

Rolf Martens

The chess genius, maoist and rebel

Axel Smith
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Axel Smith

Born 1986 in Lund. Grandmaster, Swedish blitz champion 2021 and Nordic champion 2013. Smith has written five chess books and been editor of *Tidskrift för Schack* since 2014. Chairman of LASK 2004-07. Dumpster diver and marathon runner at 2:28.

Corresponded with Rolf Martens in 2005-08, and became one of the adepts in the UHCA school. Responsible for text, editing, chess and design.



Photo: Selma Smith

Fredrik Danelius

Born 1962 in Stockholm. Master of Laws, notary public, researcher and teacher at Lund and Oslo Universities. Editor of the *Nordic Journal of International Law* and the Vällingby SS club magazine *Schackmattadåren*. Author of three collections of sonnets. Co-founder of the drone company Propellerpågåarna.

Has written mainly *The One-Man Party* and *The Final Word*, as well as parts of *Rødberg and Malmö*, *Private Life* and *The Last Years*.



Photo: Amie Feltenheim

Calle Erlandsson

Born 1942 in Växjö. General Secretary of LUGI for 30 years, then Financial Officer in Malmö. Member of LASK since 1963 and clubmate with Rolf Martens for 45 years. Honorary chairman of LASK, initiator of *Lund Chess Academy* and *Rolf Martens minnesfond*.

Chess historian with an extensive picture archive and Scandinavia's largest chess library. Responsible for photographs and game index.



Photo: Lars OA Hedlund

REVIEWS

Atle Grønn (Dag og Tid): This Swedish biography is probably the best I've seen in the genre. Smith has done a great job with the book. The photos are fantastic and worth the money alone.

Skakbladet (Jan Løfberg): A superb biography of the Swedish champion. Wonderful reading. One of the best chess reading experiences I have had. (...) There are certain similarities with Bobby Fischer. Politically, Martens ended up with a one-man army of obsessive-compulsive players, but like Bobby, he was a gift to chess. We can benefit from that in this book, which deserves to be read by a large audience."

Library service (Mikael Huss): Rolf Martens' unusual life has earned him a bit of a cult status in chess circles, which is why this book is very welcome. All the better that it is well researched and contains plenty of interesting details about Martens' life from a variety of sources. (...) For those of us in Sweden who have that interest, this is simply an indispensable book. Overall rating: 5.

Tidskrift för Schack (Henrik Lindberg): The book is written with a lot of knowledge about, feeling for and love for Martens – and that's certainly not a bad starting point! Few people in Swedish chess have had such a mythological status as the man of rebellion or resistance, Rolf Martens. (...) Martens' life is really made for being documentet, and this well-written and well-researched book illustrates his many sides and peculiarities, both on and off the chessboard.

Chess History & Literature Society (Claes Løfgren): With their new book, the authors have managed to create a worthy monument for this unusual man and player

READER COMMENTS

Petteri Paronen: A labour of love – lots of it. It is so wonderful that the first glances brought tears in to my eyes. My Swedish-speaking friend was happier than me, if that is even possible.

Per-Inge Helmertz: WOW! What a book! The summer is saved!

Sven-Åke Kronberg: The Martens' book which is a magnificent work! Great layout, probably the best I have ever seen.

Anders Nilsson: It was a magnificent work that exceeded all my expectations. I am impressed.

Kurt Setterqvist: Martens is described in detail with great accuracy and tenderness. A very high rating; I actually don't know of any better chess book written in the Swedish language.

Lasse Linusson: Very enjoyable to read the Martens book. Oh how nice it was!

Göran Malmsten: The book is solid and radiates quality. I am impressed!

Lennart Strandberg: A lovely tone that creates a great sense of closeness. All the photos contribute to this.

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22 February 2022

Preface

CALLE ERLANDSSON, Honorary Chairman of Lunds Akademiska Schackklubb (LASK):

I got to know Rolf Martens at Café Athen in Lund in 1963. As a young student I had just begun my tentative steps into the wonderful world of chess, and I was fascinated by watching the chess virtuosos in the biggest café in Northern Europe. There were two chess boards with clocks, always occupied. Around the tables there were usually 10-20 spectators and a few players waiting to take over one of the heated chairs. "The winner stays" was usually the rule and too many chess enthusiasts spent half the day at Athen's chess tables.

One player who always wore a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up lost very rarely – Rolf Martens. Despite his vibrating feet, he showed enormous concentration and excellent motor skills – he was never seen to knock over a piece, even though his time limit for the whole game was often a single minute. He smoked during the games and if necessary the cigarette was placed over one ear. Sometimes he lit a new cigarette, and then he had to place it behind his second ear! On one occasion he lit a third ...

I soon became club mate with Rolf and other "Athenians". Like other clubs, LASK had a binder on a shelf near the "Big Beer Table" at Athens, and I became a member of the venerable club, which was founded in 1906 but had been dormant for some time and was revived in 1955. The binder was the internet of the time – an indispensable contact link as few students had access to phones in those days. Another means of communication was to show up exactly at 12 noon at Athen.

In 1965, LASK won its first Swedish Team Championship gold with the three musketeers Kjell Krantz, Göran Broström and Rolf Martens at the top boards. Rolf was the phenomenal blitz king and blind player. Most agreed that he had a clear path to the grandmaster title, the only question was when it would be conquered.

LASK also won the Team Championships in 1966 and 1967. Rolf won Swedish Blitz Championship in 1966 and next year, he became Swedish Champion. He travelled directly to the World Student Team Championship, where he defeated one of the world's strongest players, Vlastimil Hort. Six months later he finished second to Efim Geller in Erik Olson Memorial Tournament, becoming the first Swede to get an IM norm. In 1968, Rolf finished eighth out of 200 players at the unofficial Blitz World Championship in Munich.

