

Zenón Franco

Keres

move by move

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About the Author

Zenón Franco is a Grandmaster from Paraguay, now living in Spain. He represented Paraguay, on top board, in seven Chess Olympiads, and won individual gold medals at Lucerne 1982 and Novi Sad 1990. He's an experienced trainer and has written numerous books on chess.

Also by the Author:

Test Your Chess

Anand: Move by Move

Spassky: Move by Move

Rubinstein: Move by Move

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Foreword

I consider it a great honour to have been entrusted with the task of writing a book about Paul Petrovich Keres, especially in the year of the centenary of his birth. Keres is one of the greatest players in chess history and one of the best never to have gained the title of world champion. He was numbered among the very top players in the world for more than three decades.

For some of the previous books that I have written about great players (Morphy, Rubinstein and Spassky) there was almost no material available, but in Keres's case the situation is quite different. He has bequeathed to posterity some excellent works: annotated games, books on the endgame, books of analysis of adjourned games, etc. In addition, Keres also composed problems and endgame studies.

I remember the Argentine publishers Sopena publishing the book *El ajedrez como yo lo juego* (a collection of Keres's selected games, annotated by him), long before it came out in English. When I began to play chess, this book was already in existence, but it seemed very complicated to me; it was only several years later that I was able to appreciate its true value. I thought then that it was one of the best chess books that had ever been written. Now, more than forty years later, I still hold that opinion.

I have looked again at games from that book on many occasions. Some are works of art and/or models that have been reproduced in other important books. The depth of Keres's analyses and the clarity of his explanations make this book something extraordinary. Exhaustive analysis, seeking to understand the profoundest details was the basis of his skill, possibly ingrained from his earliest days as a player, when he played correspondence games to make up for the difficulties of playing 'real' chess over the board, due of the distances involved.

Subsequently, and especially since the advent of strong computer programs, it has been discovered that some of Keres's analyses contain errors, but this does not detract from the immense work he carried out all done, of course, without any kind of assistance. The ideas demonstrated by Keres continue to be very instructive.

The sheer profundity of Keres's analyses raises a problem. As we make use of his annotations, how can we add anything of value to what Keres has already said? This is where the *Move by Move* format is particularly useful.

As I have already commented on other occasions, passively reading a text, a chess book

Keres: Move by Move

in our case, is not the same as taking an active part in the 'lesson'. That is my task here: to set problems and exercises to try to ensure that fuller use is made of Keres's teachings; and also to expand the explanations a little, whenever I consider this to be useful.

I have tried to carry out this task to the best of my ability and I hope that the reader will be able to appreciate the work and play of Paul Keres with the same pleasure that I have had in writing about it.

GM Zenón Franco Ocampos,
Ponteareas, Spain,
March 2017

Chapter Six

World Championship, The Hague/Moscow 1948

In the spring of 1948 Keres travelled to Holland to take part in the long-awaited struggle for the highest chess title. The contestants were to be Euwe, Fine, Reshevsky, Smyslov, Botvinnik and Keres. The starting date was the 15th of September 1948 in The Hague, where the first part was played; the second part was fought out in Moscow. At the last minute Fine decided not to take part, which left five contenders.

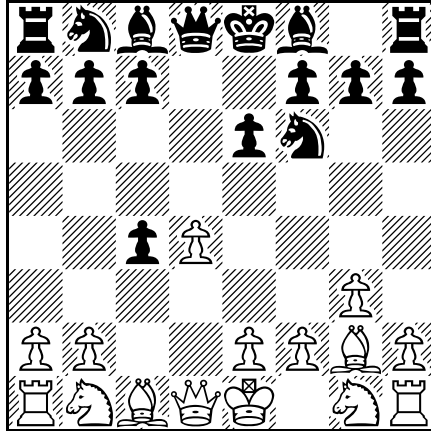
Mikhail Botvinnik was crowned world champion with 14 points out of 20, defeating all his opponents in the 5-game 'mini-matches'. Smyslov finished in second place with 11 points, Keres and Reshevsky were joint third with 10½, while Euwe finished last with 4 points.

It was rumoured that Keres deliberately lost to Botvinnik, but there is no proof of this. In any case Keres wrote: "There is no doubt at all that the new world champion, Botvinnik, played better than all the other participants and, in my opinion, this tournament has been, from the point of view of quality, the greatest success of his whole chess career".

Let us look at three of Keres's games from the tournament.

Game 10 **V.Smyslov-P.Keres** World Championship, The Hague/Moscow 1948 *Catalan Opening*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♙g2 dxc4



Question: The line 4...♙e7 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 0-0, and only then 6...dxc4, is seen more often. Is the text merely a transposition, or there are important differences?

Answer: There can be differences. If White now plays 5 ♘f3 Black can play 5...a6, to hang on to the pawn with ...b5; this is a playable sacrifice for White, it but very quickly leads to sharp positions. An example from this century continued 6 ♘e5 ♙b4+ 7 ♘c3 ♘d5 8 0-0 0-0 (it is risky, but not clearly bad to play 8...♗xc3 9 bxc3 ♙xc3 10 ♖b1) 9 ♗c2 b5 10 ♘xd5 exd5 11 b3 c6 12 e4, V.Kramnik-A.Morozevich, Mexico City 2007.

5 ♗a4+ ♙d7

Another idea is 5...♗bd7 6 ♗xc4 a6, with the plan of ...b5, ...♙b7 and then ...c5. The text move leads to a different type of position; Black activates his pieces quickly.

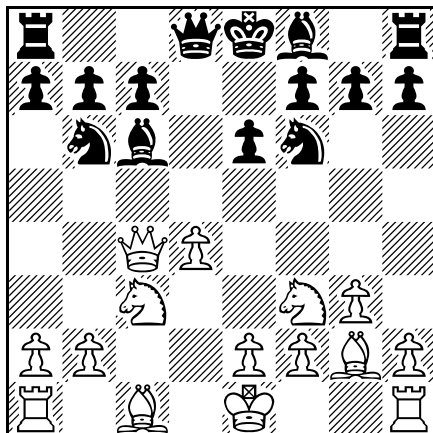
6 ♗xc4 ♙c6 7 ♘f3

Naturally the exchange of bishops would take all the sting out of White's position, but now the central light squares are left under Black's control for the moment.

