

Jürgen Brustkern & Norbert Walle

The Chess Battles of Hastings

**Stories and Games of the Oldest Chess Tournament
in the World**

New In Chess 2022

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Foreword

The first time I visited the Hastings International Chess Congress I was eight years old. It was New Year's Eve, 1975. On that day my father Charles decided to buy an impressive new chess set and board from the bookstall concession. The set, made in France of boxwood, cost him £14.95. I can be sure of this, including the date of purchase, from a label still attached to the box. Neither of us took part in the Congress that year, we merely went along to take a look.

The following December my father signed me up to the Main 'C', a nine round Swiss event for players of (approximate) similar strength, but I was out of my depth: I scored just 1.5/9, having begun with six zeros. Twelve months passed. Now ten, the general view (which I probably shared) was that it would be prudent for me to drop down a category, to the Main 'D'. This I did, where indeed it was a different story: with 7.5/9 I won it.

Jürgen Brustkern remembers me from this 1977/8 Congress, particularly for my habit of looking around the room and not at the board. At sixteen, this was his first visit to Hastings. The youngest member of a group of German friends, Jürgen perhaps let ambition and enthusiasm get the better of him: in the Main 'A' he finished next-to-last on 2/9. But the thrill of being part of this famous festival was intoxicating, and whenever possible Jürgen – like myself – would cover the short distance from the Falaise Hall (where the subsidiary events were held) to the White Rock Pavilion, programme in hand – without this there was no free admission! – in order to watch the top masters in action in the Premier tournament.

That year former World Champion Tigran Petrosian was playing, but it was Roman Dzindzichashvili who won. Jürgen was spellbound. The most lasting impression left on him was of the methods stronger masters use to gradually outplay lesser opposition, lessons in technique played out as he watched. So it was that for one young German this out-of-season seaside Sussex town became a home from home, a winter pilgrimage to be made annually. Since that time Jürgen has attended the Hastings Chess Congress on over forty separate occasions, as a player or simply to spectate and catch up with friends.

My own memories of the Congress are closely tied to those of the Hastings Chess Club. When my father and I joined in 1975 I was by far the youngest member. I made great progress thanks to weekly tuition from Arthur Winser, then seventy years old, a local man who had drawn with Gligorić at the Premier (Arthur played four times) and whose astonishing number of Hastings Club Championship victories would reach a record twenty-five. A close contemporary of Arthur was Laurie Glyde, Club President from 1976 until his death in 1983. Laurie acted on several occasions as Hastings Congress Director, and during his second period in the post my father was three times Congress Secretary, between 1976/7 and 1978/9.

Frank Rhoden (1906-81), whom I had the good fortune to know through the Hastings Club, was in charge of the Congress from the mid-50s until the end of the 60s; he also wrote an excellent column, 'Talking Chess', in the *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*. (Frank, I now learn, would even take visiting grandmasters to his local pub, where it is said quite a chess scene developed.) Club members Bill Dunphy and Jack Hatton also held the position of Congress Director. The sterling work done by Con Power deserves particular praise. Through good and bad times Con quietly and calmly steered the Congress for more than thirty years. None was ever more deserving of the title of International Organiser, awarded him by FIDE in 1995.

My family lived in Hastings for about ten years. When I think of those days, it's clear to me that what I most looked forward to each December, more than Christmas itself, was the Chess Congress. One memory is of having my photo taken with the visiting Soviet representatives, Evgeny Vasiukov and Alexander Kochiev, the picture then appearing in *The Daily Telegraph*. Eleven, serious of manner, and wearing my school blazer – with chess badges on it! – my eyes are fixed on the board in front of us as I execute the move ♖g1-f3 (with white pawns on d4 and c4 and black pawns on e6 and f5); Vasiukov seems already on cue with 3...♜f6. A mirror on a wall catches my father, watching. This was the Congress of 1978/9, the year of Ulf Andersson's first brilliant victory, but more than Ulf's games I remember the beautifully warm-looking white jersey he wore most days!

At eighteen I nervously took my place in the Premier for the first time. Lowest-rated, I scored 8/13 and tied for 2nd. In the front row of spectators sat my old teacher, supporter, and friend, Arthur Winser. From this same position – for he had his favourite chair – Arthur told me he once stood up

and handed Botvinnik a pencil when the champion had forgotten to bring a pen to the game.

I know Jürgen, and how the Hastings Congress has positively impacted his life. His clarity of vision and determination are the fertile ground on which this book has taken root; its existence represents a cherished goal, a dream fulfilled. With attention to pertinent historical details Jürgen shares his indefatigable love of one of the world's most important and iconic chess events, follows its ups and downs, and traces the changing background to the Congress as the years pass. Hastings is where he feels at home, is home, and the book you are holding is recognition of this.

Within these pages, Jürgen also examines the wider spectrum of English chess. A self-confessed fan of English chess players, his loyal support has long been reserved for our national team, particularly during its heyday in the 1980s with its 'explosion' of talent. Here we revisit those golden years. Jürgen also selects seven Hastings events, beginning with the classic 1895 tournament, for special focus. The text also throws a wide selection of players into relief: stories are combined with games and game extracts. The selection of photos is superb.

If the concept and structure of the book, and the general selection of content, are Jürgen's, it needs to be said that this does not in the least diminish the key role played by co-author Norbert Wallet, who worked closely with Jürgen on his 'dream book' for some eighteen months. That the two friends live near to each other in Berlin – they reside some 600 metres apart – surely helped. Norbert's professional eye has been instrumental in shaping the book's overall linguistic texture and style.

It gives me immense pleasure to introduce the first English language edition of this fine work.

Stuart Conquest, Grandmaster
London, August 2022

Introduction

Chess enables a dialogue through time. A game that was played somewhere in the world a hundred years ago can still today – replayed on the board at home – attract admiration and enthusiasm, and sometimes even heated discussions. Ideas that were conceived many decades ago can enjoy a surprising resurrection in modern tournaments as well-forgotten secret weapons.

This astonishing timelessness of chess sometimes means that the specific conditions under which a game was played – during a competition – take a back seat. In fact, it makes little difference to the theoretical significance of a game when and in which tournament it was played. But the very circumstances that are of no concern to theoreticians are of central importance to chess fans interested in the history of the game. A game – once played and published – may claim a certain timelessness. Chess tournaments, on the other hand, are always anchored in very specific circumstances. Whether the setting is sumptuous or austere, whether the prize fund is lavish or meagre, whether the public response is enthusiastic or almost non-existent – all of this always depends on factors that have a lot to do with the societal conditions prevailing when the tournament took place. Chess tournaments are always a reflection therefore of the social conditions of the time.

There are many factors that must coalesce to ensure that a tournament doesn't just take place once, but becomes a key event that takes place on a regular basis. At the very least, you need stable, long-term political conditions, an environment that is characterised by a certain degree of prosperity, a good infrastructure and a sense of tradition.

The fact that at the end of the 19th century Hastings gradually developed into an important, and for many decades even the most important chess tournament of all, is no coincidence, but is tied to certain historical conditions. Great Britain's progression in the Victorian era was inexorable. Nowhere was the change from manual to industrial production so rapid, more successful and so driven by steady technical progress. In the period of approximately 70 years between 1830 and 1901, the population (including Ireland) grew from 24 million to 41.5 million people.

The tremendous expansion of global trade, based on colonies and the British Commonwealth, enhanced the awareness of international

competition. In order to maintain its leading position, economic progress was essential. This was based on new inventions, and it also resulted in an enormous boost for the sciences. Applied sciences in particular require careful and precise calculation, foresight and planning, based on the superiority of logic and rationality.