At that time I tried to arrange international invitations to Rolf, so he could make IM norms. No players were invited privately, everything had to go through the national federations. Unfortunately, I received virtually no response or support from the Swedish Chess Federation. Perhaps this was a "contributing" factor to Rolf's lack of enthusiasm for pursuing a chess career, even in the late 1960s.

Rolf's interest in his ultra-hypermodern openings (UHCA) never cooled down, however. His never-ending enthusiasm was reinforced by a fantastic backing board consisting of up to a hundred analytically interested chess friends, to name a few: Klas Hellborg, Anders Nilsson, Gunnar Hjorth, Harry Schüssler and Gerard Welling. Rolf produced and updated over the years thousands of A4 pages about UHCA. The big highlights were his lectures at LASK, which could usually be 5-6 hours long and virtually unscripted.

Sadly, this was to end with Rolf's passing in 2008. I then proposed a scholarship fund and a memorial tournament in Rolf's name. To date, the fund has raised over 30,000 euro and more than 20,000 euro has been awarded in scholarships. The memorial tournament has been organised annually since 2009.

A biography of Rolf has long been in LASK's idea bank. It is therefore gratifying that Fredrik Danelius gave us a nudge in 2021 and that the book can now be published. Above all, Axel Smith has put in considerable work to make the project a reality.

AXEL SMITH, Honorary Member of LASK:

Rolf Martens meant a lot to my chess during the years when I went from junior to senior. Partly the discussion about his openings, partly as a source of inspiration. I write more in the introduction to part II. Here I would like to thank the 30 or so people who helped drawing the picture of Rolf. Of these, his sister Berit talked about his upbringing, his childhood friend Lennart Strandberg about his early years with chess, Kjell Krantz about his time in Lund and his partner Yvonne about the last decades.

Many have made photographs available, as well as copies of their correspondence with Rolf. And the lessons of his time still live on. Listening to stories of his political work, I was once told to change room to avoid being overheard.

There is no doubt that Rolf meant a lot to many. However, this is not a memorial book, nor is it a black-and-white tribute in which we only talk about his successes on the black-and-white fields. Our ambition has been to write a more comprehensive story. Wherever possible, we have made use of game annotations from Rolf's active period, or of his own writings. We are grateful to his siblings who have allowed their republication.

In 2005, I asked Rolf about the progress of his book on the UHCA openings.

"The book project has been very much on hold for some time," he replied. "Maybe it will never happen. For me, there are many other things taking up my time."

I hope Rolf would have appreciated the book you hold in your hand. Happy reading!

FREDRIK DANELIUS:

Unlike my co-authors, I never met Rolf Martens, so I have approached him in a different way. I have been fascinated by his dual relationship with his father: Rolf goes his own way but also follows in his footsteps. In the back of my mind has been the film *The Heroes of Telemark* (1965), in which resistance fighters led by Rolf Pedersen plan to blow up a factory important to Nazi Germany's nuclear weapons programme. The year is 1942, the year Martens was born. Like his namesake, Rolf Martens was a true resistance fighter, both at the chessboard and in his political work.

Lund, 2022-02-22

Axel Smith, Fredrik Danelius and Calle Erlandsson

Part I: Chess and politics



At the Swedish Championship 1967. Photo: Sydsvenskan.



The decisive moment of the Swedish Blitz Championship. With both flags hanging, Rolf Martens manages to bring life into his poor light squared bishop. Illustration: Göran Smith.

17 July 1988

Prologue

On one side of the board: a man approaching fifty, with yellowed fingers and stained teeth, but a youthful appearance. The untucked light-striped shirt is unbuttoned at the top, his feet wiggling under the table, his eyes focused on the board. And what a look! It glows about him, a flame forming a bubble around the rack – trying to bring the bad light squared bishop to life.

His opponent, half his age, has succeeded perfectly with his dark square strategy. They each have a few pawns, the old man a useless bishop, the youngster a strong knight. Ludvig Sandström is on his way to a silver medal at the Swedish Blitz Championship, another sign of the generational change that is taking place in Swedish chess. The day before, he finished second in the Master Elite and qualified for the top group, where the average age has already dropped by ten years.

The year is 1988 and the scene Himmelstalundshallen in Norrköping, a hockey rink where the ice has long since melted. 120 players started in the Blitz Championship this Sunday afternoon, and after eleven games, ten advanced to the final. Grandmaster Harry Schüssler is the favourite for the gold. He has already finished his game and is among the large crowd of spectators watching the final game. Schüssler's 6/9 will be enough for gold if not the old man – against all odds – succeeds to win the game with his dead bishop.

The flags on the Tower Chess Clock have started to rise for both combatants, but Rolf Martens' eyes are fully focused on the board. His feet are wobbling, his upper body motionless. Martens, the concentration phenomenon, is at his best.

It is something Swedish chess has seen too little of. 21 years earlier Martens became Swedish Champion. He was then the youngster who defeated the older gentlemen. After taking Sweden's first IM norm, he was, according to later calculations, ranked 62nd in the world.

A few years later he stopped playing. Chess was not important enough, not in a world where Soviet imperialism was suppressing true communism. Politics became his new game plan, and he engaged in it with the same intensity and single-mindedness as he had previously played chess. He saw states that focused more on their power than on being states – including Sweden. He saw the national referendum on nuclear power as one big conspiracy. Now, eight years after the decision was to phase out nuclear power, he still



For once in a shirt that isn't all white.
Photo: Hasse Svedbark.

hadn't given up.

The night before the Blitz Championship, he put up posters in the center of Norrköping to propagate for a new referendum. The streets were almost empty, but after a couple of hours a person came in the opposite direction. Martens ducked behind a corner.

The night walker was chess journalist Kent Jägerflod, who was on his way home from the pub. Wasn't that Rolf Martens? Jägerflod thought,

remembering the Swedish Championship in Västerås 30 years earlier. Back then he had seen Martens as a future star and had been amazed by the pedagogical comments about bishops and knights. He pulled into the same side of the street.

