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Misha Interviews...

Misha Savinov

Interview with Alexander Shashin

Master Alexander Shashin is a former theoretical nuclear physicist whose current occupation is playing and teaching chess. His familiarity with modern scientific methods led him to some highly original ideas that were successfully tested in practical play and analysis. Shashin invented a new theory of chess thinking and, as a side-effect, a move-search algorithm. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce this theory to English-speaking readers.

Misha Savinov: Dear Mr. Shashin, could you tell more about yourself and your chess career?

Alexander Shashin: I was born on January 29, 1944 in Leningrad. I learned chess at age 8, and started to take it seriously at age 10. My first teacher was my father, who played at 1st or 2nd category strength; chess was pure entertainment for him.

MS: Why did you start taking chess seriously?

AS: The turning point was the 1954 match between Botvinnik and Smyslov. I came across the annotations of one of their games in a newspaper, written by a well-known master, whose poisonous comments left me with the impression that my level of play was very close to the grandmasters. Perhaps he was just in a bad mood, or had an aversion to the participants, but I was quite sure that Smyslov was weaker than me, and that Botvinnik only marginally surpassed me and after proper training I would be able to beat him easily. Naturally, I decided to become a world champion and joined the ranks of chess fanatics. I enjoyed playing, analyzing and summarizing theoretical knowledge. Strengthened by ambition, I advanced fairly quickly.

MS: What were your main competitive achievements?

AS: There were some good results in junior competitions at the local and national level. In 1967 I earned the master of sports title. I finished 2nd and

3rd several times at the Leningrad championships. At the national level I once tied for 1st-3rd at the strong championship of "Burevestnik." However, at some point I started to lose my enthusiasm for practical play. In 1974 I finished 2nd at the Leningrad championship and qualified for the so-called all-Soviet qualification tournament, the winner of which would advance directly to the Higher League, and those who finished 2nd through 8th would play in the First League tournament. I was in excellent form and thought I had reasonable chances of qualifying. However, during the tournament I realized that some of the other participants, such as masters Boris Gulko, Alexander Beliavsky, Yuri Balashov, and Oleg Romanishin, to name just a few, were already better players, and also much younger. So I relinquished my dream of becoming a world champion. It took 20 years to defeat this illusion. After that I expanded my teaching activity and started to reduce my playing obligations. A couple of years later I accepted Korchnoi's invitation to help him during a training session – two weeks before he defected to the West.

MS: How did you discover that he decided to stay in Amsterdam?

AS: I participated in a team tournament in Kiev. There were 10 teams and about 120 players. The news spread fairly quickly as many chess players habitually listened to Western radio stations. None of us could play a decent game of chess after that shocking news. The other players crowded around me – that day I was the most popular player of the event. Some of them were sure that I would be met by the special service agents as soon as I returned to Leningrad.

MS: And?

AS: Surprisingly, I wasn't questioned by anyone.

MS: Apparently, it was difficult to suspect you of motivating Mr. Korchnoi to leave the USSR?

AS: Or, maybe the matter is my Nazi-like appearance (smiles)? After all, the KGB and SS had many similarities and a certain mutual respect.

MS: How are your present relations with Korchnoi?

AS: As far as I know, he has a positive opinion of me. Occasionally we meet in St. Petersburg.

MS: Despite your playing and teaching achievements, you consider your contribution to the theory of chess to be your major success. Could explain these findings to our readers?

AS: Well, my primary point is that chess is a self-sufficient complex system, which acts according to the known laws of nature (i.e., chess rules) and, as with any other dynamic system, can be analyzed using scientific methods. It contains a gradient of potential. The system is not in equilibrium. Generally, a model of a dynamic system that obeys chess laws in no more specific than, say, a model of Brazilian economics or the demographics of the XXI century. Chess has all the qualities of a complex system, so I applied the analytical methods for complex systems to chess, and it resulted in some interesting and curious conclusions. One of the consequences is my move-search algorithm.