Progress also meant mobility. In the second half of the 19th century, inventions such as the steamboat and telegraphy stimulated British optimism about progress. By 1902, all of the British colonies were linked by a network of telegraphic cables. The sweeping economic dynamism took place in a comparatively stable political environment. Under Queen Victoria, political decision-making power was increasingly transferred to Parliament. Freedom of the press and the conflict of opinion between competing parties also gave the workers the feeling that they could defend their interests within the system.

Prosperity for more and more members of the middle classes, political stability, a keen awareness of international competition, a zeitgeist of rationality, an entrepreneurial spirit that is positive about taking new risks and seeking new adventures – these are all factors that are beneficial if a chess tournament is to establish itself and survive over the years. In addition, there is the British sporting spirit, which led to the establishment of numerous sports in the 19th century. Football, cricket, boxing, billiards, golf, polo and of course chess: in the course of the 19th century, the first rules and regulations for these sporting disciplines emerged on the island. The contacts made in sports clubs were new stepping stones for careers in society. The ambition to move the centre of the chess world to England from its perennial competitor, France, may have been an added incentive that should not be ignored.

Ultimately, it takes determined and fundamentally optimistic characters to transform good preconditions into really successful projects. In Hastings, things all came together in exemplary fashion. On the pages that follow, our intention is to trace the path of the chess tournament, steeped in tradition, that still takes place regularly today.

2



**The path to the first
super-tournament in
chess history**

When a chess tournament becomes a long-term success, it is never just for sporting reasons. There must be financial and political conditions in place to ensure that a good idea and the enthusiasm of the early days can be put on a stable basis that will last for decades and even longer.

Hastings was already a thriving spa resort in the early 1880s. The emergence of rail had brought the town closer to London and attracted enterprising business professionals. The town's hotels were famous all over Europe. The restaurants and shops had an excellent reputation. Hastings quickly rose to become one of the UK's leading seaside resorts; only Brighton ranked ahead in that list. And the town grew rapidly: two piers, a concert and theatre hall, a public swimming pool and a huge cricket facility were built. Towards the end of the 19th century, the incorporation of the prestigious suburb of St. Leonards marked another milestone in the development of the town. The magnificent buildings of this small community were the work of James Burton, the builder of much of London's Regent Street, and his son Decimus, the architect of the Athenaeum and the beautiful Wellington Arch at Hyde Park Corner. Prominent guests quickly established the reputation of the seaside resort: the young Princess Victoria (1834) and the exiled Louis Philippe (1848) were early visitors to the town. On 26 June 1882, the Prince and Princess of Wales (later King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra) graced Hastings with their appearance.

This was the year in which the Hastings and St. Leonards Chess Club (HSL) was founded. The impressive (for the time) list of 42 members is evidence of a certain enthusiasm for chess in the country. A year earlier, the first issue of the legendary *British Chess Magazine* (BCM) was published.

A growing and prosperous town that was trying to create an international image for itself, numerous supportive prosperous business professionals and many enthusiastic chess players: this represents an excellent basis for a chess boom. But it does not adequately explain the breakthrough to becoming a chess Mecca. This required the happy fortuitous meeting of two people who were equally passionate about chess and who had enough practical skills to turn dreams into traditions. And it took the happy combination of an experienced chess professional and a restless businessman who was extremely skilled in marketing matters. The long path to the first world-class chess tournament of modern times lasted ten years, and it began with the meeting of the then internationally known and feared chess professional Joseph Blackburne with the young businessman Herbert Dobell (1862-1938) in 1884.

Cload and Keene point out in their quintessential Hastings book *Battles of Hastings*, which provides an essential basis for our historical overview

together with the records in the club journal, that Blackburne found the cure for his ailing health in Hastings and paid a visit to the chess club.

It was there that he met Dobell. That was the beginning. Dobell's father, who ran a thriving business as a jeweller, was the club's first treasurer and regularly brought his son with him to games evenings. The junior quickly became an ambitious and strong player. In 1892 he won the East Sussex Queen, a major regional tournament. He also got involved in organisation and developed a talent that was no less great in this area. In 1884 he was elected HSL's second treasurer at the age of just 22.

In conversations with Dobell, Blackburne developed ideas to increase membership through more effective training. But for Dobell, who was driven by the ambition to make chess great in Hastings, that was not enough. He was thinking much bigger. He wanted to host an international championship tournament in Hastings. An outrageous plan! But one that was still a little ahead of its time. When Dobell told the chairman of HSL John Watney about the idea of a world-class event, his shocked reaction was to stall. Watney just couldn't imagine how holding such a major event could be accomplished financially. In the long term, however, more important for Dobell was the assurance from Blackburne, who, unlike the chairman, was enthusiastic about the project, that he would be happy to help put together the field of participants.

But the time was not yet ripe – especially since Dobell would be taking on a lot of responsibility over the next few years due to taking over his father's jewellery business. Nevertheless, the enthusiast found the energy to organise regular chess competitions with London clubs. He also kept in touch with Blackburne. And he never gave up on his dream of organising a big tournament. On the contrary. In his often praised calm and at the same time charming manner, he continued to promote his idea. And he achieved small partial victories. In 1890 he succeeded in establishing a tournament committee which was given the responsibility of organising a regular chess festival. The basic idea was to improve the playing strength of the club members primarily through simultaneous events and lectures by strong master players. And Dobell's idea turned out to be an exciting one. It also turned out to be extremely useful that he never lost contact with Blackburne. In April 1890, he was the first master player to give a widely acclaimed blindfold simultaneous event in Hastings. The chess virus had finally infected the seaside resort, and the idea of a top international tournament no longer seemed so utopian.

Then another fortunate circumstance played into Dobell's hands. In 1894, Blackburne left the hectic city of London and moved with his family to Hastings for two years. The number of club members there had almost

doubled in recent years, and Dobell saw that the time had come to finally realise his long-cherished dream. In a passionate speech at the annual general meeting of the HSL in 1894, he convinced the members with the argument that the club could become world-famous in one swoop with a major championship tournament. After the vote, which went well for him, he put together a prominent tournament committee, in charge of which was the wealthy banker Horace Chapman and the club's chairman.

In executing his plans, Dobell used all the diplomatic and tactical skills that he had always been credited with. As early as February 1895, he wrote to all major English clubs and the most famous British chess personalities. In the letter he announced that the time was now ripe to host a chess festival with a high-level championship tournament in Hastings. He did not neglect to note that such a tournament would be supported by local business people to the tune of £250. This in particular made a great impression and ultimately ensured success. Almost all chess enthusiasts who were contacted were pleased with the idea and offered their patronage. A special triumph for Dobell was that the prince (Duke of York) was won over to the cause, who was followed by almost all (!) foreign ambassadors in London. After this overwhelming response, the detailed programme was published in the BCM in May 1895.

With the help of Chapman, Dobell eventually managed to meet the total expected cost of £500. This calculation turned out to be a complete success at the end of the tournament, as there was even a surplus of £18.

The tournament, the first Battle of Hastings, was, as Dobell predicted, a great success. The tournament committee received a sensational 38 inquiries from master players, but only 22 players could be invited due to the budget. The selection was made in principle according to skill level and successes achieved so far. In 1895, Hastings became home to the 'Who's Who' of the chess world. First and foremost there were the big four: Emanuel Lasker (1868-1941), Wilhelm Steinitz, Mikhail Chigorin (1850-1908) and Siegbert Tarrasch. But interesting young masters such as Emanuel Schiffers (1850-1906), Richard Teichmann (1868-1925), Carl Schlechter (1874-1918) and Karl August Walbrodt (1871-1902) were also there.