After they greeted each other, Martens told that he had intended to put up the posters the night before, but that he had been stopped by the police and had his glue confiscated.

- But I had more in my room!
- How do you dare?

Martens explained that he had nothing to fear. Jägerflod watched as he spread glue on the walls with a paintbrush, rolled up the posters the size of a newspaper and pressed them into place. Occasionally Jägerflod had to hold the bottle of brandy Martens had in his pocket. They talked about Poland and foreign travel as poster after poster took place on the buildings.

At the crack of dawn they shared a taxi to the playing hall. There, Jägerflod met the elite player Rickard Winsnes, and he told him that Martens had been up all night.

- Who is Martens? Winsnes asked.

He soon found out as Martens won game after game on his way to the final. Against Bo Jörstål he started with 1.e4 ♖a6 2.♙xa6 bxa6 3.d4 ♗h6 4.♙xh6 gxh6. Jörstål could not believe his eyes, but soon he saw the bishop pair and the rook lines decide.

In the very last game, perhaps fatigue is taking its toll – it seems like Martens can't find a move. The flag rises, and when Ludvig Sandström turns his head to look at the clock, he sees that they have no more than a minute left for the rest of the game. Martens doesn't react, his upper body is motionless, his eyes fixed on the board.

A few years after Rolf Martens stopped playing, he began to propagate an opening

system that later became known as the UHCA – the Ultra Hypermodern Counter Attack School. As in politics, the openings challenged the prevailing order and established theory. That didn't stop them from being picked up by several of the country's strongest players. The winner of the B-final of the Blitz Championship used Snake Benoni, in which the dark squared bishop coils like a snake to attack the center from the flank.

Harry Schüssler also uses Martens' openings, as does Ludvig Sandström. Earlier in the day, Sandström played the Left Hook Variation in Sicilian, again a flank idea that leaves the established theory early. When he won one of the first games with the opening, Martens was on fire.

And then came the final round and their mutual game. The decider for the medals.

Martens opened with 1.d4.

– I wouldn't dream of playing 1.e4 against you, he said, looking up at Sandström.

– Really?

– I know you know the refutation!

The voice did not reveal whether it was meant as a joke. For Martens, everything was serious. He wasn't participating in the Blitz Championship to show that he had retained his playing strength, but rather to demonstrate that his opening system was based on correct strategic principles. Revolutionary, he was happy to add.

After up to half a minute – at least that's how it felt to the spectators and to Sandström – Martens sacrifices a pawn. Sandström grabs it immediately, and then comes another pawn sacrifice. The rest of the moves are played à tempo. At the cost of two pawns, Martens activates his king, and by that hopes that the light squared bishop will come to life. One of the spectators is a columnist for *Östgöta Correspondenten* and later writes about the drama. Martens is not swindling, he notes, but finds the only way to keep up the pressure.

After a few quick moves, Sandström hesitates. Defending is a change. He feels the position should be winning, but it's an ungrateful situation with the flag close to falling. After a couple of correct defensive moves, he places the knight on the wrong square, Martens breaks through, both rush with their pawns to promote new queens. A series of checks follows, but they have too little time left to think and soon the queens are exchanged. Apart from the kings, only one pawn remains. It's white and it's unstoppable.

Sandström holds out his hand to resign. The spectators can take a few deep breaths, their pulse is still high.

Rolf Martens looks up. The win in the Blitz Championship is a sensation, but he doesn't want to listen to that ear. It's the opening system that matters and, of course, the possibility of another nuclear referendum.

Ludvig Sandström finishes fourth, and is later asked how he perceived his last game.

– Such things can happen when you play against Rolf, he replies resignedly.

Harry Schüssler has to settle for silver. He regrets missing out on the gold, but at the same time is happy for his friend. Perhaps the victory will bring Martens back to the tournament halls.

Afterwards, a friend and fellow analyst calls Martens.

– You managed to win, he says. Congratulations!

– I guess it was no big deal. I had been glewing posters all night, so compared to the others I was already warmed up. That was a big advantage.

When his friend was not convinced, Martens continued.

– And I had glue on my fingers. It gave a devilish grip on the pieces!

”A remarkable punch”, writes *Tidskrift för Schack* (TfS) about Martens’ victory, but a real comeback is not meant to be. His chess work is entirely devoted to the openings.

The fact that chess computers are on the rise does not worry Martens. At the Swedish Championship in Norrköping, Mephisto M M 4 Turbo convincingly won an amateur group. The participation of computers does not continue, but in the openings, they become more and more important. Martens still analyses by hand or, quite often, blindly. Productivity is high, so is creativity. Few in the history of the world – if any – have invented as many game openings.

Was Rolf Martens really as good as they say? Do his openings stand the test of time? And above all: what kept him off playing? After all, he devoted countless hours to chess.

Ludvig Sandström, Harry Schüssler and Martens’ other friends have different answers to these questions, but they have one thing in common: they never asked. It was difficult to get close to Martens. For him, the theory was important, the person and the practice secondary. In that way he lived just as he taught.

Writing about Martens is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle with unevenly cut pieces. The pieces do not form a unified whole, but provide enough contours and features for everyone to create their own interpretation.

Now it’s your turn, dear readers.



Martens receives the first prize in the Blitz Championship. Photo: Hasse Svedbark.

1942–55

Rødberg and Malmö

The year is 1942. Norway has been occupied by Nazi Germany and resistance is growing, not least in hard-to-control Telemark and Hardangervidda. The resistance plans a sabotage operation against a plant producing heavy water for the German nuclear programme.

Dentist Per Johan Martens is not involved, but he is a resistance man and has a radio hidden under the floorboards of his house in Rødberg, Buskerud county, eleven miles north-west of the capital. On the Germans' list of those to be shot in a sabotage in the area, he is number three. The list is meant to be a deterrent, but Per Johan nevertheless crosses the mountains with messages to other resistance fighters.

