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Ulf – the Attacker!

56 Thrilling Games from Sweden's Chess Legend

New In Chess 2025

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Preface

Books about Ulf Andersson

The motivation behind the present book is to highlight an overlooked and underrated aspect of Ulf Andersson's game: his attacking play. I have already written a coffee-table book about him, *Schackets Mästare – I huvudet på Ulf Andersson*, published in Swedish in 2019 together with sports journalist Robert Okpu. It was a biography with a mix of personal and public photographs, aimed at a Swedish audience. In contrast, this book aims to appeal to an international readership, focusing on his chess career and games. While the Swedish book featured 22 well-annotated attacking games, this one includes 56 games as well as 16 game snippets on that same theme, all of the annotations having been computer-checked.

Apart from that Swedish book, I am aware of only three other books that exclusively focus on Ulf Andersson. They all emphasize his strategic foresight, understanding of positional aspects and outstanding endgame technique; they often neglect his attacking play, offensive spirit, and pursuit of tactical complexities.

The first book on him I encountered in my twenties was Ulf Andersson's *Decisive Games*, written in 1985 by India's second International Master, Vaidyanathan Ravikumar (Ravi). It's a small 80-page volume with a yellow cover, featuring 82 selected games, of which 32 are well-commented. Spanning games played from 1973 to 1983, it comes highly recommended, but unfortunately it's not easy to come by.

The second book, *Grandmaster Chess Strategy: What Amateurs Can Learn from Ulf Andersson's Positional Masterpieces* by Jurgen Kaufeld and Guido Kern, was published by New In Chess in 2011. It presents 80 complete games to illustrate his mastery of technical chess and realization of positional advantages. It's a valuable resource for chess players seeking to deepen their understanding of strategic concepts. The structure of the book focuses on 15 specific themes, each explored in depth from his games to provide a detailed understanding of the subject matter. It might be of interest to list the themes here in order to give a flavour of the extensive ground the book covers; they are Playing against Two Weaknesses, An Advantage in Space, Control of the d-file, Prophylaxis, Playing against the Isolated Pawn, The Bishop Pair, An Original Exchange of Bishop for Knight, Fighting Against the Hedgehog, The Positional Exchange Sacrifice, The Positional Queen Sacrifice, The Art of Defence, The Catalan Endgame, Rook Endings, Rook and Minor Piece and Minor Piece Endings. It's

not just about learning these themes from his games but also about applying those insights to one's own games.

The third book, Cyrus Lakdawala's *How Ulf Beats Black – Ulf Andersson's Bulletproof Strategic Repertoire for White*, was published by New in Chess in 2018. It not only discusses Ulf's approaches to the opening with the white pieces, but also incorporates the author's and other players' attempts to implement his ideas into their own games. The division of the book into various opening set-ups provides players with a practical way to learn and apply his strategies. The wide range of openings covered include the King's Indian, the Pseudo-Grünfeld, the Queen's Indian, the Hedgehog, the Quadruple Fianchetto, Réti's Opening, the Catalan, the Tarrasch Defence, the Symmetrical English, the Modern, the Pirc, the Accelerated Dragon, the Dutch and the Exchange Slav.

Playing style

My idea for the present book was to go through Ulf's games in chronological order and focus on him as an attacking player, as this aspect has never been written about extensively before.

Naturally, he chose solidity when facing the world's best players. It was a different story when he was young and playing significantly weaker opponents. Even in correspondence chess, he played aggressively. From my thorough study of his attacking games, I have noticed that certain themes recur, such as his preference for exchanging the dark-squared bishops and then exploiting the resulting weakness on the dark squares. There is also a noticeable proportion of games where Ulf wins due to weaknesses on his opponent's back rank. For Ulf, securing king safety is surely high on his list of fundamental elements, and if his opponent is less aware of this, Ulf is right there like a cobra, ready to strike.

Regarding his focus on weak dark squares, it may well be related to his early career fascination with the game Reshevsky-Bronstein, Zurich 1953; he thought this game was fantastic because it showed how Bronstein exploited the dark squares in White's camp. Ulf commented on the game in the collection *Learn From the Grandmasters*, published by Batsford in 1975 and compiled by Raymond Keene. He chose it for that book as the game which had created the deepest impression on him.

This is what Ulf had to say about the game in issue number 8 of *Schacknytt* from 1999, which is similar to his comments in the Batsford book, and with my italics added:

'I first played through this game in my early years, as it was included in one of my first chess books. Even then, I was impressed by the game's structure and the fighting spirit both players displayed. The way Black manoeuvred his forces, particularly the knights, made me think of two evenly matched giants – one standing on solid ground and the other on quicksand. Black's advantage grew as the game progressed. Reshevsky

had no counterplay on the queenside and was forced into a desperate attempt with e4-e5. The way Bronstein responded to this attempt and his play in the ensuing endgame brings me joy every time I revisit this masterpiece.'

Here is the game with light comments provided by me, other than the comments in italics which were given by Andersson.

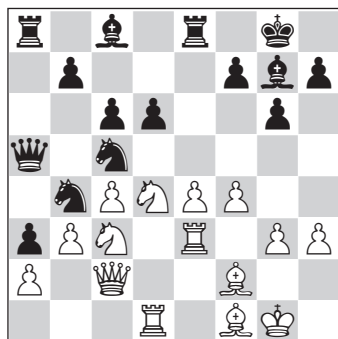
King's Indian Defence

Samuel Reshevsky

David Bronstein

Candidates Tournament, Zurich 1953

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♙g7 4.♙g2 0-0
5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 ♘bd7 7.0-0 e5 8.e4
♙e8 9.h3 exd4 10.♘xd4 ♘c5 11.♙e1
a5 12.♙c2 c6 13.♙e3 ♘fd7 14.♙ad1
a4 15.♘de2 ♙a5! 16.♙f1 ♘e5 17.♘d4
a3! 18.f4 ♘ed7 19.b3 ♘a6! 20.♙f2
♘dc5 21.♙e3 ♘b4



Ulf was particularly impressed by how the knights increased the advantage as the game progressed.