7...♗bd7

Keres mentioned the possibility of 7...♙d5, aiming to equalize quickly; if 8 ♗c2 then 8...♗c6 (or 8...♙e4) would be unpleasant, while after 8 ♗a4+ ♙c6 9 ♗d1 Black has 9...e5!, with good play.

8 ♘c3 ♗b6



Question: While this move does not lose a tempo, since it attacks the queen, the knight is surely generally not well placed on b6? So why is this move preferable to 8...♗e7, for instance?

Answer: The focus of the struggle lies elsewhere. White will try to play e2-e4, leaving the black pieces badly placed, with little space. In the present game the main struggle will develop precisely around this advance, which for the next 20 moves will constitute White's main objective.

Black is fighting against this. After, for instance, 8...♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖d3, White is already ready to play e4, and in the event of 10...♗d5 White can gain the advantage with the pawn sacrifice 11 e4! ♗xc3 12 bxc3 ♗c5 13 ♖e3 ♗xe4 14 ♗e5!.

9 ♖d3 ♗b4

Fighting for control of e4; this is why Black needed to drive the white queen away from c4.

10 0-0 0-0 11 ♗d1

With 11 ♗g5 h6 12 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 13 e4 White could have forced through the advance e4, but at a high price, as Keres pointed out; after 13...♗fd8 the black bishop-pair would constitute sufficient compensation for the space advantage. K.Junge-A.Alekhine, Munich 1942, continued 14 ♗ad1 ♗e8! (seeking to play the counterblow ...c5) 15 a3 ♗f8 16 ♖e3 ♗ac8 17 ♗h3 (preventing 17...c5 due to 18 d5) 17...♗b8 18 ♗fe1 ♗a4 (18...c5! was also good: 19 dxc5 ♗c4 20 ♖e2 ♗e5!, regaining the pawn, or 19 d5 ♗c4 20 ♖e2 ♗xb2! when 21 e5?! is not to be feared due to 21...♗xd1 22 exf6 ♗xc3, followed by ...♗xd5) 19 e5 ♖e7 20 ♗xa4 ♗xa4 21 ♗c1, and as well as the move played, 21...b6, transferring the bishop from a4 to d5, via c6, was also satisfactory.

11...h6

Preventing the pin 12 ♗g5, although Keres thought that after 12...♖e7 13 ♗g5 h6 13

♙xf6 ♖xf6 White's extra tempo (♖fd1), compared to the variation in the previous note, would have no great importance.

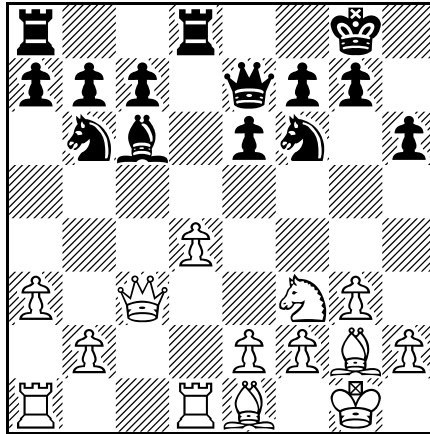
12 ♙d2 ♖e7 13 a3 ♙xc3 14 ♖xc3

Black also has satisfactory play after 14 ♙xc3 ♙e4, followed by 15...♖fd8 or 15...♘bd5.

14...♖fd8

After 14...♘e4 15 ♖c2 (if 15 ♖b4 then 15...♖e8!, with the strong threat of ...a5) 15...♘xd2 16 ♖xd2, Keres gave 16...f5, controlling the e4-square, but of course it was difficult to decide upon this line, since it weakens Black's pawn structure. White is slightly better after 17 ♘e5.

15 ♙e1



Exercise: Black has emerged from the opening with good play and with control of the central squares at present. It is time to initiate a new plan. What do you think Keres played?

Answer: 15...♖ac8

Keres decides to prepare the advance ...c5, but this is easy to prevent. Instead, 15...a5! was very interesting, restraining all White's activity on the queenside, and with the positional threat of ...a4.

16 ♙f1!

As in other lines of the Catalan or the English, White plans to move his knight from f3, so that he can play f2-f3 and e2-e4, while preserving the light-squared bishop.

16...♙d5 17 b4

Preventing the advance ...c5 and threatening 18 ♘e5, followed by the aforementioned manoeuvre of 19 f3 and 20 e4.

17...♘bd7 18 ♘h4

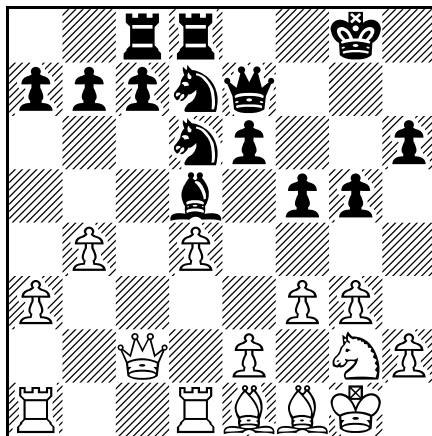
Black has prevented 18 ♘e5, so that in order to pursue his idea White must move the

knight to another square. In the event of 18 ♖d2 Black could play 18...e5, but now that move would require Black to consider the response 19 ♗f5, as well as 19 dxe5 ♕xe5 20 ♕xe5 ♗xe5 21 ♙c3, followed by ♙h3, and the white bishops come to life.

18...♗e4 19 ♕c2 ♗d6 20 f3 g5

20...f5 was playable, but it is not clear that Black can manage without playing ...g5; after 20...f5 21 ♙f2 Black must reckon with the threat of ♗g6, followed by ♗f4 and the knight would immediately occupy the strong square d3.

21 ♗g2 f5



Question: The situation does not appear to be bad for Black. He doesn't seem to have any serious problems?

