

Cold warriors

IT WAS bad news and good news for American chess professionals in search of their El Dorado this year. First there was the blow that the renowned Lone Pine tournament was not to be held, because of the failing health of Louis Statham, its Californian millionaire benefactor. Then the new Reykjavik Swiss-system International materialised to fill the void, and, although not quite offering the same financial delights that Lone Pine is famed for, it was nonetheless sufficient to attract a large US contingent.

Consequently it was no surprise that a New Yorker, Soviet-born Grandmaster Lev Alburt, flew home with Reykjavik's \$US6000 first prize. He was a deserving winner in the 54-player field, and scored 8½ points from 11 games. Other leading totals were 2, Abramovic (Yugoslavia) 8; 3, Gurevic (USA) 7½; 4-11, Schneider and Wedberg (both Sweden), Byrne, Shamkovich and de Firmian (all USA), Adorjan (Hungary), Sahovic (Yugoslavia) and Sigurjonsson (Iceland) 7. It was a reasonable achievement for the organisers to attract 11 grandmasters, especially with so many competing internationals during this time of year.

The adoption of the fashionable Swiss-system format — which allows an unlimited number of players — is if anything overdue in Iceland, which must rank as one of the most chess-intensive countries in the world. Of a population of 230,000 — an estimated 40,000 play the game, and grandmasters are household names. The great Dane Bent Larsen likes to tell the story of his match with Fridrik Olafsson for the Nordic championship many years ago, when even the Icelandic Parliament was postponed as members had gone to watch!

The 1972 Fischer-Spassky "Match of the Century" held in Reykjavik gave a marvellous boost to this popularity of course, but the tradition goes back as far as the Vikings. One explanation for this little island's disproportionate strength was advanced by a Robert McFadden who in an article in the *New York Times* on January 1, 1979 wrote: "For centuries, chess has been virtually a national pastime in Iceland, a rocky North Atlantic island where long winter months of twilight darkness have produced a scholarly but insular people, fiercely independent, stubbornly individualistic, proud of their traditions — and tigers over the chessboard."

So it's all down to long and cold winters, apparently. I wouldn't like to speculate as to whether this influenced the following final round game from Reykjavik, but Moscow (Alburt's original homeland) is certainly nipper than Sweden!

QUEEN'S INDIAN DEFENCE

L. ALBURT T. WEDBERG
1. d4 Nf6

- 2. Nf3 e6
- 3. c4 b6
- 4. g3 Bb7
- 5. Bg2 d5
- 6. cxd5 Nxd5

6... eXd5 was played by Abramovic twice during Reykjavik with some success — he earned a grandmaster norm.

- 7. 0-0 Be7
- 8. Qa4 chl

An awkward check to parry. If Black plays 8... Qd7 (or 8... Bc6) White retreats with 9. Qb3 and 10. Ne5 comes next move.

- 8. ... c6
- 9. e4 Nf6
- 10. Nc3 0-0
- 11. Bf4 Nbd7
- 12. Rad1

White has established a clear positional advantage. Wedberg seeks counterplay by advancing his queenside pawns.

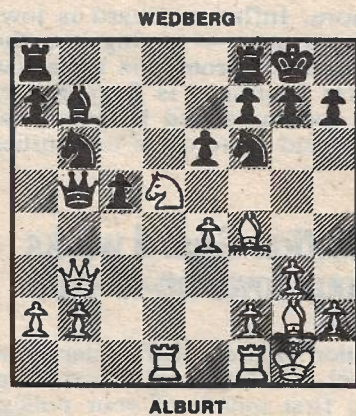
- 12. ... b5
- 13. Qb3 b4
- 14. Na4 Qa5

On 14... Nxe4, 15. Ne5 is strong — 15... Ndf6 16. Rfe1.

- 15. Ne5 Nb6
- 16. Nc5l

A temporary pawn sacrifice that has the benefit of eliminating the Black bishop on e7.

- 16. ... Bxc5
- 17. dxc5 Qxc5
- 18. Nd3 Qb5
- 19. Nxb4 c5
- 20. Nd5l



This neat riposte, using the fact that the Black queen is undefended, eliminates Black's threats against the pawn on e4.

- 20. ... Qxb3
- 21. Nx16 ch gx16
- 22. axb3 Rfd8
- 23. Bd6 c4
- 24. bxc4 Nxc4
- 25. Be7 Rxd1
- 26. Rxd1 Kg7
- 27. Rd7 Rb8
- 28. e5l

Even in the end game broken king-side pawns can be weak. Wedberg's bishop is attacked twice and he must exchange.

- 28. ... Bxg2
- 29. exf6 ch Kg6
- 30. Kxg2 a5
- 31. Rd4 Nxb2
- 32. Rg4 ch Kf5
- 33. Rg7 Nc4
- 34. Rxf7 a4
- 35. g4 chl Ke5

If 35... Kxg4 simply 36. Rg7 ch followed by f7 wins.

- 36. Rxh7 a3
- 37. f7 Resigns

Black has lost the race to promotion. On 37... a2 there follows 38. f8=Q Rx8 39. Bx8 a1=Q 40. Bg7 ch skewering king and queen.

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