22.♙e2 ♙d7 23.e5?! dxe5 24.fxe5
♙ad8 25.g4 ♘e6 26.♙h4 ♘xd4
27.♙xd4 ♙c5 28.♙de4 ♙h6! 29.♙h1
♙e6 30.g5 ♙g7 31.♙f4 ♙f5 32.♘e4
♙xe4+ 33.♙fxe4 ♘a6! 34.e6

Reshevsky wants to stop the knight manoeuvre ...♘a6-c7-e6.

34...fxe6 35.♙xe6 ♙f8 36.♙e7 ♙d4
37.♙3e6 ♙f5! 38.♙e8 ♘c5 39.♙xd8
♘xe6 40.♙xf8+ ♘xf8 41.♙g3 ♙xg5
42.♙xe6 ♙xg3 43.♙c8+ ♘e7 44.♙g4
♙c3 45.♘g2 ♙b2+ 46.♙e2+ ♘d6
47.♘f3 ♙c5 48.♘e4 ♙d4+ 49.♘f3
♙f6+ 50.♘g2 ♘c7 51.♙f3 ♙b2+
52.♙e2 ♙d4 53.♘f3 h5 54.♘g2 g5
55.♘g3 ♙f4+ 56.♘g2 g4! 57.hxg4 hxg4
58.♘h1 ♘b6 59.♘g2 ♘c7 60.♘h1 ♙d6
61.♘g1 ♘b6 62.♙g2 ♙c5+ 63.♘h1
♙h6+ 64.♙h2 ♙e3 65.b4 ♙d4 0-1

The final variation is nice: 66.c5+ ♘a7
67.♙g2 g3 and when the queen moves it is
mate on g1 and when the bishop moves it is
mate on h6.

There is no doubt that the key sentences in the Schacknytt quote above were those I have put in italics. They have strongly influenced Ulf's approach to how chess should be played. It is possible to extract several important themes from the game that have influenced him. It primarily concerns manoeuvring with the intention of creating a structure where one side has an advantage on one or more squares of the same colour, with particular emphasis on the placement of the knights. It also requires the psychological attitude of having a fighting spirit to achieve these goals. One can therefore view this game as an important model regarding the exploitation of squares of the same colour;

in this case, the dark squares. There are a large number of games by Ulf where this idea runs through them like a thread, often introduced by the exchange of dark-squared bishops on g7 to weaken the enemy king's position and create weaknesses on h6 and f6.

The Hedgehog System, which Ulf often played as Black and defeated Karpov with, is probably the most controlled aggressive chess one can play, as it involves attacking with all the pieces. I have written about this in my book *300 Most Important Chess Positions*. I feel it's unfair that this dimension hasn't been highlighted in the general discussion of Ulf's playing style. Ulf would never have reached the top of the world rankings if he hadn't mastered all facets of chess.

One of my favourite games of his is Karpov-Andersson, Milan 1975 (Game 25). This game, in my view, epitomizes his playing style with elements like the Hedgehog System, sacrificial strategies to dominate specific board areas, pragmatism, patience, strong psychological resilience, controlled aggression and an unwavering determination to win. I have thoroughly analysed this game and if you only want to play through one game in this book, this is the one you should see (not that I would recommend that approach...).

Another game I highly recommend as a teaser for all the other games in the book is Andersson-Portisch, Skopje 1972 (Game 24). When I first saw this game, I couldn't help but think of Paul Morphy because, just like Morphy in many romantic games, Ulf developed the bishop to a3 with decisive effect. The crowning moment is when Ulf tried to force the king to e5, and Portisch had the good sense to resign after such a humiliating treatment. Other games inspired by Morphy, and his characteristic pawn sacrifice to open up the centre, include the one against Huss, played in Biel in 1977 (Game 26), and the correspondence game against Bern in 1994/95 (Game 41).

Reflecting on Ulf's overall playing style after working on this book, it's challenging to try to pigeonhole such a great player into a single category. While he is renowned for his endgame prowess, the game against Karpov didn't display much of that.

During the 1980s, Andersson's endgame ability grew enormously, earning him a high degree of respect among top players and proving crucial to his success in world chess. When Ulf was in his prime, there was probably no equal to him in positions with only a few pieces and pawns remaining on the board. He has been referred to as the 'World Champion in chess without queens', among other accolades, by chess columnist Leonard Barden of the English newspaper *The Guardian*. The journalist Bent Larsen once described Ulf's playing style in the chess magazine *Schacknytt*:

The typical Ulf game is long. It starts with a calm opening where Ulf isn't looking to disrupt the opponent, regardless of who is playing with the white pieces. After extended manoeuvring, the opponent ends up with a weak pawn or perhaps a bad bishop. Afterwards, the queens are preferably traded, and then it becomes a slow endgame. The endgame isn't easily won, but that's okay because Ulf enjoys playing endgames. Naturally, the opponent doesn't, especially when it's an unfavourable endgame for them. So, subconsciously, they commit suicide on move 70 or 80, or they can hold out for over 100 moves. This beautiful and logical progression is occasionally disrupted, either because the opponent self-destructs earlier or because Ulf overlooks something trivial in a frantic time scramble.

Once I saw an endgame in which Caruana and Grischuk made a number of errors. It's difficult to imagine Andersson making such mistakes. Ulf is simply someone you can rely on when it comes to endgames, which is not the case with many other players in the world elite. Furthermore, the time limit for classical games has been significantly reduced in recent years, and it is the endgame phase that suffers the most from this. So, if you are going to study endgames, Ulf is the one to go to, and this also includes endgames where the queen is involved.

While he is often labelled as a great master or even the world champion of endgames, it's not accurate to confine him only to that domain. Naturally, Ulf, like Capablanca, was extremely skilled in playing without the queen. These are areas I aim to explore in my future writings on Ulf's playing style, delving more deeply into his positional and endgame strengths, particularly lesser-discussed aspects like his proficiency in various endings, especially rook endings.

