

MURRAY CHANDLER

Gone West?

FROM results at the Tunisia Interzonal it is already evident that the latest world championship cycle will be heavily Soviet-dominated. Three of the four qualifying spots were scooped up by Soviet grandmasters — a trend that could easily be continued in the Biel and Mexico Interzonals. The result would be a candidates tournament that resembles a USSR championship instead of an international title match qualification event. Public interest will likely be smothered along with any Western challenge that makes it this far and we will see yet another Soviet v Soviet world championship clash in 1986.

This might not sound unreasonable from the outside. After all, if the Soviets have most of the best players then logically they deserve to have most qualifying spots. Certainly the magnificent form displayed by Artur Yusupov and Alexander Belyavsky in Tunisia can only be admired — Yusupov's winning score placed him 2½ points clear of the nearest Western challenger. Yet there is another variation to be considered here. In ordinary tournaments players such as Timman from Holland, Andersson from Sweden and Miles from England frequently finish ahead of Eastern European competition. So what goes wrong in the interzonals?

One problem is the lamentable conditions offered to the top players, far removed from what a grandmaster would receive in a normal tournament. For the Soviet players, given trainers and regular stipends from the state federation, considerable preparation can be done for these events. The Western GM is lucky if someone pays his ticket. The reasoning of Fide, the World Chess Federation, probably goes that players will accept such treatment because they wish to maintain that small chance of reaching the championship finals. Effectively a sort of emotional blackmail, as though your boss said to you: "If you wish to have any hope of promotion in the next two years, you have to attend this training course for four weeks with no pay. If you are one of the best four to complete the course, you then have to take another harder course with no pay." And so on.

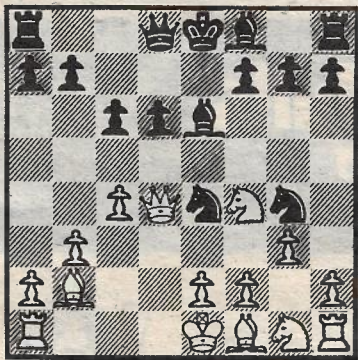
I believe that the withdrawal of England's John Nunn and West Germany's Robert Hubner from the Mexico Interzonal is partly due to these factors. Both of these highly-ranked players must have had good qualification chances; now the field is wide open for the Soviets again. But Fide's recent sweeping changes to the world championship system have made things even worse for the West. The reduction from a three- to a two-year cycle means more unpaid work, and a candidates tournament (instead of matches) means the Soviets could perform as a team to freeze rivals out. We all admire the exemplary skill and brilliance of the top Soviets — but isn't it time we gave our own grandmasters a break too?

Final leading scores in Carthage, Tunisia, were: 1, Yusupov (USSR) 11½ points; 2, Belyavsky (USSR) 11; 3, Portisch (Hungary) 10; 4-5, Chernin and Gavrikov (both USSR) 9½; 6-8, Hort (Czechoslovakia), Sosonko (Holland) and Dlugy (USA) 9; 9, de Firmian (USA) 8½; 10-12, Nikolic (Yugoslavia), Suba (Romania) and Miles (England) 8, etc.

Although I should really give a Yusupov win this week, I cannot resist the following from West Germany, just dictated to me over the phone. As I write, Hubner and Garri Kasparov have begun a six-game practice match in Hamburg — and here is the gripping first game.

ENGLISH OPENING

R HUBNER	G KASPAROV
1. c4	e5
2. Nc3	d6
3. d4	e×d4
4. Q×d4	Nf6
5. g3	Nc6
6. Qd2	Be6
7. Nd5	Ne5
8. b3	Ne4
9. Qe3	Nc5
10. Bb2	c6
11. Nf4	Ng4
12. Qd4	Ne4!!



A sensational shot. The point is that 13. Q×e4 fails to 13. ... Qa5 ch! 14. Kd1 N×f2 ch winning White's queen. So Hubner cannot take the knight, but threat of 12. ... Qa5 ch anyway means he has no time to protect f2.

13. Bh3	Qa5 ch
14. Kf1	Ng×f2
15. B×e6	f×e6
16. N×e6	Kd7!

Now 17. N×g7 fails to 17. ... Rg8, so Hubner tries desperate measures to stay afloat.

17. Nh3	N×h3
18. Q×e4	Re8
19. Nc5 ch	Q×c5
20. Qg4 ch	Kc7
21. Q×h3	Be7
22. B×g7	Rhf8 ch

An obvious sacrifice — the White king is just too exposed.

23. B×f8	R×f8 ch
24. Ke1	Qf2 ch
25. Kd1	Qd4 ch
26. Kc2	Qe4 ch
27. Kd2	Bg5 ch
28. Kc3	Qe5 ch
29. Resigns	

29. Kd3 Qe3 ch 30. Kc2 Q×e2 ch is decisive. ■