One curious fact: since it wanted the tournament to be as international as possible, the committee made its only error by inviting the Italian amateur Benjamin Vergani. Surprisingly, the invitation arose from a misunderstanding, because the Southern European was a journalist by profession and actually only wanted to report on the event. The 28-year-old scored only three points and finished last by a great distance, but he still beat the later World Championship candidates Schlechter and

England's then number two Isidor Gunsberg. The young Polish master Simon Winawer would surely also have represented a respectable strengthening of the field. However, he was rejected because he insisted on playing under a pseudonym. Apparently, even then, the masters had some strange requests.

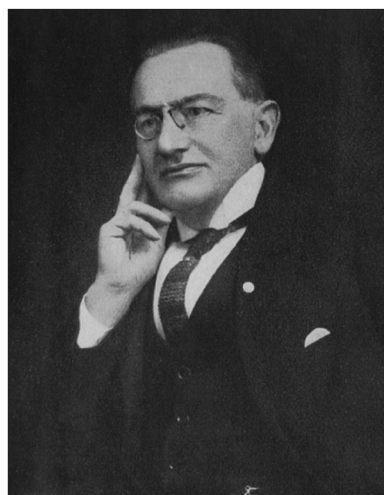


Lasker, Chigorin, Steinitz, Pillsbury

Highlight One Hastings 1895

The 21 rounds were held from 5 August to 1 September. One peculiarity was that the pairings were only announced on the day of the game. Emanuel Lasker had just become World Champion a year before and was generally considered the favourite. His perennial rival Siegbert Tarrasch wrote the following before his departure for England in his chess column for the *Frankfurter Generalanzeiger*: ‘This tournament is the most significant that has ever taken place, whoever emerges as the winner must be recognised as the strongest player

in the world!’ The legendary German Grandmaster may also have been thinking a little about himself, because with first prize in this competition of the chess giants, he could also have significantly strengthened his position against Lasker. The principled Tarrasch will have looked back on this tournament with mixed feelings. He was able to win his direct encounter with Lasker, which was a resounding setback for the reigning World Champion in the battle for tournament victory. In the end though, Tarrasch ‘only’ managed fourth place, 1.5 points behind Lasker.



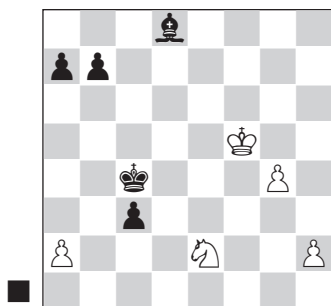
Siegbert Tarrasch, Hastings 1922

Game 4

Siegbert Tarrasch Emanuel Lasker

Hastings 1895 (19)

Notes by Jürgen Brustkern



41...♔d3??

This natural attacking move turns the game completely on its head. Lasker himself gave the following variation in the tournament bulletin, with which he could have won this prestigious duel relatively easily: 41...c2 42.g5 ♕xg5! 43.♔xg5 ♔d3 44.♖c1+ ♔d2 45.♖b3+ ♔d1 46.♖f5 a5 47.a4 b5! (this breakthrough is an important motif) 48.axb5 a4 49.b6 axb3 50.b7 b2 51.b8♖ c1♖-+, but not 51...b1♖?? 52.♖d6+ with perpetual check.
42.♖xc3 ♔xc3 43.g5

The World Champion has lost an important tempo. Now White wins the pawn race by a hair's breadth by just one tempo.

**43... ♖b6 44.h4 ♙d4 45.h5 b5 46.h6
b4 47.g6 a5 48.g7 a4 49.g8 ♔**
Black resigned.

The tournament took a varied, ultimately dramatic course. In the tough 21-round marathon, it was naturally impossible for any player to deliver a consistently outstanding performance, and variations in form were the order of the day. The start was completely dominated by the Russian combinational genius Mikhail Chigorin. He achieved a dream start with victories over the young American Pillsbury and Lasker in the first two rounds. But then Pillsbury started his breathtaking victory march. Tarrasch, Pollock, Albin, Mieses, Steinitz, Schiffers, Janowski, Mason and Teichmann – they all had to resign against the newcomer. The chess world held its breath, and began to wonder who this cheeky sonny boy really was. On the other hand, the World Champion Lasker remained at least initially a pale reflection of himself. After the loss to Chigorin, he also had to accept defeat in round four against his German compatriot Von Bardeleben. Then he was able to steady his performance and by the middle of the tournament was back in a promising position. Victories over Bird,



The only German World Chess Champion, Emanuel Lasker

Janowski, Pollock, Walbrodt, Steinitz and Gunsberg contributed to this. Above all, however, there was his victory over Pillsbury in the 12th round.

There was a lot of speculation about the World Champion's cautious start to the tournament. In his biography of Lasker, Hannak points out that Lasker arrived at Hastings in poor health. The tournament favourite had been touring England for months (since April) as part of a lecture series before the showdown in Hastings. The essential elements of these lectures were later collected in his book *Common Sense in Chess*. Hannak suspects that this intellectual commitment left Lasker drained for Hastings.

In fact, Lasker's chess in Hastings was not always convincing. Reuben Fine and Fred Reinfeld included in their book *Dr. Lasker's chess career 1889-1914* only a single game played by Lasker at Hastings. But that was a game that had it all. Lasker delivered a remarkable performance against the old master Steinitz, which after the 17th move is more reminiscent of today's FischerRandom Chess.

Game 5 Ruy Lopez

Emanuel Lasker

Wilhelm Steinitz

Hastings 1895 (9)

Notes by Jürgen Brustkern

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 d6 5.0-0 ♗ge7 6.c3 ♙d7 7.d4 ♗g6 8.♞e1 ♙e7 9.♗bd2 0-0 10.♗f1 ♞e8 11.♙c2 ♗h8 12.♗g3 ♙g4 13.d5 ♗b8 14.h3 ♙c8 15.♗f5 ♙d8 16.g4 ♗e7 17.♗g3 ♗g8!?



What a position.

18.♙g2 ♗d7 19.♙e3 ♗b6 20.b3 ♙d7 21.c4 ♗c8 22.♞d2 ♗ce7 23.c5! g6 24.♞c3 f5 25.♗xe5!

Lasker has systematically increased his space advantage and with the text move converts this into material gain. Steinitz's position is completely hopeless.

25...dxe5 26.♞xe5+ ♗f6 27.♙d4 fxg4 28.hxg4 ♙xg4 29.♞g5 ♞d7 30.♙xf6+ ♙g8 31.♙d1 ♙h3+ 32.♙g1 ♗xd5 33.♙xd8 ♗f4 34.♙f6 ♞d2 35.♞e2 ♗xe2+ 36.♙xe2 ♞d7 37.♞d1 ♞f7 38.♙c4 ♙e6 39.e5 ♙xc4 40.♗f5

Black resigned.