Ulf started his career in his younger days by consistently playing 1.e4, but changed his strategy when facing tougher opponents in the world elite. He developed his own opening systems, which is typical for geniuses. Over time, he refined his positional technique and became known for advanced and long-term exchange sacrifices. He also developed an unwavering toughness, something that can only be acquired by playing against the world's top players.

As for how Ulf in his prime would fare against today's world elite, he would likely be one of the best players today. There is no Karpov or Kasparov in today's chess world, and computer analysis cannot match Ulf's play. Comparisons between different eras are always difficult because it's the brilliance and depth of play that should truly be valued – the concepts that Ulf introduced and that players still use today, much like Morphy's immortal ideas.

I am convinced that players of all levels have much to learn from Ulf about how to play chess. Sweden's current strongest player, GM Nils Grandelius, has said the following thought-provoking words:

As a young junior, I had several training sessions with Ulf, where we analysed all sorts of things. For me, who had mostly worked with computers until then, it was deeply fascinating to see a completely different, and in many ways much more effective, approach to chess.

The greats of Swedish chess

Ulf Andersson is generally regarded as the strongest player in the history of Swedish chess, with Gideon Ståhlberg (1908-1967) firmly in second place. However, this can be debated. As Peter Holmgren remarked in 2024: 'If Ståhlberg ranks higher than Ulf Andersson, that will always be the question, but without a doubt, Ståhlberg's influence on Swedish chess cannot be overestimated. This work [Gideon Ståhlberg – An Epoch in Swedish Chess Volume 1, The Musketeer Years 1908-1939] attempts to provide a factual basis for readers to form their own opinions.'

Comparing players from different eras raises questions about what defines strength and performance. For instance, one must consider the quality and quantity of strong opponents and tournaments available during Ståhlberg's time compared to those faced by Andersson. Ståhlberg's achievements certainly stand out; he was particularly strong in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. During the 1930s, he won matches against several of the world's strongest players, including Rudolf Spielmann and Aron Nimzowitsch, and he also drew a match against Paul Keres.

Comparing their performances using Chessmetrics – a ranking system created by statistician Jeff Sonas – offers intriguing insights. This unofficial world ranking employs advanced statistical methods, including the Elo rating system, to evaluate and compare the performances of players across different eras. It enhances our understanding of chess achievements and provides an alternative way to assess historical masters who never faced modern competitors. His contributions have been groundbreaking in chess statistics and ranking.

According to Chessmetrics, Ståhlberg's highest world rank was 3rd for five months between the February and July 1948 rating lists, while Ulf's best was also 3rd, but for seven months between the May and November 1983 rating lists. Ulf achieved rating performances of at least 2700 on 26 occasions during his career from 1975 to 1990. In contrast, Ståhlberg achieved only nine results over 2700 between 1935 and 1952; but notably, one of his results was 2817, which he achieved in Buenos Aires/La Plata in 1947. Although Ulf never achieved a result over 2800, his significantly larger number of results over 2700 should be considered a stronger performance.

Furthermore, the evolution of playing styles may have influenced the impressiveness of certain achievements. Börje Jansson, who was Swedish Champion in 1968, has been a teammate on the national team with both Ståhlberg (during his last Chess Olympiad in Tel Aviv in 1964) and Ulf (from

his first Chess Olympiad in Siegen in 1970). Jansson shares his perspective on the comparison, stating that, positionally, he believes Ståhlberg and Ulf were equals. However, Ulf brought an additional dimension to his positional play, as demonstrated by his exchange sacrifices. He had a remarkable ability to sacrifice a rook for a knight or bishop at precisely the right moment, a technique he seemingly employed almost regularly in his games.

Additionally, the historical importance of a player's era can significantly affect their legacy and impact on future generations of players. Considering that Ståhlberg's peak period, according to Chessmetrics, lasted from 1935 to 1952, it is notable that he did not have access during those years to the crucial Candidates Tournament in Neuhausen/Zurich in 1953, where one of the games left a lasting impression on Ulf, as we have seen. The tournament was also groundbreaking in terms of important ideas within the Sicilian and King's Indian openings, where the reasoning that a weakness is only weak if it can be attacked gained significant traction and set dynamic opening systems in motion towards new variations.

If we set aside world rankings and rating performances, it is clear that Ulf to a certain extent employed a dynamic style influenced by concepts from the Russian school of chess that dominated during this time. For example, Tigran Petrosian was a typical exponent of the exchange sacrifice, which became Ulf's hallmark throughout his career. Ståhlberg, on the other hand, largely represented classical chess and was contemporary with the Soviet chess school, led by Botvinnik, which gradually began to develop dynamic chess concepts that ultimately reached their peak in the 1953 tournament, where several Soviet players participated.

It is also clear that Ulf has had a significant influence on his contemporaries and succeeding chess players in Sweden. Grandelius has expressed it this way: *Ulf has meant incredibly much for Swedish chess. It's almost impossible to describe how important he has been. A whole generation of strong grandmasters emerged in the wake of Ulf's success.*

My experiences with Ulf

I have had the privilege of meeting Ulf on several occasions. The first time I visited him at his home in Arboga with SK Rockaden, I was surprised by the absence of any chess books or a chessboard. It soon became clear to me that everything was in his head – he truly was a chess genius, much like Capablanca, who also didn't have a chessboard at home. It took time for me to grasp the difference between ordinary hard-working mortals and chess gods, but today it is clear to me.

I had the honour of having a long conversation with him on 7 October 2023, after the European Club Cup in Durrës, Albania. We were sitting on a couch

at the hotel, waiting for the airport shuttle. Both of us had suffered from food poisoning, but Ulf had been hit particularly hard and needed a doctor to give him an injection.

The last time I saw Ulf play was during the final round of the Stockholm Summer Rapid Open on 14 July 2024, the second day of the event. On the first day, there had been a stifling level of heat in the playing venue and Ulf experienced dizziness, something he had never encountered before in his life. On the second day, the weather had changed, and Ulf was able to play under normal conditions. I followed the game in the final round, and I was greatly impressed with his endgame technique.

