

Coaching Kasparov, Year by Year and Move by Move

Volume I: The Whizz-Kid (1973-1981)

Alexander Nikitin

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Other photos provided by Alexander Nikitin

Analysis of the Kasparov vs Tal blitz match was carried out by the author in 2019 using modern computer engines. Analysis of the other games has generally not been updated since it was completed in the early 1990s, although a small number of corrections have been made, as the main purpose of the analysis is to provide practical advice from the point of view of a coach, and to explain the thought process of the young Garry Kasparov and his opponents, and that advice and explanation has not changed

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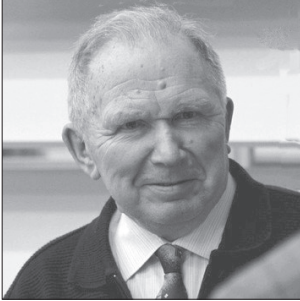
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About the Author



Alexander Nikitin, born 1935 in Moscow, coached Garry Kasparov from 1973 until 1990. He was Kasparov's chief second in his candidates and world championship matches from 1983-1987. In 1992 Nikitin seconded Boris Spassky during the latter's return match against Bobby Fischer, and later in the 1990s he coached the young Etienne Bacrot. Other illustrious former pupils include Grandmaster Dmitry Jakovenko.

At just 17 years of age Nikitin became one of the youngest USSR masters of sport in chess, in 1952. He was awarded the title of International Master in 1992. Nikitin gained the titles of honored trainer of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1980 and of the USSR in 1986. He became FIDE Senior Trainer in 2004. Nikitin participated in several Moscow championships, and his best result was sharing 2nd-5th places in 1954. He also played in the USSR championship in 1959. As a member of the Soviet team he won the student world championship in 1955, 1957 and 1958. Nikitin shared 3rd-4th places together with Razuvaev and ahead of Taimanov at the Botvinnik Memorial veterans tournament, held in Elista in 2002. He was a senior trainer in the Petrosian School from 1977 to 1993, which he ran from 1984 after the ex-world champion's death. Super grandmasters that Nikitin coached at the school include Levon Aronian, Alexander Grischuk and Boris Gelfand.

He is the author of a number of chess books in several languages, including on opening theory. In the 2000s, Nikitin assisted Kasparov in producing the latter's autobiographical works. Living in Moscow, he remains an active chess writer, completing a Russian-language book in 2019 on the games and legacy of his friend Grandmaster Evgeny Vasiukov.

Foreword¹

I promised to knock Karpov off his throne

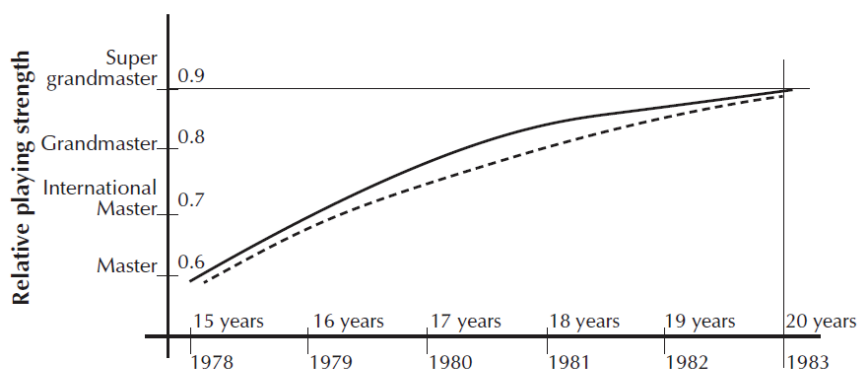
A February evening of distant 1978... Just a few days earlier, Garik and I had parted after his latest session at the Botvinnik chess school. The lad had attended it after a sensational victory in an adult tournament, where he had amazingly easily scored 3.5(!) points more than needed to make a master of sport norm. This success opened bigger prospects for him, meaning that I would have to resolve new, more complicated challenges. This chess eaglet had begun his rapid rise and demanded ever more high-quality food. The coach would need to work out a new ration and regimen for feeding him chess.