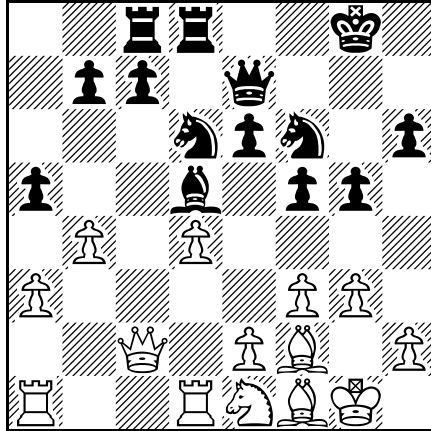
Answer: The calm is only temporary. The struggle will continue around the advance e2-e4 by White. Black has prevented it so far, but at the cost of weakening his position. At the moment White cannot exploit this, but if he, in the future, after appropriate manoeuvres, succeeds in playing e2-e4, Black, and especially Black's castled position, will sorely miss his dark-squared bishop. Black cannot confine himself to waiting; the manoeuvre ...b6 and ...c5 is on his agenda.

22 ♙f2

This defends the d4-pawn, clears the e1-square for the knight and also exerts pressure along the g1-a7 diagonal, hindering Black's intended ...c5 advance.

Instead, 22 ♙c3 would have allowed ...b6 and ...c5 at an appropriate moment.

22...♗f6 23 ♗e1 a5



Question: Was it not better to play 23...g4, ruling out the e2-e4 advance almost permanently?

Answer: Indeed, Black could have prevented the e2-e4 advance by playing 23...g4, but at very high price, as Keres points out, since this move would weaken the dark squares, and after 24 ♕g2, followed by 25 ♖d3, White would have clearly the better game.

With 23...a5 Black opens a new front, which White must attend to, putting on hold his main plan, which is to play e2-e4.

24 ♖d3

Another possibility was 24 bxa5 ♖a8 25 ♖d3 ♖xa5 and now 26 ♕e1, planning ♕b4; this would be a change of plan, and it is not clear that it would be better.

24...♖a8

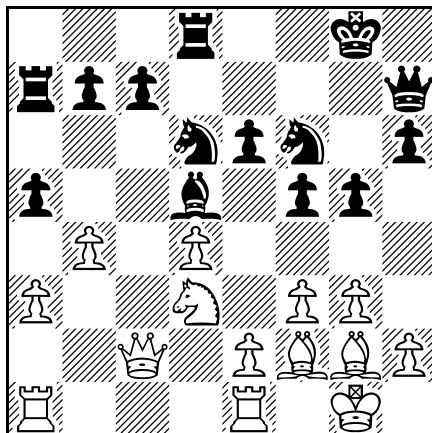
'The threat is stronger than the execution.' Black could already play 24...axb4 25 axb4 ♖a8, in order to prevent the manoeuvre bxa5, followed by ♕e1-b4, but he prefers to maintain the pressure, doubling rooks before playing ...axb4.

Keres noted that both players were already beginning to be short of time, which influenced the following phase of the game.

25 ♕g2 ♖a7 26 ♖e1 ♖h7

Black bolsters his control of the e4-square. If White now plays 27 ♖c5 and Black decides to allow 28 e4 then, after exchanging with 28...fxe4 29 fxe4, the white e-pawn would remain pinned, which would limit White's play.

Another idea was 26...axb4 27 axb4 ♖da8; then after 28 ♖xa7 ♖xa7 29 ♖e5 White would still not be threatening 30 e4? owing to 30...fxe4 31 fxe4 ♖fxe4!: for example, 32 ♕xe4 ♖xe4 33 ♖xe4 ♖h7 34 ♖e2 ♖a1+ 35 ♕e1 ♖xe1+, winning material, or 32 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 33 ♕xe4 ♖a1+ 34 ♖g2 ♖h7! 35 ♖f3 ♖a3+ 36 ♕e3 ♖f5+ and Black wins.



We have reached a critical position. White can stick to his earlier strategy of playing for e2-e4, or he can change his plan.

27 b5!?

By means of this pawn sacrifice White will be able to carry out his plan and finally succeed in forcing through e2-e4. The alternative was 27 bxa5 ♖xa5 28 ♙ec1, with the idea of 29 ♕e1 and 30 ♕b4, with which, according to Keres, White could retained prospects of gaining a positional advantage.

27...♗xb5 28 ♚c5 c6 29 a4 ♘d7

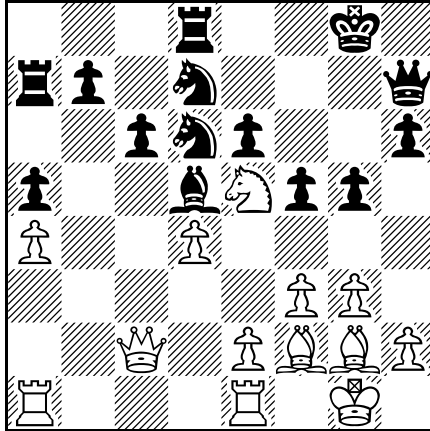
Forced; this is the only move that does not lose material.

30 ♚c2

Consistent; the queen keeps an eye on e4. Instead, 30 ♚c1! was interesting, to try and exploit the weakness of the kingside dark squares, meeting 30...♗d6 with 31 h4!, and if 31...gxh4 then 32 ♚f4!.

30...♗d6 31 ♘e5

With 31 ♘c5 White could force through the advance e2-e4, since Black cannot reply 31...f4 because of 32 ♚xh7+ ♔xh7 33 gxf4, and then if 33...gxf4, 34 ♕h4 wins the exchange. However, 31 ♘c5 would be of no great benefit to White, since after 31...♗f6 32 e4 fxe4 33 fxe4 b6 Black would emerge from the complications in good shape. Keres gives as a sample continuation 34 ♙ac1 bxc5 35 exd5 ♚xc2 36 ♙xc2 exd5 37 ♙xc5 ♙c8 38 ♙e6 ♗fe4 39 ♕xe4 ♗xe4 40 ♙cxc6 ♙xc6 41 ♙xc6 ♙b7, and thanks to his strong knight, Black has the slightly better ending.



Exercise: How did Keres reply to 31 ♖e5?

Answer: 31... ♗f6!

Of course, bolstering the defence of the e4-square.

