Mikhail Tal

The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal

New In Chess 2026

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Foreword by Yasser Seirawan

When I grew up, Mikhail Tal was a real chess hero, especially because of his two books *The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal* and his World Championship match book, *Tal-Botvinnik 1960*. Those books – I didn't read them, I ingested them. I just loved his writing. The way he described his own feelings during the game resonated as if I was sitting next to him and he was talking to me.

Along with Bobby Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*. I'll put these two books in a category by themselves. Rereading these three books as a B-player, as an expert, as a master, and finally as a Grandmaster – I learned something new every time.

Playing Tal

The 1980 Olympiad in Malta was my first. Pal Benkö was our captain. Every day we would talk about facing the Soviets. Who should we play? What colour allocation was best for us? We lived this perpetual anxiety. With Garry Kasparov as the second reserve, the Soviet team was a force to be feared.

One early morning, having gone to bed with one certainty – that we were not playing the Soviets, I had a harsh knock on my door. It was Larry Christiansen.

'We play the Soviets! You're White against Lev Polugaevsky.'

'Oh, darn it.'

I stayed in bed for fifteen minutes reflecting on my own games and the games I knew of Polugaevsky. Those days we had *Chess Informants*. I had brought a pile and for the next two hours I ingested Polugaevsky's games.

When I came to the board, across sat Mikhail Tal. Just like, oops. We shook hands, while I was thinking, how was I going to kill Larry Christiansen? By the time I came to my senses, I realized that not only was I worse – we were also losing the match. Then, to my great surprise, Tal offered a draw.

Our match strategy was: if a Soviet offered us a draw, Benkö would try to negotiate another game into a draw package. Pal's head was low. We were down 0-2, with two inferior positions remaining.

I said, 'Misha offered a draw. What do you want me to do?'

'You're on your own.'

When I returned, Tal half stood to shake hands. His eyes went wide when I said, 'I'd like to play.'

He looked at the board, and back at me, this punk kid. Behind me, Pal Benkö threw bulletins in the air, violently cursing.

Long story short: in the time scramble he messed up. The game went to adjournment. My five teammates, all US champions, helped with the analysis. I won. From that moment, Tal, who always treated everybody with kindness, treated me with respect and was extra friendly to me. Remember: this was the height of the cold war. The evil Soviet Union versus us, the good guys, the Yankees.

Great till the end

During the 1990 Kasparov-Karpov match in New York, I had the best gig. The SWIFT company had a suite with open bar and buffet. I would show the bankers on a large demo-board what was going on in the games. One day, Tal showed up, straight off a fourteen-hour flight. He took a place in the bar.

Garry was winning. Misha had a few drinks and watched the game and my analysis. Then Garry made a bad move, on move 39 or move 40. And there was Misha, completely exhausted from his long travel. His face scrunched up as if he had bitten into an unexpected sour piece of fruit. The move had spoiled Garry's advantage; Tal saw it immediately. The game ended in a draw.

Tal's health was always fragile. In 1962, he went to the hospital in the middle of the Candidates Tournament. In 1992 he died, only 55 years old.

Yasser Seirawan
Saint Louis, September 2026

Foreword by the publisher

It is always a difficult job to re-issue a classic chess book. The first obligation is to preserve what made the book a classic in the first place. The second is to balance the respect for the reader and for the author. If the author is alive, this is usually easy, as they will be happy to either update the book themselves, or give their philosophy on how an update should take place. Tal, however, is long deceased, and we know that Alexander Roshal, the chief editor of the famous Russian chess magazine *64*, played an important part as the presumed co-author, at times called 'journalist' in the book. For the narrative, this creates no issues. This was Tal's story, and he definitely told it. Roshal's help made the book better, to whatever extent and whatever form it took.

But when we come to the analysis of the games, we face some bigger questions. Sometimes they are extensive, suggesting they were actually written by Tal; other times they are more flimsy, suggesting they were narrated to Roshal in conversation. But we cannot be sure. Some of the annotations most likely go back to Tal's work with Alexander Koblencs. But it is clear that Tal was happy to lend his name to his co-author's pen.

When Grandmaster John Nunn prepared a previous reissue for Cadogan Chess, in 1997, he added small remarks on some of the pages. This had the advantage of keeping the purity of the original text, while providing the reader with a number of corrections. We have decided to not follow this approach for a number of reasons:

- Firstly, we cannot be certain whose annotations we are preserving.
- Secondly, we feel certain that Tal would have been happy for sounder lines to replace less sound ones. But he would care about the spirit of the annotations remaining intact – replicating his feeling during the game, the sense of the struggle and the excitement of the games.
- Thirdly, since computer programs have gone from providing some assistance (late 1990s) to becoming close to infallible, we feared that this approach would ultimately read as 'wrong again, Misha!'

Which brings us to the main and final point. We wanted to update the narrative of Tal to be as readable as it was when the book was first published in the 1970s. But to do so, we had to fix some variations, omit some and add others. We have done this with care, to preserve the spirit of the original book. Sometimes, to preserve something, you have to polish it...

For those who wish to read the Cadogan Chess version of this book, but cannot find a physical copy, we recommend checking out forwardchess.com.

Jacob Aagaard
Glasgow, September 2026

Acknowledgements

Bringing out a revised and updated version of what many consider the best chess book of all time is thrilling, and also a little frightening. We owe many thanks to RHM Press, who published the first version of this classic work by Mikhail Tal in 1976 (edited by David Levy), as well as to Cadogan Chess (the predecessor of Everyman Chess), who re-issued it in 1997, with some clarifying remarks by the translator, Ken Neat, who also created Tal's tournament and match record at the time. In this edition, we have preserved his remarks with credits to 'translator'.

