

Everyone was right

BEFORE IT BEGAN there were two groups of thought about the candidates semi-final match between Viktor Korchnoi and Lev Polugayevsky in Buenos Aires. One group, recalling Korchnoi's crushing 8½ to 4½ victory over the same opponent in the previous series at Evian 1977, maintained that the Soviet defector was simply too determined for Polugayevsky. The other group were insisting that the loyal Russian Polugayevsky should not be underestimated — he had, after all, disposed quite decisively of countryman Mikhail Tal in the quarter-finals.

Everyone, as it turned out, was right. Korchnoi took the lead by winning with the Black pieces in game four, but two rounds later Poly struck back and equalised the score. In game 10 Korchnoi again won with Black, only to be hauled back by Poly in the 12th (and scheduled final) game, necessitating a mini-match play-off series of two games each. Korchnoi won game 14 and it was all over.

The match did resemble their 1977 contest in one respect, that being some careless adjournment analysis by the Soviets. In this position from game four the game was adjourned, Korchnoi having just declined a draw.

If instead 10.Kf4, Black continues 10...c4 11.Kxf5 Kc5! winning, eg 12.Ke5 cxb3 with ...Kc4 and ...b2 to follow.

- 10. ... fxe4
- 11. fxe4 c4!
- 12. Kf4

Naturally not 12.bxc4 dxc4 — two connected passed pawns win automatically in almost all rook endgames.

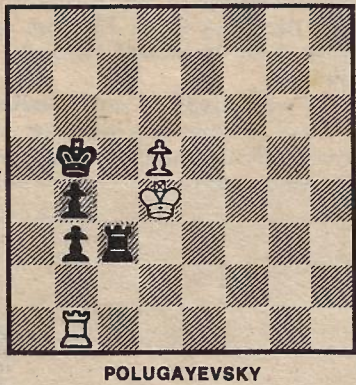
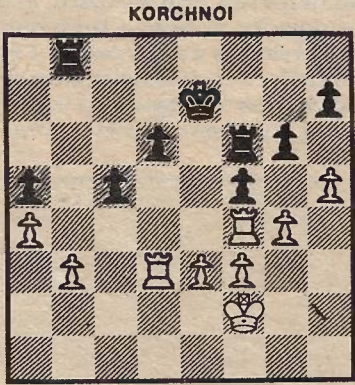
- 12. ... cxb3
- 13. Ke3 Kc5
- 14. Rc1 ch Kb5
- 15. exd5 Rxa6
- 16. Kd3 Rh6!
- 17. Rb1 Rh3 ch
- 18. Kd4

On 18.Kd2 Black can eke out a win in amazing fashion with 18...Kc4 and now:

(a) 19.Rc1 ch Kxd5 20.Rc8 b2 21.Rd8 ch (if 21.Kc2 Rc3 ch) Kc4 22.Kc2 Rh2 ch 23. Kb1 Kc3 24.Rc8 ch Kb3 25. Rh8! (as 25...Rxb8 is a draw by stalemate) Rc2! 26.Rh3 ch (26.Rc8 Rc1 ch) Rc3 27.Rxc3 ch Kxc3 28.Ka2 b1=Q ch! 29.Kxb1 Kb3 and wins.

(b) 19.d6 Rd3 ch 20.Kc1 Kc3 21.d7 (21.Rb2 Rh3) Rxd7 22.Rb2 (praying for 22...Rh7 23.Rc2 ch!) Rdl ch! and again Black wins the king and pawn ending.

- 18. ... Rc3!



1. ... Rb4
The sealed move. Black does have some advantage thanks to his queenside pawn majority, but of course the position is objectively quite drawn. Play continued...

- 2. hxg6 hxg6
- 3. Kg3?

The wrong direction. White can draw simply with 3.Rxb4 axb4 4.gxf5 gxf5 5.Ke2 Ke6 6.e4 as after 6...f4 he just moves his king backwards and forwards — Black can make no substantial progress.

- 3. ... Ke6
- 4. gxf5 ch gxf5
- 5. Rxb4

Now White exchanges, but his inconsistent play means the drawing line with e4 is no longer viable.

- 5. ... axb4
- 6. Rd1 d5
- 7. a5 Rf8
- 8. a6 Ra8
- 9. Ra1?

The fatal error. According to Korchnoi 9.Rh1! Ke5 10.Rh6 should draw as after 10...d4 White scurries back with Kf2-e2.

- 9. ... Kd6!
- 10. e4

The key move. Once more all defences lose by a hair's breadth:

(a) 19.d6 (19.Ke5 Kc5 wins the d-pawn) Kc6 20.Ke5 Rd3 21.Rc1 ch Kb6! 22.Rb1 Rd2!! 23.Rxb3 Kc5 and Black wins the d-pawn with ...Rd5 ch and ...Rxd6, leaving a rook and pawn v rook endgame with White's king cut off.

(b) 19.Rb2 Rc4 ch! (19...Ka4 meets the riposte 20.d6 Rc2 21.d7! Rxb2 22.Ke3 and White queens!) 20.Kd3 Kc5 21.Rxb3 Kxd5 and because of the uncomfortable position of his pieces White is lost, eg 22.Kd2 Kc5 23.Rb2 Kb5 24.Rc2 b3!

Instead Polugayevsky puts up almost no resistance...

- 19. Rd1? b2
- 20. Rb1 Rc2
- 21. d6 Kc6
- 22. Ke5 b3
- 23. Resigns

In the final candidates match Korchnoi will now meet West German Grandmaster Robert Hubner, who has just won his semi-final match with Hungarian Lajos Portisch by 6½-4½.

MURRAY CHANDLER