

Viktorious still

VIKTOR KORCHNOI'S surprise 6-3 demolition of Lajos Portisch in their quarter-final Candidates match showed two things. One was how different these tussles, where a player meets the same opponent game after game, are from regular tournament play. But most of all it showed that Korchnoi, despite advancing years, and with increasing fluctuations in form and results, still cannot be written out of the world championship cycle.

Most observers had tipped Portisch to take this match, staged in Bad Kissingen, West Germany. The 46-year-old Hungarian Grandmaster remains a formidable tournament contender, and his poor record in matches seemed less significant than Korchnoi's uninspired recent results. Yet Soviet defector Korchnoi (the Germans call him the vice-world champion) won three out of the first four games! That effectively sealed the outcome of the best-of-10-games contest, and Portisch's comeback in game eight served only to make the losing margin more respectable.

In pure chess-strength terms it is difficult to explain such a walk-over. Clearly Korchnoi responds well to the match atmosphere, where he is pitted against a single opponent. Was it nerves on Portisch's part? Although Lajos shows all the emotion of a piece of granite at the board, his compatriots say he sometimes works himself into a frenzy of worry before major events. Several times in Bad Kissingen Portisch fell victim to tactical sequences, such as in this example from game four.



KORCHNOI

PORTISCH

Portisch, to move with White, could have allowed a draw by perpetual check with 1.Qxa3 Qxf2ch 2.Kh1 Qf1 ch etc, or continued to play for a win with 1.Re3. Instead he found 1.Qg2?? R×h3 ch! 2.Kg1 (desperation but 2.Q×h3 Q×f2 ch and 3.Kh1 Ra6! wins or 3.Qg2 Rh6 mate) 2...Rh6 3.Kf1 Ra6 4.Re1 Ra2 5.Be4 and White resigns. 5...Rh1 ch mates after 6.Q×h1 Q×f2.

Korchnoi now goes through to the semi-finals of the Candidates, where he clashes with the Soviet wonder-boy Garri Kasparov. Off the board Viktor's private life continues to be turbulent — he and his wife are said to be divorcing, and Korchnoi is contesting an 8000 Swiss Franc (nearly \$NZ6000) a month alimony claim.

Here is the third match game.

ENGLISH OPENING

V. KORCHNOI L. PORTISCH

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| 1. c4 | c5 |
| 2. Nf3 | Nf6 |
| 3. Nc3 | Nc6 |
| 4. d4 | c×d4 |
| 5. N×d4 | e6 |
| 6. Ndb5 | d5 |
| 7. Bf4 | |

On 7.c×d5 N×d5 8.N×d5 e×d5 9.Q×d5 (using the trick 9...Q×d5 10.Nc7 ch) Black gains excellent counterplay with 9...Bb4 ch followed by ...Be6, or 9...Be6 immediately.

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| 7. ... | e5 |
| 8. c×d5 | e×f4 |
| 9. d×c6 | b×c6 |
| 10. Q×d8 ch | K×d8 |
| 11. Nd4 | |

More testing is the continuation 11.Rd1 ch Bd7 12.Nd6 as Korchnoi chose in games five and seven of the match. Probably Korchnoi was just playing it safe here, surprised by Portisch's use of the Four Knights' defence against his English.

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| 11. ... | Kc7 |
| 12. g3 | Bc5 |
| 13. Rc1! | f×g3 |
| 14. h×g3 | Ba6? |

Walking into another of Korchnoi's combinations. 14...B×d4 instead lets White regain his piece with advantage by 15.Nb5 ch Kb6 16.N×d4, but Black has several promising alternatives such as 14...Bd7, or even 14...Rb8!? or 14...Ng4!?

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| 15. N×c6! | |
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An immensely strong move, exploiting the delicate position of Portisch's king on the c-file. On 15...K×c6 16.Na4 White emerges a pawn ahead.

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| 15. ... | Bb7 |
| 16. Na4 | B×f2 ch |

A desperado sacrifice — 16...B×c6 17.R×c5 Kd6 is met by 18.R×c6 ch K×c6 19.Bg2 ch etc.

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| 17. K×f2 | Ne4 ch |
| 18. Kg1 | |

This leads to a forced material gain, but 18.Ke3 looks even simpler to me — 18...B×c6 19.R×c6 ch K×c6 20.K×e4 or 18...Rae8 19.Na5 dis ch Ne5 dis ch 20.Kf2.

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| 18. ... | B×c6 |
| 19. Bg2 | Rae8 |
| 20. Rh4 | f5 |
| 21. g4! | |

Exploiting the cross-pins on Black's pieces to decisive effect. Portisch cannot maintain the pawn on f5 by 21...g6 because of 22.g×f5 g×f5 23.Rh6, and 21...Kd6 fails to 22.R×c6 ch K×c6 23.g×f5 Kb5 24.B×e4 K×a4 25.Bc6 dble ch.

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| 21. ... | f4 |
| 22. R×c6 ch | K×c6 |
| 23. Nc3 | Kc5 |
| 24. B×e4 | Kd4 |
| 25. Bf3 | Rb8 |
| 26. Na4 | Rb4 |
| 27. Rh5 | Rd8 |

If 27...R×a4 28.Rd5 ch Kc4 29.b3 ch. Two pieces for a rook down, Portisch could already resign with a clear conscience.

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| 28. b3 | h6 |
| 29. Kf2 | Rd8 |
| 30. Rf5 | g5 |
| 31. Rf7 | Ke5 |
| 32. R×a7 | Rd2 |
| 33. Nc5 | Rbd4 |
| 34. Ra6 | Rd6 |
| 35. Ra5 | Resigns |

MURRAY CHANDLER