

Max makes the mark

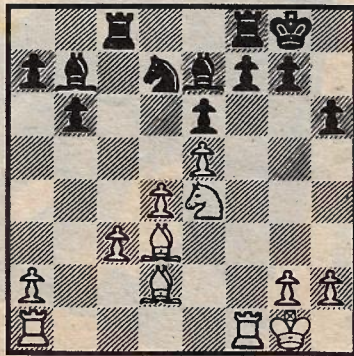
THE AWARDING of master and grandmaster titles by Fide, the world chess federation, is done mostly on a statistical basis using international Elo ratings. Two or three tournament "norms" totalling 24 games are needed to claim the title, and the hunt for these "norms" can be a tricky business.

In a round-robin tournament the number of points required can be calculated beforehand, perhaps seven out of nine for a GM (grandmaster) norm, six for the IM (international master) norm. The trouble is, as soon as one gets close to the wretched target, one begins to worry more about points required than what is objectively going on in one's positions — with predictably disastrous consequences.

This complicated system has created a handful of legendary figures. They are the ones who, with virtuoso dexterity, always manage to fail the final hurdle. Most skilful of them all could well be the Dutchman Hans Ree, whose quest for the GM title quickly gained him two out of the three required norms. But then things just seemed to go wrong. Despite an Elo rating of 2520, one most grandmasters would be proud of, he always drew that vital last game he should have won, or lost the one he should have drawn.

The unluckiest misser of IM norms must be the Australian Max Fuller. For a decade now, Max has traversed the globe totting up 20 failed attempts at the title. It's not that he's not a classy player — it's just that, come that vital last game, the butterflies seem to take over.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I report Max has now made his first international master norm, at the Benedictine Congress in England recently. Here is a position from one of his games on the way.



Castro v Fuller, round six.

Max played 1... Rfd8 2.Nf2 Nxe5! (a temporary piece sacrifice which wins a pawn) 3.dxe5 Bc5! and now if the bishop on d3 moves, 4... Rxd2 or if 4.Kh1 (4... Rxd3 was threatened) then 4... Bxf2 5.Rxf2 Rxd3 with a winning end game.

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