As Jacob Aagaard explains in his Foreword, Tal may have been helped in his analyses by Alexander Roshal to a certain extent. Nevertheless, David Levy ascribed all the game annotations to Tal, except for Games 8, 11-13, 16-18, 23 and 29 (done jointly by Tal and Alexander Koblencs, his Latvian coach) and Games 87, 88 and 92 (done jointly by Tal and Valentin Kirilov, a Latvian chess master).

The text itself hardly required any correction. New analytical findings were incorporated with the help of engines, John Nunn's old 'Cadogan' notes, and, in the case of Game 94 with Spassky, Garry Kasparov's analyses in his brand new book *Mikhail Tal* (Chess Elevation 2026). These corrections hardly did any damage to the gripping story the 'magician of Riga' made of each and every one of his game analyses. To keep the flow of these stories, we have restricted ourselves to giving comments only where the assessments of a position differed sharply, and put those in italics. In some cases, when (part of) a variation turned out to be incorrect, we have left that out altogether.

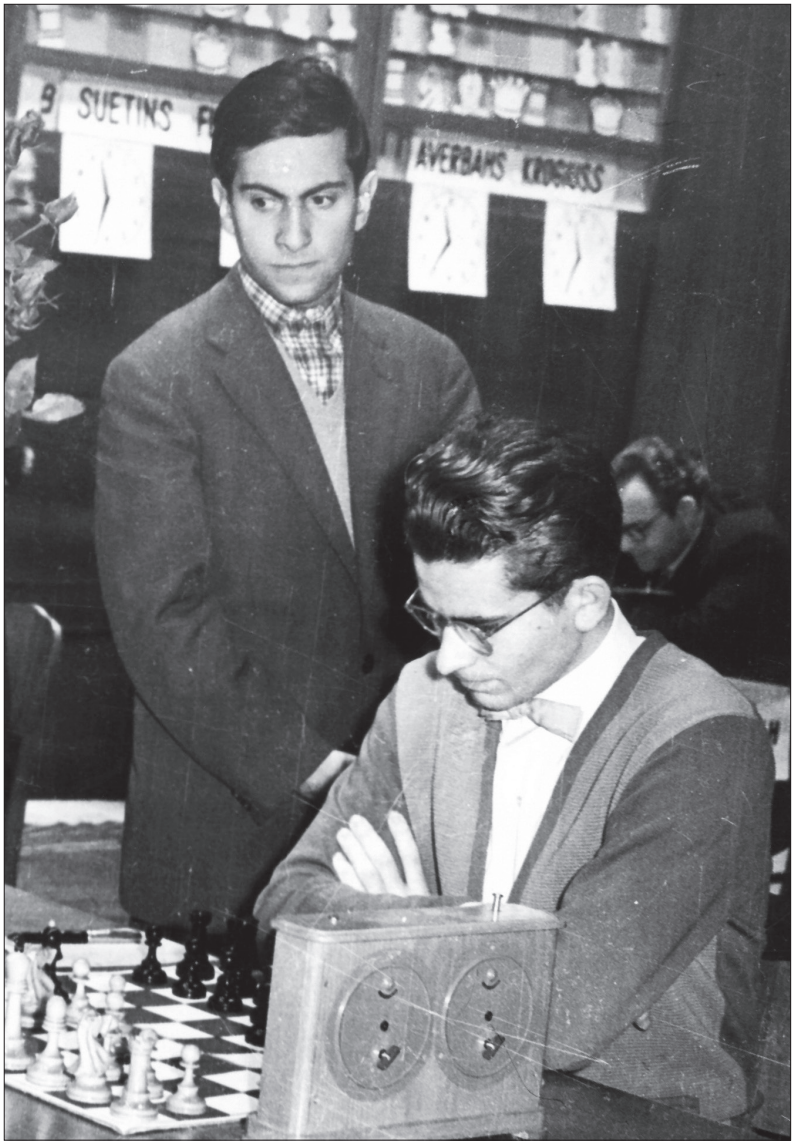
While checking the analyses with the help of the databases, we also discovered that the order of the games was wrong at places. For instance, Tal-Mohrlok (originally Game 46) was played before Franco-Tal, Tal-Gligoric (originally Game 53) came before Tal-Padevsky, Tal-Fuchs (originally Game 60) before Smyslov-Tal, and the order of Tal-Byrne, Kristiansen-Tal and Tal-Bolbochan should be Games 68, 69 and 70 respectively. Also, Tal-Filip (Game 73 originally) was played before Bilek-Tal and Tal-Petrosian, and the correct order of Games 79 and 80 is first Tukmakov-Tal and then Tal-Zaitsev. In the introduction to Chapter 8, the right order of opponents is first Vooremaa then Nei, and Saidy then Timman.

We have endeavoured to enhance the reader's enjoyment of this book by adding a good number of diagrams as well as a collection of photos, kindly provided to us earlier by Alexander Roshal. We do hope, and trust, that you will immensely enjoy our new rendition of this paragon of chess literature.

Peter Boel
Chief Editor New In Chess
Alkmaar, September 2026

with great difficulty that my captain restrained my hand, which was about to pick up my king so as to place it on d5. In this case, the loss on time would not have counted.

Regarding the position, there can be no two opinions – a draw, since after 40...♖h4+, in reply to 41.♔d5 Black can fearlessly answer 41...bxa4 (41...♔a5 is probably also possible) 42.♗xc4+ ♔a5. A game rich in adventures and mistakes, but my first victory over a Grandmaster.



Watching Boris Spassky's game, late 1950s

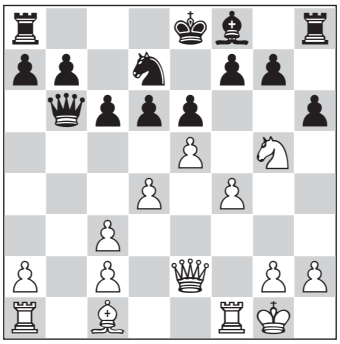
CHAPTER 2

A Young Master

1956 began with my first appearance in the Final of the USSR Championship, which on this occasion was unfortunately rather weakened. At that time all our leading players would normally take part in the Championship, but this was the year of the Candidates Tournament, and so all those seeking the chess crown, with the exception of Spassky, preferred to rest.

