

# Flying Nunn

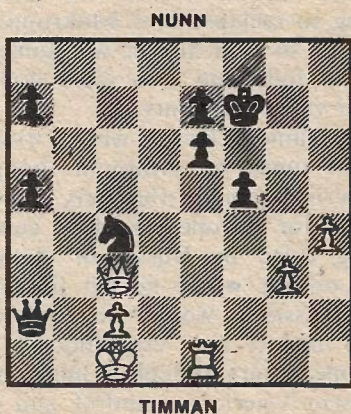
THIS YEAR's Hoogovens Schaaktoernooi in Wijk aan Zee, Holland, saw young English grandmaster John Nunn burst into prominence by tying for first place with Russian Grandmaster Yuri Balashov. It was an outstanding result for Nunn, a former Oxford don in mathematics, as only a couple of years ago he was near the rear end of a tournament of similar strength in London. Since then he has deliberately set out to gain experience at world-class level, while retaining a crisp, attacking style of play.

At category 13 on the World Chess Federation rating scale, Wijk aan Zee was certainly world-class. The pre-tournament favourite, home Grandmaster Jan Timman, is currently ranked second in the world, and other participants included Robert Hubner from West Germany and Mikhail Tal, the brilliant former world champion from the USSR. At the lower end of the scale were a small number of young hopefuls, such as myself.

From the start, however, it became clear that Timman was in astonishingly poor form. Nunn shot off to an early lead, to be later challenged by Balashov and 21-year-old Dutch International Master John van der Wiel. In an exciting finale, Nunn disposed of van der Wiel and was left facing his experienced Russian rival in the last round. After gaining little out of the opening with White, Balashov accepted the draw and honours were shared. Final scores were: Nunn (England) and Balashov (USSR) 8½; Hort (Czechoslovakia) and van der Wiel (Holland) 7½; Tal (USSR), Kavalek (USA), Hubner (West Germany), Nikolic (Yugoslavia) and Sosonko (Holland) 7; Ree (Holland) 6½; Timman (Holland) 5½; Christiansen (USA) 4½; Sunyë (Brazil) 4; Chandler (New Zealand) 3½.

I will speak more about my experiences in Wijk aan Zee in next week's column, but I must say that the organisation and playing conditions were absolutely superb.

One of the most remarkable endgames from the tournament occurred in the second-round game Timman-Nunn. Earlier on Timman had succeeded in winning rook for knight and at the adjournment, when John and I trekked off to analyse, things looked bleak.



Black to play.

From the adjournment play proceeded:

- 41. ... a4
- 42. h5 a3
- 43. h6 Qb2 ch
- 44. Qxb2 axb2 ch
- 45. Kb1 e5
- 46. Rh1?

*Now it is only a draw. Instead 46.g4! would have won a vital tempo over the game. On 46...fxg4 then 47.Rg1! while if Black declines by 46...f4 then White wins with 47.Rh1 Kg8 48.h7 ch Kh8 49.g5 followed by g6 and g7 ch.*

- 46. ... Kg8
- 47. g4 f×g4!
- 48. Rg1 e4
- 49. R×g4 ch Kh7
- 50. Rg7 ch

*Naturally 50.R×e4 is not possible because of the knight fork by 50...Nd2 ch.*

- 50. ... K×h6
- 51. R×e7 e3
- 52. Rc7 Ne5

*Not 52...e2 53.Re7.*

- 53. Rc??

*John and I had actually reached this position in our analysis, and were pondering over whether Black could continue to hold on by 53...Ng4 when an amazing idea struck me...*

- 53. ... Nf3!!

*Timman had overlooked this completely and suddenly it is White who must fight for the draw. In fact he can do this by 54.R×e3 Nd2 ch! 55.K×b2 Nc4 ch 56.Kb3 N×e3 57.c4 followed by advancing his king up to capture the last Black pawn. Timman's alternative turns into a curious mixture of impressive-endgame knowledge and elementary carelessness.*

- 54. K×b2! e2
- 55. R×f3! e1=Q
- 56. Ra3

*The point is that this position is a theoretical draw, a fact few players would either know or have the courage to use. White simply oscillates his rook between a3 and d3 and there is nothing Black can do. Nunn, realising this, felt a little embarrassed about playing but decided to try a few more moves anyway.*

- 56. ... Qb4 ch
- 57. Ka2 Qc5
- 58. Kb2 Kg5
- 59. Rb3 Kf4
- 60. Rd3 Ke4
- 61. Ra3 a5
- 62. Rd3 a4
- 63. Ra3 Qb4 ch
- 64. Ka2 Kd5

*It is worth noting that Black could have a-pawns stretching back to a7 and it would still be drawn!*

- 65. Rd3 ch Kc5
- 66. Ra3 Qc4 ch
- 67. Kb2 Kb4
- 68. Rd3 Qe4

*Now of course White should simply play 69.Ra3 and Black can make no progress.*

- 69. Ka???

*What's this? Having set up his positional fortress white suddenly throws it all away with a trivial error.*

- 69. ... a3!

*The draw evaporates — 70.R×a3 Q×c2 ch leaves a standard win with queen versus rook. So, looking as sickened as I have ever seen him, Timman had to resign.*