Mostly, though, he thinks about the fact that at 33, he's about to become a father. His wife Susanne, born in Setane and raised in Holt in southern Norway, is five years younger. She wants to see the world and, after studying in Oslo, she worked in northern Norway before becoming a teacher in the village.

The villagers have a power plant to thank for the fact that they have a school. When the plant was built on the river, which comes from Hardangervidda and continues eastwards, it brought in lots of workers, and although it initially led to conflicts, it has turned out well. There is a railway, a hospital – and a school.

Per Johan and Susanne have been married for just over a year, since 30 December 1940. When they met in the village before the outbreak of war, he had just returned from his dental internship at the prestigious University of Göttingen. He got his profession from his father Rolf Georg, who was active in artistic circles and spoke with the accent of an overclass person. In Norway, it was not possible to study to become a dentist, but German was not a problem for Per Johan. His grandfather Heinrich (1855–1904) was a German wine merchant who had emigrated to Norway, where he founded Martens & Gundersen wine company on Vestra Strandgate in Kristiansand.

Heinrich had been associated with cultural figures such as Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. His position in Norwegian artistic circles was confirmed when his son Rolf Georg married the sister of Brynjulf Strandenæs (1890–1952), a trained opera singer and artist who painted landscapes and still lifes, but who became particularly famous as a



Sletta, April 1943. Rolf is 14 months old, the mother has unborn Berit in her womb.



Rødberg, 1944. Rolf is just over two years old.

portrait painter, commissioned by the Norwegian royal family.

Per Johan notes that his son will be born into a fine family, with a tradition in both science and art. However, he has little use for snobbery; he himself is bouncy and cheerful. The outbreak of war, however, has forced him to take his German roots seriously – for him it is particularly important to distance himself from the occupation. The occupation is present in Rødberg, and the increased need for electricity means that the power plant is expanded in several stages. A large dam is built where the river falls most. When the dam grows into a lake, the Martens family is forced to move their house further up the river. The dentist's office is on the ground floor and this is where they live when Rolf Olav Martens is born in Oslo Hospital on 22 February 1942.

Siblings

During his years in Rødberg, Rolf got two siblings. Berit was born in 1943, a younger sister five years later. Berit quickly became a good playmate. In the winters, they went



With Berit 1947.

sledding on a hill by the house, and she looked up to her resourceful and mischievous older brother. His pranks were among the best she knew. He often introduced her with: "This is Berit. To be a girl, she's good. She's not afraid of anything!"

Rolf was a quick learner, and before he turned two, he knew the alphabet.

– Now I know all the letters except *tå* and *de*, he said while pointing out the most difficult ones to pronounce. There is *tå* [K] and there is *de* [G], but I can't say them.

He made up a lot of jokes. It happened that he and Berit hid in the bushes next to the road and ran in front of the cars. When their parents found out what they had done, they got banned.

– 'You'll have to watch out for Rolf,' their grandmother once said. He could get into trouble.

Giftedness and hyperactivity were the only epithets he was given. There were no alphabetical diagnoses in those days.

Rolf Martens grandmother and grandfather were musical. He was a violinist, she played the wing. However, cleaning was not her thing, so the wing in the musical salon was often



Pictured as a 5-year-old. Photo: Sturlason.

dusty. When they had guests, she would carve "Welcome!" in the dust.

In 1948, a dental school was founded in Malmö. The school was open to Norwegian students and they thought it wise to have a Norwegian teacher. In Rødberg, Per Johan Martens was in charge of school dentistry, and the same year the school opened in Malmö, he was recruited to teach children's dentistry.

He enjoyed his work and soon had the idea of bringing the whole family to Sweden. In Rødberg, it was natural to send the children to a boarding school when they finished kindergarten. The family's plan had previously been to move to a larger town to keep the children at home. Why not Sweden?



Rolf rides in Rødberg.



With neighbours in Rødberg 1954.



Summer 1952 in Malmö.

In autumn 1950, a few weeks after Berit started school, the family moved to Sweden. Mother Susanne, who had been a teacher in Rødberg, stopped working.

New home country

– Do you wear Sunday clothes?

The question from the children in Pildammsparken in Malmö is a strange one. Rolf and Berit don't understand it; they've never had any special Sunday clothes. But they remember their father telling them that the local children in their new homeland are polite, and that they should be just as polite back.

– No, we haven't.

The children take the answer as an approval that they are free to wrestle Rolf to the ground. Berit's and Rolf's first impression is not at all that Swedish children are polite and nice. They wander off home, where their mother is horrified when she hears what has happened.

They have to make an effort to fit in. Rolf, who calls himself ROM after his initials, quickly starts speaking the local dialect Scanian. Instead, Berit can imitate the accent from the capital. When the children play theatre in the yard outside the apartment on Carl Gustaf's road, she portrays a fine snobbish lady. The neighbours get to see many theatre





Left side: The apartment on Tessin's road 1954.

Above: School photo in Malmö.

and circus performances.

Soon they are happy in Malmö. The apartment is more modern than their old house in Rødberg, and in addition to Pildammsparken, Slottsparken is nearby. They pick violets for their mother on the railway tracks and buy sweet peas from the gardener. But of course, they miss nature. The first winter they go skiing at Frostavallen, but that's nothing compared to Hardangervidda. The parents soon buy bicycles to the children, and they take trips out into the forest, but still only Norway represents real wilderness.

As a socially engaged middle-class person, Per Johan finds it important to put down roots in his new home country. He will soon become a Swedish citizen, and he wants to teach the family the Swedish he picked up during his years at dental school. However, sometimes it's not possible to say if he speaks Norwegian or Swedish.