MS: What are the qualities that make chess a complex system?

AS: 1) The abundance of elements, which is 10^{36} of independent positions. 2) Hierarchy. There are several descriptive levels, more or less independent of each other. These inner connections within the system form the hierarchy. 3) There is a so-called "chaos zone," where it is impossible, in principle, to predict the direction that the system would develop in certain positions. The system chooses one or another direction by chance. Classical theoreticians accepted this class of positions as an inevitable evil, considering them to be some sort of transition between more rational ones.

MS: So, you do not categorize your theory as "classical?"

AS: Classical theory is Steinitz. Mine is certainly non-classical. Moreover, I could call it post-non-classical. I use the evolutionary-synergetic paradigm

as a weapon, apply it to the complex system of a chess game and determine the inner connections of this system, which could be described mathematically. Basically, I am able to predict the optimal behavior of the chess system in most positions, except in the "chaos zone" bifurcation points of the system.

In general, the life of a chess game could be described as the gradual movement of the system towards the 8th rank *(meaning the eighth rank for White and the first rank for Black - M.S.)*. Even if you play randomly, this movement will take place because pawns can't go backwards. The point of strategic play is the gradual movement of compact chess masses towards the 8th rank. The difference here is "compact." This movement could be accomplished by moving either the rear guard or the advance guard of your army. In both cases the movement of chess masses affects the level of the system's safety. I introduced the term "packing density," which I hope would be understood intuitively. A higher packing density means more safety. Safety or survival of the system is dominant. Our human point of view is that the aim is to destroy the opponent's pieces, the king in particular, but this is only a 2nd tier of the system: its desire for expansion.

MS: The values high packing density and expansion are contradictory, aren't they?

AS: Correct. One has to be compact to survive and has to take risks to expand in order to increase the chances for survival, because successful expansion means controlling more territory, etc. But survival is paramount. That's why I believe the most natural players are Capablanca and Karpov. They care about safety first, and are aggressive within reasonable limits – unlike rogues such as Alekhine, Tal, Shirov, and the young Kasparov. However, chess needs such players to gather priceless information. It is remarkably hard for them to win a world championship, or, in Tal's unsurpassed case, to reign for a long time. Such players are doomed to perish quickly, but they will be remembered no less than the world champions.

MS: Now that we know the driving forces, survival and expansion, how do we find the best plan?

AS: Not the best plan, but the best move. The concept of a plan is totally foreign to my theory. Or maybe it is better to say that my theory discredits such a concept. Complex systems develop spontaneously in nature. So to find the best move in a given position we need to consider the following four factors:
1) Material (m). A very simple and well-known calculation 9-5-3-3-1. Divide your sum by the opponent's sum. Usually m=1. It is analogous to the mass of a system.
2) Mobility (p). The number of legal moves in a given position. P_1 is the mobility of our pieces, P_2 is the mobility of the opponent's pieces. $P_1/P_2 =$

p. Mobility is analogous to the kinetic energy of a system.

3) Expansion factor. It is defined by calculating the center of gravity of a given position. Take the starting position. White has 8 pieces on the 1st rank, and 8 on the 2nd rank: 8*1+8*2=24, divided by the number of pieces, 24/16=1.5, so the center of gravity lies "between" the first and second ranks. In every position there are two expansion factors, White's and Black's. An important number is the Greek Delta, which denotes a change or variation of a quantity, and the difference between them. The expansion factor is analogous to the potential energy of a system.

4) Packing density. There are several different types of packing density: by all pieces and pawns; by king and pawns; by king, pawns and knights (short-range pieces); by pawns only; and local density at certain sections of the board. The most informative densities are those by short-range pieces. Imagine a position: Kg2, Nf3, and pawns on f2-g3-h2. The area of the smallest rectangle that contains these pieces is 6. There are 5 pieces, 5/6=0.83, very dense and therefore a safe construction!