I started well; in particular, one of my victories, that over Simagin, appeared in all the chess periodicals, although there was only one move in it which proved difficult.

□ **Mikhail Tal**
■ **Vladimir Simagin**
USSR Championship, Leningrad 1956



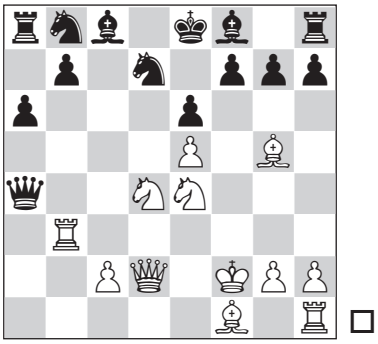
Black is trying to drive the knight away, but White does not even think of retreating: **12.♘xf7 ♔xf7 13.f5 dxe5 14.fxe6+ ♔xe6 15.♖b1** It was after finding this move in his preliminary calculations that White decided to sacrifice the knight. On 15...♕a6 there can follow 16.♕g4+ ♔d6 17.dxe5+ ♔c7 18.♗f4 and on 15...♕a5 simply 16.♖xb7. **15...♕xb1 16.♕c4+ ♔d6 17.♗a3+ ♔c7 18.♖xb1 ♗xa3 19.♕b3!** Black has adequate material compensation for the queen, but White's advantage in development makes his attack irresistible. **19...♗e7 20.♕xb7+ ♔d6** (the return journey!) **21.dxe5+ ♘xe5 22.♖d1+ ♔e6 23.♕b3+ ♔f5 24.♖f1+ ♔e4 25.♖e1+ ♔f5 26.g4+ ♔f6 27.♖f1+ ♔g6 28.♕e6+ ♔h7 29.♕xe5**
And in addition to his initiative, White had also gained a material advantage.

It was here that the one-sided nature of my play revealed itself. Instead of a quiet, purely technical realisation of my advantage, I decided to include my king in the attack, planning to march him along the route g1-f2-g3-h4-h5-g6. In the end this was successful, but on the way Simagin could have gained a draw.

In the sixth round came the important encounter with Spassky. It was clear that on his 'home ground' (the Championship was held in Leningrad) it was Boris who had the support of the spectators; I did not like this, and I played somewhat strangely: first limply (in the opening), then over-sharply (in the middlegame). Spassky won very 'cleanly'.

After this my play deteriorated. I won one game, drew a few, and lost one, but there were practically no good games. I say practically, because in the final round I nevertheless succeeded with a rather complicated combinative attack.

□ **Mikhail Tal**
■ **Alexander Tolush**
USSR Championship, Leningrad 1956



15.♗b5!? It is now known that 15.♘xe6!! gives White a decisive attack. **15...axb5 16.♘xb5 f6 17.exf6 gxf6** It looks difficult for Black to defend himself after 17...♕xe4 18.fxg7 ♗c5+ 19.♔g3 *but here he has a brilliant idea: 19...♖g8! 20.♖e1 ♘f6! 21.♗xf6 ♕g6+ 22.♗g5 ♘c6 and Black is better, for example 23.♘c7+ ♔f7 24.♘xa8 ♖d8! followed by ...h6. If he wants to avoid all these complications, 17...♘xf6! gives good defensive chances.* **18.♖e1! ♖a6 19.♗xf6 ♘xf6 20.♘xf6+ ♔f7 21.♖f3 ♕h4+ 22.♔f1 e5 23.♕d5+ ♗e6 24.♘d7+** *24.♘h5+ ♔g6 25.♕d3+ was winning here. Now the king should have gone to e7.* **24...♔g6? 25.♘xe5+ ♔g7 26.♖g3+ ♕xg3 27.♕xb7+ ♘d7 28.hxg3 ♖b6 29.♕c7 ♗c5 30.♘xd7 ♗c4+ 31.♖e2** and Black overstepped the time limit: **1-0**

Following the tournament, the reviewers considered that a share of 5th place was not bad for a first appearance, but I myself was dissatisfied. Since the Championship, as has already been said, was weakened, and since the competitors were, in the main, winners of the Semi-finals like myself, I had hoped to do better. In the first instance, in the creative sense. Thus, for instance, in my game against Taimanov, an extra piece proved insufficient to win: I was deceived by the 'shuffling' of the pieces. Although similar 'presents' were also made to me, one forgets about them, whereas one remembers one's own mistakes for a long time...

Soon after the Championship I had my first trip abroad. With the USSR Student Team I set off for the World Championship in Sweden. There were a great number of new, colourful impressions, plus the special character of the 'Little Olympiad' – everyone was young and good-humoured, and got on well together, while the language barrier was overcome 'from the first move' – all this sticks in my mind for ever.

From the point of view of the result, our team, which consisted entirely of future Grandmasters, won easily. I was awarded the prize for the best result on board 3. Of interest was my game with Ivkov, which is given below.

The year 1956 ended somewhat dramatically. Despite a poor result in the match between Latvia and Estonia, I was considered favourite for the USSR Championship Semi-final in Tbilisi. I will not now undertake to explain what was at the bottom of it, but the tournament turned out to be extremely difficult for me. After 12 rounds my column of the tournament table showed one win (and goodness knows, the victory was not exactly convincing in an ending with four queens against Kasparian), two zeros and nine (!!) draws. In addition, the defeats were extremely vexing, being the result of bad blunders.

The one thing that cheered me up was a stubborn and successful defence as Black against Korchnoi in our game from the 12th round. Once again around the hundred-move mark (!), the game ended in a draw, and even now I do not know whether it was to this that I owed my spurt at the finish: 6 out of 7. As a result I succeeded in 'catching hold' of the last step on the finalists' train departing for Moscow.

