

Beating Karpov

THERE IS a book entitled *How to beat Bobby Fischer* which devotes itself to dissecting the ex-world champion's losses, while attempting to pinpoint his greatest weaknesses. As it is highly improbable that Fischer will ever hunch over a chessboard again, a more practical subject nowadays would be Anatoly Karpov.

Such a new book would, I am sure, find many eager readers among the master-elite. Since gaining the world crown in 1975 (when Fischer defaulted, not having played — let alone won or lost — a single serious game as world champion) Karpov has reigned. He has lost, if my calculations are correct, only 20 games from the hundreds of top-class encounters since.

The trouble with this 29-year-old Soviet hero is that he is such an all-rounder. His openings are well prepared and modern. His positional play is superb, his tactical ability terrifying. He is as happy crushing you in 20 moves as grinding you down in a long, accurately played endgame, another speciality.

His most discernible weakness is a slight hesitancy when faced with unusual openings, as his two losses to Larsen, and humiliating downfall against Miles's 1...a6 defence at Skara 1980 will confirm. But the only real consolation, should you have the misfortune to find yourself sitting opposite him in the near future, is that, statistically, winning is getting easier.

In 1975, the year he became champion, Anatoly lost only once, to Andersson in Milan. He lost two games in 1976 (to Torre in Manila and Geller in the USSR championship) and two again in 1977. In 1978, however, he lost six — five to Viktor Korchnoi while successfully defending his world title. Perhaps these defeats helped shatter the myth of Karpovian near-invincibility, for, although he lost only two games again the next year, in 1980 he suffered six defeats at the hands of six different grandmasters.

So far this year Karpov has stemmed this trend. Despite a tournament programme that has included Linares and Moscow, his only loss came recently at the IBM tournament in Amsterdam. It was to Vlastimil Hort of Czechoslovakia, a player who had never before defeated him.

Holland 1981

QUEEN'S GAMBIT DECLINED

| V. HORT | A. KARPOV |
|---------|-----------|
| 1. d4 | Nf6 |
| 2. Nf3 | e6 |
| 3. c4 | d5 |
| 4. Nc3 | Be7 |
| 5. Bg5 | h6 |
| 6. Bh4 | 0-0 |
| 7. e3 | b6 |
| 8. Rc1? | Bb7 |
| 9. cxd5 | |

It is not unusual for players to play both sides of an opening and presumably the champion had something prepared against 9.Bd3 Nbd7 10.0-0 c5

11. Qe2 Rc8 12. Bg3 cxd4 13. exd4 dxc4 14. Bxc4 Bxf3 15. gxf3 Nh5 16. Ba6! Nxc3 17. hxg3 Rc7 18. Rfd1 Nf6 19. Nb5 with advantage as in Karpov-Geller, Moscow 1981.

9. ... exd5
10. Be2 Nbd7
11. 0-0 c5
12. Qc2 a6?!

Having played the break ...c5 without a struggle, Karpov now tries for more — perhaps too much. Safer is 12...Ne4 to ease his position with exchanges.

13. Rfd1 c4

Black's strategy is quite clear — he wants to advance his queenside pawns en masse.

14. a4 Bc6

To answer 15.b3 with 15...b5.

15. Ne5 Qc7

16. Nxc6 Qxc6

17. Bf3!

In retrospect this natural move makes Karpov's entire conception seem almost naive. No longer able directly to prevent Black's ...b5 advance on the flank, Hort switches to a more subtle approach — counterplay in the centre. On 17...b5 now would follow 18.Nxd5 Nxd5 19.Bxd5 Qxd5 20.Bxe7. Probably necessary here is the passive 17...Rae8, as with the move he plays Karpov falls into a second trap.

17. ... Bb4?



18. Nxd5!

A devastating stroke, after which Black's game collapses.

18. ... Nxd5

19. Qf5 Qxa4

On 19...N7f6 20.Bxf6 wins, or 19...Nxe3 20.fxe3 and Black's queen and rook are skewered on the long diagonal.

20. Bxd5 Rac8

21. b3

Not 21.Bxc4?? Rxc4 22.Rxc4 Qxd1 mate.

21. ... cxb3

22. Rxc8 Rxc8

23. Qxf7 ch Kh8

24. Bxb3 Qb5

25. Be6 Rf8

26. Bxd7!

More accurate than 26.Qxd7? — Qh5! forking h4 and d1. Now Hort wins another pawn after 26...Rxf7 27.Bxb5 axb5 28.Rb1, and so ...

26. ... Resigns

The amazing thing about this first Karpov loss of 81 is that it all looked so easy! Was he just too ambitious after his run of successes, or did he have an off day? Someone should hunt down his bio-rhythm charts.

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