Notice that I only need four factors to describe any position. Two of them, the expansion factor in the form of a center of gravity; and packing density, are original, or, at least, I never seen them suggested by anyone else. In most positions it is enough to know m and p. If m=1, p is the main factor we need to identify, which algorithm of the three known should be applied. If p>1.25, it's "Tal," p<0.8, it's "Petrosian" (note that 1.25*0.8=1), and if p belongs to (0.8, 1.25), it's "Capablanca."

MS: "Tal" for a position with much better mobility – apparently, an attacking one? By the way, why did you name algorithms after great champions?

AS: For pedagogic reasons, as it is easier to understand and memorize them. "Tal" means that 1) first we look for an open attack, 2) optimal piece deployment, 3) sacrifice, 4) material gains. In an open attack; we attack material targets according to the hierarchy: king, queen, rook, bishop, knight, pawn, or an empty square.

"Capablanca," when we have no or little mobility advantage, suggests a different approach: 1) optimal piece deployment, 2) pawn advances, 3) exchanges. After the exchange, if the position still belongs to "Capablanca," return to 1. The process is cyclic.

"Petrosian" is defensive play, the "anti-Tal." If your position is bad, give up territory, like the Russian army during the Napoleonic War in 1812. Giving up your territory increases your packing density and makes you more resilient. Then try to reduce the deficit in mobility and change the algorithm to "Capablanca." There are, naturally, many subtleties in move-searching, but these are my general rules.

MS: As far as I understand, the aforementioned bifurcation points would be

placed on boundaries between algorithms?

AS: Correct. If m=1, p equal to 1.25 and 0.8 suggests that we are at a bifurcation point. How should we decide between whether it is "Tal" or "Capablanca?" If factors 3 and 4 don't help either, then make a random decision. Another chaotic zone appears inside the "Capablanca" algorithm and is linked with the problem of exchanging pieces. In some positions the system is indifferent to exchanges; whether you swap pieces, or not, does not change the system status. So you are free to make a random decision.

MS: Do you think that it is possible to use your method in chess computer programming?

AS: Actually, all I just said is a poor translation from mathematical, machine language to human language. I claim that my four factors open a great perspective for computer modeling of strategic play. These parameters unambiguously evaluate every position in chess. Compare my four factors with hundreds and thousands of parameters currently used in chess software to evaluate positions – for programmers it should be easier to teach the computer strategic play. Actually, translating machine ideology to human language is not very important. The human mind is very flexible, so the advantages of my theory compared to Steinitz's theory are not obvious for humans. I believe that my theory is better, but I am not going to discuss that, because there are no objective criteria for comparison. I would like to underscore that I am not a greater genius than Steinitz because my theory is better than classical theory. Absolutely not – I am just lucky to live 100 years after him, I know much more. Plus scientific methods developed at an enormous pace and I was able to apply them to chess.

MS: You work as chess teacher at a former Pioneer's Palace (now Anichkov Palace). Do you teach your students classical chess theory?

AS: No, I only give them my theory.

MS: Could you give some of the names of your students, past and present?

AS: The best known of them, I believe, is Gata Kamsky. I can't say he is my creation, as Kamsky worked with many trainers, and my lessons were not too intense. Kamsky's main trainer was Mr. Shishkin, quite a strong master who unfortunately liked to drink; therefore his lessons were very inexpensive. Among my current students there are many participants of the junior European and World championships. Not necessarily Russians – there are also people from Lithuania, Switzerland, England, even Malaysia. Usually I bring a child up to the level of qualifying to the world championship via national championships (in Russia it is required to win a junior championship to qualify) and stop the instruction.

MS: Why?

AS: Maybe the reason is that I do not have much ambition left in teaching. Previously I had doubts about the power of my method, but now I realize it, and try to focus my efforts on future theoretical investigations. In 1996 the team of our Pioneers' Palace won the St. Petersburg championship, finishing 4½ points ahead of the second-best team, we could even lose by default 0-4 in the final round! The team consists of 6 players (4 + 2 subs), and five of them were my pupils.

