8+ ♙xf8 34.♙xb7 ♙c5+
35.♔h1

Black has no good check and White threatens 34.♙g7 mate. Westman could have resigned here.

35...♙d4 36.♙g7+!

Simplifying into a winning pawn endgame.

36...♙xg7 37.hxg7 ♔xg7 38.♔g2 h6
39.gxh6+ ♔xh6 40.a3 a5 41.axb4
axb4 42.c4 ♔g5 43.c5 1-0

Notes from Československý Šach 10/1965, p. 151; also published in Shakhmatny Bulletin 12/1965, p. 358, opening review by A.Konstantinopolsky.

Game 11 Sicilian Defense

Lubomir Kavalek

German Khodos

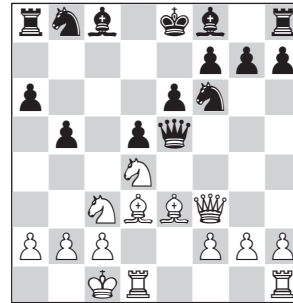
Sinaia student of 1965 (1)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4
a6

Played already in the 19th century by Louis Paulsen.

5.♘c3 ♙c7 6.♙e3 ♘f6 7.♙d3 b5 8.e5
White sacrifices a pawn for quick development.

8...♙xe5 9.♙f3 d5 10.0-0-0



10...♙d6?

A) 10...♙c7?! 11.♖he1! with pressure;

B) 10...♘bd7? 11.♙f5! ♙b8 12.♘xe6 with a devastating attack;

C) 10...b4! 11.♘a4 ♙c7! 12.♖he1 ♙e7 was best.

11.g4!

Closing the net around Black's queen.

11...♙b7

Better may have been 11...h5!? but White replies 12.g5 followed by 13.g6.

12.♙h3

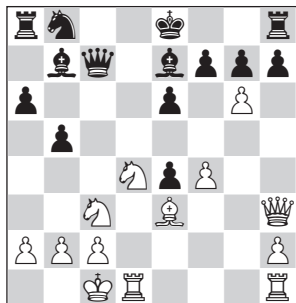
White threatens to win the queen with 13.f4.

12...♙e7?!

Somewhat more tenacious was 12...♙c5.

13.f4 ♙c7 14.g5 ♘e4 15.♙xe4 dxe4
16.g6!

Undermining the pawn on e6. The threat is 17.♙xh7!.



16...fxg6

16...♙f6 17.♘xe6 fxe6 (17...♚c8
18.♜d8+ ♙xd8 19.♘xg7+ ♖f8
20.♘f5 fxxg6 21.♚h6++-) 18.♘xe4
and now:

A) 18...♙d5 19.♜xd5 exd5 20.♚e6+
♚e7 (20...♙e7 21.♘f6+ gxf6 22.g7!)
21.♘xf6+ gxf6 22.♚c8+ ♚d8
23.g7+-;

B) 18...♙c8 19.♘xf6+ (19.♚h5 ♙e7
20.gxh7+ ♖f8 21.♘g5 ♙xg5 22.fxxg5
♖e7 23.♜hf1+-) 19...gxf6 20.g7!
♚xg7 21.♚h5+ ♚g6 22.♚f3+-;

C) 18...♘d7 19.♚xe6+ ♙e7
(19...♖d8 20.♙b6) 20.♘d6+
♖d8 21.♙b6 ♚xb6 (21...♘xb6
22.♘xb7+ ♖e8 23.♚f7#) 22.♘f7+
♖e8 (22...♖c8 23.♚xd7+ ♖b8
24.♘xh8+-) 23.♚xd7+ ♖f8
24.♜he1+-;

D) 18...♙xe4 19.♚xe6+ ♖f8
20.♙c5+ ♚xc5 21.♚f7#.

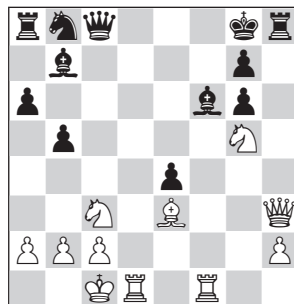
Too bad one cannot play all these
variations in one game!

**17.♘xe6 ♚c8 18.f5! ♖f7 19.fxxg6+
hxxg6 20.♜hf1+ ♙f6**

20...♖g8 21.♚g4 ♚e8 22.♘xg7!
♖xg7 23.♙d4+ ♖g8 24.♚e6+ ♖h7
25.♚h3+ ♖g8 26.♚xh8#.

21.♘g5+ ♖g8

21...♖e7 22.♙c5+ ♚xc5 23.♚e6+
♖f8 24.♜d8#.



22.♜d8+

Black resigned here.

22...♚xd8 23.♚e6+ ♖f8 24.♚f7#;
22...♙xd8 23.♚xh8+ ♖xh8 24.♜f8#.
Notes in Československý Šach 10/1965
p. 150.

This game won the prize for the
most brilliant game of the 1965
Student Olympiad.