32...♘g6 33.e6 fxe6 34.♖xe6 ♔f7
 35.♞a6 ♜c7 36.♞b1 ♘e7 37.h4 ♘c8
 38.♞b5 ♘b7 39.♞f5+ ♔g8 40.♞e6
 ♘e7 41.♞f4 ♘d5 42.♞d6 ♜c8 43.♞a6
 ♜c1+ 44.♔h2 ♘c6 45.h5 ♜c2 46.♞f5
 ♘e6 47.♞f4 ♜c4 48.g4 ♘c8 49.♞xc6
 ♞xc6 50.♞xe4 ♔f7 51.♞a4 ♞a6
 52.♞f4+ ♔e7 53.♞e4+ ♔f6
 White resigned.¹⁷

After a dream start of three points from three games, Thomas then suffered a setback against a future World Champion. In this game, the Dutchman implements a model standard plan in the Queen's Gambit, which should find its place in future middlegame books:

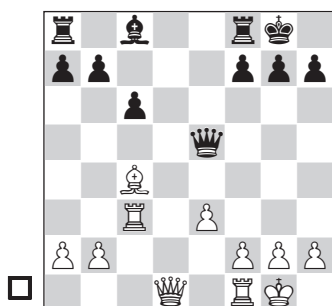
Game 30

Max Euwe

Sir George Thomas

Hastings 1934/35 (4)

Notes by Jürgen Brustkern



15.f4!

In connection with f5-f6, a classic restriction concept. This and the following moves form the point of White's plan: White leaves himself with a backward king's pawn, but

restricts the black bishop and retains constant pressure on f7. However, Black also has counter-opportunities.

15...♞e7

15...♞e4 is regarded today as the best move.

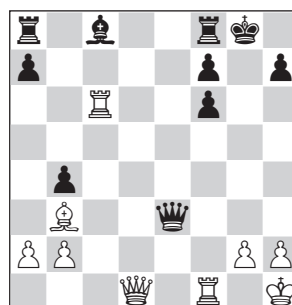
16.f5 b5?!

16...♞f6 was more precise here, as the f5-f6 thrust must be prevented at all costs.

17.♘b3 b4!?

This pawn advance seems consistent, but the subsequent destruction of the black kingside is more important: therefore 17...♞d8 18.♞e2 ♞f6 19.e4 ♞d4+ 20.♔h1 ♞e5 21.♞h5 was necessary, after which White still has the initiative.

18.f6 gxf6 19.♞xc6 ♞xe3+ 20.♔h1



20...♘b7?!

The best chance was 20...♘e6 21.♘xe6 fxe6 22.♜c7±.

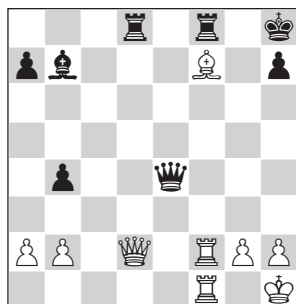
21.♞cxf6 ♞e4

21...♞g5? loses material due to 22.♞e2 ♞ad8 23.♞xf7.

22.♞d2 ♔h8 23.♘xf7 ♞ac8 24.♞f2 ♞cd8?

After this, the game can no longer be rescued due to the weak back rank. After the natural 24...a5

25.h3± Thomas could still have resisted for some time.



25. ♖g5!

White simply threatens 26. ♖f6 mate, which can no longer be reasonably prevented.

25... ♜d6

25... ♗d4 also fails to 26. ♗d5!

26. ♗d5



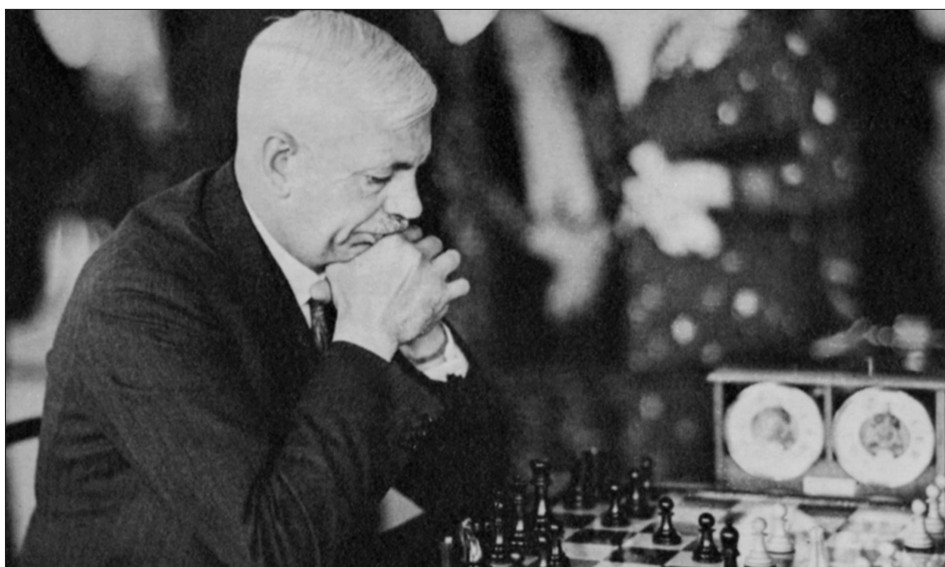
Dr. Max Euwe at Hastings

Black resigned.

But the story, his story, does not end here, it is only just beginning. After this minor setback, the Briton puts on a spurt with 3.5 points from the next four games and only halves the point with the solid Flohr. He leads the field before the last round with 6.5 points ahead of Euwe (6) and Flohr (5.5) in front of all the assembled international chess celebrities.

It's all over. One of the greatest sensations in chess history is imminent. And the pursuers have all along since resigned themselves to their fate. Because what Thomas needs now, compared with the feats he has achieved in this tournament, is just one last small step, a matter of routine, a perfunctory task: a draw, half a point, has yet to be secured. Under normal circumstances that shouldn't be a problem, because the opponent is the 61-year-old R.P. Michell. Thomas should easily beat him anyway. This time, however, he also has the entire course of the tournament on his side. Michell has played a disastrous tournament and is second to last. Everything bodes well for Thomas. All the outside observers assume that a quick draw would be agreed with the wounded Michell. The British compatriot would not put up any resistance. After all, they are both friends.

But Thomas doesn't want an agreement. He has played the entire tournament with an unshakable fighting spirit and also scored most of the winning games. Again, he will fight. It does not chime with his sense



Sir George Thomas, the 'moral victor' of the 1934/35 Congress

of chivalry to secure victory by a friendly draw without a fight. It's risky. Today's chess professionals would say it's irresponsible.

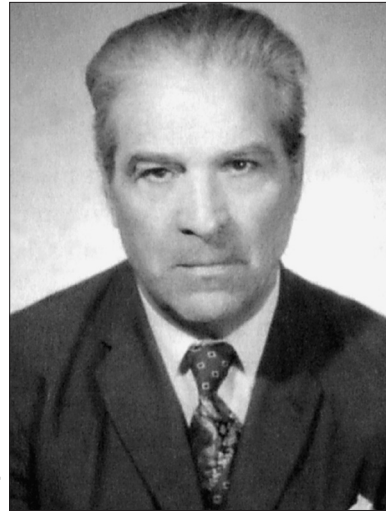
In fact, everything takes the worst possible turn. In the end he loses. Thomas is still a co-winner, together with Euwe and Flohr. But it's not the triumph, not the milestone in chess history, not David's victory over Goliath and his friends. 'Just' a remarkable result, but not a sensation. Even so, this did not stop the *Wiener Schachzeitung* amongst others from celebrating Thomas as the 'moral winner of this world-class tournament'. But there are no extra points and no special page in the history books for a moral victory.

So that's Sir George A. Thomas today. For chess historians at least. The person who fell at the last hurdle, who stumbled on the home straight, with victory in sight and the field far behind. And this failure was due to naive notions of fair play. An amateur who had his moment. For many reasons, this view is absurdly diminishing. From a chess perspective, it is completely inappropriate. Thomas didn't just have this one big chance on the chess stage. Nor was it that the last round at Hastings in the 1934/35 tournament would have thrown him off track. He could live with the disappointment, but not with an arranged draw between friends – and that's admirable.