However, it is not impossible that a part was played by a conversation with my trainer Koblencs, who was appearing in the same Semi-final. He had played well in these 12 rounds to be amongst the leaders, and I jokingly said to him: 'Don't be upset, Maestro! We will still be going to the Final together, only this time I will be your second.'

Towards the end Koblencs faded, and in the Final, 'tradition was maintained'.

On to January 1957. The Championship of the Soviet Union was a strong tournament and very interesting indeed from a creative point of view. I do not say this because I succeeded in winning it, but because that is how it really was. Tolush, for instance, gave several brilliant examples of attack; the experienced Bronstein and Keres played with enthusiasm; and it was here that the normally reserved Petrosian demonstrated that he was able – and how! – to play 'open' chess. He lost several games, but was able to win even more. I also succeeded in winning several interesting encounters.

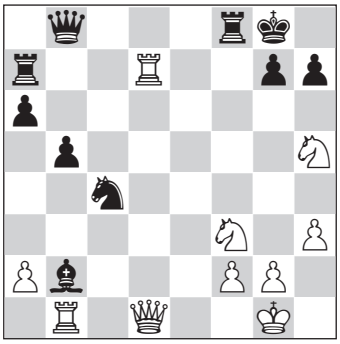
Contrary to normal practice, the start of the tournament went well for me: the game with Aronson is given below. Then I won three further games in a row, including one against the previous year's Champion Taimanov, and my first ever game against my idol Bronstein, whose play has always been for me an example, and, if you like, a yardstick. The fourth victory, against Bannik, continued the

gallery of my games, already quite long, where my opponent set a trap and I fell into it, but in doing so I continued the variation for a further few moves, which allowed me to find a 'hole' in the trap.

I dropped my first half point in the fifth round, and, of course, it was in my game with Korchnoi, while in the sixth round I was drastically punished by Nezhmetdinov for assessing the position incorrectly.

The following could have been my best game in the Championship. After interesting complications, this was the position reached.

□ **Mikhail Tal**
■ **Vladimir Antoshin**
USSR Championship, Moscow 1957



I sacrificed the exchange: **25.♖xb2 ♘xb2 26.♕d5+ ♔h8 27.♕d4 ♖xd7 28.♕xd7 ♖g8 29.♘g5 h6 30.♘f7+ ♔h7** and here I thought that in the variation 31.♕f5+ g6 32.♕d7 gxh5 33.♘g5+ ♔g6 34.♕e6+ ♔xg5 35.g3 h4 36.f4+ ♔h5, I could not play 37.g2(!!!)-g4, because Black would then take en passant. About the fact that the pawn was already on g3, and that the mate by 37.g3-g4 is quite legal, I somehow forgot.

After the game (not having found a mate, I quickly won back the exchange and agreed a draw) this was naturally pointed out to me by Geller, Bronstein, and someone else, and then I really went to pieces. There followed four draws in a row, which is nothing to boast about, and then a game against Boleslavsky adjourned in a poor position, which in the end I lost.

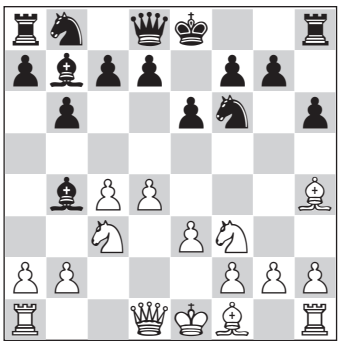
By the adjournment day my mood improved significantly, for I succeeded in winning an interesting game against Petrosian. Then things got better. I managed to defeat Keres (the game is given in the book), who was leading at the time, in positional style, which was a surprise even to me, and went ahead together with Bronstein. In the following round, the 17th, I played a game which brought me half a point, enormous satisfaction, and a special prize.

Game 30 Nimzo-Indian Defence
□ **Mikhail Tal**
■ **Svetozar Gligoric**
Candidates Tournament, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6
In this tournament the King's Indian Defence underwent certain crises, and even such an expert in this opening as Gligoric was subjecting it to major analysis. At the end of the tournament he again used it, but without success.

3.♘f3 b6 4.♘c3 ♗b7 5.♗g5 ♗b4
By a transposition of moves we find ourselves in a variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defence where the position, in the light of the most recent games, slightly favours White. Of this variation I should have been careful, because Gligoric was a witness to my game with Dückstein in the Zürich International Tournament, where White got the better of it. Having burned my bridges as to the choice of opening, I was forced to employ the same continuation as in the game against Dückstein.

6.e3 h6 7.♗h4



7...g5
International Master Konstantinopolsky, who annotated this game in the tournament bulletin, preferred 7...♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♕e7 followed by ...d6, ...♘bd7 and ...0-0-0. I think that the text-move is stronger, since after 8...♕e7 White would continue 9.♘d2 and the knight would control the very important square e4.

8.♗g3 ♘e4 9.♕c2 ♗xc3+ 10.bxc3 d6 11.♗d3 ♘xg3!
In Keres-Taimanov, 22nd USSR Championship, Black played 11...f5 with the idea of attacking on the kingside, but after 12.d5 not only did the attack fail, but Black's position became untenable owing to his bad pawn structure. With the text-move Black maintains his pawn structure.

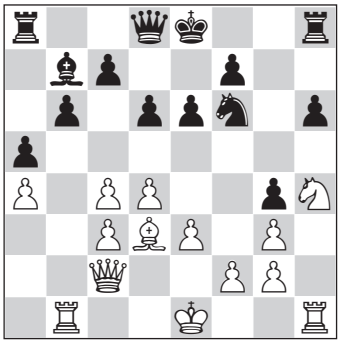
12.hxg3 ♘d7 13.a4
More natural would have been 13.♗e4, but after 13...♗xe4 14.♕xe4 ♘f6 15.♕c6+ ♔e7 the 'dangerous' position of Black's king is only illusory. Black's next move is positionally forced.