Here is the game as I remember it:

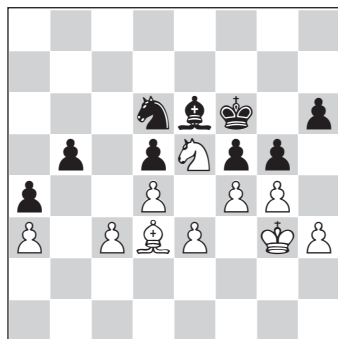
Chigorin Defence

Ulf Andersson

Haroon Azizi

Stockholm rapid 2024

1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.♟f3 ♙g4 4.♞c3 e6
5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙f4 a6 7.e3 ♟f6 8.♞c1
♙d6 9.♙g5 ♙e7 10.♙e2 0-0 11.0-0
♙e6 12.♞c2 h6 13.♙h4 ♞d7 14.♙xe7
♞xe7 15.♞a4 ♞fc8 16.a3 ♞d8 17.♞c5
♞xc5 18.♞xc5 ♞xc5 19.♞xc5 c6
20.♞fc1 f6 21.♞d2 ♙d7 22.♞5c3
a5 23.♞b3 b6 24.♙d3 f5 25.f4 ♟f8
26.♞d2 a4 27.♞f3 ♞f7 28.♞h4 ♞d6
29.♞g6+ ♟e8 30.♞e5 ♞c7 31.♞xc6
♞ac8 32.♞b4 ♞xc3 33.♞xc3 ♞xc3
34.bxc3 ♙e6 35.♟f2 b5 36.♞c6 ♙d7
37.♞e5 ♙e6 38.h3 ♟e7 39.g4 ♟f6
40.♟g3 g5



I remember thinking about how Ulf would be able to break through, and then came...

41.♞f3!

But I still couldn't see what Ulf was up to.

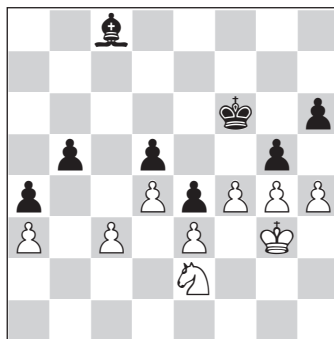
41...♙c8 42.♞d2 ♙d7 43.♟f3

It then dawned on me that he wanted to perform a 'castling' manoeuvre with the knight on f3 and the king on g3, and increase the pressure on f5.

43...♙e6 44.♞f1 ♞e4

Haroon understands what Ulf is up to, but it is too late.

**45.♙xe4 fxe4+ 46.♟f2 ♙d7 47.♞g3
♙c8 48.♞e2 ♟e6 49.♟g3 ♟f6 50.h4**



I recall thinking that Ulf planned to manoeuvre the knight to h3, forcing Black to resolve the tension between the pawns – a refined dark-square strategy with a focus on g5.

**50...gxh4+ 51.♖xh4 ♙e6 52.f5 ♙g8
53.♘f4 ♖g7 54.g5 ♖h7 55.f6 ♙f7
56.♖g4**

Black resigned.

After the game he analysed it for a long time with his opponent who probably got his greatest lesson ever. I was deeply impressed by Ulf's endgame technique, especially regarding the coordination between the king and knight. What sets geniuses apart from ordinary mortals is precisely the ability to create a masterpiece on the spot, while others might achieve it only occasionally when the right inspiration is there and the stars are perfectly aligned in the universe. Ulf always seems inspired because for him a game is more than a game.

His humility and modesty are evident in his reluctance to discuss or highlight his victories, even against strong opponents. Instead of dwelling on his successes, Ulf preferred to analyse and learn from the games of others, constantly seeking to expand his knowledge and deepen his understanding of various positions and strategies. The young Ulf used to comment in Swedish magazines on the games he had lost, which says something about his attitude. This reflects his continuous pursuit of improvement and mastery of the game.

Ulf modestly credits his opponents' mistakes for his successes, rather than highlighting his own accomplishments. This reflects his humble nature and his dedication to the game over the seeking of personal accolades. Though he frequently recounts his own career, he frames others as the central figures in the narrative. He is unassuming, careful, almost reserved, yet his enthusiasm shines through, particularly when discussing players he admires.

Personally, Ulf is widely regarded as one of the most likable figures in the chess world. He is consistently humble, generous with his time and maintains a positive demeanour. Known for his exceptional sportsmanship, Ulf serves as a role model in both Swedish and international chess circles.

IM Thomas Engqvist
Stockholm, Sweden
12 November 2024

Introduction

Ulf Andersson was born on 27 June 1951 in Västerås, Sweden, and grew up in Arboga, a working-class town 200 kilometres west of Stockholm. It is remarkable that one of the world's top chess players would emerge from such a place. Introduced to chess at around the age of ten by his father, Egardt, Ulf initially preferred sports like football and ice hockey. He still finds it surprising that chess eventually became his main focus. His interest in chess grew when he and some boys used to engage in various sports like running and pole vaulting, as well as playing various games. One of them suggested that chess should be included in their decathlon competition. After a while, when Ulf was thirteen years old, he and his friends joined the junior section of the Arboga chess club and visited the club twice a week. In his own words:

I never made a decision to focus solely on chess; it just turned out that way. I started playing for Arboga SK quite soon, and I still remember the trips we took together to the Swedish Championship, which were always the highlight of the year.

In the 1930s, Sweden was a leading chess nation, with the famous trio of Gideon Ståhlberg, Erik Lundin and Gösta Stoltz at its forefront. After these great players left the scene, Swedish top-level chess declined. To revive its past glory, the Swedish Chess Federation initiated a Youth Programme, of which Ulf was a product.

For many years, the Arboga Chess Club was renowned as a leader in Swedish youth chess. School students were engaged early, given opportunities to face skilled older players, and encouraged to participate in tournaments, nurturing both their interest and skills.