The move that defined a life

Andor LILIENTHAL

Beauty alone is not enough. In the course of their careers, great masters play many powerful attacks, countless sacrifices and combinations that bring a smile of appreciation to the faces of chess fans. Most of these works of art are seen, admired, forgotten, replaced by future exploits from future tournaments. A lot has to come together for a brilliant performance by a player to remain in the minds of experts and fans alike. The (in-)frequency of a motif is a factor. The chess world had never seen such a daring king's march over a



Andor Lilienthal, around 1950

full board like that played by Nigel Short in his world-famous game against Jan Timman (Tilburg 1991). How Garry Kasparov pursued the king of his opponent Veselin Topalov across the board to his opponent's first rank at Wijk aan Zee in 1999 – that was as breathtaking as it was extraordinary. There are other factors that make games unforgettable. It can be the exciting tournament situation, such as Kasparov's 'win on demand' in the last game of his World Championship Match against Karpov in Seville in 1987. But it can also be because the right opponents come together and the beauty of the game fits into a narrative about the two protagonists.

When the Hungarian master Andor Lilienthal sat down at the chessboard in Hastings on New Year's Day in 1935, he had to assume that he was going to have a hard day at work. His opponent had perhaps the most illustrious name in the chess circus of those days. The Cuban José Raúl Capablanca had already lost his world title to the Russian Alexander Alekhine, but he still exuded the aura of a glamorous man of the world and an ingenious player. In order to visualise the task that a game against Capablanca posed in those days, you have to keep reminding yourself that the Cuban only lost five games between 1914 and 1927. Out of the 578 tournament games he played, he only had to concede defeat in 36. No wonder that people liked to call this all-time winner 'the chess machine' back then. So it is clear that a win, gritty and unspectacular as it might have been, would have garnered Lilienthal the attention and recognition of the chess scene.

But Lilienthal didn't just win. It's not even the fact that he forced the ex-World Champion to resign after only 26 moves. It's about 'how' this

triumph was achieved. Lilienthal won in the most beautiful way possible. It is every chess player's dream to win, just once, with a queen sacrifice. Some never get to do that. The great masters succeed occasionally – and these games make the rounds of the chess world. But the fact that Lilienthal succeeded in this stroke of genius against one of the greatest legends in the entire history of chess is what makes this game immortal. And the name Lilienthal is forever associated with this one magnificent game played on 1st January 1935 in Hastings.

It was a long and very rocky path that brought him to this moment of pure chess bliss. His journey of life was hard and arduous. He was married three times and changed country three times – from Hungary to Russia and back. The highest chess crown was denied to him, but he played against ten World Champions in his long career. 'Chess Was My Life' was his motto, which also became the title of his biography.

Lilienthal was born in Moscow in 1911, his father was an electrical engineer and his mother an opera singer. World War One separated the family, in 1913 the Hungarian mother and the children returned to Budapest, but his father stayed in Russia. Since his mother lost her voice due to illness and became penniless, she handed her children over to the state. The boy learned the tailoring trade in a children's home. As a 15-year-old trained tailor who could not find employment, Lilienthal learned to play chess from his brother and showed great talent. Soon after, he was spending all of his time in the cafés of Budapest, playing for money.

From then on, chess became the elixir of life for the young Lilienthal, a game which gave him joy and at the same time secured him a small income. In Vienna, Berlin and Paris he spent a lot of time in the local cafés and played against the greats of the time. In 1930 his international career started at an international tournament in Paris, which he finished in a creditable fourth place. With the strong line-up of the Moscow tournament of 1935, he finished only in the middle of the table with 9/20, but won the heart of a Russian during the tournament, whom he married soon afterwards. The couple lived in Moscow from then, and Lilienthal was granted Soviet citizenship in 1939. A year later he achieved the greatest success of his career when he tied for first place in the Russian Championship. Lilienthal was in his mid-thirties, a prime age from a chess perspective, but World War Two prevented him from fully realising his chess potential.

His only attempt at the highest chess title was unsuccessful: although he qualified for the Candidates Tournament in Budapest in 1950, he could only manage eighth place in his former homeland, which was disappointing for him. In the years that followed, he played in only a few

tournaments and began a career as a coach in the 1950s. From 1951 to 1963 he worked with the Armenian grandmaster Tigran Petrosian, whom he accompanied as a second to the World Championship title. After 40 years of marriage, his wife died in 1976 and he moved back to his old homeland, Hungary. His best historical Elo rating was 2710, which he reached in 1934. That made him the sixth best player in the world at the time.

‘I am very grateful to Capablanca’

His participation in the Hastings tournament occurred during the prime of his career. He played at the traditional congress twice. On the first appearance in 1933/34, he and Alexander Alekhine took an excellent second place behind the winner Salo Flohr. From this tournament, Lilienthal reports an interesting episode in his biography:

The reigning World Champion, who had inflicted the only defeat on Lilienthal in a convincing game, was still quite upset about his placement after the tournament. He had expected to take first place. The evening after the awards ceremony, Lilienthal and his friend Flohr watched Alekhine playing bridge. The young Hungarian wanted to comfort Alekhine and made the following remark: ‘Don’t be so sad, it was a dead heat with me after all!’ Alekhine reacted very angrily to this childish comment and surprised the then 22-year-old with the following double threat: ‘And take note: you will never again take part in any tournament in which I am also playing!’ It then took Salo Flohr’s entire persuasive powers to calm down the enraged Alekhine. At this subsequent appearance in Hastings he achieved fifth place and thus missed being amongst the prizewinners. But for this he was richly compensated. He played a game that went around the world and found its place in chess literature among the most beautiful queen sacrifices of all time:

Game 31 Nimzo-Indian Defence

Andor Lilienthal

José Raúl Capablanca

Hastings 1934/35 (5)

Notes by Andor Lilienthal,
otherwise Jürgen Brustkern (JB)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.a3

‘The sharp Sämisch Variation, in which White obtains the bishop pair but accepts a permanent weakening of the pawn structure.’ (JB)

4...♙xc3+ 5.bxc3 b6

‘With the subsequent moves ...♙a6 and ...♗b8-c6-a5, the aim is to attack the double pawns.’ (JB)

6.f3 d5 7.♙g5 h6 8.♙h4 ♙a6 9.e4!?

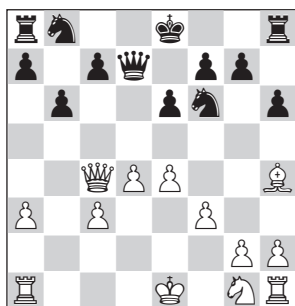
By transposition (7...♙a6 8.e4 and after 8...h6 9.♙h4) this pawn sacrifice was first played by Alekhine in Hastings a year before. His then opponent Eliskases declined it, just like Capablanca did now.

9...♙xc4

Accepting the sacrifice with 9...dxe4 10.fxe4 g5 11.♙g3 ♘xe4 12.♙e5 gives White a strong attack after ♙e2 or ♙d3. White also obtains good compensation after the direct 9...g5 after 10.♙g3 dxe4 11.♙e5 ♘bd7 12.♚a4 ♙b7 13.h4 gxh4 (13...0-0? 14.hxg5 hxg5 15.♚xd7!+-) 14.♚xh4.