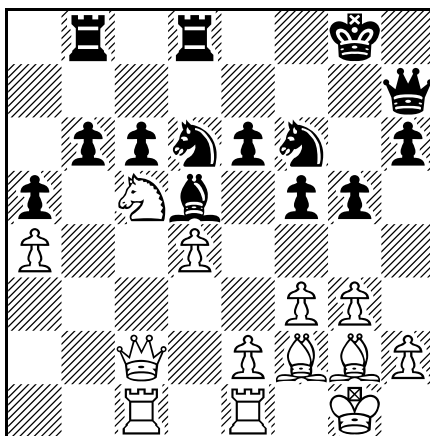
32 ♜ac1

Now Black will no longer be able to exploit the fact that the white queen is undefended.

32... ♜aa8 33 ♘d3 ♜ab8

Instead of playing 33...b6, to prevent ♘c5, Keres prefers to have ...b5 as a threat. Black judged that the following complications would not be dangerous for him.

34 ♘c5 b6



35 e4!

“Smyslov exploits in excellent fashion the opportunity presented to him to gain attack-

ing chances”, wrote Keres.

There was no time for 35 ♖b3, with the idea of 36 ♖d2 and e4, since Black could play 35...f4, and the extra pawn would begin to count. With 35 ♖d3 instead, White would have permanently abandoned his plan to play e2-e4.

35...fxe4 36 ♖xe4

Maintaining the pressure. Instead, going into an endgame with 36 fxe4 bxc5 37 exd5 ♖xc2 38 ♖xc2 is not advantageous for White, since after 38...exd5 39 ♖xc5 ♖de4 40 ♖xa5 (or 40 ♖xc6 ♖dc8) 40...♖b2 Black would have good play.

In the sharp position that has arisen it is difficult, even in subsequent analysis, to find the best moves for both sides; and it would have been even more difficult during the game, with the clock ticking.

36...♖g6 37 ♖e2 ♖b7 38 ♖c3 ♖c4 39 ♖b2

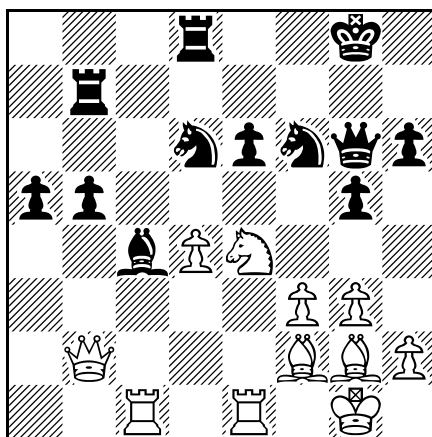
As Keres points out, it is not easy for Black to exploit his extra pawn. His pieces lack secure bases in the centre and the open position allows White to create dangerous tactical threats, especially if the white bishops can come into the game.

39...b5

With this move Black is trying to make use of his superiority on the queenside, but at the same time he is allowing his opponent counterchances.

In the event of the preparatory 39...♖f8, to be able to reply to 40 ♖e4 with 40...♖fxe4 41 fxe4 ♖bf7, White can play 40 g4, with the idea of ♖g3, or, even better, he can exploit the tactical situation by playing 40 d5!, when after 40...exd5 41 ♖e6 White attacks one knight on d6 and pins the other one on f6; after 41...♖d7 42 ♖xb6 the white pieces are very active.

40 axb5 cxb5 41 ♖e4

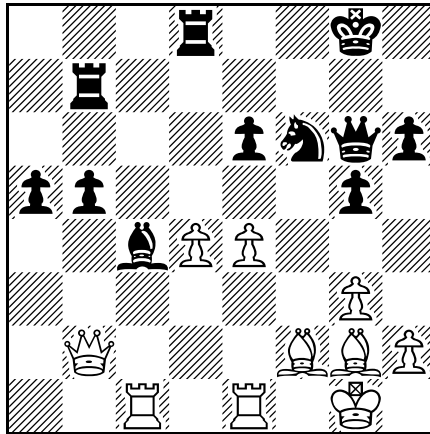


The game was adjourned here and this was the sealed move. 41 f4 would have been inferior since after, for instance, 41...♖f7, Black would have been left in control of the important squares e4 and g4, which would not have been fully compensated by the increased activity of the g2-bishop.

41...♘dxe4

Black is almost forced to improve White's structure, in view of the threat to win a piece with 42 ♘xd6 ♙xd6, followed by 43 ♖xc4. Black also had to take into account the idea of ♘c3, followed by d4-d5, which is similar to what we have already seen. 41...♗f7? would not have prevented the combination: after 42 ♘xd6 ♙xd6 43 ♖xc4 bxc4 White has 44 ♗b8+.

42 fxe4



Exercise: What did Keres have in mind here when he traded knights on e4?

Answer: 42...♗g4!

“After thorough home analysis, I became convinced that this surprising combination, based on the sacrifice of a piece, grants Black the best practical prospects of a win”, wrote Keres. Nearly seventy years on, our analysis engines reach the same conclusion.

As well as 43 ♖xc4 White was planning 43 d5, opening all the lines for his bishops and rooks at the cost of another pawn. Keres gives as a sample line 42...♗f7 43 d5 exd5 44 exd5 ♘xd5 45 ♖cd1, when Black's extra pawns are practically worthless.

After the game, many considered 42...♗bd7 to be stronger, but Keres had rejected it precisely because of 43 d5!, when after 43...exd5 44 ♗b6 the white pieces suddenly acquire tremendous power and Black's extra pawns would have lost their value.

43 ♖xc4 ♗h5!

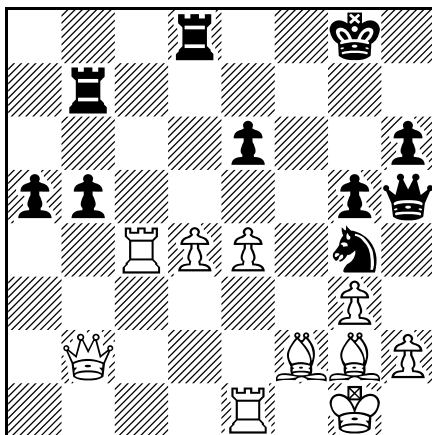
This is the key to the preceding sacrifice, which seems to have been completely unexpected by Smyslov, since he now used up most of his remaining time, without being able to find the correct continuation.

