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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 21/2-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 eightman 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 51/2; 3 Korchnoi (now Switzerland) 5; 4, Dzhindzhihashvili (USA) 41/2; 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

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1. e4 2. Nf3 3. d4 4. N×d4 5. Nc3

d6 c×d4 Nf6

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 b5

8. Qf3 9. Bd3 Nbd7 10. g4 11. g5 Nc5 12. g×f6 13. f×g7 14. b41?

Against Portisch, Hubner made the mistake 14.b×c3 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.

N×d3 ch 15. c×d3 Rc8 16. Rg1 Bf6 **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. N×e6

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

Q×b4 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... B×g7, but Hubner shortly compels him to do so.

20. Qh5 21. e5! 22. f×e5

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

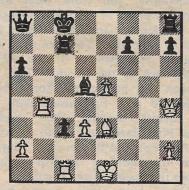
Rc7

d×e5

B×g7

23. R×g7 24. Rg4 Qb7 25. Qh4 ch! Kc8

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



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

27. Qd4 28. R×c3 Rd8 29. R×c7 ch K×c7 Kd7 30. Qc5 ch

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

32. Bg5 33. Kd2 Qb1 ch Q×a2 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

MURRAY CHANDLER