Ulf graduated from trade school in 1969 as an industrial mechanic, having just learned turning and welding. If young Ulf Andersson hadn't encountered chess during his school days, he would probably have spent his life working on the factory floor in 1970s Sweden. Instead, his life took a different path. To quote him again:

I attended a two-year metalworking programme. The first year was theoretical, and the second year was practical, involving various placements. We learned everything – drawing, welding, and turning. The whole of Arboga revolves around these industries. I had a job offer from the last place I had interned, but it didn't work out.

Throughout the 1970s, 1980 and 1990s, Ulf Andersson was firmly part of the world chess elite. In 1979, he was ranked 25th globally, climbing to 12th by

1981. Remarkably, in 1983, he reached 4th in the world with an Elo rating of 2640, holding this rank across both official FIDE lists released that year. In 1985, he placed 18th amid intense competition among the top 20-30 grandmasters. In the January 1991 list he was at number 10 with an Elo of 2640, while in 1992, he still held a respectable 33rd place with a rating of 2605.

In addition to his exceptionally strong performances in over-the-board play, Ulf has also achieved admirable results in other forms of chess. He has previously held the world record for playing simultaneous chess: in 1996 against 310 opponents during a PR exhibition in Älvsjö, Stockholm. Ulf won 268 games, drew 40 and lost two, with a total playing time of 15 hours and 23 minutes!

Ulf was also a successful correspondence chess player, participating in three tournaments between 1994 and 1999. After completing two of these tournaments, he achieved the highest rating ever, with 2805. Upon finishing all three tournaments, he held the official world number one spot according to the 2005 rating list.

Even though Ulf Andersson is now a retired senior citizen, he has no plans to stop playing competitive chess. His great role model, Victor Korchnoi, continued to play even after reaching the age of 80. Ulf has famously said:

As long as I'm able and can sit down at the chessboard, I will continue to play chess!

Ulf's attacking games from 1967-2018

Ulf's career is divided into four parts, displaying a selection of his most instructive attacking games spanning over fifty years. By presenting these games chronologically, it will be easier to follow Ulf's rise and observe how he developed his aggressive concepts to win – and sometimes lose – games. Studying his earlier games is crucial, as he advanced rapidly during the late 1960s and early 1970s, eventually becoming one of the best players in the world during the 1980s.

The deliberate choice of your author to avoid the typical games Ulf is known for – those which demonstrate his prowess for deep opening concepts, exceptional positional play and high-level endgame techniques – highlights the versatility of his play and the way he adapted to different situations and opponents. Ulf in an attacking mood, where his main focus was attacking the king, is an often overlooked and underestimated dimension of his play. It is clear that someone who ascended to the world chess elite with attacking games and maintained his position for so many years, and needing just two tournaments to become the highest rated player ever in correspondence chess, is skilled in both the strategic and tactical aspects of the game.

Attacking chess is often a question of calculated risk, which is why we will also see games in which Ulf pays a high price for his aggressiveness. The intention is to provide a holistic view of Ulf as an attacking player.

Many may not know that Ulf contributed to the theory of the Moscow Variation against the Open Sicilian to avoid forced variations like the Dragon and Najdorf. This system, with ♟f1-b5 on the third move, can be complemented by other anti-lines such as the Alapin/Sveshnikov $2.\text{c3}$, or $2.\text{♞f3}$ and $3.\text{c3}$ or the Grand Prix Attack $2.\text{f4}/2.\text{♞c3}$ and $3.\text{f4}$. Bent Larsen achieved great success with the latter anti-system group in the Interzonal Tournament in Amsterdam in 1964.

There follows the important model game that led many Sicilian enthusiasts on the black side to find it practically difficult to create dynamic play with a fair share of winning chances.

Game 24 Sicilian Defence

Ulf Andersson

Lajos Portisch

Skopje Olympiad A-final 1972

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 d6 3.♟b5+

This is one of the model games that have helped popularize the Moscow Variation, which was originally played by several masters from Moscow after the war. The approach demonstrates that a strong player can be defeated with seemingly simple moves. The basic idea is not only to avoid complex and forced open lines but also to prepare a slower central build-up with c2-c3 and d2-d4 .

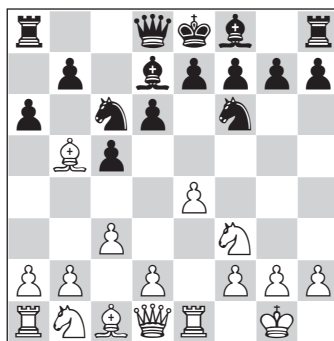
3...♞c6

This transposes to the Rossolimo Variation.

Black doesn't mind piece exchanges, so $3...\text{♟d7}$ is logical, which can be met with $4.\text{♟xd7+ ♞xd7}$ $5.\text{c4}$, leading to a Maroczy Bind set-up. The advantage for Black of exchanging the bishops is that the light-squared bishop cannot

be trapped behind its own pawns, unlike in the standard Maroczy Bind set-up.

4.0-0 ♟d7 5.♞e1 ♞f6 6.c3 a6



7.♟f1

The best and most logical continuation. Here the bishop is not obstructing any of White's pieces, especially the king's rook.

The gambit line $7.\text{♟xc6 ♟xc6}$ $8.\text{d4!?$ ♟xe4 $9.\text{♟g5}$ created problems for

Black in the 1980s, but nowadays this variation has been thoroughly analysed and doesn't pose as much difficulty. After the text move, White's pawn structure is the same as that which arises in the Ruy Lopez, but the important difference is White's light-squared bishop, which here is on f1 instead of b3 or c2 as is customary in the Ruy Lopez. The

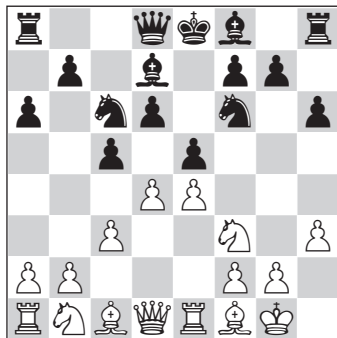
bishop is more active on f1 because it can help undermine Black's pawns on the queenside with a2-a4 once they have advanced.

