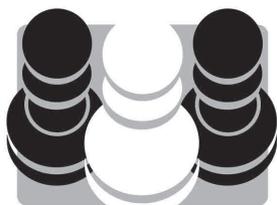


WINNING

By

Nigel Short



Quality Chess
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This contents page has been abridged to fit into one page. The full contents pages in the book detail Short's games in each tournament round by round.

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Introduction

This is my first book, and it has taken a global pandemic for me to write it.

Some of you may be puzzled by this statement. Dozens of tomes have been published about me, and in a few of them, I have even been listed as the author. While it is true that I have composed, with pleasure, many hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, I must confess that all books with my name on the cover – and with profound apologies to those who bought them – were all ghost-written.

All, that is, except an old, theoretical treatise of unexceptional quality called simply: *The French Defence*.

The story of that monograph is quite interesting, as it negatively affected my attitude towards chess publishers for decades afterwards. In the late 1980s, I was approached by the veteran New Zealand International Master, Bob Wade, to write a pamphlet on the French Defence, for a series on opening trends that he was producing with his chum, Hilary Thomas (best known, at the time, as an author of the collected games of Mikhail Tal).

As I was then one of the strongest players in the world, it was undoubtedly a coup for the publisher that I accepted; particularly as the pay was rather modest. I asked Bob how long he thought it would take. He answered, somewhat optimistically, as it would transpire: “About a weekend.”

To my great surprise, I was then handed paper printouts of over 2,000 games, asked to arrange the material and, if possible, add some deep and meaningful comments. If I had not been concerned about the deforestation of the Amazon prior to that moment, I certainly was thereafter.

More than a tad suspiciously, I began work on this project, and it was quickly confirmed that I had been totally duped. It was a Sisyphean task, barely distinguishable from slave labour. After a couple of weeks, and more, I was nowhere near finishing the job. Having been so grossly misled, I submitted an incomplete manuscript, albeit with a strange, irrational feeling of guilt, and informed Bob that was all he was going to get.

When *The French Defence* duly appeared in print, it was not a pamphlet of no more than 60 pages, as the contract specified, but a whole book! I generally got on pretty well with Bob, but this was the only time I was really annoyed with him. However, he had such a bumbling affable manner, I was never quite sure how much of the blame for this deception was his, or that of his business partner, and so I forgave him.

Since this incident, I had always harboured suspicions about Hilary Thomas being a somewhat unscrupulous character. This hunch was confirmed in 2017, when Thomas, who by this time had changed his name to Richard Pentreath, was jailed for 35 years for attempting to burn down the house of a woman in revenge for having testified against him in a rape trial. In fact, he had

the wrong address, having apparently been led astray – as many of us have, in hopefully different circumstances – by Google Maps.

Thankfully, no one was hurt. The innocent victims of this dastardly deed – a single mother and her child who were alone in the house – became aware of the blaze and escaped unscathed.

Absurd and egocentric as it is, I like to think that Hilary Thomas' lengthy custodial sentence was due to bad karma from the earlier publishing incident, rather than the proximate cause of rape, arson and attempted murder.

The format of *Winning* is highly unusual. Indeed, I believe it is unique in the vast literature of chess. Rather than attempting to squeeze my entire career into a single volume, and failing miserably, or produce an entertaining, but grossly distorted, “best games” selection, in which I might con you into believing that I am a brilliant player; I have chosen instead to focus in detail on eight tournaments spanning several decades. Each a case study if you will.

The happy coincidence that I won all these events satisfies the author's vanity, but at the same time I hope the inclusion of each partie, in order, will also serve a useful and instructive purpose. For it is only by examining all the games from a tournament that one gets a proper appreciation of how an event unfolded.

The selection is subjective and can by no means be described as the definitive list of my eight greatest tournament victories; although it also includes some of those. These are basically just some events that I am proud of in one way or another. As I have won over 70 tournaments, I could easily have chosen others. With the exception of the Anzali tournament (Chapter 8), which featured the rather rare Scheveningen System format, all the events contained herein were round-robins. This was a deliberate choice, as I am intending (if the book sells) that matches and open tournaments will be covered separately in future editions.