By 1954, the family's fourth and last child, Tore, was on his way. To prepare, they moved to a large apartment with a balcony in a newly built house at Tessins väg 14 in Ribersborg. During the construction Rolf and Berit were very curious. From time to time they would cycle to the house and enter through a basement window. Once a door slammed behind Berit. She was locked in, but knew the house well and made her way out onto the balcony on the third floor. Rolf thought she could jump down to the roof of an extension on the first floor, but she didn't dare. They found no other solution and Rolf went to aunt Elsa, who unlocked the door. When they got home, their parents banned them.

Growing up, Berit and Rolf talked about who was more terrible: the Germans, who had occupied their homeland, or the Russians, who were also dangerous. They never reached a conclusion, but the interest in war became central for Rolf. He built models of armoured cruisers, painted the ships and even made his own creations in the carpentry room in the



In Rødberg with Berit.

basement of the building. Over the years, they became more and more realistic.

In Malmö, Rolf was allowed to start in the second grade at Dammfriskolan. The teacher quickly realised that he was in the wrong place and after two weeks he was promoted to the third grade.

Two years later, it was time to apply to Realskolan. Rolf ended up at S:t Petriskolan, where he stayed in upper secondary school, the maths program.

His father had taught him that studies were important. In Malmö, Per Johan switched from paediatric

dentistry to histopathology (tissue science), and left clinical work to devote himself entirely to research. He liked to talk about his cells with passionate interest, and then he might forget the social codes and creep up close to the person he was talking to. It was as if he physically wanted to pass on his enthusiasm. When the person backed off, he followed. The research led to a doctoral thesis on the origin of dentin, the hard tissue – the tooth bone.

Evenings in the new house were harmonious, with classical music on vinyl records, games, books. There was also time for leisure, like at the 1958 World Cup in soccer when Rolf watched West Germany against Argentina at Malmö Stadium with more than 30,000 others.

The grandparents' farm house in southern Telemark still belonged to the family, but they only went to Norway on a few occasions. There wasn't money for more, but the stories of the war were kept alive. Per Johan liked to tell stories in a cheerful way. Only later did Berit begin to doubt the whether they were all true. After the war, every Norwegian wanted to present themselves as resistance fighters, and with German relatives and studies in Germany, that was particularly important for Per Johan.

When she found the diploma from Crown Prince Olav, she no longer needed to doubt. "Per Johan Martens – Thanks for participation in the resistance movement."

Rolf graduated in 1960, Berit two years later at Slottsstadens läroverk. She followed in her father's footsteps and had him as a teacher at the dental school. While Rolf's other sister stayed in Malmö, he himself moved to Lund to begin studies in philosophy.

1956–60

The Junior Era

Rolf Martens learned the rules from his father at the age of five, using *Sjakk for alle* (Chess for all) by C.O. Hovind as an instruction book. Until he turned fourteen, however, he only played at home.

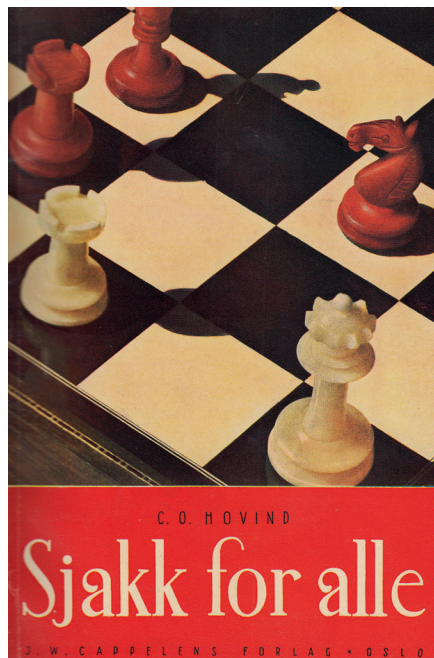
In 1956, the municipality of Malmö had responded to a long-standing request: activities during the February school holidays. As part of *Kul i Tre*, a chess tournament was arranged at Ungdomens Hus (the Youth House) over eight rounds with thirty minutes per player. Martens, according to runner-up Lennart Strandberg, "had to thank his luck to some extent for winning the tournament", as the victory in their mutual encounter was "somewhat undeserved".

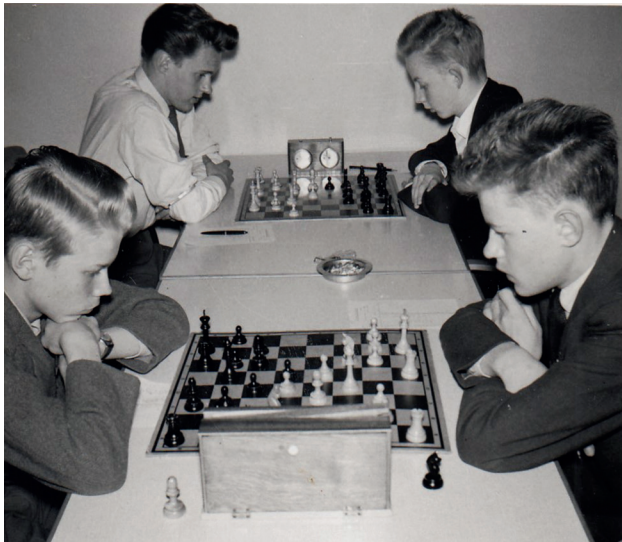
The next appearance was in the same tournament the following year. Martens took five points in the group for older boys, but to Strandberg, who was so pleased with the victory that he wrote the game down when he got home.

This time Martens took up chess and joined Malmö Allmänna Schackklubb. The club had left its former club premises, where they were occasionally thrown out if the landlord received a large restaurant order, and instead moved into the same street where the Martens family lived. The new premises had other problems, however, and later in the year they returned cap in hand to their old premises near Gustav Adolfs Torg.

By then, Martens was already one of the busiest members. A month after visiting the club for the first time, he entered the Regional Junior Championship, and from that moment, he played almost everything there was. After only a few months he gave a simultaneous exhibition against the other juniors, with seven wins and three draws.