Game 12 Philidor Defense

Draguljub Velimirovic

Lubomir Kavalek

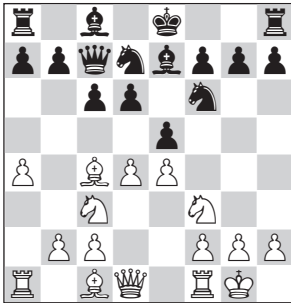
Belgrade 1965 (11)

With three rounds to go, I was
leading the tournament by a half
point. You don't want to be on the
losing end of a brilliancy game.

**1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 e5 4.♘f3
♘bd7 5.♙c4 ♙e7 6.0-0 c6 7.a4 ♚c7**

The Dutch International Master
dr. Johan Barendregt was the main
defender of this system. Black
postpones castling or can start
attacking on the kingside with ...h7-
h6 and ...g7-g5.

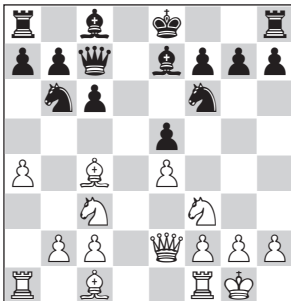
7...0-0 is preferable.

**8. ♖e2 ♜b6?!**

Asking for trouble, but I could not foresee what Velimirovic was about to do. That's, perhaps, why he was called the Yugoslavian Tal.

9. dxe5

9. ♖b3 ♖g4 10. a5 ♜bd7 11. ♖c4 0-0 12. ♜g5 ♖h5 = 0-1 (52) J.Littlewood-Barendregt, Birmingham ENG-NED 1963.

9... dxe5**10. ♖xf7+!**

The storm starts with a thunderbolt. Immediately after the game, we were not sure about the correctness of the sacrifice. Even today's computers show the game being roughly equal.

10... ♜xf7

At first glance, it is not clear how White plans to attack here. Remarkably, Velimirovic just keeps

the black king in the middle and calmly develops his pieces.

11. a5!

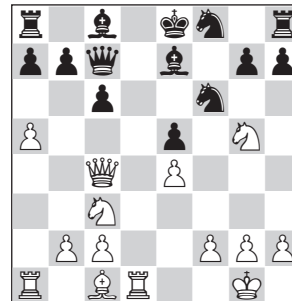
By chasing back the knight, White gains the important square c4 for his queen.

11... ♜bd7 12. ♖c4+ ♜e8

Black can't allow a king hunt after 12... ♜g6? 13. ♜h4+ ♜h5 14. ♖f7+ ♜xh4 (14... g6 15. ♜f5) 15. g3+ ♜h3 16. ♖e6+ ♜g4 17. ♜e2 ♜df6 18. ♜h1 ♖xe6 19. ♜g1#.

13. ♜g5 ♜f8

White gets the other rook after 13... ♖f8 14. ♜e6 ♖d6 (after 14... ♖b8 15. ♜xg7+ ♜d8 16. ♖d1 Black is playing without his queenside pieces) 15. ♜xg7+ ♜d8 16. ♖d1 ♖b4 17. ♜e6+ ♜e8 18. ♜c7+ ♜d8 19. ♖xb4 ♖xb4 20. ♜xa8, winning.

14. ♖d1**14... ♖d7**

I missed a better defense: 14... ♖d6 15. ♖e3 h6 16. ♖xd6 hxg5 (16... ♖xd6? 17. ♖f7+ ♜d8 18. ♖d1+-) 17. ♖ad1! (17. ♜b5?! ♖e7 18. ♖xc6 ♖e6⚔) 17... ♖e6 18. ♖xe6+ ♜xe6 19. ♖xe6+ ♖e7 20. ♖xe7+ ♜xe7 21. ♖xg5 when with two pawns for the exchange White should not worry too much, but neither should Black.

Another way to prevent mate on f7 is 14...♔d8 but White keeps the advantage with an exchange sacrifice: 15.♖xd8+! (15.♙e3? ♙g4!= 15.♙f4? exf4 (15...♗e7!=) 16.♗b5 cxb5 17.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 18.♗f7+ ♗xf7 19.♗xf7 ♗d6d7 20.♗xg7 ♗g6 21.♖d1=) 15...♖xd8 16.♙e3 ♖e8 17.♖d1 ♙e6 (17...h6 18.♗b5!+–) 18.♗xe6 ♗xe6 19.♗xe6+ ♗e7 20.♗c4 with White's edge.

15. ♙e3

Velimirovic quietly brings another piece into the attack and I couldn't find a sensible defense. It was possible to strike immediately with 15.♗b5 ♗b8 16.♗f7+ ♖d8 17.♗d6 ♙xd6 18.♗xg7 ♙e7 19.♗f7+ ♖c7 20.♗xe5 ♗e8 21.♗xh8+– (Houdini).

15... ♗c8?