A disadvantage is that the f1-bishop could potentially obstruct the classical Steinitz manoeuvre ♖b1-d2-f1. However, there might instead be a knight manoeuvre to c4. The strong resemblance to the Ruy Lopez is one of the reasons for the popularity of the Moscow Variation, as it demonstrates the soundness and inherent positional strength of the system. Such systems are what Ulf prefers and has favoured throughout his career.

7...e5

Another method to fight for the d4-square was 7...♙g4, as the tempo loss doesn't matter much in this closed position.

8.h3 h6 9.d4



9...♚c7?!

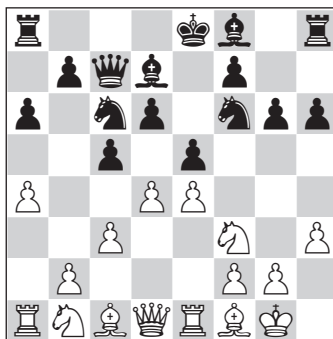
It is stronger to release the tension in the centre by 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 exd4 11.♘xd4 and continue 11...♙e7 12.♘c3 0-0, with a slight advantage for White.

10.a4

White benefits from the position of his light-squared bishop as explained above.

10...g6?

It was again stronger to capture twice on d4 with the pawns and then dissolve the centre by playing ...♙e7 and ...0-0.



11.♘a3

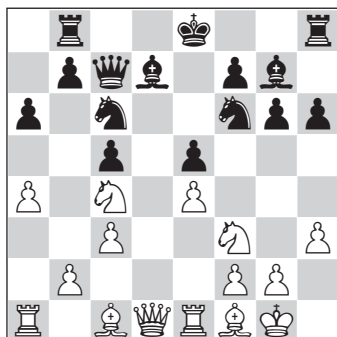
Taking advantage of the drawback of his opponent's previous move, Ulf aims to directly exploit the weakness on d6 that arises when Black places his bishop on g7.

Another option is to seize space in the centre with 11.d5 ♘e7 and then focus on the queenside with 12.b4!, aiming to open the game there with 13.bxc5. This would effectively force Black to respond with 12...cxb4, but then White has the surprising 13.♚b3! with the idea of 14.♚xb4. White is then dominating, and 13...bxc3 14.♘xc3 does not improve Black's chances.

11...♙g7 12.dxc5 dxc5 13.♘c4 ♖b8

Black is already lost, but the relatively best move was 13...0-0, which would

have been met with 14.♔d6! ♚xd6 15.♜xd6 ♖ab8 16.a5!. The artificial isolation of the c5-pawn means that moves like ♜c1-e3 and ♜f1-c4 are difficult for Black to deal with.



14.b4!

Also strong was 14.♔d6! ♚xd6 15.♜xd6+ ♜e7 16.♜c4, when White has not only the threat against the e5-pawn but also the positionally strong ♜c4-b6.

However, in a romantic spirit, Ulf prefers to play a much more aggressive move.

14...cxb4

The relatively best option in this difficult position was 14...♜e6 15.♜d6+ ♜e7 16.bxc5 ♖hd8, followed by artificial castling with ...♜f8 and ...♜g8.

15.cxb4

The advance to b5 is a troublesome threat for Black.

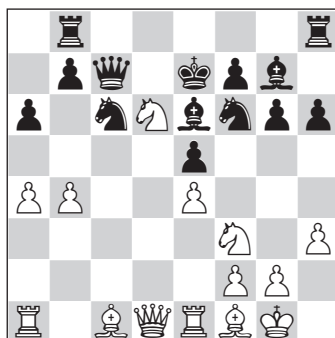
15...♜e6

15...♜xb4 is most easily met with 16.♜b2! ♜h7 (or 16...♜c6 17.♜a3!)

17.♔d2 a5 18.♜xe5 ♜xe5 19.♜fxe5 ♜g5 20.♜d6+ ♜e7 21.♖ad1!. Black is now lost because 21...♜xa4 fails to 22.♔f4!, with the point being 22...♜d1 23.♜xg6+! fxg6 24.♜f5+ ♜d7 25.♖xd1+ ♜c8 26.♜d6+ etc.

16.♜d6+ ♜e7

16...♜f8 would have been met by 17.b5 axb5 18.axb5 ♜d4 19.♜xd4 exd4 20.e5 ♜d7 21.♔xd4 and White is clearly winning.



17.♜a3!

Ulf plays just like the masters of the 19th century, who loved to place the bishop on the a3-f8 diagonal when Black has comprised his kingside or failed to castle kingside. Morphy won numerous games in this manner.

17...♜e8

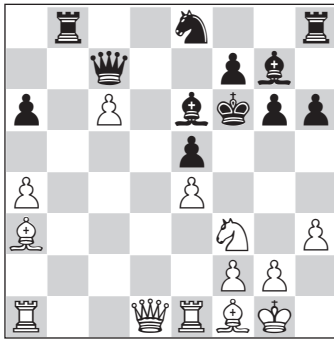
17...♔xd6 18.b5 ♜b4 19.♔xd6+ ♜xd6 20.♜xb4+ results in an exposed king and the loss of the pawn on e5, so this variation is basically as hopeless as the one played in the game. In a bad position, there are no good variations.

18.♜xb7! ♔xb7

If instead 18...♖xb7 19.b5+ ♘d6
20.bxc6 (20.♖c1 is also decisive)
20...♖b6 21.♖c1 ♖xc6, the positional
pressure on d6 and a6 will determine
the outcome of the game after
22.♞d3!.

19.b5+ ♖f6 20.bxc6 ♞c7

20...♞xc6 is also met by 21.♘xe5!, but
it leads to a different mating pattern
after 21...♙xe5 22.f4+! ♙xf4 23.♞f3+
♙e5 24.♞g3+ ♙f6 25.e5+ ♙f5 26.♞g4
mate.