Question: 43...♘xf2 looked tempting. Was this not equally strong?

Answer: It looks very strong, since after both 44 ♗xf2? bxc4 and 44 ♘xf2? ♗f7+, followed by

45...bxc4, White loses the exchange.

However, White could answer 43...♘xf2 with 44 ♖c3!, and after 44...♗f7 45 ♖ec1 the open position is uncomfortable for the black king and gives White good compensation. 44...♘g4?! is no better, since after 45 ♖c6! White suddenly has an excellent position.



44 ♖c2?

This allows Black to undertake a decisive attack. 44 h3? was also bad because of 44...♘xf2, threatening 45...♘d3, or 45...♘xh3+.

44 h4! was best, with a very complex position, which would have been difficult to handle with little time. Black would continue with 44...♘xf2, and now there are various possible continuations, although we can immediately rule out 45 ♖c3 ♘d1 and 45 ♖c6 ♘d3:

a) 45 ♗b3 is interesting. After 45...bxc4 46 ♗xb7 gxh4, the best move appears to be 47 ♗b6, but then Black has 47...♗f8 48 ♗xe6+ ♔g7 49 ♗e7+ ♗f7 50 ♗xh4 ♗xh4 51 ♗xh4 ♘d3 and Black's pawns seem to be more dangerous than White's; the black king will take part in the struggle, blocking the white pawns, while the white king will have little to contribute, although, of course, this endgame is complex.

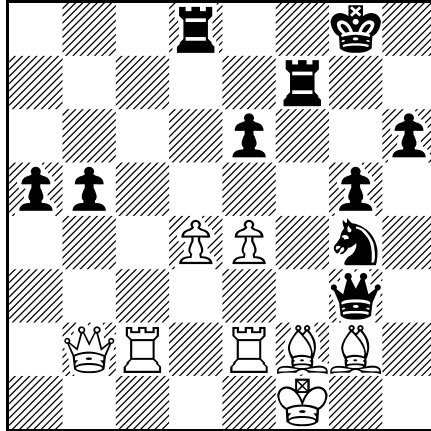
b) Keres considered that 45 ♖f1! was the best defence, continuing 45...♘d1 (after 45...♘d3? 46 ♗b3 ♗f7 White even gains the advantage with 47 ♖c3!) 46 ♗b3 bxc4! (46...♘e3 allows the elegant saving move 47 ♖c8!) 47 ♗xb7 ♘e3, and as Keres notes, "Despite the fact that Black has managed to preserve the extra pawn, his king position offers White good chances of keeping the balance".

Finally, Keres excused his opponent, "Since in his home analysis Smyslov had overlooked these variations, he can hardly be reproached for not finding the only way of salvation, on unexpectedly being confronted with these complications over the board."

44...♗xh2+ 45 ♔f1 ♗f7

With the threat of 46...♘xf2 47 ♖xf2 ♖xf2+, followed by 48...♗f8.

46 ♖ee2 ♗xg3



In return for the piece Black has three pawns and no less than four passed pawns. His queenside pawns are especially strong, since they can advance unhindered, benefiting from the discomfort of the white king on the other wing.

47 ♖c3

This loses, but by now there was no salvation for White, as Keres points out. If 47 ♖c3, then Black has 47...♗d6, threatening ...♗df8, while if 47 e5 Black advances his queenside pawns with 47...a4 and 48...a3, winning in a similar fashion to the game.

47...♗xc3

A lot clearer than 47...♗xf2 48 ♗xg3 ♗xe4+ 49 ♗f3 ♗xf3+ 50 ♗xf3 ♗g3+ 51 ♗e1 ♗xe2 52 ♗xe2 ♗xd4 53 ♗xb5.

48 ♗xc3 ♗df8 49 ♗cc2 ♗xf2

General liquidation now constitutes the quickest method of reaching the goal. Instead, 49...a4 would allow the resource 50 ♗h3.

50 ♗xf2 ♗xf2+ 51 ♗xf2 ♗xf2+ 52 ♗xf2 a4!

This pawn is unstoppable.

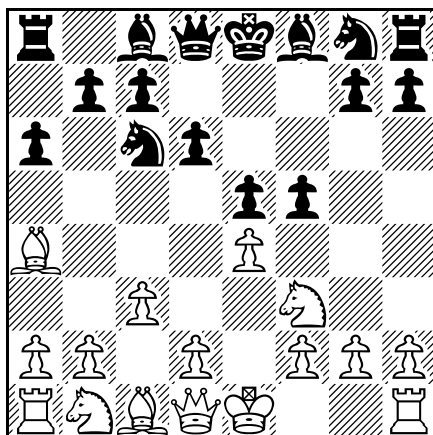
53 ♗h3 ♗f7 54 d5 exd5

Or 54...a3 55 ♗xe6+ ♗f6 and the a-pawn queens.

55 ♗d7 ♗f6 56 ♗c6 dxe4 57 ♗xb5 a3 0-1

Game 11
M.Euwe-P.Keres
 World Championship, The Hague/Moscow 1948
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 d6 5 c3 f5



Question: This looks risky, doesn't it? Why did Keres deviate from the usual move 5...♙d7, which he had employed many times?

Answer: Keres explained his choice in this way: “This interesting variation was introduced into tournament praxis by Capablanca in the Budapest tournament of 1928. In the ensuing years it was subjected to numerous analyses and investigations, and the general conclusion reached was that White, with correct play, should get the advantage. But the lines recommended are not altogether convincing and allow a resourceful master full opportunity of adducing improvements to the main variations.”

I fear that this comment is less valid now, in the twenty-first century, following the appearance of computer programs that are now so strong that they can carry out such research almost unaided, at least for games at the highest level.

The main reason for Keres's choice was in fact a competitive one, since “owing to my position in the tournament I was compelled to play for a win in this game at all costs, so as to retain any chance whatever of the first place. For this reason the opening variation suited my purposes admirably”.