13...a5 14.♖b1 g4!
It is interesting that Black has no better move.

If he moves his queen to enable queenside castling, then after ♗e4 and the exchange of bishops, the rook on b1 would be ideally placed and White would follow up with c5.

The move ...♘f6 is impossible at the moment, because of ♘xg5.

15.♘h4 ♘f6



16.d5

This move was necessary – otherwise Black would prepare for queenside castling, and then I could not find an active plan for White.

16...♕e7

If Black takes the pawn on d5, then all White's pieces would become very dangerous.

17.0-0

Weaker was 17.dxe6 ♕xe6 18.♗f5 ♗e4.

17...♘d7

After this logical move White takes over the initiative.

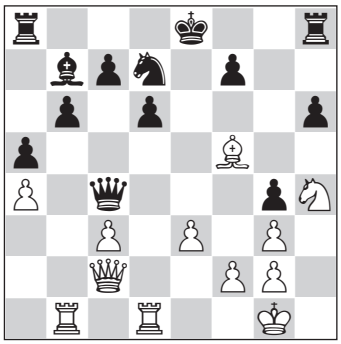
Very tempting was the exchange sacrifice 17...0-0-0 18.dxe6 fxe6 19.♘g6 ♕g7 20.♘xh8 ♖xh8: in this position White would play 21.c5, activating his pieces. Of course the play would become very interesting, but Black's chances would not be bad.

To be truthful, I must say that after 17...0-0-0 I would not have given up my active knight on h4 for the passive rook, but would have played the simple 18.e4.

18.dxe6 ♕xe6 19.♗f5!

Immediately necessary, as after 19.♖fd1 ♘c5 20.♗f5 ♗e4! Black equalises.

19...♕xc4 20.♖fd1

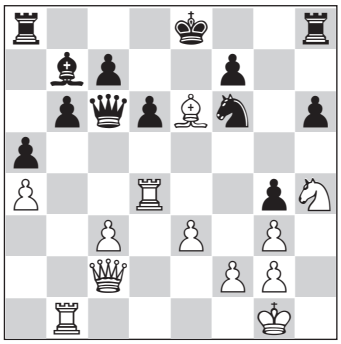


20...♘f6

Black still cannot castle. In the position after 20...0-0-0 White would avoid 21.♖b5 ♗c6 22.♖d4 ♗xb5 23.♖xc4 ♗xc4 24.♕e4 ♗e6, when White would have no obvious continuation. Much stronger is 21.♖d4 ♕c5 22.♖b5 ♕a3 23.♗xg4 and White has an excellent position.

21.♖d4 ♕c6 22.♗e6!

The aim of this move is to force the rook to g8, where it will become the object of White's attack. Black cannot take the bishop because of 23.♕g6+ ♔d7 24.♕g7+!. There is also the threat of winning the queen by 23.♖c4. After 22...d5 I would have been greatly tempted to continue with 23.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 24.♕g6+ and it is easy to see that White's attack is very dangerous.



How to cope with all White's threats? Gligoric finds the best answer.

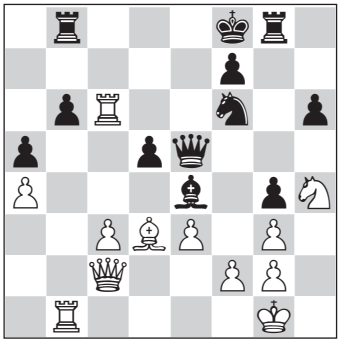
22...♖g8

Now, after 23.♖c4 fxe6 24.♖xc6 ♗xc6 Black would have rook, bishop and pawn for queen.

23.♗c4 ♔f8

White regains the pawn and keeps his positional advantage.

24.♗b5 ♕c5 25.♖c4 ♕e5 26.♖xc7 ♗e4 27.♗d3 d5 28.♖c6 ♖b8



If White takes the pawn on b6, then after the exchange of rooks his initiative would slowly disappear. At the moment White's knight appears to be inactive but it has great potential. With his next move White decides to open up the position even more.

29.c4 ♖g5

After 29...dxc4 30.♖xc4 ♗xd3 31.♕xd3 Black has trouble preventing ♘f5.

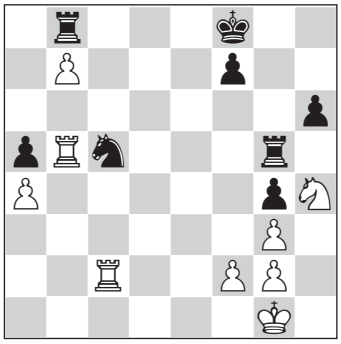
30.c5

White still cannot get the knight into play, but now follows a new threat and White creates a dangerous passed pawn.

Konstantinopolsky's advice to continue 30...bxc5 must be a blunder, for White would not play 31.♕xc5+ but would first exchange rooks at b8 and then collect the knight.

30...d4 31.exd4 ♕xd4 32.♗xe4 ♕xe4 33.cxb6 ♕xc2 34.♖xc2 ♘d7 35.b7 ♘c5 36.♖b5

Possibly, 36.f4 was even stronger, but after a tiring fight and being in time-trouble I did not want to go into the complications after 36...♖d5 37.♖b5 ♖d1+. Now 38.♔h2 ♘xb7 39.♖c7 *(39.♘f5! still wins)* 39...♖e8 40.♖bxb7? is too dangerous due to 40...♖ee1, for example 41.♖c8+ ♔g7 42.♘f5+ ♔h7 43.♖xf7+ ♔g6 44.♖g7+ ♔h5. This is not good enough, and I did not like 38.♔f2. So I decided that two pawns were enough to win this game.



36...♘xb7 37.♖cb2 ♖xb5 38.♖xb5 ♔e7 39.♘f5+

At last the knight becomes active.