10.♙xc4 dxc4 11.♚a4+ ♚d7

12.♚xc4



12...♚c6

'A typical reaction by the ex-World Champion: he wants to simplify the position. The aforementioned game progressed as follows: 12...♘c6 13.♘e2 ♘a5 14.♚d3 ♚c6 15.0-0 0-0-0 16.♚ab1 g5 17.♙g3 ♘h5 18.f4 f6 19.♚b4 ♚hg8 20.f5 e5 21.d5 ♘xg3 22.♘xg3 ♚c5+ 23.♙h1 ♙b7 24.♚fb1 c6= ½-½ (67) Alekhine-Eliskases, Hastings 1933/34.' (JB)

13.♚d3

I avoided exchanging queens because I hoped to bring to the fore my agile pawn centre.

13...♘bd7 14.♘e2 ♚d8

Capablanca refrained from queenside castling because of 14...0-0-0 15.c4. Black wins a pawn after 15...♘e5 16.♚c3 ♘xc4, but 17.♚c1

b5 18.a4 a6 19.0-0 gives White an excellent attacking position.

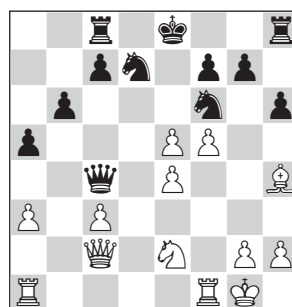
15.0-0 a5 16.♚c2

This preparatory move is necessary, as the impatient 16.f4?! ♘c5 17.♚c4 ♚xe4! 18.♙xf6 gxf6 19.f5 ♚d3! 20.♚xd3 ♘xd3 21.♚ab1 e5 22.♚f3 ♘f4 23.♘xf4 exf4 24.♚xf4 only leads to equality.

16...♚c4 17.f4

Prevents ...g7-g5 and threatens e4-e5. The immediate 17.e5 is countered with 17...g5, e.g. 18.exf6 gxh4 19.♚fe1 ♘xf6 20.♘f4 0-0 21.♚d2 ♙h7 22.♘d3 ♘d5 23.♚ac1 ♘e7 24.♘e5 ♚d5 25.♚f4 with equal chances.

17...♚c8 18.f5 e5 19.dxe5



19...♚xe4?

Frankly, I am very grateful to Capablanca for this move. It has been many years since we played the game. But wherever I went to lecture courses in the Soviet Union, chess lovers always asked me to show them how I had sacrificed the queen against the great Cuban.

19...♚c5+ is a suggested improvement from Euwe who then gives the following variation:

20. ♖f2 ♜xe5 21. ♙d4 ♜xe4
 22. ♜xe4+ ♘xe4 23. ♙xg7 ♖h7 24. f6,
 and the black position is critical
 due to the trapped rook.

‘As a matter of fact, the crucial line
 is 21... ♜d6 22. ♜ad1 ♘e5 23. ♜a4+ c6
 24. ♙xb6 ♜e7±.’ (JB)

I prefer 20. ♘d4!?, as after 20... ♘xe5
 21. ♙f2 ♘fg4 22. ♘e6 ♜d6 23. ♘f4
 ♘xf2 24. ♜xf2 ♜d8 25. ♜g3 the white
 position looks promising.

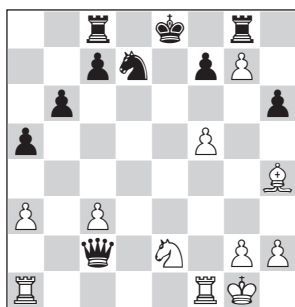
‘Perhaps the critical line of defence
 is 19... ♘xe5.’ (JB)

‘We thus reach the critical position,
 in which the Hungarian achieved
 chess immortality. It is interesting
 that 27 years later Mikhail Tal
 sacrificed his queen in a similar
 way in his game against Hecht at
 the 1962 Olympiad in Varna.’ (JB)

20. exf6!

‘The basic idea of the sacrifice is
 that the black king will get stuck
 in the centre. The rooks have also
 lagged behind in development.’ (JB)

20... ♜xc2 21. fxg7 ♖g8



22. ♘d4

The black queen is now caught in
 the crossfire. There is no square

to which the black king could
 escape. A fatal check from e1 is
 threatened.

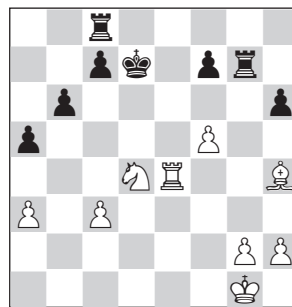
22... ♜e4

Even worse is 22... ♜a4, e.g. 23. ♜ae1+
 ♘e5 24. ♜xe5+ ♔d7 25. ♜d5+ ♘e8
 26. ♜e1 mate; or 22... ♜d2 23. ♜fe1+
 ♘e5 24. ♜xe5+ ♔d7 25. ♜d5+ ♘e8
 26. ♜e1+ ♜xe1+ 27. ♙xe1+–.

23. ♜ae1 ♘c5 24. ♜xe4+ ♘xe4

25. ♜e1 ♖xg7 26. ♜xe4+

In the tournament bulletin it was
 incorrectly stated that Capablanca
 resigned here. Not yet, as he played
26... ♔d7.



But when he saw that White can
 win after 27. ♜e7+ ♔d6 28. f6 ♖h7
 with 29. ♙g3+, he didn't wait for my
 reply. He smiled and shook hands
 with me in congratulation.¹⁸

Lilienthal led a long life. For
 many years he was the oldest
 living grandmaster. He died at the
 age of 99 on 8th May 2010. Even
 until the last years of his life he
 was repeatedly asked about his
 immortal queen sacrifice against
 Capablanca.

In old age, Portisch devotes himself even more than before to his second great passion. Until recently, the trained baritone still gave recitals, with mostly German art songs from Schubert to Strauss on the programme. Portisch is revered in his homeland. In 2004 he received the highest award in Hungarian sport, the title of Sportsman of the Nation, which also provides for a small monthly payment.

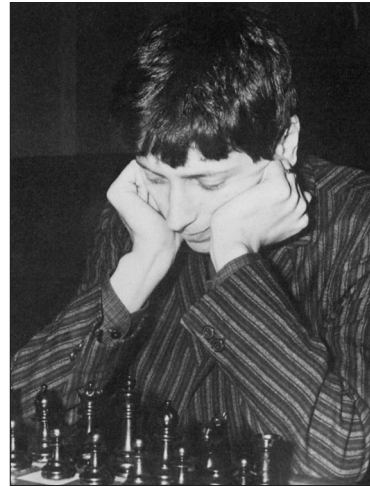
Another award shows perhaps even more so what a tremendous reputation he enjoys in Hungary. At the suggestion of its discoverer Krisztian Sarneczky, the astronomer Szilard Csizmadia from the Konkoly Observatory Budapest named a newly discovered asteroid ‘Lajos Portisch’ in 2016.

The escapee

Michael BASMAN

On the icy heights of absolute world-class chess, cold efficiency and the sober logic of success are what count. It’s always like that in sport and nobody can criticise it. But in chess in particular, a lot would be lost if only the bare result were the last and highest criterion for judging a player. Chess is also – like painting, music or literature – a means of expressing oneself, exploring and living out one’s own character, and developing individuality. The chess audience has a keen sense for it. That is why it has a soft spot for the non-conformist, the unorthodox, those who are looking for their own way in the thicket of chess openings and sometimes get lost because they are the first to look for direction in unmapped regions.