No doubt my editor, the renowned trainer, Jacob Aagaard, would have preferred the structure of this particular tome to be more thematic and didactic, but it is not really how my brain works. That is probably why I rarely read chess books from beginning to end, preferring to start in the middle, when I have found something of interest, and then constantly hopping backwards and forwards, batrachian-style. If I were organised, I would have become an accountant, but thankfully I am not. If there is any method to this apparent madness, I do not know, but perhaps, as a consequence of this haphazard process, I have become a firm believer in the value of eclecticism. Knowledge can be gleaned from many sources.

The quality of games ranges from the exceptional to the utterly dire. It is a typical human failing that while we all admire our own genius, we tend to brush bad experiences under the carpet. One of the best ways to improve is to examine one's own failings in a dispassionate, objective manner, without resorting to masochism. Self-loathing is rarely good for anything.

Unfortunately, I only acquired proficiency in the art of analysis relatively late (if, indeed, I ever really succeeded at all) and this deficiency has undoubtedly hampered my career.

I hope, first and foremost, that the reader finds this book enjoyable. For a book that spends all of its life on the shelf is, frankly, worthless.

Secondly, I hope you find it instructive. I used some material from this book for an online lecture that I gave in 2020. Irina Krush, who had organised the event and was an enthusiastic participant, told me that she found my comments inspiring and that they helped her win the US Women's Championship a short while later.

Such a strong player as Irina is more than capable of winning the national championship without the slightest assistance from me, as she has proven previously, but I am nevertheless thankful for her flattering words. I owe her a debt of gratitude, as she spurred me to finish the project, which had ground to a halt.

One final note: *Winning* contains a handful of short draws. It is not something I am greatly proud of, but they are a part of the narrative. If you want, just skip them completely: you will not suffer great loss, as you will still have more material than in Bobby Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*.

Nigel Short
Athens, 2021

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my wife, Rhea, for the constant encouragement to write this book.

To my son, Nicholas, for providing translations from Dutch for Chapters 1 & 3.

And to my daughter, Kyveli, for being a brilliant film producer.

My dear friend Peter Svidler was extremely kind to agree to write the foreword. Other people may know him as the eight-time Russian Chess Champion. I know him as Russia's foremost expert on cricket.

Thanks to Douglas Griffin, Johann Hjartarson and Shohreh Bayat for helping with the photos.

John Upper, from Canada, generously provided a little computer-checking of my endgame against Judit Polgar, from Pamplona (page 221).

Last, but not least, special thanks to my editor and publisher, Jacob Aagaard, for not suing me when I failed to hand the manuscript in on time.

Chapter 2

Don't Stop Me Now

Reykjavik 1987

Round 1	Nigel Short – Ljubomir Ljubojevic	75
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In cricket, it is well known that even the best batsmen are often dismissed for low scores. That is why it is important, when striking the ball sweetly, to go on to make a landmark; at least a 50 or, better still, a century.

But the greatest batsmen are even greedier. Graham Gooch, who for a long time held the record for the most number of runs by an England cricketer, spoke about the importance of making “Daddy hundreds” – i.e. really huge scores. You never know if or when you will have the chance again. So when you are in “the zone”, make the most of your opportunity. Plunder the bowling until your boots overflow. And then some more.

Reykjavik 1987 is to me a source both of pride and regret. It is undoubtedly one of my finest victories. But I know it could have been much better still, perhaps +7 or even more, in a world-class field. I have only myself to blame for losing concentration when so far in front.



A word or two about the country: Iceland was a quite different place back in the 1980s. Rather off the beaten track, and before budget flights made it a popular destination for those seeking a different holiday experience than the usual sun and sand.

It was pricey, and alcohol was ridiculously expensive. I liked to joke that you had to take out a second mortgage before buying a round of drinks. Laughter eased the pain in your wallet. Extortionate cost, however, did not seem to stop the locals from getting hammered regularly. Curiously, beer was banned at the time, but wine was legal – a legacy of an old trade deal with Spain. And for one day a week, there was no television at all.

It was nevertheless an excellent place to play chess. The game appears frequently in Icelandic sagas and, at the distinct risk of causing a cultural war of words between Iceland and Norway, it is perhaps also the birthplace of the Lewis Chessmen – the exquisite walrus ivory and whale tooth Viking carvings, placed in the British Museum and the National Museum of Scotland.