39...♔d7 40.♘xh6 ♔c7 41.♘xf7 ♖f8 42.♘h6 ♖d8 43.♖g5 ♖d1+ 44.♔h2 ♖a1 45.♖xg4

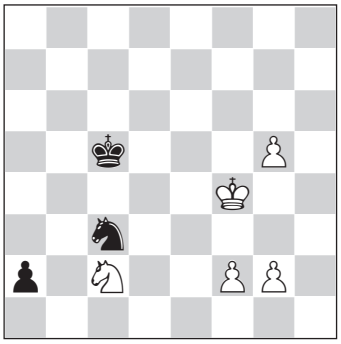
The sealed move.

45...♘c5 46.♖c4 ♔c6 47.♘f5 ♖xa4 48.♘d4+ ♔b6 49.♖xa4 ♘xa4 50.g4 ♘c3 51.♔g3 a4 52.♔f4?

Carelessness: White forgot that Black's pawn was advancing. After the simple

52.g5 or 52.♘c2 Black would have had to resign.

52...a3 53.♘c2 a2 54.g5 ♔c5



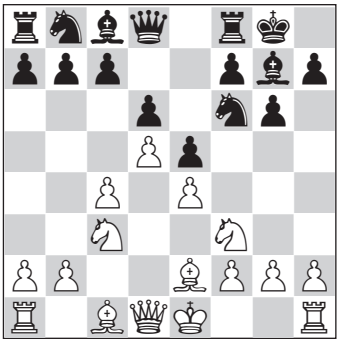
55.g6
Also 55.♔e5 was still winning.

55...♔c4 56.g7 ♘d5+ 57.♔g5 ♘e7 58.f4 ♔c3 59.♘a1 ♔b2 60.f5 ♔xa1 61.f6 ♔b1 62.fxe7 a1♕ 63.e8♕
Now we see the idea of move 57 – Black's queen cannot take the pawn because of 64.♕g6+.

63...♕a5+ 64.♔h6 1-0

Game 31 King's Indian Defence
□ **Mikhail Tal**
■ **Bobby Fischer**
Candidates Tournament, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗e2 0-0 6.♘f3 e5 7.d5
Knowing the United States Champion to be a player with chess principles (not to say dogmas), I had no doubt that one of the variations of the King's Indian Defence would be played in our game from the third cycle. It will not be out of place to recall that the majority of Fischer's defeats in the Candidates Tournament were the result of him repeating the same and, to a considerable extent, inferior opening systems. Of course, one cannot place an opening such as the King's Indian Defence in such a category, but from the results of this tournament it can be concluded that Grandmaster Petrosian, possibly without himself realising it, has placed King's Indian players in a very difficult position. If I remember correctly, he first adopted this system in his game with Suetin from the 25th USSR Championship, when he spoke very modestly about its value, saying that its main advantage was that Black did not obtain active play. Many games have now been played with this system. Black indeed does not obtain active play, but White does, and what play!



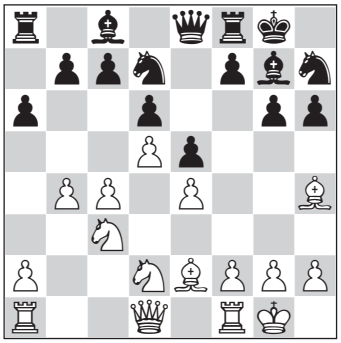
7...♘bd7
It seems to me that this move is inaccurate: after 7...♘a6 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗h4

♕e8 10.♘d2 ♘h7 White must either allow Black to advance ...f5 without great loss of time, or else play g4, as occurred in the game Tal-Vasiukov (USSR Peoples' Spartakiad), which at least gives Black some compensation.

8.♗g5 h6 9.♗h4 a6

The continuation 9...g5 10.♗g3 ♘h5, which, incidentally, occurred in the game Smyslov-Benkö from the third cycle, appears to be an over-strong measure, since sooner or later one of the white knights establishes itself on the obligingly created post at f5. Besides, it is not in the style of the youthful but cautious American Grandmaster to decide on such a continuation without extreme necessity.

10.0-0 ♕e8 11.♘d2 ♘h7 12.b4



12...♗f6

12...f5 would clearly be a mistake because of 13.exf5 when Black is forced to take with his rook (13...gxf5 14.♗h5).

In our game from the first cycle, 12...♘g5 was played, and then Black advanced ...f5, but did not obtain an attack, since his knight turned out to be 'under the feet' of the storming pawns.

To be fair, it should be mentioned that White's play was still further improved by the author of the system, Petrosian, in his game with Gligoric from the final round.

In the present game Fischer chooses the most dogmatic, but also very slow, continuation, involving the exchange of the dark-squared bishops. This continuation, I recall, was recommended by Grandmaster Averbakh in an article devoted to the tournament in Portoroz, and one must suppose, for this reason, that it was familiar to me. After the game it was revealed that the young American had spent ten hours analysing this variation. Alas, this did not improve the variation, but it did leave Fischer tired.

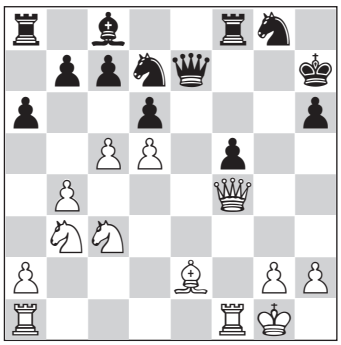
13.♗xf6 ♘hxf6 14.♘b3 ♕e7 15.♕d2 ♔h7 16.♕e3

16.♖ac1 was possibly more accurate, for the moment not determining the position of the queen. Black is unable, without considerable positional sacrifices, to prevent the breakthrough by c5.

16...♘g8!

By defending his queen, Black assures himself of future counterplay based on the e5-square.

17.c5 f5 18.exf5 gxf5 19.f4 exf4 20.♕xf4



20...dxc5

It is curious how players can have a different approach to the same position. I did not consider the capture 20...dxc5 at all, since I thought that, with the 'frozen' queenside, it would be equivalent to suicide for Black to surrender his last base.