Which brings us to Michael Basman. For some an oddball, for others an unwavering seeker of new paths, a mind of its own, brave, often cocky and cocky on the board, but often also brilliant – sometimes crazy, but always extremely original. For many chess players, the son of Armenian parents who emigrated to England, born on 16th March 1946, is a personal warning not to accept any chess principle as unchangeable and questionable. The spirit of cheeky contradiction always shines from Basman’s games. His treatment of the openings is one of his hallmarks. He would have simply suffocated in the thin air of sophisticated classical opening theory. That is why his chess is a singular attempt to break out.



Michael Basman at his first Hastings appearance in 1966/67

For example, he plays Grob's Attack (1.g4!?). Even with the white pieces, the cheeky advance of the g-pawn on the first move is a provocation of the purist doctrine of healthy development in the first phase of the game. But Basman even plays it with a tempo less – with Black! Or he shocks his opponents with the St. George Defence that scorns the centre: 1...a6 and 2...b5. He has also written books on both systems (*Play the St. George* and *The Killer Grob*, both published by Pergamon).

Basman's parents were both employed. The famous jazz singer Cleo Laine occasionally took care of the boy. He learned the game at the age of ten, and successes quickly became apparent. In 1963 he won the British U-21 Youth Championship. At the age of 20 he took part in the tournament in Hastings for the first time and immediately achieved third place. He regularly represented England at the Student World Championships and achieved his best result in 1963 in Sinaia on second board with 8.5 out of 12. In 1967, he and his team won the bronze medal in Harrachov, Czechoslovakia. Basman defeated the Russian grandmaster Savon and thereby made a decisive contribution to the historic 3:1 victory against the highly favoured USSR. In 1968 he played in Lugano – the only time – in an Olympiad for England. On the second reserve board, he scored 6.5 points from 11 games.

Basman holds both the British and the Armenian citizenship. In the early 1970s, he lived in Yerevan for some time. There he won the strong city championship twice. Once, in 1973, he was very close to the national championship in Great Britain. It was only in a playoff that he was defeated by William Hartston, who had equal points in the tournament, by 1.5:4.5. In 1980, FIDE awarded him the title of International Master. Basman was a pioneer in many ways, not just in terms of exploring new opening strategies. He also broke new ground in conveying his knowledge. As early as the 1970s, he was working with audio cassettes, the forerunners of DVDs, which are now well established as a chess medium.

In the 1990s, Basman devoted himself increasingly to work as a coach and youth chess. He founded his own chess school and organised the nationwide, annual British School Championships in which around 70,000 young people took part in its heyday. This major event was one of the most important breeding grounds for the later explosion in top British chess.

Subversive passivity

Although Basman only participated at Hastings three times, he leaves at least two memorable games that underscore his extraordinary talent. The Russian World Champion Botvinnik recognised this talent early on and

had a painful personal experience of it. He told Basman that he was ‘the most unusual and creative English player’, who strongly reminded him of the Russian grandmaster Vladimir Simagin. Botvinnik’s judgment is also the result of his encounter with Basman at the 1966/67 Congress, where he was completely outplayed by his opponent and only escaped defeat by a hair’s breadth. But Basman achieved his masterpiece at the anniversary congress in 1974/75. This game shows a second string to his play: Basman was a great tactician whose combinations could develop devastating force. He proved that against the fantastic attacking player Albin Planinc in a game that our commentator described as ‘the peak of audacity’.



Albin Planinc in 1973,
a fantastic attacking player

Game 53 Sicilian Defence

Albin Planinc

Michael Basman

Hastings 1974/75 (2)

Notes by Dr Reinhold Cherubim,
otherwise Jürgen Brustkern (JB)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

‘This provocative treatment goes
back to Aron Nimzowitsch.’ (JB)

3.♘c3 b6!?

Almost only played by Basman,
and maybe his invention. Basman
is England’s most headstrong
player and disdains any draw. But a
position like the one we see before
us in a few moves would have been
approved by Steinitz.

4.e5 ♗g8 5.♙c4 ♙b7 6.0-0 ♘c6

7.♞e1 ♞c8!

At first sight a strange move, but it
alone prevents 8.d4.

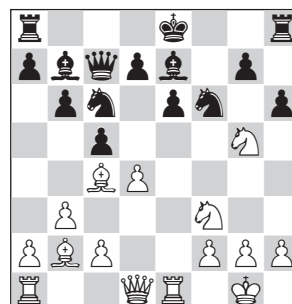
8.♗e4 e6

Another – harmless – hole!

9.b3 f5!?

It takes some courage to open
lines in such an underdeveloped
position.

**10.exf6 ♗xf6 11.♗eg5 ♙e7 12.♙b2
♞c7 13.d4 h6!?**



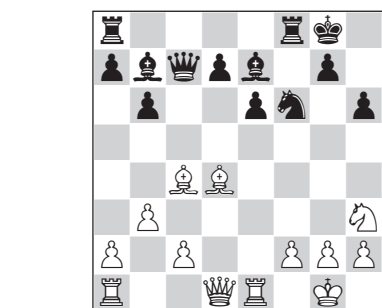
You almost have to say: ‘The peak of
audacity!’

14.♗h3?!

Certainly after careful considera-
tion and determination that
nothing in Basman’s position

is terminal. And yet, a Tal, who Planinc otherwise emulates, would certainly have sacrificed the knight on e6 'without thinking'. White first gets two pawns for the piece, keeps the black king in the middle and can reinforce his attack unhindered. With these practical chances, it shouldn't matter if you can't work out on the board that the sacrifice is one hundred per cent correct. 'The assessment of the time is confirmed by the best engine:

14. ♖xe6 dxe6 15. ♙xe6 ♖xd4 (clearly worse is 15...cxd4? 16. ♚d3) 16. ♙xd4 cxd4 17. ♗e5 just looks very strong, e.g. 17... ♚c3? 18. ♗g6 ♜f8 19. ♚e2 ♗e4 20. ♗xf8 ♙xf8 21. ♙f5 and White's position is very promising. The best defence is 17...h5!, getting the rook out to h6.'



0-0

17. ♚d3?

The Yugoslav master exchanges his best attacking piece and puts his queen out of the game. This quickly turns the tide in favour of Black. Stronger was 17.f3 to bring the stranded knight h3 back into the game via f2.

17...d5! 18. ♙a6 ♙xa6 19. ♚xa6 ♗g4! Mobilises the powerful centre.

20.g3 e5!

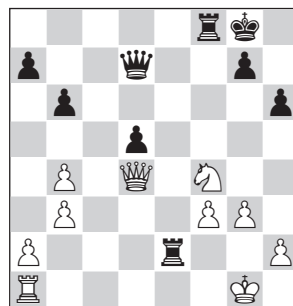
Suddenly, just seven moves after Planinc's sacrifice, Basman's position is very strong.

21. ♚e2 ♚d7

Eyeing up the knight on h3.

22.f3 ♙b4 23.c3 exd4 24.cxb4 ♜ae8

25. ♚d2 ♗e5 26. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 27. ♚xd4 ♜e2 28. ♗f4



28... ♜xf4!

Played a tempo!

29.gxf4 ♚f5 30. ♙h1 ♚h5

White resigned.