There were not many juniors and he often met Lennart Strandberg, even though they played in





Limhamns Schackklubb

Den 5 1 5 1957 ROND: 3

-turnering Klass: Grupp:

MATCH: M Serie: Bord:

Spelöppning: *gambitski*

Vit: *Ulf Arnek* Svart: *Rolf Martens*

	Vit	Svart	Vit	Svart
1	e4	d6	Txc1	Td8
2	d4	Sf6	Dd2	La4
3	Sc3	a6	Dd1	La5
4	Lc4	Ld7	Tc1	Sd8
5	Sf3	O-O	Txb3	Txc3
6	O-O	e6?	Txc3	Txc3
7	La5!	Dd8	Ta4	Dc7
8	Td1	Sfd7		
9	d5	e5		
10	Sb5	Sa6		
11	a3	Sf6		
12	Lxf6	Lx6		
13	Dd3	Dd7		
14	b4	Td8		
15	Lb3	c5		
16	Lxc5	Sxc5		
17	Dc3	a6		
18	Sc3	Ld7		
19	a4	Tac8		

Ulf Arnek against Rolf on 5 May 1957. In the background Ove Ark against Lennart Strandberg.

different clubs.

Martens found opening theory particularly interesting, and was happy to listen to Malmö AS's nesor Simon Krenzisky. On walks to the beach or the park with little brother Tore in the pram, he brought chess books with him, which he studied while Tore fed the birds or slept.

He filled a notebook with theory and extensive opening statistics from major tournaments. From the other side of the book appeared something that would become one of his other great interests: languages. Hard and soft vowels, phonetic signs and a small glossary in Russian.

But mostly it was chess. In the summer, he got 4½/8 in the qualifying group of the Swedish Junior Championship in Stockholm, but with growing experience came success - first with victory in Class II of the club tournament in the autumn.

During his first fifteen months as a chess player, Martens played 81 recorded games. At the 1958 Swedish Junior Championship in Växjö, he was regarded as a possible challenger, despite the fact that at the age of 16, he was still several years younger than many others.

The usual source for finding new opening moves was *Euwe's Loose Leaves*, which appeared regularly. Martens had also found a golden source in Russian chess magazines. They were mostly game collections, but that was what he needed. One time he showed a theoretical position to Lennart Strandberg in King's Gambit.

- 'You can play up the knight to g5,' Martens told him.

Strandberg studied the sacrifice, but he didn't reach a clear conclusion until the next batch of *Euwe's Loose Leaves* arrived in his mailbox. The knight move was there.

The variation in the King's Gambit was one of Martens' and Strandberg's recurring



Martens drew in 18 moves against Strandberg in Swedish Junior Championship, Stockholm 1957.

topics of conversation. The other was the Kaijers Gambit (Volga), with long variation trees and explanations and countless blitz games. For the Swedish Junior Championship, however, Martens had chosen something else. He had read one of the most famous chess books, Pachman's *Moderne Schachteorie*, and had chosen a slow Benoni variation as his black weapon. In an home-made variation, he had planned a large number of preparatory moves to finally succeed with the flank counterattack ...b7-b5.

In Växjö, Martens and Strandberg shared a room with an aunt who had a lot of religious books. They played in separately qualifying groups, and after starting with five points in the first six rounds, Martens was first with a one-point margin. The door to the final was open, but then he had his first game with the Benoni – and lost.

A final win was needed to advance to the final. His opponent seemed manageable, 15-year-old home player Kjell Krantz. Martens gave his Benoni another chance.

Bondeindiskt & Kréti

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6 & 1.♗f3 ♘f6 2.c4 a6

Invented	1976
Followers	Axel Smith, Manuel Bosboom
Good to know	Kamchatka, Symmetrical English
Theoretical status	Good
Learning	A lot to learn
Chapter type	Repertoar, but with several transpositions

The purpose of the Pawn Indian (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6) is to transpose to Kamchatka, but without White being able to stop the gambit with 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 a6 4.a4.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6 3.a4?! weaken the b4-square too much. The difference (compared to a2–a4 in the Kamchatka) is that Black’s dark squared bishop has not been blocked by the c-pawn (2...c5), which makes it possible to get a brilliant version of Nimzoindian with 3...e6 and ...♗b4.

A practical advantage with Pawn Indian is that the white player is forced to think for himself already after two moves. The first games were played by the Hungarian GM László Bárczay in 1976 and the Dane Henrik Sørensen the following year.

□ **Henk Bernink**

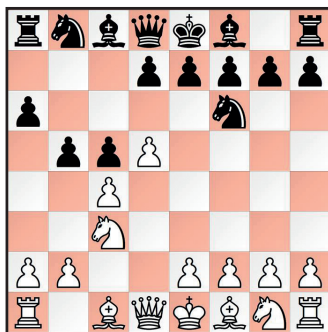
■ **Henrik Sørensen**
Arnhem 1977

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6

Henrik Sørensen (Skakbladet 8/1977): "My opponent looked up at me in amazement and then laughed so loudly that other players started to jeer at him! I laughed too and when he asked me if I had played like that before, I truthfully

denied it. But of course it was a preparation with a well thought out idea."

3.♗c3 c5 4.d5 b5



"White should accept the pawn sacrifice, because against everything else Black equalizes easily."

5.cxb5 axb5

... and Black won.

Both Bárczay and Sørensen continued to use the system for several years.