In 1958, Fridrik Olafsson qualified for the Candidates Tournament, becoming a Grandmaster and national hero in the process. And, of course, the 1972 World Championship Match, in Reykjavik, between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky, was arguably the most important chess event of all time. It caused a great boom among the populace. The generation of Icelanders who achieved the remarkable result of 5th place at the 1986 Dubai Olympiad, and who were participating in this tournament, owed much to that seminal event.

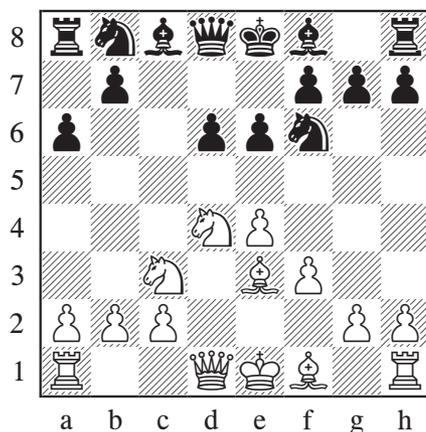
Round 1	19.02.1987
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Nigel Short – Ljubomir Ljubojevic

Reykjavik, Sicilian Defence, Najdorf Variation

It was my second occasion to be facing Ljubo in just a few weeks – this time with colours reversed. I was buoyed by my previous win. I had suffered at his hands as a teenager, when starting my international career, but henceforth felt I could face him with confidence.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.♕e3 e6 7.f3



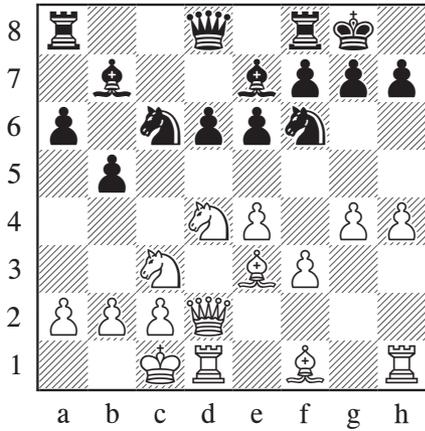
Given that I had defeated Garry Kasparov just two months earlier with the same variation, which later became known as the English Attack, it was understandable that I should wish to try it again.

7...♕e7

This is not the place to give a modern theoretical survey of a line which was then very much in its infancy. Suffice it to say that the plan adopted by Ljubojevic – castling short and thereby presenting a clear object of attack – is over-committal.

Experience has demonstrated it is more flexible to first expand on the queenside, oft combined with a counter-strike in the centre (e.g. ...b5-b4 followed by ...d6-d5), and also more effective.

8.♖d2 b5 9.g4 ♕b7 10.0-0-0 0-0 11.h4 ♗c6



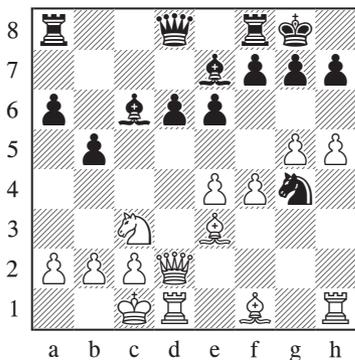
12. ♖xc6!

An important decision, thwarting, for the moment, one of Black's main plans, which is to bring the knight to c4, via e5 or b6. If left there unmolested, Black's attack often assumes alarming proportions with great alacrity.

12... ♙xc6 13. g5 ♘d7 14. ♘e2!?

A prepared novelty – John Nunn's suggestion, if I recall – and a pretty good one at that. From d4 the white knight performs multiple functions: defending f3 while attacking c6 and probing e6.

But it is by no means the only way to proceed. Even the crude: 14. h5 ♘e5 15. f4 ♘g4



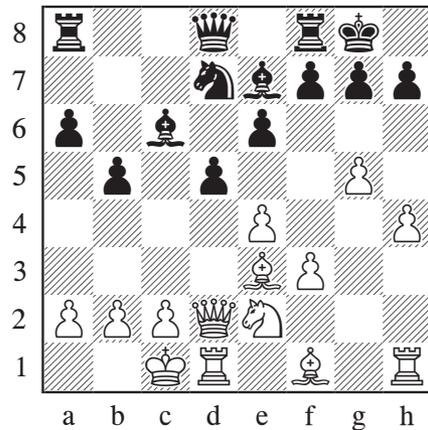
16. ♖g1 ♘xe3 17. ♗xe3, disdaining long-term considerations, like the bishop pair, had its merits. The attack is already highly accelerated.