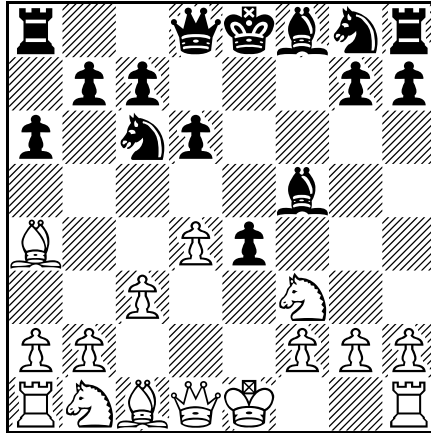
We should point out that in fact Capablanca had played this position much earlier, but with White, in his match against Frank Marshall in 1909. It later acquired its name of the ‘Siesta Variation’ because that was the name of the sanatorium in which the Budapest tournament of 1928 was held.

6 exf5 ♙xf5 7 d4

The alternative is 7 0-0, allowing 7...♙d3, and after 8 ♖e1 e4 9 ♖e3, followed by 10 ♘e1, forcing Black to retreat his bishop or else sacrifice a pawn, but this line only came into fashion later. Keres did not consider this line to be particularly promising for White, and we can say that his judgement has been confirmed with the passage of time; White's main move today is not 9 ♖e3, but 9 ♙c2.

Keres placed Euwe's choice within its contemporary context: "At the time this game was played, however, 7 d4 was held to be best for White and in what follows Euwe continues with the plan held to be best by theory".

7...e4



8 ♘g5

In the 14th game of his match with Marshall, Capablanca chose the less demanding 8 ♖e2, and after 8...♙e7 9 ♘fd2 ♘f6 10 h3?! d5 Black gained an excellent position. In A.Steiner-J.Capablanca, Budapest 1928, White played another rather unpromising continuation, 8 ♙g5, and after 8...♙e7 9 ♘h4 ♙e6 10 ♙xe7 ♘gxe7 Capablanca commented that, "It is evident that Black has the advantage, as White's king's knight is poorly placed". The continuation was 11 ♗h5+ g6 12 ♗h6 ♘g8 13 ♗f4 (after 13 ♗g7 ♗xh4 14 ♗xh8 0-0-0 Black has a fine position) 13...♘f6, and Black gradually increased his advantage.

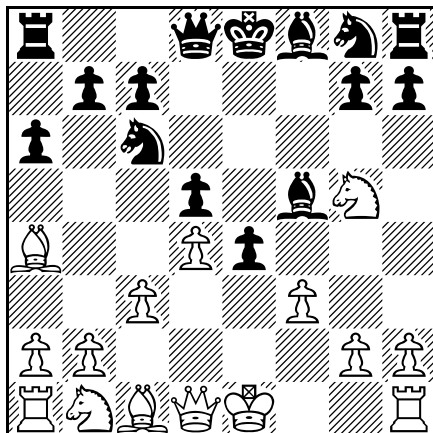
Keres also mentioned the piece sacrifice 8 0-0 "with a persistent initiative and good attacking prospects", to which he added: "But, of course, this manner of play is not to everyone's liking". This sacrifice has been played a few times, even by the great attacking player Nezhmetdinov, but without success; today's analysis engines do not consider it to be sound after, for instance, 8...exf3 9 ♗xf3 ♗c8.

8...d5

"Undoubtedly, one of the best replies for Black", wrote Keres; another is 8...♙e7.

Instead, both 8...h6? and 8...♘f6? are considered to be weak, in view of 9 ♗b3!, which is very strong. After closing the diagonal a2-g8 Black is now, indeed, threatening 9...h6.

9 f3



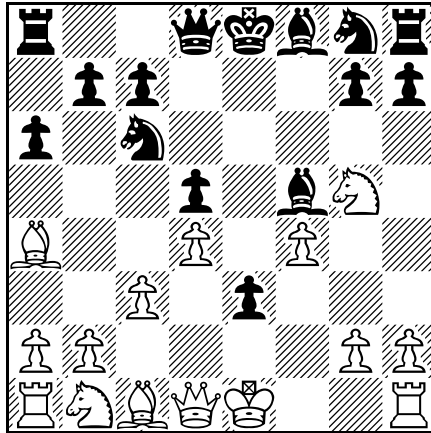
9...e3!

A pawn sacrifice that was already known at that time, but “in the present game Black tried to demonstrate that its bad reputation is unfounded”, wrote Keres.

At the present time this move is considered best. 9...exf3? only opens lines for White after 10 O-O!, and if 10...♙xb1? 11 ♖xf3 ♙e4 12 ♖xf8+!. Keres found 9...h6 unconvincing too, in view of 10 fxe4 hxg5 (not 10...fxe4? 11 ♗b3!) 11 exf5 and considered that White has the advantage. Today’s engines share the same ‘opinion’, but in practice Black’s results have been quite good, which once again supports Keres’s remark that “an inventive master will easily find the opportunity to contribute some new idea to improve the main variations”, at least in practice over the board, in territory that has not been analysed: for example, after 11...♙d6 12 ♗f3 Black has successfully employed the optimistic sacrifice 12...g4!?.

10 f4

After 10 ♙xe3 Black gains a good position with 10...h6 11 ♘h3 ♙xh3 12 gxh3, when in addition to the move suggested by Keres, 12...♙d6, it is worth considering the materialistic 12...♗h4+ 13 ♙f2 ♗xh3. It is possible that Keres did not even consider capturing the doubled pawn, but if his career had developed in the 21st century, with the current focus on the concrete, often based on calculation (the influence of computers again), perhaps he would have considered it.



Question: Let us get back to the game please, as Black is going to lose a pawn. Where is the compensation?

Answer: Keres pointed out that Black obtains very good piece play and an advantage in development, which compensate for White's small material advantage.