PAWN INDIAN – theory

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6

THIRD MOVES

- A) 3.♘c3 c5 4.dxc5** _____ **219**
B) 3.g3 _____ **220**
C) 3.♙c2 _____ **220**
3.♘f3 b5 (Polish Counter Attack) _____ **221**

CALIFORNIAN MOVE ORDER: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6 3.♘f3 e6

- A) 4.g3** _____ **222**
B) 4.♙g5 _____ **222**

MINOR CROSSROADS: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6 3.♘f3 c5 4.♘c3

- A) 4.dxc5** _____ **223**
B) 4.g3 _____ **223**
C) 4.♘c3 cxd4 _____ **223**

MAJOR CROSSROADS: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6 3.♘f3 c5 4.♘c3 e6

- A) 5.e4** _____ **224**
B) 5.e3 _____ **225**
C) 5.g3 _____ **225**

KRÉTI & KINGLISH

- A) 1.Sf3 Sf6 2.c4 a6 (Krėti)** _____ **229**
B) 1.c4 Sf6 2.Sc3 a6 (Kinglish) _____ **229**

The crossroads got their names from the fact that several move orders lead to the same position:

♘ To reach **The Minor Crossroads** White can play d4, c4, ♘c3 and ♘f3 in almost any (dis)order – c2-c4 must be played before ♘c3.

♘ To reach **The Major Crossroads** Black can also vary on ...e7-e6 and ...c7-c5. If you also count Black's two other moves, there are 288 possible moves orders to the position that emerges after only four moves! I guess all of them have been played.

THIRD MOVES

If the theoretical section seems difficult to understand – it is precisely because it is difficult to understand. Variations transpose back and forth and White has lots of possibilities.

However, for those who take the time to understand the pros and cons of different move orders, Pawn Indian is an excellent opening.

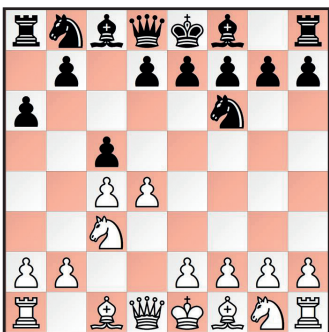
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 a6

Almost all moves are answered with 3...c5, trying to transpose to the Kamchatka Gambit without White having the chance to stop it with a4.

But what happens if White avoids d4-d5? Is a6 too early?

A) 3. ♘c3

3. ♘c3 c5



4.d5 gives Kamchatka.

4.e3 is concession. After

4...e6, Black can aim for a Tarrasch setup with d7–d5. Without ♙c1-g5, White has a harder time putting pressure on a possible isolated pawn on d5.

4.e4 cxd4 5. ♖xd4 is of course wrong. Black can (but need not) be ambitious: 5... ♗c6 6. ♖d3 b5!? or 6. ♖e3 e5!? – a move possible now that White doesn't have ♙g5.

4.dxc5!! e6



With the knight on c3 it is interesting to capture on c5:

♗a4 is possible

♗... ♖d8-a5 is not check

♗ ♖d1 defends the rook on a1 faster if the a-file is opened (1.b4 a5 2.a3 axb4 3.axb4)

5.e4

a) 5.b4?! a5 and White can't keep the pawn.

b) 5. ♙e3 ♗g4! and White has to give back the pawn. After 6. ♙f4 (6. ♙d4? e5) 6... ♙xc5 7.e3 ♗f6 the tempi

are equal. White lost a move with the dark squared bishop and one exchanging on c5, Black two with the knight.

c) 5. ♗a4?! ♗e4 and the c5-pawn drops as follows:

c1) 6.b4? b5! ♣

c2) 6. ♗b6? ♙xc5 7. ♗xa8 ♙xf2 mate

c3) 6. ♙e3? ♖a5 ♠ 7. ♗c3 ♗xc3 8.bxc3 ♙xc5 9. ♙xc5? ♖xc3 ♠ 0-1, John Redmond–Smith, blitz 2022.

c4) 6. ♗f3 ♗xc5 is balanced.

5... ♗c6

6.e5 was a threat because Black's knight cannot jump to g4.

6. ♙e3

6.f4 ♙xc5 7.e5 ♗g8∞ is a UHCA manoeuvre.

6... ♖a5

Double threat: ♗xe4 and ♙xc5.

7. ♖a4!

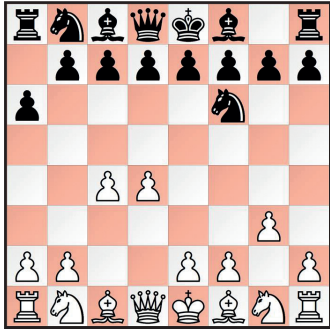
7.a3 ♗xe4 8.b4 ♗xc3 9. ♖c1 almost wins for White. However, White's coordination is disrupted by 9... ♗a2! 10. ♖xa2 ♗xb4 and it is Black who has a clear advantage, as in Klaus Mika-Smith, Blitz 2022.

7... ♗g4 8. ♖xa5 ♗xa5

Black captures e3 and gets full compensation for the pawn.

B) 3.g3

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 a6 3.g3



There are several options to choose from depending on which openings Black feels comfortable with.

a) Not 3...b5? 4.♙g2 threatening the rook.

b) 3...c5 4.♘f3 is a variation in English.

c) 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♜xd5 is Scandinavian Pawn-Grünfeld, "promising" according to Martens. However, it looks risky – with a pawn on e2 instead of c2, White has more potential. The only way to justify the opening is to challenge the center with 5.♘f3 e5!. White has three options:

c1) 6.dxe5 ♜xd1† 7.♘xd1 ♘g4 8.♙e1 ♙c5! 9.e3 ♘c6 wins back the pawn.

c2) 6.♙g2 e4!?

c3) 6.♘c3 ♙b4 7.dxe5 ♜xd1† 8.♘xd1 ♙xc3 9.bxc3 ♘e4 10.♙e3 ♘xc3† and the

bishop pair gives a plus.

3...c6

Martens' choice and a standard method when White plays d4 + g3 before Black stops the light squared bishop from developing with ...e7-e6. Black's plan is to:

- 1) close the light squared diagonal with c6 + d5
- 2) develop the bishop to f5 (since the e4 square is weakened)
- 3) complete development with e6 + ♙e7 + 0-0

In Pawn Indian, Black has played the luxury move a6 – he gets a a6 Slav! In the past, White's fianchetto was considered tame; in recent years it has become modern, though without much ambition.