In the long term, Black may very well be unable to enjoy his bishops, on account of being dead.

14...d5

Immediately attempting to exploit that the knight no longer covers the d5-square. However, Black's modest development and tactical vulnerability mean that this is ineffective. His position is already unpleasant.

14... ♘e5 15. ♘d4 ♙b7 16. h5 ♖c8, threatening 17... ♘xf3, was arguably better. But even here, 17. ♗g2! maintains a strong initiative.



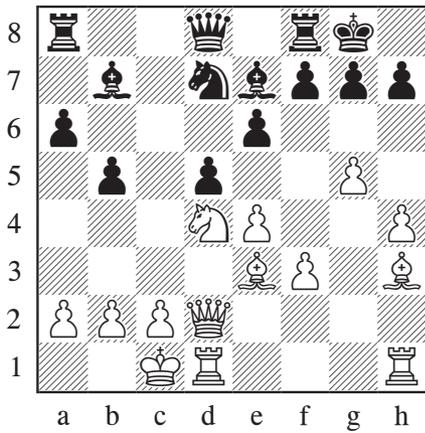
15. ♘d4

More accurate was 15. h5!, so as to meet 15...dxe4? with the crushing 16. h6!, with multiple threats. Especially ♗d2-c3!, forking g7 and c6. Black is in deep trouble.

15... ♙b7 16. ♙h3?!

Having just mentioned the importance of the c4-square, it should be clear why this move is wrong. But poor strategic decisions are often made, not because of lack of understanding, but because of an inability to calculate correctly.

In this case, I failed to see that 16. h5 e5 17. ♘f5 d4 could have been well met by 18. ♖g1!, with a clear advantage, thanks to a pin down the d-file.



16...♖e5!

Obviously not 16...dxe4? 17.♗xe6 fxe6 18.♖xd7 and Black will lose material.

Also after 16...e5? 17.♗f5 d4 18.♕xd4, Black is not long for this world.

17.♖e1?!

The stronger 17.f4 would have reduced Black's options.

17...♗c4

The easiest path to equality lay in 17...♗c5! 18.f4 ♕xd4 19.♕xd4 ♗f3 20.♖e3 ♗xd4 21.♖xd4 ♖a5 22.a3 dxe4 23.♕g2 and Black has been allowed to solve his problems.

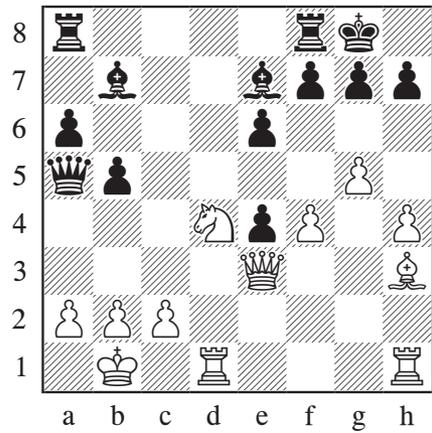
18.f4 ♗xe3 19.♖xe3 ♖a5

I thought this move was inaccurate at the time, but it is perfectly playable, and indeed best.

A less precarious practical alternative is 19...♖b6 20.e5 ♕c5 with chances both ways. White may also try 20.g6!?, but the outcome is not very clear.

20.♖b1 dxe4

The consistent continuation. 20...♖b6 just loses a tempo compared to the previous line.

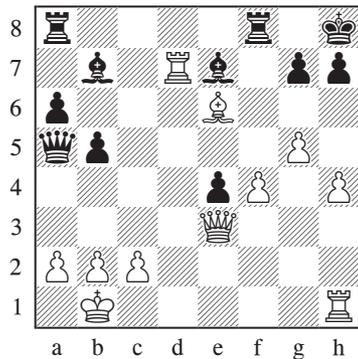


White's pieces are ready. It is time to roll the dice.

