

Daring entertainment

WITH an all-Soviet semi-final, the women's world championship Candidates matches were unlikely to feature the same protracted shenanigans that accompanied the men's event. The ladies had made no mistake about disposing of the inevitable defector (Tatiana Lematchko) in the quarter-finals — in contrast to the men's series, where exile Viktor Korchnoi ended up being secretly paid vast sums by his former Moscow masters just to play Garri Kasparov. So the women's matches took place in venues in the USSR, accompanied by minimal international fanfare. In the Black Sea resort of Sochi, Lidia Semenova beat 21-year-old Nana Ioseliani by 5½ points to 4½ in the 10-game contest. The clash between Nana Alexandria and Irina Levitina in Dubna saw a dramatic finish. Alexandria lost the 10th game, putting the score at 5-5 and necessitating a mini-playoff. Levitina won the 11th game as well, Alexandria pulled back in game 12, but after a draw in game 13 it was Levitina who took the last, decisive game.

Levitina, 29, now meets Semenova, 32, in the Candidates final, probably starting at a similar time to the Kasparov-Smyslov men's final (tentatively scheduled for Vilnius, March 10). As whoever wins the women's final will meet world champion Maya Chiburdanidze from Georgia it is, of course, quite certain the title will remain in Soviet hands. Nevertheless in the ongoing battle of "USSR versus the Rest of the World" there are a few attractive hopes on the horizon for the "Rest". The Swedish girl Pia Cramling continues to demolish male misconceptions (and inflated egos) in mixed tournaments, and has now gained the "men's" International Master title. There are reports from Hungary that 14-year-old Zsuzsa Polgar is progressing towards similar status, and in the national super-championship another 14-year-old, Ilona Madi, toppled some established names. Yet the champion Chiburdanidze, still only 23, sits stoically on her throne. Her latest impressive result is clear first in a major women's event in Smederavska Palanka, Yugoslavia.

Although women's chess, as a whole, still has much distance to make up in comparison to men's, it does have its unique aspects. The play in the Candidates matches was marvellous spectator entertainment — completely uninhibited and full of bold sacrifices and daring combinations. Witness, for example, the following insane encounter from game two at Sochi. White's king sauntered the length of the board to find a hole in Black's pieces. I do not dare to make in-depth judgments whether it should have been a haven, but leave it up to the reader to decide for him or herself.

SICILIAN DEFENCE

L. SEMENOVA	N. IOSELIANI
1. e4	c5
2. Nf3	d6

3. d4	cxd4
4. Nxd4	Nf6
5. Nc3	a6
6. Bg5	e6
7. f4	Be7

Play is proceeding down the main variation of the Sicilian Najdorf. Matters often become exceedingly double-edged when White castles queenside and tries to rip open the centre to get at Black's king.

8. Qf3	Qc7
9. 0-0-0	Nbd7
10. g4	b5
11. a3	Rb8
12. Bh4	Nc5
13. Rg1	b4
14. axb4	Rxb4
15. g5	Nfd7
16. Be1	Qb6
17. Nd5?	

White relinquishes two pieces for a rook to open the e-file, but the sacrifice looks dubious after Black's 21st move.

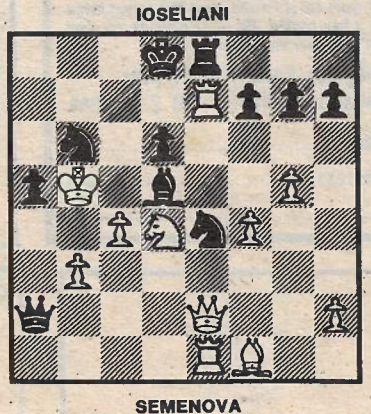
17. ...	exd5
18. Bxb4	Qxb4
19. exd5	Bb7
20. Qe2	Nb6
21. c4	Kd8!
22. Rg3	Re8
23. Re3	Qa4
24. Re1	Bxd5!

Intending 25.cxd5 Nxd5 with numerous threats.

25. Rxe7	Qa1 ch
26. Kc2	Qa4 ch?

This move probably deserves the question mark (indicating mistake) — but I wouldn't bet my Elo rating on it. 26...Be4 ch! should at least draw after 27.Rxe4 Qa4 ch 28.b3 Qa2 ch.

27. b3	Qa2 ch
28. Kc3!?	Ne4 ch
29. Kb4!?!	a5 ch
30. Kb5!?!?	



These women know no fear. Now 30...Nc3 ch forks king and queen, but still fails after 31.Kxb6 Nxe2 32.R(1)xe2.

30. ...	Qa3
31. Rxe8 ch	Kc7
32. Re7 ch	Nd7

This looks a likely spot to hunt for improvements — say 32...Kd8!?

33. Rxd7 ch	Kxd7
34. Ka6!	

The king completes his remarkable march. Ioseliani can still find no way to exploit the position of the arrogant monarch, and shortly it is Semenova who takes over the mating attack.

34. ...	Qb4
35. Nb5	Bc6
36. Qe3	Kc8
37. Bh3 ch	Resigns

MURRAY CHANDLER