MS: How many teachers are in the Palace?

AS: Ten. My experience in science told me that my method is confirmed statistically. It is obvious that the method is effective. Only Zak had similar successes, but he had much greater influence and could take virtually any schoolboy in Leningrad to his classes. The last challenge for me as a trainer is to train a junior world champion. However, I realize that a potential world champion does not really require instruction. A player with world class talent does not need method. So, it's a lottery. A born champion could join your class, but you can't produce a champion from an ordinary player.

MS: Who is the most promising of your present pupils?

AS: I think it is Dina Bazhenova. She became Russian champion U10 in rapid chess in 2004, and two years ago she won the Russian U8 in classical chess. Currently I have very few students. As I said, my present goal is sharpening my method.

MS: What makes someone a natural born champion?

AS: In general, chess strength depends on working capacity and talent. How much of each ingredient is required, I don't know, but one definitely needs both of them in great quantities.

MS: And how would you describe talent for chess?

AS: There are essentially two types of chess talent. The superior one – intuitive, and the 'usual' one – better memory, better calculating speed. People like Capablanca, Smyslov, and Karpov somehow learned where to properly place their pieces all by themselves and at a very early age. Troubled by mediocre memories, which prevented them from memorizing zillions of intermediate positions in

the process of calculation, they nevertheless were the world's strongest players for many years. They don't calculate as much as visualize images. The objective of such players is simply to choose the most aesthetically pleasing image of a position, which is often an ideal, and then to find the regrouping maneuver, which requires short-range calculation.

The most brilliant players representing another kind of chess talent are Tal and Kasparov, who have a photographic memory and are unusually fast at calculation. They digest a lot of variations and consider many more critical positions than intuitive players; however, their evaluation is much rougher. But it is not all hopeless for them, as one is able to learn strategic play. Also geniuses of the intuitive type are naturally lazy. They don't work much. This is not a reproach – it's their greatest problem, the consequence of their merits. While intuitive geniuses observe desirable positions and don't see any reason to improve, men like Tal and Kasparov gradually expand their evaluation function, accumulate more and more critical positions with refined evaluations, and slowly approach the inborn clarity of vision of intuitive players. That's why the great Capablanca lost a match to a workaholic like Alekhine, and the 23-year-old Kasparov defeated the mature champion Karpov, which was, in my opinion, an absolutely impossible task. Kasparov is the greatest player in the history of chess. I am a big fan of Capablanca, but Kasparov is the greatest.

MS: What do you think of Fischer?

AS: Fischer is a man with an acute form of pathology. He is a talent of Tal's and Kasparov's caliber, but maybe with less calculation ability. The unusual thing about him is that he divided himself into "White Fischer" and "Black Fischer." With the white pieces, Bobby pretended to be the greatest classic player, playing dry and precise chess, often draining his opponents in 60-move endgames. The Black Fischer, because of a pathological greed for points in the tournament table, strove for ultra sharp play in Korchnoi's manner. But his brain rebelled against such a heavy undertaking. It impaired Fischer's nervous system. This explains his fear to play in tournaments, too. It is a great pity that Fischer did not have a true friend. Not a yes-man, but a sincere critic, who would not hesitate to protest against the suicidal actions of this fellow. This is my advice to future geniuses – you all need such friend! For instance, in the 32nd game of the Karpov - Korchnoi match in the Philippines; if I were Korchnoi's second, I would try to convince him to play the French Defense or Ruy Lopez with the psychological aim of making a draw – suffer, in pain, but to hold. When Victor replied to 1.e4 with 1...d6, I would have immediately severed my connections with this self-destroyer. A man of artistic temperament overestimated his strength and thought that he could place his bishop on g7 against Karpov! There are very few madmen who risk employing Pirc or King's Indian against Karpov.