21.♗xe6! ♖fe8?

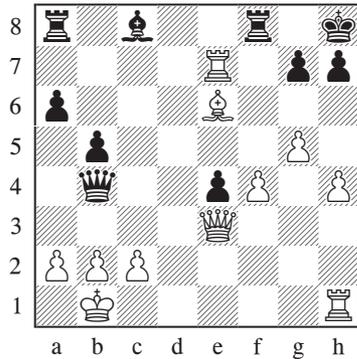
This wildly optimistic move is absolutely fatal. By now, however, Black's path to any sort of safety is extremely narrow, and neither of us saw it.

After the obvious 21...fxe6 22.♕xe6† ♖h8 23.♖d7, comes the crossroad:



a) The first idea to calculate is: 23...♕c8 24.♖xe7

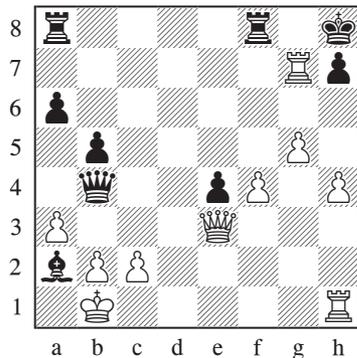
a1) The critical move is 24...♙b4.



At this point I had intended to simply keep a solid positional edge with 25.♙d5, which is reason enough to enter the variation.

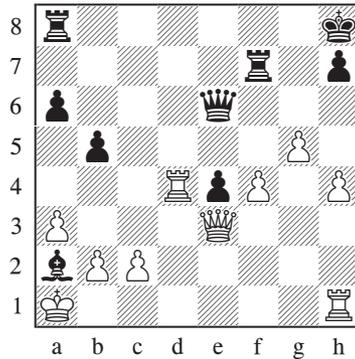
But the brilliant 25.♙xg7!! simply blows Black away. After 25...♙xg7 26.a3! wins on the spot. e.g. 26...♙d6 27.♙c3† ♙g6 28.h5#

25...♙xe6 is thus the most tenacious. 26.a3! overloads the black queen, which can only prevent her counterpart coming with devastating effect to the long diagonal by engaging in ultimately unsuccessful contortions. 26...♙a2†! Best. Black cannot allow the queen to enter the diagonal. (Both 26...♙c4 27.b3 ♙c6 28.♙d4 and 26...♙d6 27.♙c3 are hopeless.)



27.♙a1! The only way! (27.♙xa2? ♙c4† would give Black a free tempo and drop the rook.) 27...♙c4 28.♙d7! Black is just too tangled.

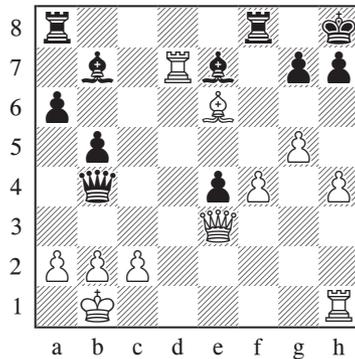
After 28...♙f7 29.♙d4 ♙e6



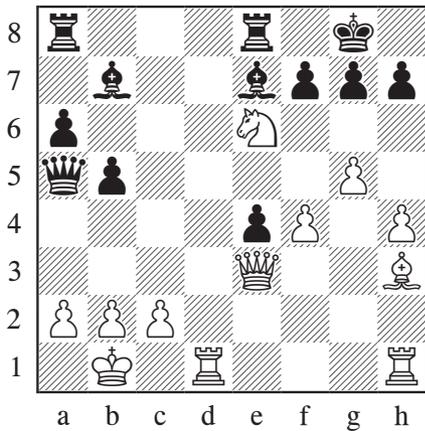
30.♙xe4 ♙d5 31.h5 White has a winning attack for no material investment.

a2) Objectively better is 24...♙d8 25.♙c5 ♙xe6 26.♙xe6 ♙xf4 27.♙e5, although White keeps a serious pull.

b) Only 23...♙b4! comes close to maintaining the balance.



