

Tal's talent

ALTHOUGH the USSR is the strongest chess-playing nation in the world, the majority of Western grandmasters do not seek invitations to tournaments there. This is partly because the prizes are usually paid in roubles (not convertible into anything resembling dollars) and partly because they consider spartan sleeping and eating facilities to be the norm.

At least that is what I thought until I arrived in the attractive holiday resort of Suchi in December for a category II grandmaster tournament. Suchi, on the shores of the Black Sea, was surprisingly warm considering that the first winter snowflakes were gracing Red Square in Moscow. Our hotel, 17 storeys high, was modern and comfortable. But unfortunately one can't have everything. The horde of famous Soviet Grandmasters lined up for English GM Jon Speelman and myself, the only two Westerners, included Tal, Geller, Psakhis, Romani-shin, Razuvaev...

Overall favourite was of course Mikhail Tal. With his spectacular sacrificial style of play, the legendary Latvian ex-world champion is still, quite possibly, the most popular player in the world. When he went up to collect his individual gold medal at the Lucerne Olympiad prize-giving he received an ovation that eclipsed even that of current world champion Anatoly Karpov. During the opening ceremony at Suchi he was applauded when he rose to collect his number in the drawing lots; when he drew number one the cheers grew even louder.

The first round at Suchi gave the crowd yet further reason to vent its appreciation. Tal, unlike some other great names of his generation, has not let the passing years deter him from sharp opening variations. Here he clashes with the young Czech Grandmaster Lubomir Ftacnik, a noted theoretician, in a currently fashionable variation of the Sicilian defence.

SICILIAN DEFENCE

M. TAL	L. FTACNIK
1. e4	c5
2. Nf3	d6
3. d4	cxd4
4. Nxd4	Nf6
5. Nc3	a6
6. Bg5	e6
7. f4	Qb6
8. Qd2	Qxb2

Grabbing this "poisoned pawn" is always risky, as the author of the original book Sicilian Naidorf, Michael Stean, may tell you. The game Bel-ravsky (USSR) v Stean (England), Lucerne Olympiad 1982, continued 9. Nb3 Nbd7 10. Bd3 b5 11. 0-0 Nc5 12. Nxc5 dxc5 13. Bxf6 gxf6 14. Rab1 Qa3 15. Nxb5 Resigns (15... axb5 16. Bxb5ch Ke7 17. Rfd1 forces mate).

9. Rb1	Qa3
10. Be2?	

An unusual departure from the traditional continuations 10. Bxf6, 10.e5 or 10.f5. Both Tal and Ftacnik were, however, aware of a game Kengis-Azmaj-parasuli, played earlier that year in the

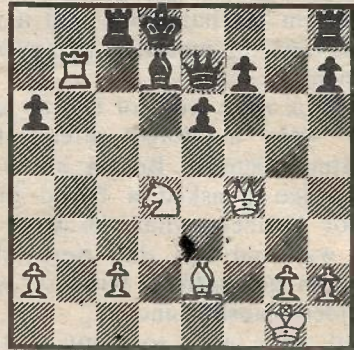
USSR, where White embarked on the same sacrificial spree Tal adopts.

10. ...	Be7
11. 0-0	Nbd7
12. e5	dxe5
13. fxe5	Nxe5
14. Bxf6	Bxf6
15. Rxf6!	gxf6
16. Ne4	Qe7
17. Qf4	Kd8!

On 17...Nd7? 18.Nd6 ch Kd8 White would win with 19.Rxb7! Bxb7 20.Nxb7 ch Kc8 (20...Ke8 21.Nd6 ch Kf8 22.Nc6) 21.Nd6 ch Kc7 22.N(6)b5 dis ch.

18. Nxf6	Nd7
19. Nxd7	Bxd7
20. Rxb7	Rc8

Not 20...e5? 21. Nc6 ch Bxc6 22. Qd2 ch Bd7 23. Bg4.



21. Nf3! f6

With his king in the centre Black cannot afford the luxury of 21...Rxc2. White would continue 22. Qd4 f6 23. Bxa6 with numerous threats.

22. Bxa6 Rf8?

The aforementioned game, Kengis-Azmajparasuli, had gone 22...Rg8 23.Bb5 Qc5 ch 24.Kh1 Rc7 25.Rb8 ch Rc8 26.Rb7 with an eventual draw. Afterwards it was suggested that 25.Qxf6 ch Kc7 26.Qf4 ch e5 27.Nxe5! was strong, which caused Ftacnik to vary here. In view of Tal's powerful follow-up, however, 23...e5 24.Qd2 Ke8! was the best chance.

23. Qd4!

Intending 24.Qb6 ch Ke8 25.Rxd7! Qxd7 26.Bb5 pinning the queen. Black is forced into passive defence.

23. ...	Ke8
24. Bb5	Rd8
25. Qb6	e5
26. Nd2!	

Bringing the knight into action.

26. ...	f5
27. Nc4	Rf6
28. Bxd7 ch	Rxd7
29. Qb5	Re6
30. a4	

Tal intends to march the pawn to a5 to facilitate Nb6; if immediately 30.Nb6 Black has 30...Rxb6.

30. ...	e4
31. Kf1!	

Using the king to block Black's one counterchance — the e-pawn. In a way it is a pity that Ftacnik now blunders, as it spoils a fabulous variation Tal had planned after 31...e3 32.Ke2. In the post-mortem he revealed it: 32...f4 33.a5 Rg6 34.Ne5! Rxc2 ch 35.Kf3 Rf2 ch 36.Ke4!! and White's mating threats triumph while the king watches with impunity from e4! For example 36...e2 37.Rb8 ch or 36...Kf8 37.Rxd7 e2 38.Qb8 ch Qe8 39.Rf7 ch.

31. ...	Qg7?
32. Rb8 ch!	Resigns

On 32...Ke7 White has the still attractive 33.Qxd7 ch Kxd7 34.Rb7 ch.

MURRAY CHANDLER