MS: But what's wrong with the opening?

AS: The position of the bishop on g7 is strategically suspect, it is playable, but not against a natural intuitive genius! Kasparov feels Indian positions with his fingertips, but did not risk playing the KID against Karpov until their 4th match. And when Garry did not lose, he confirmed his absolute dominance over Karpov. It became clear that Karpov's attempts to regain the title would never succeed.

MS: Do you like Kramnik's play?

AS: As an experienced trainer and former researcher I am able to analyze chess players and diagnose their current condition. Usually it is enough to examine their last 15 games. Some very strong grandmasters don't hesitate asking my advice. Kramnik, I think, became confused. He lost Ariadne's Thread. Vladimir plays worse now than he did five years ago. He experienced a very serious creative crisis and presently shows only slight signs of overcoming it. It is a pity, but Kramnik is not the only young man in crisis, for example, think of Ponomariov. I am very sorry to see their self-destructive actions. Young players today pretend they know everything about chess in general, their styles, training, etc. But the truth is that they are unable to evaluate themselves objectively. I repeat – young and successful people desperately need a wise mentor who, if necessary, can be very critical. I teach my children: if you become someone important, put your ill-wishers on the payroll, pay your critics, not your flatterers. Karpov is different – he is capable of objective self-evaluation.

MS: Is this a difference between generations?

AS: Maybe, because modern players, unlike their predecessors, have an opportunity to earn decent money. Karpov, for example, grew up in very moderate financial conditions, and he was motivated only to become world champion, the world's best chess player. These days there are other goals, such as entering the top 20, top 10, receiving more starting money, or better conditions, etc. And those lucky and talented enough to achieve this sometimes do not want to fulfill their potential and develop further, which is sad. In this sense money has a negative influence on chess.

MS: What do think about the computers influence?

AS: It is not negative or positive; it just speeded up the process of the natural evolution of our game. The computer invasion started a whole new era in chess, the history of chess could be separated into two periods: "before computer" and "with computer." These engines simply initiate a non-classical approach! The computer plays like an idiot and wins. The subtleties of Steinitz's theories are no longer important, the machine just calculates variations, and somehow this is enough to beat us. Imagine how much stronger computers could be if we taught them how to play strategically.

MS: Would you agree to work on such project?

AS: I am eager to. It requires a lot of technical work to describe my 4-dimensional phase space in detail and after we finish, refining the computers algorithm would be a relatively easy task. The whole project would last no longer than two years and cost around $100,000. I think software companies spend more on their sophisticated chess products. It would be great to find sponsorship in any form for this project. I am motivated to complete my theory by plotting the 4-D phase space, which would help to evaluate any position. However, this is not a task for an individual, who has to spend a lot of time on less productive things like chess tutoring to make ends meet.

MS: Could you show me some practical examples on how to apply your method in practical play?

AS: Naturally. Just come to one of my lessons at the Pioneers' Palace, and you'll have a chance to test it.

I did and Shashin's approach is different than most other trainers. He usually brings 5-6 books of games, this time it was game collections of Geller, Fischer, Kramnik, and "555 best games" – his own collection of brilliant and instructive games, plus a thick copybook of his own material. One of his pupils picks a random game and they analyze it. No opening discussion, it's all about the middlegame. Shashin shows how to use the algorithm to find the best move and is ready to defend his findings at the board. He did not annotate the following games, but rather discussed them from his method's point of view.

Petrosian,T - Unzicker,W
FRG-USSR Hamburg, 1960
Queen's Gambit

Although not so widely known, this is one of the best games by Petrosian.

We are skipping the opening, as usual.

