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Short lives

NEVER SAY DIE was the moral of a compelling final round at the 18-player Biel Interzonal in Switzerland. On 9½ points, and only four qualification places available, England's Nigel Short had seemed out of the race with one game to go. Rafael Vaganian from the USSR, in an unbeatable lead, had already taken one spot through to the World Championship Candidates Tournament. American Yasser Seirawan, on 11 points, needed only a draw against Soviet Andrei Sokolov to guarantee his berth. The remaining two places seemed certain to go to either Sokolov, Eugene Torre of the Philippines or John van der Wiel of Holland, all on 10½ points.

But as the final 17th round progressed, it became clear a major upset might be on the cards. Seirawan and Sokolov drew as expected but, up on stage, Short had launched a furious assault against van der Wiel's king. Equally critical, the uncomprising Hungarian, Gyula Sax, although out of the running, was fighting against Torre. A hundred extra spectators crowded the Biel auditorium as Short offered pawn and piece sacrifices. When van der Wiel resigned after 30 moves, his kingside in shreds, all eyes switched to the Sax-Torre game. Under pressure the Filipino erred in a knight and pawn endgame and was in a hopeless position by adjournment. Torre's resignation means a three-way play-off between himself, Short and van der Wiel for the last remaining qualification place.

Whatever the result of the play-off, this dramatic last round was the culmination of an impressive comeback by 20-year-old Short. As his second during Biel, I was constantly reassuring him that he still had a chance, but three rounds from the end even I had doubts! Then he beat Torre, and came within a whisker of getting Sokolov (see this week's game for the young Soviet's stunning saving resource). Final results at Biel were: 1, Vaganian 12½ points; 2, Seirawan 11½; 3, Sokolov 11; 4-6, Torre, van der Wiel, Short 10½; 7-9, Andersson (Sweden), Ljubojevic (Yugoslavia) and Polugayevsky (USSR) 9½; 10-11, Sax and Rodrigues (Cuba) 8; 12-13, Jansa (Czechoslovakia) and Quinteros (Argentina) 7½; 14, Petursson (Iceland) 7; 15, Gutman (Israel) 6½; 16, Li Zunian (China) 6; 17, Partos (Switzerland) 4; 18, Martin (Spain) 3½.

Vaganian, playing effortless, fluent chess, was easily the most consistent player, and fully deserved his resounding victory. Seirawan's elevation to the Candidates is a personal breakthrough for the 25-year-old from Seattle. He was the only US participant in all the Interzonals denied extensive financial assistance by

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the American Chess Foundation (apparently as a "punishment" for not playing in the Greece Olympiad); and was second-less in Biel. Sokolov, the third qualifier, was more erratic, but displayed superb depth for a 22-year-old. The way he escaped in this following clash must rank as one of the most imaginative drawing combinations I have ever seen.

SICILIAN DEFENCE

A SOKOLOV N SHORT
1. e4 c5!

Short is not a habitual player of the Sicilian but we had prepared a little surprise for Sokolov, based on his first round game with Sax (given in this column two weeks ago).

2. Nf3 d6
3. d4 cxd4
4. Nxd4 Nf6
5. Nc3 g6
6. Be2 Bg7
7. O-O O-O
8. Bg5 Nc6
9. Nb3 a5!?

Sokolov-Sax had gone 9... a6.

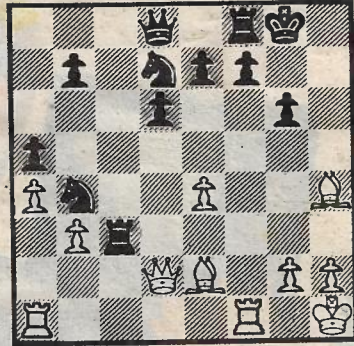
10. a4 Be6
11. f4 Rc8
12. Kh1 Nb4
13. Bh4 Nd7

A strong novelty first played in Nunn-Watson, Commonwealth Championship, London, earlier this year. That game continued 14. Qd2 Bxb3 15. cxb3 Nc5 16. Qd1 Nc6 17. Rc1 Bxc3 18. Rxc3 Nxe4, with advantage to Black. While preparing, Short and I considered it very unlikely Sokolov had seen this game, let alone prepared improvements.

14. f5 Bxb3
15. cxb3 Bxc3
16. bxc3 Rxc3

White's position is critical; if 17. Bc4 Nc2! follows and he remains a pawn down for no compensation. Clutching his head in his hands, Sokolov slumped into thought for 90 minutes. It says much for his mental discipline that he used this time constructively, unearthing the only saving resource.

17. f×g6 h×g6
18. Qd2



18. ... Rc2
19. Qh6 R×e2
20. Rf3

White's idea with the piece sacrifice becomes clear — he wants Rh3 to threaten various checkmates down the h-file.

20. ... Qe8

Incredibly, the only move for Black to draw. On 20... Ne5 comes 21. Bf6! e×f6 22. Rh3. On 20... Qb6 21. Rh3 Qd4 (intending 22. Bf6 Q×a1 ch!! 23. B×a1 Re1 mate) White has 22. Qh7 ch!! K×h7 23. Bf6 dis ch Kg8 24. Rh8 mate.

21. Bf6

Forcing a draw by perpetual check. Weaker are Rh3? f6 and B×e7? Q×e7 22. Rh3 f6 23. Qh8 ch Kf7 24. Rh7 ch Ke6 25. R×e7 K×e7 with too much material for the Queen.

21. ... N×f6
22. Rh3 Nh5
23. R×h5 g×h5

Draw agreed. ■