

# Exit Hubner

THE PRECISE reasons for Robert Hubner's untimely departure from his world championship candidates final against Viktor Korchnoi remain somewhat obscure. What was going on in the mind of the brilliant but highly sensitive West German Grandmaster at the moment he walked out of the contest in Meran, Italy, is difficult to say. What is certain is that the match was by no means decided — Korchnoi at that point was leading 4½-3½, increasing at most to 6-4 when the adjourned ninth and tenth games were resumed. Even so the Soviet defector, now 49, would still have required another 2½ points to clinch the 16-game match.

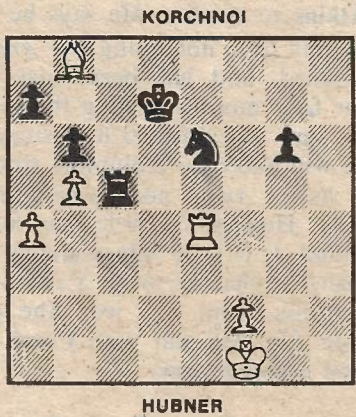
Understandably the Meran organisers and public were furious at Hubner's inexplicable disappearance. Korchnoi, however, must have been greatly relieved to see the end of the match, which featured some particularly scrappy play by both sides. He had been trailing at the start, having lost the first and fourth games and won the second. Then, in a slightly advantageous endgame in round seven, Hubner had committed a gross blunder, leaving a rook en prise to a simple knight fork.

After this ghastly error the West German academic, who has only recently turned professional, may have lost his inner control. The personal crisis, fueled by squabbling in his own camp, grew out of hand. A public row broke out in *Der Spiegel* after Wilfried Hilgert, Hubner's club manager back in Solingen, criticised him in the paper — and Hubner reacted in print.

Korchnoi proceeded to win the eighth game as well, and adjourned slightly worse in the ninth and better in the tenth, when Hubner suddenly boarded a train for home.

Here, so you can judge for yourselves, are the positions from the two unfinished games.

Game nine.

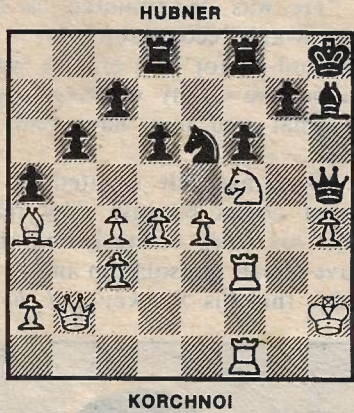


Here White stands slightly better, as he has threats of winning Black's pawn on a7 for no compensation. Korchnoi probably sealed either 46... Rcl ch or 46... Ng5, when after 47. Rd4 ch Kc8 48. Bxa7 Kb7 49. Rd7 ch Rc7 50. Rxc7 ch Kxc7 is a draw as 51. a5 is now forced to save the bishop.



Korchnoi: to play Karpov yet again.

Game 10



Korchnoi again sealed, probably 44. Bdl when 44... Qf7 45. Rg3 g6 46. Ne3 or 46. Nh6 Qg7 47. Qd2 (planning 47... g5?; 48. Nf5) are plausible continuations. White has the greater control and manoeuvrability and may indeed be winning with his kingside pressure. But Black's position is not devoid of defensive chances, while White's own king is not altogether safe and an attempted breakthrough may entail some risk of losing. Certainly the game is not resignable for Black.

Although Hubner has been the centre of controversial incidents before (such as the abruptly terminated 1971 match against Petrosian) he has always had a clear-cut grievance, and his walk-out in Meran came as a great shock. I located him by accident shortly after the end of the match when ringing a friend in Hamburg. My friend was out, but Robert was recuperating at his house. He told me he had lost all track of time after what had happened and said he had withdrawn for "private reasons". "I looked at the whole theatre, and thought it was ridiculous. Too many things were happening that had nothing to do with chess," he said.

So once again it is Anatoly Karpov against Viktor Korchnoi for the world championships, the match scheduled for later this year. Karpov, champion since 1975 and still only 29, is playing as well as ever and I consider Korchnoi's chance of dethroning him to be somewhat inferior to three years ago. Nevertheless Korchnoi has always been a man full of surprises and the contest should once more be compelling viewing.

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