21.♘xe5!

Black resigned. The last pride of his
position, the e5-pawn, has vanished.
After 21...♙xe5, Ulf could have
delivered checkmate in four moves
with the beautiful line 22.f4+ ♙xf4
23.♞f3+ ♙e5 24.♞c3+ ♙f4 25.♙c1
mate.

Similarly, 21...♞xe5 loses after
22.♞f3+ ♙f5 23.exf5 and so on.
It is aesthetically pleasing that
the often underestimated 'home
diagonals' f1-a6 and c1-h6 contributed
to the victory. This is an important
positional idea that Richard Réti
(1889-1929) realized and capitalized
on in several games during the 1910s
and 1920s by deliberately delaying the
development of his bishops.

The Danish Grandmaster Bent Larsen (1935-2010) was a candidate for the World Championship on no less than four occasions, reaching the semifinals in three of them. During the years 1965-1973, he secured numerous tournament victories and was considered, along with Fischer, to be one of the players posing the greatest threat to Soviet dominance. He had an uncompromising playing style and would sometimes employ unconventional openings to unsettle his opponents.

Game 32 English Opening

Bent Larsen
Ulf Andersson

Tilburg 1982

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 c5 3.g3 e6 4.♙g2?!

Probably a slip, as Black can now seize the initiative in the centre.

Correct is 4.♘f3, answering 4...d5 with 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d4, entering the main line of the Tarrasch Variation in the Queen's Gambit. This is an illustration of Lasker's well-known principle that the knight should be developed before the bishop.

4...d5 5.cxd5?!

Now, the game becomes very comfortable for Black; after only five moves, the balance has shifted in Ulf's favour, despite him starting with the second move.

The consistent move was 5.♖b3! to try to force Black's d5-pawn to clarify its position. After 5...dxc4 6.♖xc4 ♙e7 the game would have been equal.

5...exd5 6.d4

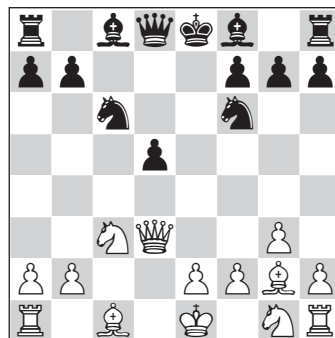
The question is whether to allow the black d-pawn to advance to d4 with tempo or to play d2-d4 himself. After the text move, Black will gain a lead in development and the d5-pawn nevertheless advances to d4.

The alternative is to be a bit more cautious in the centre with 6.d3 and to meet 6...d4 with 7.♘e4 ♘xe4 8.♙xe4 ♙d6, leading to a slightly better position for Black.

6...cxd4 7.♖xd4 ♘c6 8.♖d3?

Here the queen becomes exposed. A well-known classical rule suggests not developing the queen too early, and this rule applies here as well. The punishment comes swiftly.

The retreat 8.♖d1 or the active 8.♖a4 were both better choices.



8...♘b4!

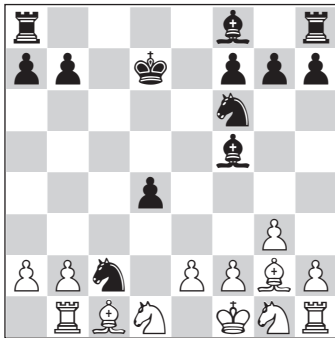
Ulf breaks the classical rule of not moving the same piece multiple times in the opening phase. Here this is justified as Black needs to capitalize on White's mistake, and the isolated pawn is hanging. Ulf's aggressive intentions are precisely on target.

9. ♖d1

While 9. ♖b1 prevents 9... ♗f5, it allows the dangerous advance of the d-pawn with 9... d4 10. ♘e4 d3.

9...d4?

It is surprising that Ulf doesn't play the standard continuation 9... ♗f5. If White has their knight on f3, he could easily parry the 10... ♘c2+ threat with ♙f3-d4. However, with the knight currently on g1, that move is unavailable, and White needs to look for more convoluted defensive methods. The only move to avoid an immediate loss is 10. ♖a4+, maintaining Black's good winning chances after 10... ♖d7 11. ♖xd7+ ♙xd7 12. ♙f1 ♘c2 13. ♖b1 d4 14. ♘d1



analysis diagram

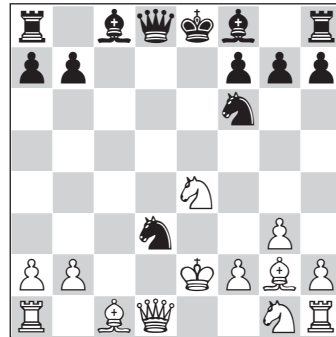
14... ♖c8!. Note that the materialistic 14... ♘e3+ grants White more chances to survive with moves like 15. ♗xe3 ♗xb1 16. ♗xd4 ♗xa2 17. ♗xb7 ♖b8 18. ♗a6, as the d4-bishop becomes powerful. Perhaps the difficulty of finding the 14th move was why Ulf didn't find the best 9th move.

10. ♘e4 d3

A strong alternative was also 10... ♗f5. A possible variation is 11. ♗g5 ♖a5! 12. ♘xf6+ gxf6 13. ♗d2 ♖b5 14. a4 ♖a6 15. ♖c1 d3 16. ♙f1 ♖d8, and Black is slightly better.

11. exd3 ♘xd3+ 12. ♙e2??

Necessary was 12. ♙f1, with the possible continuation 12... ♗e7 13. ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 14. ♗e4 ♘xc1+ 15. ♖xc1 ♗xb2 16. ♖xd8+ ♙xd8 17. ♖b1 ♖e8 18. ♗g2 ♗f6 19. ♗xb7 ♖b8 20. ♖d1+ ♗d7 21. ♗c6 ♖e7 followed by 22... ♖b2, giving Black a slightly better position.



12... ♘xc1+?