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.Bg5 d5 4.c4 c6 5.Qc2 Be7 6.e3 0-0 7.Nc3 h6 8.Bf4

Typical Petrosian! Tigran Vartanovich was either indifferent to the opening stage, or didn't like it. It didn't prevent him from discovering new lines and systems, but he always preferred his own way. The text move is less common than 8.Bh4, but Petrosian probably wanted to keep pressure, avoiding possible exchanges after 8...Nh5 or 8...Ne4 (justified by 9.Bxe7 Qxe7 10.Nxe4 dxe4 11.Qxe4 Qb4+, restoring the material balance). The method suggests we are inside the "Capablanca" algorithm (4 developed pieces versus 3), slightly more elevated, which suggests avoiding exchanges.

8...Nbd7 9.cxd5 cxd5

Oh, that's horrible. Unzicker definitely did not have a chance to get a solid chess education, which was fairly difficult in Germany during the war. We know that recapturing with the c-pawn is bad when a knight positioned on d7. Now White must get the edge.

Knowing this, some nervous young lady would probably look for forced variations to fix the advantage, but there is nothing forced. White's position is better strategically, so simply follow the strategic algorithm – improve your pieces, advance pawns, exchange, etc.

10.Bd3 a6 11.0-0 b5

This is an unnecessary move that softens up Black's position; a more patient player like Petrosian would almost certainly play 11...b6.
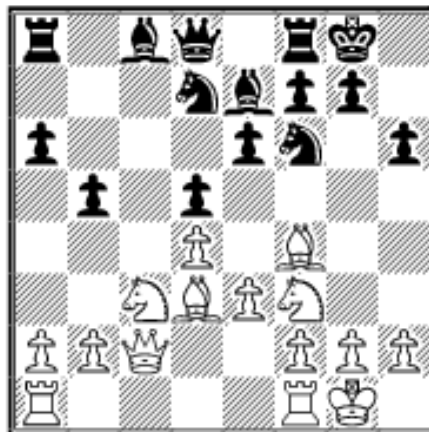
How should White proceed? I think the "Tal" nature of this position is fairly obvious, just look at those active pieces. We don't calculate the mobility each time, we agree to calculate it only once during the game, if it's really necessary. Therefore, look for an attack. Can you attack the enemy's pieces? Not really. Well, what about attacking his pawns?

12.a4! b4 13.Na2 Ne8 14.Nc1 a5 15.Nb3 Ba6

Sometimes in team events a captain would tell you: don't rush! Spend at least a minute for each move! And so on. In most cases you should obey your orders. However, this position is an exception. Black's packing density is small; he is weak and by exchanging pieces you increase your advantage. If you spend more than 10 seconds for White's next move, you are chess

criminal.

16.Bxa6 Rxa6 17.Qd3 Ra7 18.Rfc1 Nd6

What to do now?

19.Bxd6! Bxd6
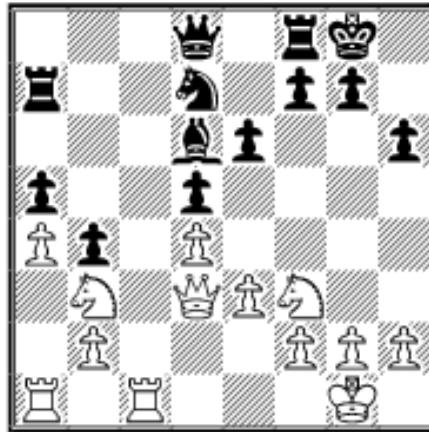
The position has stabilized. We are in "Capablanca," there is no dynamic play, so think of regrouping. In "Capablanca" one should constantly improve his pieces, advance pawns, exchange. Try to find the best spots for your pieces here. How do you want to place them? Double the rooks, queen on b5, knight on e5? Well, let's see.

20.Rc6 Nb8 21.Rc2 Nd7 22.Rac1 Nb6 23.Qb5 Nc4 24.Nfd2 (another exchange) **24...Nxd2 25.Rxd2 Qa8 26.Rdc2 Rd8 27.Rc6 g6**

This is the last critical position of the game; all our pieces stand excellently, all are doing something useful. Correct? Wrong! We forgot to take care of the king. Improve the position of his majesty, please. And suggest another regrouping plan.

