

Hubner takes it seriously

WHEN GRANDMASTER Robert Hubner of West Germany writes about his own games there is a secret reason why his notes are scrupulously objective and contain only chess moves, not his inner thoughts during the game. For the brilliant academic, now turned full-time professional in his first determined assault on the world championship, doesn't want to give his prospective opponents even the smallest psychological ammunition when they meet over the board.

Hubner, by beating Hungarians Andreas Adorjan and Lajos Portisch, has now qualified for the candidates final match, the winner of which will challenge world champion Anatoly Karpov in 1981. His opponent in this final is Soviet defector Viktor Korchnoi who challenged Karpov in 1978, and who at 49 is 17 years Hubner's senior. Korchnoi's personality is well known, and it has been his fiery determination for revenge against the regime he spurned in 1976 that has carried him to the very brink of the championship.

But much less is known of Robert Hubner, who tends to keep most of his thoughts to himself. He looks like an academic, standing about 174cm tall, with a beard, glasses and stooped shoulders, perhaps from the hours spent on his papyrological investigations at Cologne University and more recently from a thorough study of chess opening theory.

Of his coming match with Korchnoi this Christmas he said rather dolefully, "It will be like a pupil playing his teacher."

Hubner is constantly putting himself down. He protests he has never played a game he is completely satisfied with, that his ideas do not stand up to the intimate scrutiny he subjects them to after each game. But one should not be misled by such pessimism. Over the chessboard he is as bold and brave as anyone else, and even the fierce Korchnoi may be hard pressed to counter the free-flowing style of the West German.

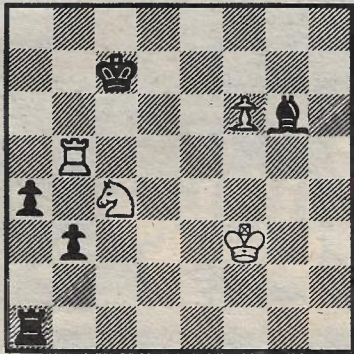
Hubner has once met Korchnoi in a match, in Solingen in 1973, losing 4½-3½. But now Hubner has switched from talented amateur to dedicated professional, prepares deeply and has acquired a powerful squad of Grandmaster aides in the shape of Hort and Sigurjonsson.

So who will win? Korchnoi the brash defector versus the sorrowful Hubner. A lot depends on what reserves of energy Korchnoi can still summon at his age. Hubner can beat anyone on a good day — but how many good days will he have? I simply cannot choose between them. One thing is sure — neither player will emerge from this contest psychologically unscarred.

Here is the adjourned position from Hubner's final game with Portisch. Being two wins ahead and only play-

ing for the draw, Hubner had fallen into an inferior endgame which appeared quite lost. However he found a study-like resource to save the game and end the match.

L. PORTISCH



R. HUBNER

Play continued:

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| 1. Ke2 | a3 |
| 2. Rxb3 | a2 |
| 3. Ra3 | Bh5 ch |
| 4. Kf2 | Rh1 |

This is the position Portisch was aiming for. Black's threat to win White's rook is unstoppable, as on 5.Rxa2 there comes the skewer 5...Rh2 ch.

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| 5. Ra7 ch! | Kb8 |
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Other squares do not work: 5...Kc6 6.f7 Bxf7 7.Rxa2! Rh2 ch (7...Bxc4 leaves rook and bishop v rook — a technical draw) 8.Ke3 Rxa2 9.Ne5 ch and White wins the bishop and draws with knight against rook; or 5...Kd8 6.Ra8 ch Kd7 7.Ra7 ch Ke6 8.Ra6 ch and now both 8...Kf5 and 8...Kd5 fail to 9.Ne3 ch followed by Rxa2 as the knight can interpose on g2 when the rook checks on h2.

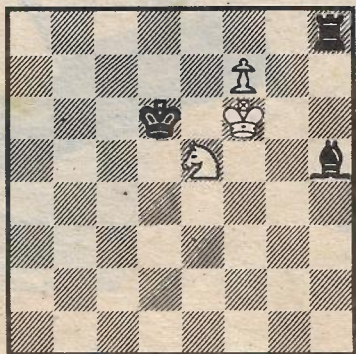
After the text move Portisch wins a rook fair and square — but, amazingly, the position is drawn.

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| 6. Rxa2 | Rh2 ch |
| 7. Kg3 | Rxa2 |
| 8. Ne5! | |

Now 8...Ra7 is prevented, and black cannot stop the f-pawn by 8...Ral because of 9.f7 Rf1 10.f8=Q ch Rxf8 11.Nd7 ch forking king and rook.

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| 8. ... | Kc7 |
| 9. f7 | Ra8 |
| 10. Kh4 | Rh8 |
| 11. Kg5! | Kd6 |
| 12. Kf6 | Draw agreed! |

PORTISCH



HUBNER

After 12...Rf8 13.Kg7 Ke7 White forces a draw by 14.Nc6 ch. Danish Grandmaster Bent Larsen labelled this game "miracle on the a-file".

MURRAY CHANDLER