I thought that Black was bound to play 20...♘e5, on which there would probably have followed 21.♖ae1 followed by ♘d4, gradually preparing a kingside attack. Fischer, in his turn, captured on c5 without hesitation, evidently thinking that White had overlooked this, and that, with an extra pawn, he would have no difficulty in defending himself. I thought for a long time over my next move, which apparently further convinced Fischer of the correctness of his judgement.

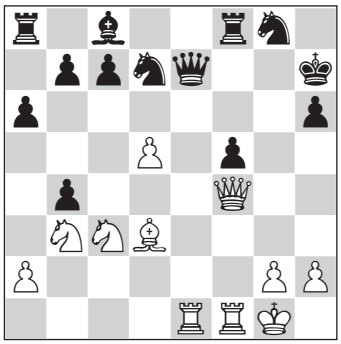
21.♗d3!

White spent his time deciding between the continuation in the game and the variation 21.bxc5 ♘xc5 22.♖ac1 ♗d7! 23.♕xc7 ♖ac8 24.♕f4 ♘xb3 25.axb3 ♖xc3 26.♖xc3 ♕xe2 27.♖c7 ♕e7 28.d6 ♕e6 when, despite the active placing of the white pieces, there is apparently no decisive continuation. Now, however, White's threats become considerably more concrete in character.

21...cxb4

After his previous move this capture could be readily expected. Upon the conclusion of the game it was suggested that the attack could have been beaten back by 21...♕g7. The fact that this is not quite so, is illustrated by the following line: *22.♖ac1 ♘e5 23.♗b1 c4 24.♘d4 ♗d7 25.♗xf5+ ♔h8 26.♕e3.*

22.♖ae1



22...♕f6

This is the decisive error. 22...♕d6 was better, when play would probably have continued as follows: 23.♗xf5+ ♔h8 24.♕d4+ ♘df6 25.♗*xc8* ♖*axc8* 26.♘*e4* ♕*xd5* with good chances to hold. Now events develop by force.

23.♖e6

23.♗xf5+! ♕xf5 24.♕xc7 wins. After the text, Black could have hung on with 23...♕g7 24.♗xf5+ ♔h8 25.♕xb4 a5 26.♕d4 ♘df6.

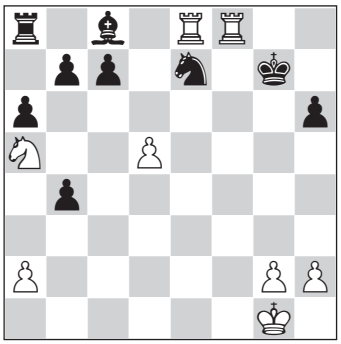
23...♕xc3 24.♗xf5+ ♖xf5 25.♕xf5+ ♔h8 26.♖f3 ♕b2

Black has no way of hindering the storm by the heavy pieces. A player whose main concern was for the number of moves played would no doubt have preferred 26...♘df6 27.♖xc3 bxc3 with good chances of adjourning the game. However, the result would hardly have changed. On 26...♕g7 27.♖g3 ♕h7 (or 27...♕f8 28.♕xf8 ♘xf8 29.♖e8), the immediate 28.♖e8! is decisive.

27.♖e8 ♘df6 28.♕xf6+ ♕xf6 29.♖xf6 ♔g7 30.♖ff8

Simply 30.♖f3 was possible, but White couldn't resist the temptation to put his opponent into an unusual zugzwang.

30...♘e7 31.♘a5



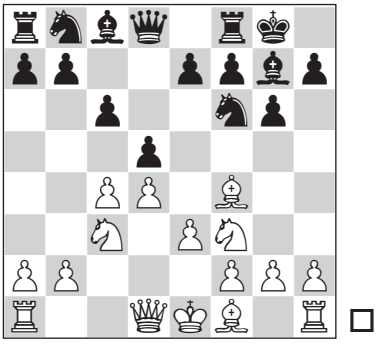
An amusing position: Black's king, knight and bishop have no moves, while he cannot advance his c-pawn as White gets a passed pawn, nor his b-pawn in view of ♘c6. On 31...♖a7 White does not have to capture on c8, but can win a piece by simply moving his rook away from f8.

31...h5 32.h4
This not only demonstrates the hopelessness of Black's position but also creates a mating net.

32...♖b8 33.♘c4 b5 34.♘e5
Black resigned.

Game 32 Slav Defence
□ **Mikhail Tal**
■ **Svein Johannessen**
Riga 1959

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 g6
Schlechter's Defence, which Black uses in this game, leads to a fairly safe, but not very promising game in which Black has few chances of creating active counterplay. Johannessen is a chess master who loves having the initiative, and for this reason it is difficult to agree with his choice of defence.



5.♗f4
It would have been more accurate to first exchange pawns by 5.cxd5 cxd5 and only then play ♗f4, but I did not like to allow Black's knight to come to c6.

5...♗g7
To 5...dxc4 my reply would have been 6.e3 ♘d5 7.♗e5 f6 8.♗xb8 ♖xb8 and 9.♗xc4 with advantage for White, as in the game Geller-Barcza, Budapest 1952.

6.e3 0-0

7.♗e2
Inaccurate. To stop Black's breakthrough I should have first played 7.♖c1.

7...c5!
Usually in this variation the move ...c5 becomes an unfulfilled dream. Here, by contrast, Black can free himself with gain of tempo because of White's unnecessary move 7.♗e2.