When the Patriarch, as everybody respectfully called Botvinnik, approved the proposed principles and plan of the upcoming work, I decided to establish deadlines for completing its stages, in order to set markers to guide us on our long journey. So on that wintery February evening I wrote down a long message for Garik's mother, who was organizing all of her son's work in Baku. The letter turned out to be very serious, as though an academic paper. I want to begin this book with an extract from this message:

...Today Garik is the most likely successor to the current world champion... So we shouldn't get euphoric about the lad's successes, but instead adopt a long-term work program aimed at raising an extra-class grandmaster, achieving a level of 90% of his maximum possible ability as measured above by around 1983.

I think that the Patriarch justifiably believes that the USSR Sports Committee will not help to address this problem, if for no other reason than the fact that the bosses need victories today, victories to meet plans and socialist obligations. Moreover, the prospect of exchanging the current world champion for Garik might significantly annoy "some people". However, we need to think about the future, and hence I decided to draw a chart to demonstrate the chess strength of your son and placed some markers on it:

¹ This foreword covers both Volume I and Volume II of this book. Volume II is planned by the publisher to appear in English in 2020. The appendices referred to in the foreword will be contained in Volume II



I believe that now, at the age of 15, Garik has achieved around 60% of his potential. This year we can help him add another 10%. Then he will reach a playing level (let's call it hypothetically "international master") when we won't be embarrassed to send him to play abroad. I think that this year he is quite capable of making the Higher League of the USSR adult championship.

By the end of next year, 1979, Garik can reach a playing level of an average grandmaster, which will enable him to confidently win the title of world junior champion and play regularly in the Higher League. In order to ascend to the level of a strong grandmaster (a super-GM) he will have to work another 2-3 years. To say what will happen to a greater degree of accuracy and, especially, further out, is difficult – nobody knows how his student years and other circumstances will pan out.

Having reached the level of "90%" (which might happen in 1982-83), Garry can start the fight to join the candidates cycle. Evidently, he can become a real candidate in the 1985-87 cycle. If everything runs smoothly, we can think about a new leap. But it's too early to talk about that.

Of course, to achieve this forecast we need a favorable convergence of many circumstances, including non-chess ones. However, if we work hard, and, most importantly, effectively, the timetable that I have drawn up with the markers doesn't look like fantasy...

Well, time has passed, we achieved everything that we planned, and the actual timetable of Garry's achievements and growth in chess ability was very close to the one we set out. Well now I'm totally proud, not because I turned out to be so foresighted without expecting to be, but because the efforts that I invested in those years, the knowledge and nerves, were not expended in vain.

This book tells you about my work with Garry Kasparov, about the victories, difficulties and even obstacles on our journey. I really want the curious reader to see not only how Garry's chess ability grew, but how the personality of the 13th world champion was formed. He has already written a book about his battle for the crown. I think it will be interesting to read how this battle looked from the coach's bench.

The author hopes that this book will be read with interest by many chess fans who will find out about one of the most interesting pages of chess history, rich in sudden and quite elaborate turns. After thinking hard I decided to leave in the book a description of little-known but very important episodes which, I think, significantly influenced the chess career of this super-talented lad nurtured under the bright son of Azerbaijan.

I have great respect for all aspects of Garry Kasparov's chess output and consider him to be one of the brightest and strongest chess players of all time, and, without doubt, the strongest chess player today. Many generations of chess fans will enjoy his amazing works of chess art. However, everything unrelated to chess or only on the sidelines of chess that is connected with his name one way or other is not material for history and will be soon forgotten.

The selected games are addressed above all to chess players. Looking at Kasparov's games, which are provided here in chronological order, the curious reader can trace how his mastery grew with every year, with the content of his play becoming richer and more intricate.

The book contains games by Kasparov that were particularly memorable for me as a trainer and which generated ideas that may prove useful to young talents searching for their path in chess. From the commentary, and, more precisely, from the stories about the games, you can learn how decisions are taken in the heat of chess battle, how psychological factors influence them, and, ultimately, how errors occur.

Many of the games include the number of minutes spent by the players on each move. Time becomes an active participant in events on the board, which is something I try to show in my commentary. One of the appendices to this book explains the undoubted benefits of chess chronometry.

For young players there is no example or benchmark more appealing than the high achievements of their classmates. Everybody can find in Kasparov their contemporary by selecting the appropriate year of their life and making a comparison, not only of their games but also of tournament results and ratings, which are given in the appendices.

I hope that this book will be useful for ambitious players, inquisitive coaches working with young players, and devoted parents playing an active role in their child's chess upbringing.