10...♙d6 11 ♖f3

White had many possibilities. There are at least four lines worthy of attention: the move played 11 ♖f3, the *zwischenzug* 11 ♖h5+, 11 0-0, and the capture 11 ♙xe3. Over the board it is very difficult to discover which is the best; the differences are minimal. There can be no objection to Euwe's choice, although, as Keres notes, the queen occupies the square that the knight will need to go to e5. Let us take a brief look at the other options:

a) Interpolating 11 ♖h5+ has the purpose of provoking 11...g6, and after 12 ♖f3 continuing as in the game, but with the g6-square now unavailable to Black's knight. Black also can play 11...♙g6, and after 12 ♖f3 ♖f6 13 ♖xe3+ ♗ge7 the move mentioned by Keres, 14 ♖e6, exchanges queens, but after 14...♙f5 15 ♖xf6 gxf6 White lacks good squares for his pieces, in particular for the knights; he also has many weak squares, so his advantage is minimal.

b) After 11 0-0 the combination 11...♙xf4?, hoping for 12 ♖xf4? ♖xg5 13 ♙xe3 ♗ge7 with excellent development for Black, is unsound due to 12 ♗h3! and White gains the advantage, such as after 12...♙xh3 13 ♖h5+ g6 14 ♖xh3. The position has opened up and once he regains the pawn, White will have advantage; if 14...♖g5 then 15 ♖f3, while 14...e2? fails to 15 ♙xc6+ bxc6 16 ♖e6+. Thus after 11 0-0 Black should play 11...♖e7.

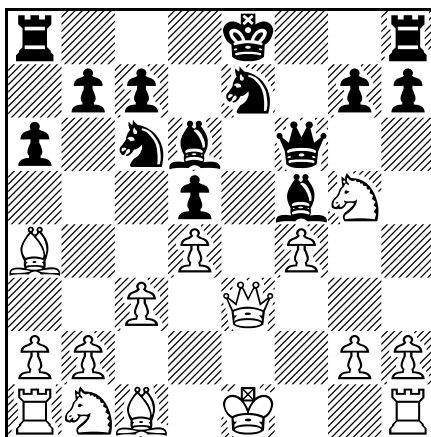
c) Keres commented that after the fourth possibility, 11 ♙xe3, the position resulting would also be unclear. A possible continuation then would be 11...♖e7 12 ♖e2 ♗f6 (not 12...♙d3? 13 ♖xd3 ♙xf4, because of the pretty reply 14 ♗f7!, with a winning advantage to White) 13 ♗f3 (heading for e5) 13...♙g4 14 h3? ♗e4! 15 hxg4 ♗g3.

Keres concluded by saying: "Of course, the variations considered cannot cover all the possibilities, but give an accurate idea of the dangerous nature of the initiative that Black obtains for the sacrificed pawn."

11...♖f6 12 ♖xe3+

The most flexible; after 12 0-0 ♗ge7 Black was planning to play 13...h6, when White should also play 13 ♖xe3. If, instead, 12 ♖xd5 the simple 12...♗xf4 is possible, but even better is 12...♗e7 13 ♖f3 ♖g6!, threatening ...♗b1 as well as ...h6, followed by ...♗e4, among other things; the white pieces are very disorganized. Likewise, if 12 ♗xe3 can play 12...h6 or 12...♗e7, once more with ...h6 followed by ...♗e4 on the agenda.

12...♗ge7

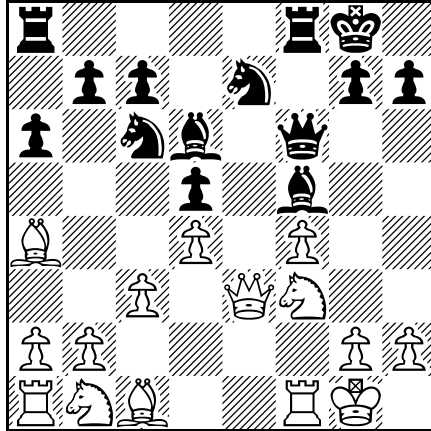


As Keres indicated, Black has gained sufficient compensation for his pawn. Black has excellent development and there are various weaknesses in White's position; having played f4 and d4, White's light squares are particularly weak.

13 ♗xc6+?

Doubling Black's pawns is a minor triumph, in return for giving up control of the light squares for ever. Other disadvantages of this exchange quoted by Keres are: Black's centre has now been strengthened, and he has been handed the advantage of the pair of bishops, which are very active.

Keres wrote that in this position there is only one satisfactory plan for White: the transfer of the king's knight to e5, although it is necessary to arrange this in the move correct order, for instance, White could play 13 ♗f3 0-0 14 0-0.



Exercise: Why is not yet correct to play 14 ♖e5, instead of 14 0-0?

Answer: Because Black can exploit the poor coordination of the white pieces and the fact that the king is still on e1 with, among others, 14...♙xb1 15 ♖xb1 ♙xe5 16 dxe5 ♗g6, with a double attack.

14 ♖bd2 is also inferior to 14 0-0. There are several possibilities for Black, such as 14...♙g4, but the strongest move appears to be 14...♖g6, clearing the e-file (remember the purpose of the *zwischenzug* 11 ♗h5+), and in the event of 15 ♖e5? Black has 15...♖cxe5 16 dxe5 (or 16 fxe5) 16...♖xe5! 17 fxe5 ♗h4+ 16 ♗g3 ♗xa4, and as the bishop on d6 is taboo due to 17...♖ae8+, the material is equal, but Black's position is far superior. The *zwischenzug* 15 ♙xc6 does not help White, due to another *zwischenzug*, 15...♖xf4!

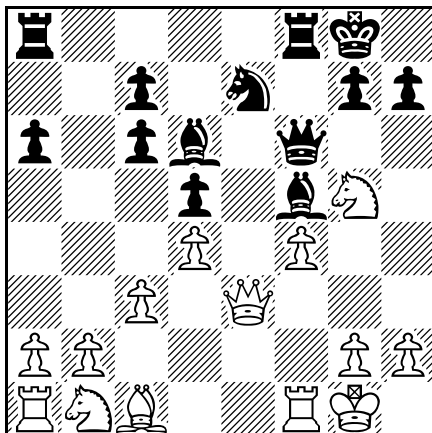
Let us go back to the main line, 13 ♖f3 0-0 14 0-0. Now White is finally threatening to land on e5 with his knight. Black could play 14...♙e4 with the idea that 15 ♖e5? loses material to 15...♙xe5 16 dxe5 ♗g6, but instead White can play 15 ♖g5! and Black must repeat moves with 15...♙f5 16 ♖f3.

Keres mentioned a possible way for Black to continue the struggle: 14...♙xb1!? 15 ♖xb1 ♗g6, when if White plays 16 ♖d2, cementing his extra pawn, then Black plays 16...♖ae8, with the idea of ...♖f5, with good compensation, while after 16 ♙d2 ♖xf4 we reach a position full of fighting possibilities, which is what Keres needed, owing to his situation in the tournament.