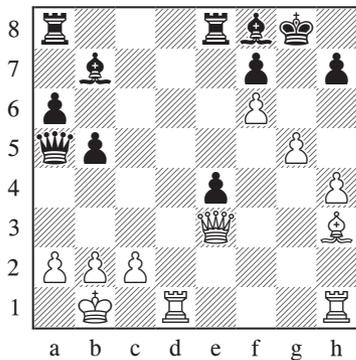
24.a3! (24.♙xb7 ♙c5 would give Black counterplay) 24...♙c5 25.♙xc5 ♙xc5 26.♙xb7 ♙xf4 27.♙a2 Black still has a few problems to solve, despite the simplifications. But he would be over the worst.



22.h5!

Of course, White will not retreat!
 22.♘d4? ♖b6 leaves Black firmly on top.

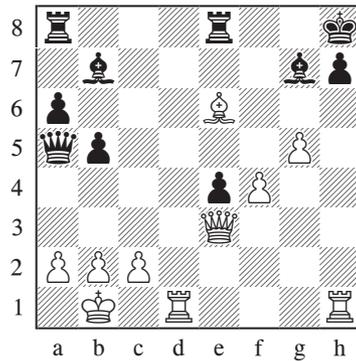
But to give you an idea just how utopian Black's strategy has been, even 22.♘xg7! ♕xg7 23.f5 is crushing, due to the breakthrough: 23...♙f8 24.f6† ♕g8



25.g6! hxg6 26.h5 I didn't consider this. But to be honest, this should come as no surprise. With just a dark-squared bishop protecting the king, it is no wonder that Black cannot survive with all these open lines and a white army ready to fight for the light squares.

22...♙d8

The key tactical point is that after 22...fxe6 23.♙xe6† ♕h8 (23...♕f8 24.h6 makes no difference) 24.h6! ♙f8 25.hxg7† ♙xg7:

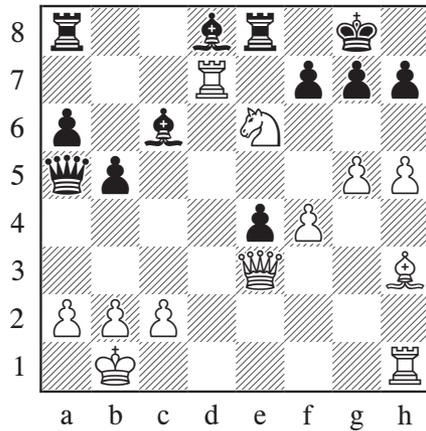


White mates with 26.♙xh7† ♕xh7 27.♖h3† ♕g6 28.♗f5† ♕h5 29.♙h1#.

22...♙f8 23.♘xf8 ♙xf8 24.h6 is just hopeless.

23.♙d7 ♙c6

After 23...♙b6 White is winning with both 24.♖b3 ♙c6 25.♘d8!, and 25.♙xf7 ♕xf7 26.♘d8† ♕e7 27.♘xc6†, forking the royals.



24.♗d4

The simplest, but for those who enjoy complications, I should add that 24.♙xf7! ♕xf7 25.♗b3! ♕e7 26.♘xg7 is completely winning as well.

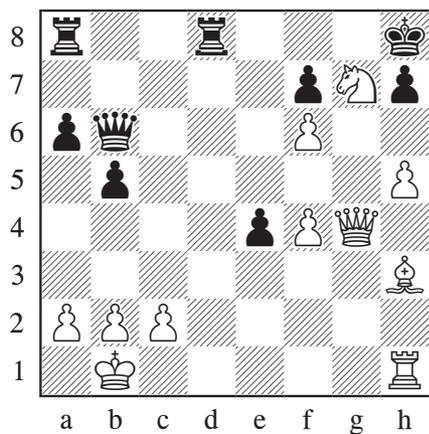
24...♙f6

Black has to try something. After 24...♙xe6 25.♙xe6 ♙xd7 26.♖xd7 fxe6, White has the undeniable option 27.♗e8#.

25. gxf6 ♔xd7 26. ♖xd7

Also 26. ♖g1! was strong.

26... ♖b6 27. ♘xg7 ♜ed8 28. ♖g4 ♔h8



29. ♘e8!

A pleasing interference. And a great start to the tournament.

1-0



Short, Ljubojevic, Timman,
Polugaevsky and a nice lady