Say, g3, Kg2, Rc2, Qf1-c1, Rc8. Well, maybe. But there is a more effective solution! As Genrikh Chepukaitis used to say, imagine you can parachute your king to any square on the board. Which one would it be, maybe f6, for mate in one? If you said a2, you have world class positional understanding!

28.g3 Kg7 29.Kf1!! Kg8 30.h4 h5 31.R1c2 Kh7 32.Ke1 Kg8 33.Kd1 Kh7 34.Kc1 Kg8 35.Kb1 Kh7

Petrosian could play his king to a2 immediately, which would probably have been more consistent, but he delays it for a couple of moves.

36.Qe2

Creating the deadliest attack by very simple means.

36...Qb7 37.Rc1! (regrouping the pieces) **37...Kg7 38.Qb5!?**

Temporarily changing direction, the queen is immune to exchange because of 38...Qxb5 39.axb5 a4 40.b6 Rad7 (40...Raa8 41.b7 Rab8 42.Na5) 41.Na5 Ra8 42.Rxd6! Rxd6 43.b7 Rb8 44.Rc8 Rd8 45.Rxd8 Rxd8 46.Nc6, so

Petrosian just wants to win some time before the adjournment.

38...Qa8 39.f4 Kh7 40.Qe2 Qb7 41.g4!

After this move resistance is futile.

41...hxg4 42.Qxg4 Qe7 43.h5 Qf6 44.Ka2 (finally!) **44...Kg7 45.hxg6 Qxg6 46.Qh4 Be7 47.Qf2**

White has a murderous attack, so Black could well save time and resign here.

47...Kf8 48.Nd2 Rb7 49.Nb3 Ra7 50.Qh2 Bf6 51.Rc8! Rad7 52.Nc5! b3+ (nothing helps: 52...Rxc8 53.Nxd7+ Ke7 54.Rxc8, or 52...Rd6 53.f5 Qxf5 54.Qxd6+ are both losing as well) **53.Kxb3 Rd6 54.f5! Rb6+ 55.Ka2 Black resigned**.

What a splendid strategic win! Now, let's take another game from another book.

Kramnik,V (2625) - *Ulibin,M* (2570)
Chalkidiki, 1992
Queen's Indian defense

1.d4 e6 2.c4 Nf6 3.Nf3 Bb4+ 4.Bd2 Qe7 5.g3 Nc6 6.Nc3 0-0 7.Bg2 Bxc3 8.Bxc3 Ne4 9.Rc1 d6 10.d5 Nd8 11.dxe6 Nxe6

In his annotations Kramnik writes that his next move is a novelty. Who can guess it? Here's a hint: we are a little bit more elevated and less tightly packed. Correct, we should avoid exchanges. In fact, the following novelty is the most logical move in this position.

12.Bb4 Bd7

Kramnik states that after 12...a5 13.Ba3 N4c5 14.0-0 Bd7 15.Nd4 Nxd4 16.Qxd4 Bc6 17.Bxc6 bxc6 18.Bxc5 dxc5 the position is balanced. I think one could also play the intermediate 17...Ne6 to avoid tripled pawns, but in general this evaluation is correct.

13.Ne5
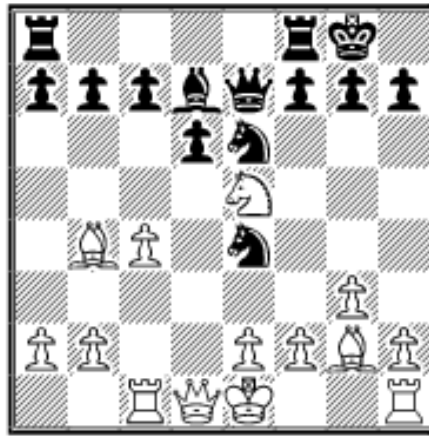
This is an anti-system move! We are in "Capablanca," and it is time to improve the pieces, so 13.0-0 comes to mind. 13.Ne5 is in "Tal"-style, and we don't have the right to start fireworks now. So, it should not lead to any advantage for White with correct play.