13...bxc6 14 0-0

White could begin with 14 ♖f3 0-0 and now 15 ♖f3, but not 15 ♖e5? on account of a tactic that should by now be familiar to us: 15...♙xb1 16 ♖xb1 ♙xe5 17 dxe5, followed by 17...♗g6.

14...0-0



15 ♘d2?

This is a serious error, allowing Black to launch an irresistible attack.

Once more White needed to play 15 ♘f3!, although this move is less good, now that White has exchanged on c6; once more Black could continue with 15...♙xb1 16 ♖xb1 ♚g6 17 ♙d2 ♖xf4, when Keres considered that Black is slightly better, owing to his control of the light squares.

Black could also try 15...♙e4, and after 16 ♘g5, instead of repeating moves, he could play 16...♖ae8! (this is only possible thanks to 13 ♙xc6), with the idea of 17...♘f5; then after 17 ♙xe4 dxe4 18 ♚xe4 ♘d5 Black regains the pawn, but this does not appear to achieve more than the line starting with 15...♙xb1.

15...♘g6

Simple and effective, putting pressure on f4 and clearing the e-file.

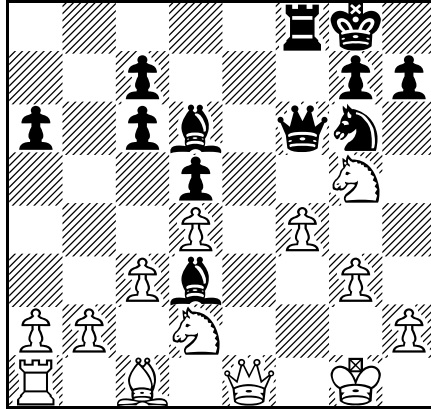
16 g3 ♖ae8!

A new piece joins in the offensive and Black gains a decisive attack. As Keres points out, this is stronger than 16...h6 17 ♘gf3 ♙h3 18 ♖f2, with a rather unclear position. The move ...h6 remains as a latent threat; indeed, if now 17 ♚f3? then 17...h6 wins a piece.

17 ♚f2 ♙d3

This move is strong, since it eliminates a very important defender and brings the win closer. 17...h6 18 ♘gf3 ♙xf4! was also good enough to win, since 19 gxf4? loses to 19...♘xf4, threatening 20...♘h3+ as well as 20...♖e2.

18 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 19 ♚xe1



Exercise: White's king position invites Black to open the lines.
How did Keres do this?

Answer: 19...♙xf4!

With this sacrifice White's kingside defences are destroyed and Black obtains a decisive attack. Instead, the other possible sacrifice was less good: 19...♘xf4? 20 gxf4 ♖xf4 fails to 21 ♜e6+! (controlling g4) 21...♙h8 22 ♘df3, forcing the exchange of queens.

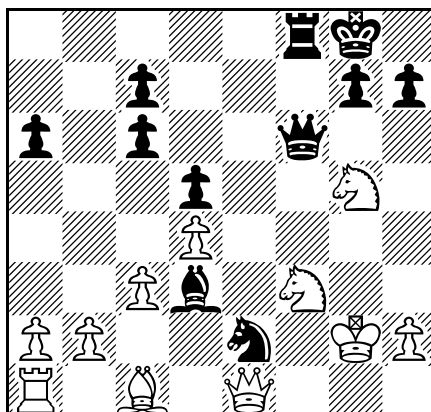
20 gxf4

Here exchanging queens with 20 ♜e6+ is no defence, since Black plays 20...♜xe6 21 ♘xe6 ♙e3+ 22 ♙h1 ♜f1+! 23 ♙g2 ♜f2+ and wins.

20...♘xf4 21 ♘df3

Other moves also lose: if 21 ♘g3 then 21...♜g6+ wins; if 21 ♜h4 then 21...♘e2+ 22 ♙g2 ♙e4+ wins; and, finally, 21 h4 loses to the simple 21...h6.

21...♘e2+ 22 ♙g2



22...h6!

Regaining the piece, since it is impossible to retreat the knight.

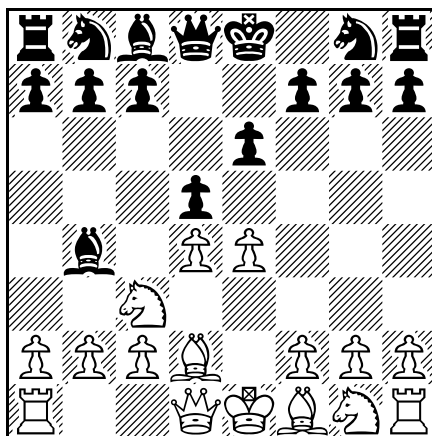
23 ♖d2 ♜f5 24 ♜e3 hxg5 25 ♙d2 ♙e4 0-1

“An interesting game not without theoretical value”, wrote Keres.

Our next game was played in the last round, when Botvinnik was already sure of gaining the title of world champion.

Game 12
P.Keres-M.Botvinnik
World Championship, The Hague/Moscow 1948
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♙d2



This move became well known after the game A.Alekhine-S.Flohr, Nottingham 1936. Keres liked the complex position arising after the pawn sacrifices, since if they are accepted White gains an enduring initiative.

4...dxe4 5 ♜g4 ♘f6

Keres indicated that White stands well after 5...♜xd4 6 0-0-0 f5 (6...♘f6 is better) 7 ♜g3 ♙d6 8 ♙f4, with good development and a persistent attack, as in P.Keres-G.Levenfish, Moscow 1948. With the text move Black returns the pawn for the sake of speeding up his development.

6 ♜xg7 ♜g8 7 ♜h6 ♘c6

An alternative was 7...♜xd4, which after 8 0-0-0 leads to complications that were investigated years later. One curious line given by Keres is 8...♜g6 9 ♜h4 ♜g4 10 ♜h3 ♜xf2 11 ♙e2 ♜h4 12 ♜xh4! ♜xh4 13 g3, and Black must return the queen, leaving him the ex-