A bad beating for Planinc.³⁶

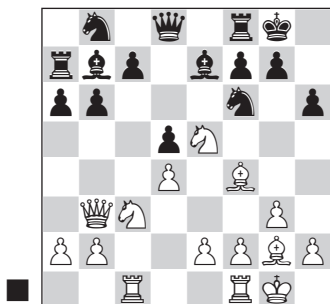
Basman showed psychological skill in the game against the ultra-solid Swede Ulf Andersson. The endgame expert and later world-class player will probably never forget this game. The Czech master player Cenek Kottnauer (1910-1996), who emigrated to England, tellingly called Basman's extravagant play 'subversive passivity' in his annotations in *Schach-Echo*:

Game 54

Ulf Andersson**Michael Basman**

Hastings 1974/75 (11)

Notes by Cenek Kottnauer,
otherwise Jürgen Brustkern (JB)



‘Basman had provoked the Swedish filigree technician in the opening with ...a7-a6 and ...♖a7 and in the following continues to stick to his bullfighter tactic.’ (JB)

12... ♙a8

A bit strange, but this defends the weakness on c7.

13. ♜fd1 ♘h7 14. h3 ♙g8 15. ♘h2 ♘h7

Ah, that’s different. But let’s leave the comments for the next ten moves; Black tries a kind of ‘come and get me tactic’ for the next ten moves. I have to admit that I have never seen anything like it in master chess!

16. g4 ♘g8 17. ♙g3 ♙b7 18. e3 ♙a8 19. a3 ♙b7 20. f4 ♙a8 21. ♞d2 ♜d6 22. f5 ♜d8 23. ♙f4 ♙b7 24. ♞g1 c6 25. ♙f3 ♘h7 26. ♞c1

A moral success for Black: White has become insecure and is starting to weaken his position with haphazard moves.

26... ♙d6 27. ♘a4 ♙c7 28. ♘g3?!

And now, completely confused, he marches into an absurd battle with his king – with almost all of the lethal pieces still on the board.

28... ♘f6 29. h4 ♘fd7 30. ♘xd7 ♘xd7 31. ♞e2? ♞e8!

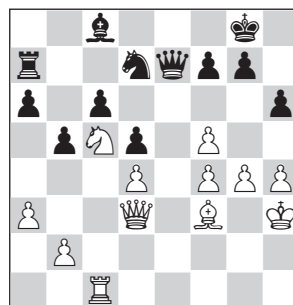
White’s haphazard attempts at attack have led to nothing; he has only created weaknesses. Black, on the other hand, now continues with not only sensible but also strong moves.

32. ♘h3 ♙xf4 33. exf4 ♞xe2 34. ♙xe2 ♜e7 35. ♙f3 b5 36. ♘c5 ♙c8

‘36... ♘xc5! is the way to go.’ (JB)

37. ♜d3?

‘White should have continued rerouting his knight: 37. ♘d3! h5 38. ♘e5 hxg4+ 39. ♙xg4 ♜e8 40. ♘xc6 ♞b7±.’ (JB)

**37...h5!**

Breaks open the c8-h3 diagonal and puts the white king in danger. White does not have a sufficient response to the various threats. After 38.g5, for example, would follow 38... ♘xc5 and 39...g6!

38.gxh5

Look at the ruins of the white position: it would be a miracle to

survive such a pawn structure, and Black carries out the attack with astonishing sharpness.

38... ♖f6 39. ♔g3 ♜xc5 40. ♜xc5 ♙xf5 41. ♖c3 ♙d7

This strange game was adjourned here, but White no longer has a defence.

42. ♗d3 ♜a8 43. ♜c1 ♜e8 44. ♖c3 c5!

‘Opens the position at the right moment.’ (JB)

45. ♖xc5

After 45.dxc5 comes 45...d4 46. ♗d2 ♖f5 47. ♗xd4 ♖h3+ 48. ♔f2 ♖xh4+ with a fearsome attack.

‘Surprisingly, the computer points out the escape route 47. ♔f2! d3 (or even 47... ♖f6 48. ♔g3 ♖f5=) 48. c6 ♙xc6 49. ♜xc6 ♖h3 50. ♗xd3 ♖h2+ 51. ♙g2 ♖xf4+.’ (JB)

45... ♖f5 46. ♗xd5

If 46. ♜h1, then 46... ♜e3 with the threat of 47... ♗xg4+.

46... ♖h3+ 47. ♔f2 ♖h2+ 48. ♙g2 ♖xf4+ 49. ♙f3 ♙g4!

‘Basman isn’t interested in the exchange, he wants to deliver mate!’

‘(JB)

50. ♜c3 ♖h2+ 51. ♙g2 ♖xh4+

52. ♔g1 ♜e1+ 53. ♙f1 ♙h3

White resigned.³⁷

Long-time companion Raymond Keene considered Basman in many ways one of the most important personalities in British chess (www.wikide.wiki). Sometimes the question arises as to whether Basman could have achieved even greater success if only he had been less extravagant and instead had played in a more risk-free and more solid way. This is a misunderstanding of Basman’s peculiarity. In his unique way of playing chess, this maladjusted head has found the appropriate form of expression for itself. He had to play like that – or not at all. And with his play he has enriched the chess world considerably.

The arsonist with smouldering eyes

Mikhail TAL

He has always been a favourite of fans of chess. To this day, Mikhail Tal is considered by many chess fans to be the epitome of the intrepid attacking player whose brilliant sacrifices could set the chessboard on fire within a few moves. 64 black and white squares suddenly became confusing labyrinths, mazes and wondrous worlds when he was in charge of the pieces. But not only his attacks were crushing, his wild, terrifying gaze, piercing and suddenly



Mikhail Tal,
the ‘magician’ from Riga

directed at the enemy, was the same. There are legendary shots of the World Champion with the smouldering eyes, his tangled hair pointing in all directions of the compass and his never-ending cigarette – a crazy mixture of conductor, philosopher and sleepwalker. Weakness overcame those who were subjected to the attacks of the Latvian magician. Tal was also a thoroughly amenable and lovable character, helpful and appealing to amateurs who asked him for autographs and photos.

The Latvian, born in 1936, only played twice in Hastings. Appearances that will be remembered. In 1963/64 he went to the south of England for the first time and won the Premier with 7 points from nine games ahead of Gligoric. The eighth World Chess Champion travelled in interesting company, namely with the 23-year-old woman World Champion Nona Gaprindashvili (born 1941) and Abraham Khasin, who was completely unknown in the western world of chess. Gaprindashvili wanted, by playing in the Challengers, to gain access to the very top players in Hastings. Khasin, who had had both legs amputated, played together with Tal in the Premier.

Looking back, you can see how impressed Tal was with the chess tradition in Hastings. In his memorable book *Life and Games of Mikhail Tal*, which is well worth reading, he evokes the special atmosphere: ‘In the tournament hall there was a large photo case with the title “You were in Hastings”. Almost all of the strongest chess players of the 20th century gazed out at us from here: José Raúl Capablanca, Mikhail Botvinnik, Alexander Alekhine, Vera Menchik and many others.’

Gaprindashvili made an impression. Not just on the board. The English language student had no communication problems and was able to answer journalists’ questions. But sometimes their curiosity went too far. One of the most frequent questions did not concern her playing style, but her impression of English men – which at least throws a significant light on the position of women’s chess at the time. At first the Georgian used to brush off such questions with a cool ‘It’s okay, thank you’. In his Hastings memoirs, Mikhail Tal describes how Gaprindashvili then turned to him with a request. ‘Misha, it’s awkward for me; say that I like them, but that I like Georgian men better!’³⁸

The interest of the chess public then quickly turned to the sporting qualities of the World Champion, because she showed remarkable talent. An early defeat seemed to put her objective at an unattainable distance before she started a race to catch up, which brought her to the top of the table with equal points. But since she had won against the player she tied with, the Swede Ove Kinnmark, she actually qualified for the main tournament as the second woman to do so after Vera Menchik.