

The first first

ROBERT HUBNER's walkover victory in the recent Cloverline International in Chicago could be a major personal breakthrough. Astonishingly this brilliant West German grandmaster had never previously won a top-class event outright — despite the fact that he qualified through to the world championship candidates final last year. In Chicago he erased this dubious distinction in style, putting a 2½-point margin between himself and American Walter Browne. Viktor Korchnoi, Hubner's victorious opponent in the candidates final, managed only 50 per cent.

Hubner, 31, has long been one of the most mysterious characters on the professional circuit. In 1971, part way through his candidates match with Armenian Tigran Petrosian, Hubner walked out after complaining of poor playing conditions. Last year he reached the final of the same matches — from which either he or Korchnoi would qualify to challenge Russian Anatoly Karpov for his world crown. At a difficult, but certainly not hopeless, stage Hubner stunned all by suddenly boarding a train for home, this time giving "private reasons" as his only explanation.

Yet, during a good patch, Hubner ranks as one of the most imaginative and dangerous all-rounders in the game. Those close to this witty and highly sensitive academic have good justification for believing that he could easily be the man to challenge Karpov next time — if only he can withstand the intense psychological pressures of the qualifying competition. Due to his success in the previous cycle, Hubner is this time seeded straight through to the eight-man candidates matches.

The Chicago tournament was a category 12 affair in which each player met the other participants twice. Hubner told me he enjoyed it — particularly because it was "a small, cosy event with just 10 or 20 spectators". Final results were: 1, Hubner 8; 2, Browne 5½; 3 Korchnoi (now Switzerland) 5; 4, Dzhindzhishvili (USA) 4½; 5, Lein (USA) 4; 6, Martz (USA) 3. Two good examples of Hubner's speciality — controlled tactical melees — were his win over Korchnoi with Black, and the following encounter.

SICILIAN DEFENCE

R. HUBNER	W. BROWNE
1. e4	c5
2. Nf3	d6
3. d4	cxd4
4. Nx d4	Nf6
5. Nc3	a6

Browne has patronised this sharp Najdorf variation so much that one of Black's defensive systems, in the 6.Bg5 line, has been named after him. Hubner, however, prefers 6.Be3, which he chose repeatedly in his candidates match with Hungarian Lajos Portisch during the last cycle.

6. Be3	e6
7. f4	b5

8. Qf3	Bb7
9. Bd3	Nbd7
10. g4	Nc5
11. g5	b4
12. gx f6	bxc3
13. fxg7	Bxg7
14. b4!	

Against Portisch, Hubner made the mistake 14.bxc3 here and fell into a poor position, although he later won (see Listener of October 18, 1980). At the time 14.b4 was suggested as an improvement.

14. ...	Nxd3 ch
15. cxd3	Rc8
16. Rg1	Bf6
17. Rc1	Qb6?

On 17...Qd7 18.Qh5! followed up by Qh6 is strong. Black should prevent this manoeuvre for good by 17...h5! with an unclear position.

18. Nxe6

Of course Browne had seen this discovered attack on his queen by White's bishop — he must have simply mis-assessed the resulting position.

18. ...	Qxb4
19. Ng7 ch	Kd8

Both kings are stuck in the centre and play becomes ultra-sharp. Browne does not want to give up his important defensive bishop with 19...Bxg7, but Hubner shortly compels him to do so.

20. Qh5	Rc7
21. e5!	dxe5
22. fx e5	Bxg7

Or 22...Bh4 ch 23.Kf1 and the bishop is misplaced on h4.

23. Rxg7	Bd5
24. Rg4	Qb7
25. Qh4 chl	Kc8
26. Rb4	

White's other rook penetrates to the queenside. In addition to this worry Browne was also suffering from his habitual time-trouble.

26. ...	Qa8
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Like a boa-constrictor tightening coils on its prey, Hubner prepares for the kill.

27. Qd4	Be6
28. Rxc3	Rd8
29. Rxc7 ch	Kxc7
30. Qc5 ch	Kd7
31. Re4	

Simply to stop 31...Qh1 ch. Browne now had almost no time at all left.

31. ...	Qb7
32. Bg5	Qb1 ch
33. Kd2	Qxa2 ch
34. Ke3	Black lost on time

In any case Black's checks have expired and mate is imminent, eg 34...Rc8 35.Qd6 ch Ke8 36.Qe7 checkmate.

MURRAY CHANDLER