Chapter 1. A Hallowed Meeting

13 is Garry Kasparov's favorite number, often mystically found among his memorable dates and events. He became the thirteenth world champion after the ad-hoc match for the chess crown held in 1985 ($8+5=13$). "Naturally", Garry was born on 13 April 1963 (again, $4+6+3=13$) in the sunny city of Baku, on the banks of the Caspian Sea.

His parents were highly educated with a wide range of interests and skills. His father, Kim Moiseevich Weinstein (pronounced "Vainshteyn"), was born into a family which had been musicians for generations, and the father was pretty talented with the violin. Garry's uncle, Leonid Weinstein, became a famous composer in Azerbaijan.

Kim Moiseevich was not only a loving father, but a wise and insightful person. At an early age he noticed the unusual aptitude of his child, and when the little boy was five he showed him how the chess pieces moved. As Garry himself recalled, just two years later he started to take chess seriously. The child's chess abilities developed early and rapidly partially because of his natural desire to learn as much and as quickly as possible, which was gladly satisfied in his kind and intelligent family. This supported the development of many aspects of the lad's talent.

Garik's parents were of different ethnic backgrounds (his father was Jewish and his mother is an Armenian from Nagorny Karabakh), each nation famous for its ancient and rich culture. Such mixed marriages often deliver talented offspring. Garry's father, as though foreseeing his own sad demise, devoted much time to his son's moral upbringing. Each day, the lad waited impatiently for his dad to come home from work to go for a walk with him – which had become something of a ritual – and to chat unhurriedly with him. Kim Weinstein on all evidence seems to have been a strong and unusual personality, highly valuing fairness and honesty. He managed to pass on much to his son, but alas it could have been more. Garik wasn't yet seven when his father died at the age of 39 from lymphoma in a Moscow hospital. I saw photos of Kim – the son is strikingly similar to the father, but, above all, he treats his memory of his father as sacred.

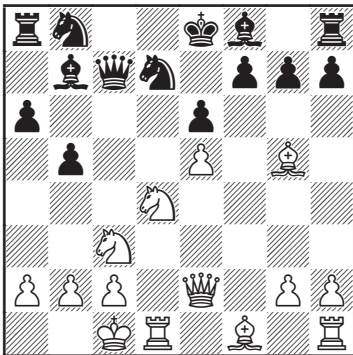
Garry's mother, Klara Shagenovna Kasparova, is a remarkable woman who loves art and is pretty knowledgeable about it. She has unusually well-developed intuition and ambition. After her life suffered this terrible blow, she took on the role of father in Garry's upbringing. She directed all her love to her sole child and became his sovereign ruler, closest friend and devoted

M. TAL – G. KASPAROVTbilisi Blitz Match (1st game). 26.12.1978*Sicilian Defense. [B96]*

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
 4.♗xd4 ♖f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♙g5 e6
 7.f4 b5 8.e5

From the very first moves, the players demonstrated that they were up for a fight. Of course, the less experienced boy might have chosen a calmer opening in the first game in order to get into the swing of things more gradually, rather than charge into a vortex. However, he undertook no special pre-match preparation and this was the outcome...

8...dxe5 9.fxe5 ♖c7 10.♙e2
 ♘fd7 11.0-0-0 ♙b7



The well-known but not fully “solved” Polugaevsky Variation of the Sicilian Najdorf. It appealed to many Sicilian fans for its wild play from the very outset. However, many others avoid it because play is based on concrete calculation in extremely sharp and messy

positions, where dynamic factors are more valuable than the material balance. There are a lot of subtleties and sharp variations that you have to memorize, preferably refreshing your memory before the game begins. And no matter how ready and willing you are to fight, you have to bear in mind that this is a risky venture.

Is it worth playing this variation in blitz?

It’s worth playing for black if you have prepared it, have experience playing it and remember that your opponent doesn’t like sharp play that’s hard to control and can lose himself in unexpected opening systems.

It’s worth playing for white if you have decent experience playing it and are familiar with the many subtleties of the system, and if you are confident of your abilities and intuition.