Ulf had a win with 12... ♗g4+ 13. f3 ♘xc1+ (13... ♘xe4? doesn't work due to 14. ♖a4+) 14. ♖xc1 (14. ♖xc1 is also met with the decisive 14... ♗d7) 14... ♗d7, with the uncomfortable threat of 15... ♗b5+.

13. ♖xc1?

13. ♖xc1 was necessary to keep the game alive. 13... ♗g4+ can then, unlike in the text, be met with 14. ♗f3. If Black finds the strong 14... ♖e7!, White will be pushed on the defensive after 15. ♖d4 ♖d8 16. ♖e3 ♘xe4 17. ♗xg4

g6 18.♔f1 h5 19.♙d1 and now after 19...♙h6 20.♙a4+ ♔f8 21.f4 g5 Black is better but the game goes on. The entertaining move 19.♙d7+? leads to a loss after 19...♔xd7 20.♚d4+ ♔e8 21.♚a4+! (21.♚xh8 ♚e6 wins for Black) 21...b5 22.♚xb5 ♚d7 23.♚e5+ ♚e6 24.♚xh8 ♚f5! 25.f4 ♘f6 etc.

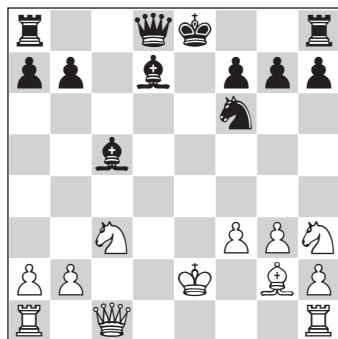
13...♙g4+ 14.f3

14.♙f3 ♙xf3+ 15.♔xf3 ♘xe4 doesn't work as White cannot achieve a queen trade. This is the fundamental difference between 13.♚xc1? and 13.♚xc1. 16.♔xe4 loses quickly to 16...f5+ 17.♔e3 (or 17.♔xf5 ♚d5+) 17...♚e7+, with a forced mate in six moves.

14...♙d7 15.♘c3

White aims to block the c-file and prevent the bishop check on b5, but now Black gains control over the classical diagonal instead. 15.a4 ♘xe4 16.fxe4 ♚c8 followed by ...♚c8-c4 also leads to a hopeless position due to White's exposed king.

15...♙c5 16.♘h3



16...♚e7+

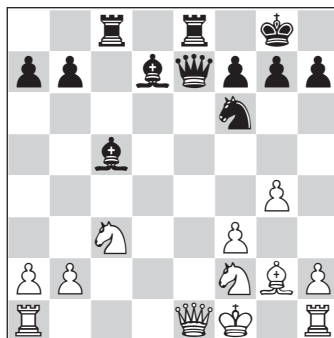
Ulf wants to prevent White from developing his kingside rook, but after 16...0-0!, the rook wouldn't be able to develop since 17.♚d1 (or 17.♚e1 ♙b5+! 18.♘xb5 ♚e8+ and White has no effective defence) would be met with 17...♚e8+! 18.♔f1 ♙b5+, with a win for Black.

17.♔f1 0-0 18.♘f2 ♚fe8 19.g4 ♚ac8

Another set-up one could consider is 19...♚ad8, followed by placing the bishops on b6 and c6. This gives Black tremendous pressure against White's position in all its aspects.

20.♚e1

A futile attempt to try to exchange queens, but it's hard to find anything constructive for White when the rooks aren't in play.



20...♚d6

The queen is heading to the classical diagonal a7-g1.

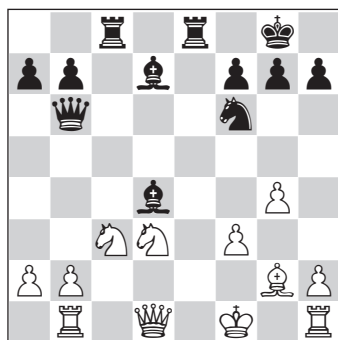
21.♚d1 ♚b6 22.♘d3

22.♚c2 ♙b5+ 23.♘xb5 ♚xb5+ 24.♘d3 ♘d5 is a disaster for White.

22...♙d4

The centralization of the bishop aligns with the queenside rook's development to c8, so Ulf doesn't allow White's queenside any peace either. Black plays across the entire board to capitalize on the neglected white pieces positioned on the kingside.

23. ♖b1



23... ♔a6

In the Elo list published on 1 January 1983, Ulf had advanced to fourth place with the enviable Elo rating of 2635. Here is how the list looked for players rated over 2635: 1) Karpov 2710; 2) Kasparov 2690; 3) Ljubojevic 2645; 4) Andersson 2635.

Six months later, on the Elo list of 1 July 1983, Ulf had solidified his position as the world number four, this time with a slightly higher Elo rating of 2640. He would never achieve a higher position than this, making 1983 the peak of his remarkable career as a chess player.

Ulf secured an honourable third to fourth place in Tilburg, remaining unbeaten with 6½ points out of 11, alongside Sosonko, behind Karpov and Timman with 7½ and 7 points respectively. Larsen ended up at the bottom of the twelve participants in the tournament, finishing with 2½ points.

His victory in the top group of the renowned grandmaster tournament in Wijk aan Zee in 1983 was particularly distinctive – five wins, eight draws, no losses, and the sole tournament victory with 9 points out of 13, ahead of grandmasters Zoltan Ribli, Walter Browne, Vlastimil Hort, John Nunn and Yasser Seirawan.

Thus, Black's queen is perfectly placed on the 'Benkō Diagonal' a6-f1, where it pins the knight and immediately threatens 24... ♖e3, winning material.

24. ♖d2 ♕xc3

Also, 24... ♖e3 25. ♖d1 ♘xg4! 26. fxg4 ♕xg4 wins material.

25. bxc3 ♕b5 26. ♖xb5 ♖xb5 27. ♔f2 ♖b6+ 28. ♔g3 ♖cd8

White resigned.

Understandably, Larsen had had enough. He is down on material and his king is exposed and running around on the third rank. The h1-rook has remained undeveloped the entire game, and Larsen was essentially playing a rook down.