8.dxc5 ♕a5 9.0-0

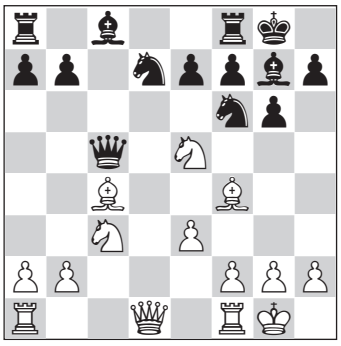
One of those quiet moves which sometimes works wonders. To tell the truth, there was really nothing better. After 9.cxd5 would follow 9...♘xd5 10.♕xd5 ♗xc3+ 11.♔f1 ♗xb2 with excellent play for Black. No more promising was 9.♕a4 ♕xc5 10.♕b5 ♕xb5 11.♘xb5 ♘a6.

9...dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♕xc5 11.♘e5

This looks a bit peculiar. White is not yet ready to sacrifice on f7. Indeed, if in this position it were White's move the sacrifice would not work. However, Black is to play and with his next move he badly spoils his own position. To be just, I have to say that after any normal continuation, for example 11.♗b3 ♘c6, Black's play would have been very easy.

After the text-move, the defensive response 11...♘c6 would have given Black equality. After the game my opponent explained that he did not like the continuation 11...♘c6 because of 12.♘a4 ♕a5 13.♘xc6 and Black would have an isolated pawn. I am sure that the half-open lines and support for the square d5 would give enough compensation for this small positional weakness.

11...♘bd7



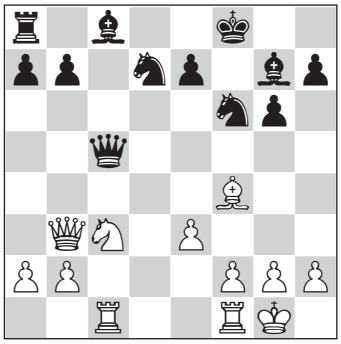
□

12.♗xf7+

I think sacrifices like this do not need deep calculation: it is enough to see the position to be sure that the sacrifice is correct.

However, what sort of sacrifice is it? Black gets two pieces for the rook and pawn. According to all textbook calculation lists he has gained half a pawn, but for that... look what happens.

12...♖xf7 13.♘xf7 ♔xf7 14.♕b3+ ♔f8 15.♖ac1



■

White's pieces take up ideal positions, while Black's queenside pieces are still sleeping. The rook at a8 and bishop at c8 will be passive for a long time, and already there is the threat of 16.♘b5 ♕b6 17.♘c7 followed by ♘e6+. Also, it is easy to see that on move 14 Black could not play ...e6, because then 15.♘b5 would have been even stronger.

15...a6

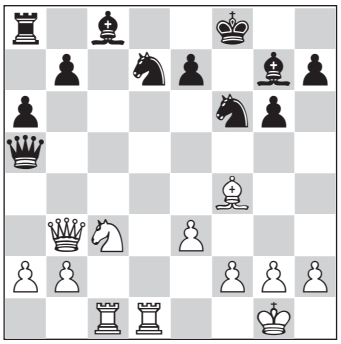
Preventing the aforementioned threat, but White's knight is looking at both sides of the board. A better defence was 15...♕b6 and if 16.♘b5, then 16...♘e8 (Keres' idea). However, White is then ready to play the simple 16.♕c4, keeping much the better position.

16.♖fd1

Now the threat is 17.♘d5 with the same ideas.

Trying to offer the exchange of queens by 16...♕b6 would fail to 17.♕c4, but not 17.♕xb6 ♘xb6 18.♖d8+ ♔f7 when Black can survive.

16...♕a5



Now Black needs only one more move, ...♘c5, and everything would be in order.

That is why...

17.♕c4! ♕f5

Black cannot see any way to develop his pieces. 17...♘c5 is bad because of 18.b4. If 17...♘b6, then 18.♖d8+ is decisive. The same would follow after the exchange 17...♘e5, and finally Black cannot play 17...b5 because of 18.♕c6. The text-move does not promise much either, but in this position good advice is already as valuable as gold dust.

18.h3

It is possible that this simple move is the best way of emphasising White's tremendous advantage. Now there is also the threat of g4, and the reply 18...h5 would weaken Black's kingside too much. Black again tries to regroup his forces.

18...♘e8 19.♘d5 ♕e6

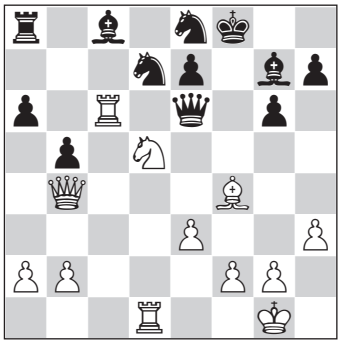
If 19...e5, then 20.♕b4+.

20.♕b4 b5

Grandmaster Keres suggested the move 20...♗e5, but after 21.♗xe5 ♕xe5 22.f4 ♕e6 23.e4 Black's position is hopeless.

In making the text-move, Black seemingly was quite 'hopeful', intending to play 21...♗b7; after 21.♘c7 ♘xc7 22.♖xc7 ♔f7 there are no real threats. I must admit that my opponent did not notice the not very complicated combination.

21.♖c6!



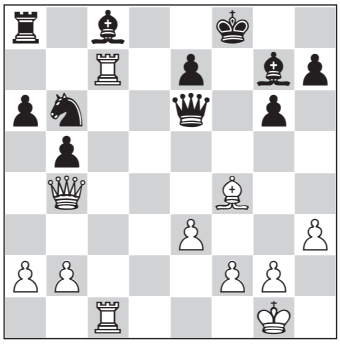
Gaining the decisive tempo. It is interesting that the final combination arrived just at the moment when, seemingly, Black was over his main difficulties. The last part of the game is more or less of a forced character.

21...♕f7

The rook cannot be taken.

22.♘c7 ♘xc7 23.♖xc7 ♕e6 24.♖dc1 ♘b6

Also hopeless was 24...♘e5 25.♕e4.



25.♖xe7 ♘d5 26.♖xe6+ ♘xb4 27.♗d6+ 1-0

At best, Black loses 'only' a piece. It is interesting to mention that Black's queen's bishop and rook did not make a single move.