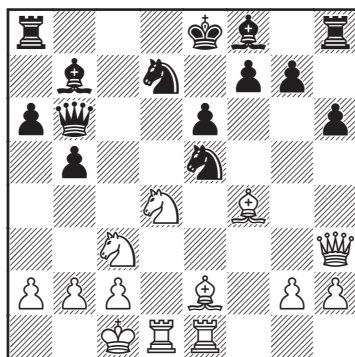
12.♙g4

Apart from this aggressive move that demonstrates that the fate of the e5 pawn is nothing compared with increasing activity of the white pieces, there is an even wilder way to sharpen the situation by sacrificing a knight to boot: 12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.♙g4 ♖xe5 14.♙xb5?! axb5 (14... h5? Here a human master erred straight away and got caught by

a cunning intermezzo after which he couldn't save himself: 15.♔d3! ♖f7 16.♖hf1+ ♜f6 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♙g6+ ♖g7 19.♙xh5+ ♗g5+ 20.♗xg5+ fxg5 21.♖f7+ ♖h6 22.♖xb7 ♖xh5 23.♖d8 g4 24.♖d1 ♖g6 (E. Jimenez – G. Garcia, Cuba 1965) 25.♜a4!+-). Such generous sacrifices are, however, not to be recommended, as after the logical 15.♖he1 black then plays 15...h5! at the right time and white's attack falls apart: 16.♗h4 ♗c5 17.♖xe6+ ♖f7+-

12...♗b6 13.♙e2 ♜xe5 14.♗h3 ♜bd7 15.♖he1 h6 16.♙f4

Everything that had taken place up to now on the board was already analyzed in detail in Polugaevsky's wonderful book *Birth of a Variation* which has been published (in Russian) two years before this game was played. After the bishop retreated to f4 or h4 (16.♙h4 ♙e7 17.♙xe7 ♖xe7 18.♗g3 g6 19.♙f3 ♜xf3 20.♜xf3 ♖ad8 21.♜d4) the position remained very complicated and double-edged, but with equal chances, which guaranteed a real headache in a blitz game. However, the lad, failing to sense the danger hanging over his king, decided to attack the white knight with his bishop and gain just one tempo from this that would enable him to spirit his king away to its usual bunker on g8. This was his sole wrong decision in the game, but its consequences couldn't be repaired.



16...♙c5?

Garry was still nervous – after all, it was a match, even if an unofficial one, with a legendary world champion. And he hadn't yet fully set his mind on the game. After 16...0-0-0! the bishop sac 17.♙xb5 axb5 18.♜cxb5 looks extremely dangerous for black, as all the other white pieces are aiming at his king, which is devoid of a pawn wall. However, the computer demonstrates that black remains in the game by not abandoning the e5 square, thereby reducing the number of attackers: 18...f6! My Stockfish 9 demonstrates that black is now well capable of fighting, even though it's frightening to look at his king's vacillations: 19.♜xe6 ♗xb5 20.♙xe5 fxe5 21.♜xd8 ♖xd8 22.♖xe5 ♗c6= or 19.♗c3+ ♖b8 20.♜xe6 ♖c8 21.♖xe5! ♜xe5 22.♙xe5+ fxe5 23.♗xe5+ ♖a8 24.♖d4 ♙a6=

17.♜xe6! Tal obviously knew this typical Sicilian sacrifice, which immediately renders black's position hopeless. He needed just ten seconds

or so to convince himself of its correctness in this position.

That's the danger of blitz for you. With any normal time control, a diligent tactician who spends a couple of minutes on reviewing a position will easily see the threat to the e6 pawn, but in the chaos of a five-minute game it's very hard to identify when you need to spend this amount of time.

17...fxe6

The other capture 17...♙xe6 falls to 18.♙g4!

18.♙h5+ ♔e7 19.♙xe5 ♘xe5 20.♖xe5

All of white's pieces are actively participating in the attack. With such weak protection for his king black cannot survive.

20...♖hf8 21.♙g3 g5 22.♙d3 ♙f6 23.♖de1 ♖g8 24.♙h7!

The less than obvious long queen move immediately ends the game.

Black resigned as mate is inevitable.

I didn't need to comfort Garry. He immediately digested the nature of what was happening and that there were another 13 games ahead...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Score
Tal	1														1
Kasparov	0														0

Game 24

G. KASPAROV – M. TAL

Tbilisi Blitz Match (2nd game). 26.12.1978

Sicilian Defense. [B67]

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♙d2 a6 8.0-0-0 ♙d7 9.f4 b5

Another fighting variation from the Sicilian. Tal deliberately allows the weakening of his pawn structure in order to strengthen the position of his king and gain the advantage of the bishop pair.

10.♙xf6 gxf6 11.♘xc6 ♙xc6 12.♙e1 ♙e7 13.♙d3 ♙b6 14.♙b1