A) 15...h6 16.♗b5 ♗b8 17.♗f7+ ♖d8 18.♗xg7 (18.♗xa7 c5!) 18...hxg5 19.♗xh8 cxb5 20.♙xg5+– (Houdini);

B) 15...♖d8 16.♗f7+ ♖c8 17.♖xd7! (17.♗xh8 ♙e6) 17...♗xd7 18.a6 b6 19.♖d1 ♗e6 20.♗d5 ♙c5 21.♗xf6 gxf6 (21...♗xc4 22.♖d8+ ♖c7 23.♗e8#) 22.♙xc5 bxc5 (22...♗xc4 23.♖d8+ ♖c7 24.♙d6#) 23.♗a4 and White's attack is too powerful.

16. ♗f7+ ♖d8



17. ♗a4!

An elegant finishing touch. White has many threats: 18.♗b6 or planting a minor piece on c5. There is not much Black can do.

17...c5

17...h6 18.♗b6!+–.

18. ♗xc5 ♙xc5 19. ♗xg7 ♗g6

20. ♙xc5

20.♗xf6+! appears to have been stronger, for example 20...♙e7 21.♗e6+ ♖e8 22.♗g7+ ♖d8 23.♙b6+ axb6 24.♗xb6+ ♗c7 25.♖xd7+ ♖xd7 26.♗e6+ ♖d8 27.♖d1+–, Houdini.

20... ♗h5

20...♗xc5 21.♗e6+–.

21. ♙e7+ ♖c7

21...♗xe7 22.♗f7+ ♖e8 (22...♖c7 23.♗xe5+ ♖c6 24.♖d6+ ♖c7 25.♖e6#) 23.♗d6+ ♖d8 24.♗xh8+ and White wins.

22. ♙d6+

22.♗f7.

22... ♖c6

22...♖d8 23.♗h6+–.

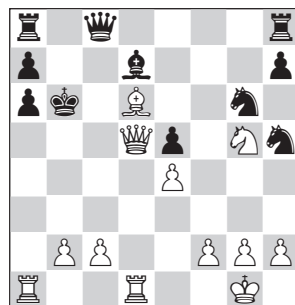
23. ♗f7 ♖b5

23...♗g8 24.♗f3+–.

24. a6 bxa6 25. ♗d5+

25.♗b3+ ♖c6 26.♖xa6+! ♗xa6 27.♗d5+ ♖b6 28.♗c5+ ♖b7 29.♗c7# – a wonderful epaulette mate.

25... ♖b6



26.c4

Velimirovic prefers quiet moves, but he could have forced mate in two different ways: 26. ♖xa6+! ♜xa6 27. ♖a1+ ♜b6 28. ♖a5+ ♜c6 29. ♖c5+ ♜b7 30. ♖b4+ ♜c6 31. ♖a6+! ♖xa6 32. ♖c5+ ♜b7 33. ♖c7#.

Alternatively, 26. ♖a5 mates even quicker! 26... ♜c6 27. ♖d3 ♖b8 28. ♖c3+ ♜xd6 29. ♖a3+.

26... ♖c6 27. ♖a5+ ♜b7 28. ♜c5 ♖ac8 29. b4 ♖hd8 30. ♜f7

30. ♖d6 ♖c7 31. ♖xa6+ ♜a8 32. ♜xa7+-.

30... ♖g8 31. ♖d6 ♜gf4 32. ♖xc6 ♖xg2+ 33. ♜f1 ♖xc6 34. ♜d8+ ♜c8 35. ♜xc6 ♜xc6 36. ♜d6 1-0

Game 13 King's Indian Defense

Lubomir Kavalek

Milan Matulovic

Bucuresti 1966 (7)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 d6 4. ♜c3 g6 5.e4 ♜g7 6.f4 0-0 7. ♜d3 e6

**8.dxe6!**

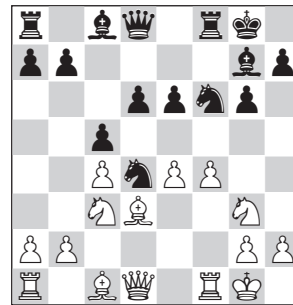
Favored by Vladimir Antoshin. I knew his four games played with this variation and he only lost half a point against me in Leipzig 1965.

8...fxe6

8... ♜xe6?! 9.f5!

9. ♜ge2 ♜c6

9...e5 10.0-0 (10.f5!? is much sharper and I wanted to test the complications, but Matulovic plays differently) 10...exf4 11. ♜xf4 ♜h5 12. ♜e3 ♖xf1+ 13. ♖xf1 ♜c6= Antoshin-Kavalek, Leipzig 1965.

10.0-0 ♜d4 11. ♜g3**11... ♜e8**

Matulovic was one of Antoshin's victims and the plan to activate the queen to h4 and then move the knight from e8 to f6 and to g4 is a result of his home preparation. I decided not to prevent this plan at first.

12. ♜e3 ♖h4 13.f5!?

Is this pawn sacrifice correct? I do not know, but I felt it had to be played.

Maybe I can talk here about intuition in chess. Maybe I can list many variations in this position, but during the game I was not calculating much. My decision cost me 30 minutes on my clock. Interestingly, this pawn sacrifice was the main choice of Komodo 10, 50 years later. It steps up the pace.

13...exf5 14. ♖d2