4.♙g2 d5 5.♘f3 ♙f5 6.0-0 e6 7.♘c3

7.♘h4 ♙e4 8.f3 ♙xb1 9.♙xb1 ♙e7 and White needs to play 10.f4, which gives Black's compensation for the bishop pair with the e4-square and the passive bishop on c1.

7...h6

A luxury now when Black does not have ♙xb1. Note that the dark squared bishop should avoid d6:

♘ Riis rule: don't point towards a well-defended pawn (g3)

♘ It can be attacked after ♘d2 + e2-e4 + ♘dxe4

8.♘d2 ♘bd7 9.e4 dxe4 10.♘dxe4 ♘xe4 11.♘xe4 ♙e7 12.♙f4 ♙xe4 13.♙xe4

White has the bishop pair but cannot open the position (d4-d5) without exchanges.

C) 3.♙c2!?

If White doesn't go down in fear after 2...a6, almost anything can be played. Let's look at some sensible moves.

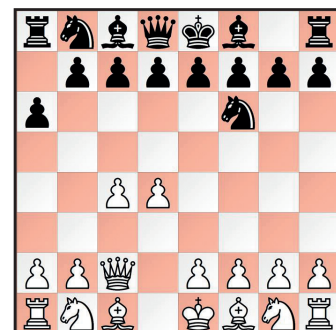
1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 a6

3.♙g5 c5!? 4.♙xf6 gxf6∞ becomes a kind of Trompovsky where White does not want to do c4. Without the dark squared bishop, the pawn prefers to stay on c3 to stabilize the dark squares.

Simpler is 3...♘e4 followed by ...e6/e5 or ...c5 with ideas on the diagonal e1-a5.

After 3.f3 c5, White should definitely do 4.d5 to prevent the dark squares from becoming too weak.

3.♙c2!?



The queen move is poisonous! It prepares e2-e4 without placing the knight on c3, which takes the edge off ...b7-b5.

a) 3...c5 4.d5 is a Kamchatka where the recommendation is to steer towards the Stalingrad Gambit: 4...e6 5.e4 exd5 6.e5 dxc4 7.exf6 d5.

b) 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♖xd5 is Martens' proposal. It feels like a failed Grünfeld, both because Black spent a tempo on a6 and because ...♗d5xc3 is not possible. The only hope stands for the trick ...♗b4. After 5.e4 ♗b4 6.♞a4† ♗8c6 Black has such tricks: the straightforward 7.d5 b5 8.♙xb5 (8.♞b3 ♗d4! 9.♞xb4 ♗c2† with a fork) 8...axb5 9.♞xa8 ♗c2† 10.♗d2 ♗6d4 11.♗e2 e5! 12.♗xd4 ♗xd4 and for the exchange, Black has a winning attack.

Unfortunately, White has 7.a3 b5 8.♞d1 ♞xd4 9.axb4 ♞xe4† 10.♙e3. White's piece is clearly better than Black's three pawns, which are distributed on both sides of the board and cannot create a pawn wall in the center.

Even 5.♗f3 with e4 a little later is good for White.

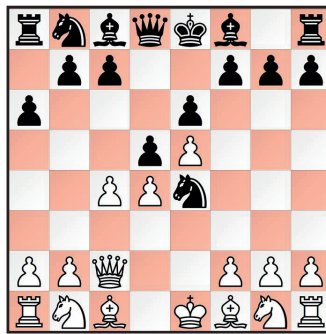
3...e6

My suggestion. Always useful in Kamchatka.

4.e4

Critical. After 4.♗c3 c5 5.d5 Black should avoid 5...b5 6.e4 exd5 7.e5 with the worst version of the Stalingrad Gambit. Instead there is 5...exd5 6.cxd5 and any Benoni position or 6...b5 7.e4 d6, when White is dissatisfied with not having stopped ...b7-b5.

4...d5 5.e5 ♗e4



The evaluation depends on the next three to four moves. Does White have time to challenge the knight on e4 before the center is undermined with ...c7-c5? Possible variations:

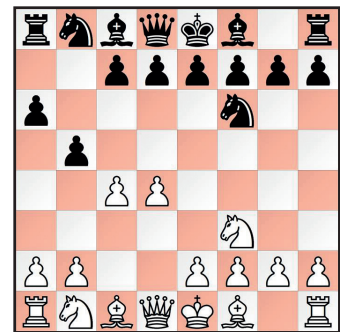
i) 6.♗c3 ♗xc3 7.bxc3 c5 and White will soon capture on c5 and/or d5, thus helping Black developing. The pawn on c3 closes the c-file for White's queen (no pressure on c5) – Black is fine.

ii) 6.♗d2 ♗xd2 7.♙xd2 dxc4 8.♞xc4 (8.♙xc4 ♗c6! with pawn win) 8...b5 and Black gets a strong bishop on b7.

iii) 6.♙d3? ♗c6!
iv) 6.♗f3 c5 7.♗bd2 ♗xd2 8.♙xd2 ♗c6 9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.cxd5 ♞xd5 With the c-file open, White has some initiative, but the threats ♗xe5 and ♗b4 allow Black to hold his own. For example, 11.♙c4 ♗b4! with equal play.

POLISH COUNTER

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 a6 3.♗f3 b5



An independent variant in Pawn Indian. The next sections deal with the normal moves 3...e6 and 3...c5.

4.♗c3!

4.e3 bxc4 is a pawn exchange that feels okay for Black. 4.b3 is also possible, but doesn't look dangerous.

4...c6

Black tries to reach a6 Slav. Not 4...bxc4 5.e4 with a clear advantage for White, or 4...b4 5.♗d5!?±.

5.e4

Of course critical.