13...N6c5?

Aha, Kramnik says that Black must strive for complications: 13...Qf6 14.Bxe4 Qxe5 15.Bxb7 Qxb2 (15...Rab8 16.Bc3) 16.Rb1 Qxa2 17.Bxa8 Rxa8 18.Qb3 Qa6 19.0-0, "with only small advantage for White." I like Black's approach here. This is a test for us: either the line is false, or the evaluation, because, as I said, the final position should be equal. First let's check the line, it seems OK, so I have to dispute the evaluation without analyzing it. If anyone objects, let's play.

> (*One of the students at 2200-2300 level said he feels White stands better and tried to convince his teacher at the board. He had the option to take moves back and to discuss his plans with friends. At any time he could concede and agree that the initial position is equal. It took about 20 minutes for him to agree that Black has sufficient resources - M.S.*)

It is actually very pleasing to be able to reject a future world champion's evaluation without even analyzing a position beforehand. But don't be too proud – it was easy because we are armed with a method.

14.Nxd7 Nxd7 15.0-0 a5 16.Ba3 Rfe8

What should White play now? He decides to improve his dark-squared bishop, which is a good decision in the spirit of the strategic algorithm.

17.b3 b6 18.Bb2 Rad8 19.Qd4 Qf6

Black caught us on exchange, but it's OK, as we are indifferent to exchanges, it does us no harm.

20.Qxf6 Ndxf6

The position is stabilized. Now don't think about your next move, but rather about your game plan. Where to place the pieces, which pawns to move? Rooks to the open file, king to e2, and advance the kingside pawns: a sound plan.

21.Rfd1 h6 22.e3 Nd7 23.Kf1 Re7 24.Ke2 Rde8 25.g4 Re6 26.h4 R6e7

27.Bf3 Ndc5 28.Rd5

I like this move, Kramnik found the way to maximize his rook's effectiveness.

28...Na6

If the pieces are well-placed: move your pawn!
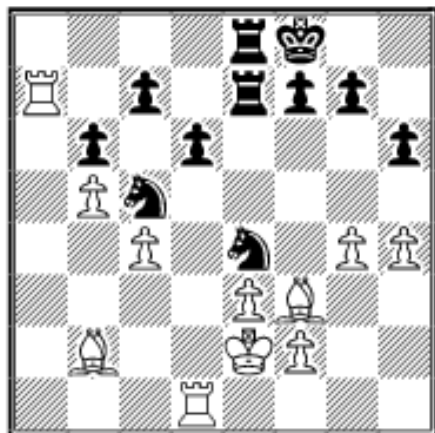
29.a3 Nac5

One more time...

30.b4 axb4 31.axb4 Na6

...and again.

32.b5! Nac5

The position has changed, so it is time to reconsider the locations of our pieces.

33.Ra1! Nf6 34.Rdd1 Nfe4 35.Ra7 Kf8

What does your intuition tell you about this position? Is this still "Capablanca," or can you see a strong resemblance of "Tal?" I believe this just changed to "Tal" and Kramnik agrees. What do you do in "Tal?" You search for a direct attack.

36.g5! hxg5 37.hxg5 Nxg5 38.Bc6 Rc8 39.Rh1 Kg8 40.Raa1!

This is an amazing regrouping! The rook stood well on a7 for our strategic algorithm, but it would stand better on g1 when the attacking algorithm prevails. The rest of the game is very easy; White only needs some patience to realize his decisive advantage.

40...Nce6 41.Rh4 f6 42.Rg1 Kf7 43.Bd5 Ke8 44.Rh8+ Nf8 45.f4 Nge6 46.Kf3 f5 47.Rg6! Nc5 48.Bxg7 Rf7 49.Bxf8 Black resigns.

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