

And then there were eight

THE DIVERSITY of age and playing styles should make the latest eight-player World Championship Candidates matches especially lively. A span of 52 years separates the oldest and youngest qualifiers. At only 19 the USSR's dynamic prodigy Garry Kasparov sits poised for his first assault on the chess summit. One of his rivals is 61-year-old compatriot Vassily Smyslov on an historic bid to reclaim the crown he last wore in 1957.

Mainly due to a few elderly Soviets getting the chop at the Interzonal stage, the average age of this Candidates has actually fallen by almost three years. The newcomers (apart from Kasparov) are Eugene Torre of the Philippines, Zoltan Ribli of Hungary and Russian Alexander Belyavsky — all aged 31. West German Robert Hubner, playing these knockout matches for the third time, is 34. At 45 the top Hungarian Lajos Portisch has participated six times previously in the Candidates matches — though this total is bettered by Viktor Korchnoi, the Soviet defector, now 51, who has won the Candidates twice from seven attempts — but both times has been foiled at the final leg by Anatoly Karpov.

No one player clearly dominates the field and the winner of this series will have to meet the mighty Karpov, the 31-year-old World Champion and Soviet No 1. To be objective, the chances of dethroning him in 1984 are slim. Korchnoi seems almost a spent force, and his wife and son have now been released to join him in the West. This must at least partly diffuse the burning desire for revenge that has propelled him in the last two Candidates.

Portisch and the unpredictable Hubner have chances to reach the final — but their joint records versus Karpov are abysmal.

Ribli, Belyavsky and Torre are all marvellous players, but lack experience at this level of match play. Furthermore, they are all of Karpov's generation, and they recognise, as well as anyone, that Anatoly is quite simply the finest chess player of that era. That leaves only the young Kasparov. It is important, psychologically, that his record against the World Champion is intact — three draws on the only occasions they have met. Additionally he is still getting stronger, and stands at 2675 on the July 1982 rating list, compared with Karpov's 2700. Their nearest rival is Korchnoi down at 2635.

But the path through the Candidates is fraught with pitfalls. As I write the drawing of lots has not yet been made, but an early match of say, Kasparov and Belyavsky could be a critical test. Like Karpov, Belyavsky is a practical player, and adept at exploiting inaccurate play. His speciality is steamrolling weaker opposition. The following game is from this year's Sarajevo tournament where Belyavsky won with 12½/15.

GRUNFELD DEFENCE

A. BELYAVSKY	P. POPOVIC (Yugoslavia)
1. d4	Nf6
2. c4	g6
3. Nc3	d5
4. cxd5	Nxd5
5. e4	Nxc3
6. bxc3	Bg7
7. Nf3	c5
8. Rb1?	O-O
9. Be2	b6?!

Popovic also tried this dubious plan against me when we played at Hastings 1980. Alternatives are 9...Nc6, 9...Qa5 and 9...Bg4.

10. O-O	Bb7
11. Qd3	cxd4
12. cxd4	e6
13. Rd1	

I played 13.Bg5 Qd6 14.Qe3 with some advantage. Belyavsky's idea is similar.

13. ...	Nc6
14. Bg5	Qd6
15. Qe3	Rfe8?!
16. Bb5!	a6
17. Bf4	Qd8

On 17...Qd7 Belyavsky gives 18.Ne5 Bxe5 19.dxe5 with a big advantage for White in Informator 33.

18. Bf1	Na5
19. Ne5	Rc8
20. h4	h5

If 20...Qxh4 21.Rxb6.

21. Qf3	
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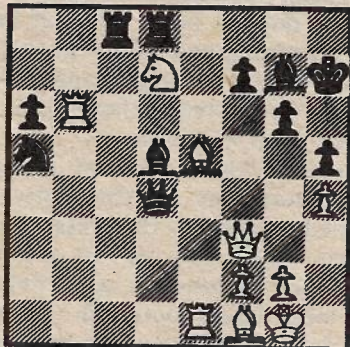
This threatens 22.Nxf7 Kxf7 23.Bg5 discovered check.

21. ...	Rf8
22. a4	Kh7

Planning ...f6. Belyavsky now embarks on a standard anti-Grunfeld thrust with his d-pawn.

23. d5!	exd5
24. exd5	Qe8
25. Re1!	Qxa4
26. Rxb6	Qd4
27. Nd7	Rfd8
28. Be5	Bxd5

The only move. On 28...Qxd5 29.Nf6 ch Bxf6 30.Qxf6 Rg8 31.Rd1 with a winning attack, as 31...Qxd1 fails to 32.Qxf7 ch, or 28...Bxe5 29.Qxf7 ch Bg7 30.Nf6 ch Kh8 31.Re7 Rg8 32.Qxg6 mating.



29. Qf6!
An elegant stroke which wins material. On 29...Bxf6 30.Nxf6 ch Kh6 31.Bxd4 White emerges a bishop up.

29. ... Qxe5
30. Rxe5 Rxd7
Hoping for 31.Qf4 Bxe5 32.Qxe5 Nc4 when matters are not so clear.

31. Rxd5 Resigns
After 31...Bxf6 32.Rxd7 Kg7 33.Rxa6 Nc4 34.Bxc4 Rxc4 35.Raa7 the f-pawn falls as well.

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