

CHESS

Dicing with sudden death

by Murray Chandler

LAST MONTH, in London during Wimbledon, I was lucky enough to acquire some centre court seats. Seeing the unfortunate Pam Shriver get resoundingly eliminated by Steffi Graf in just 50 minutes left me wondering whether chess might benefit from a knock-out system.

For years we have had that cumbersome two- to three-year cycle of qualification events: zonals, interzonals, candidates tournaments and candidates matches, topped off by marathon one-to-one world title clashes. Maybe we should just get all the top grandmasters together once a year and play sudden-death until a new champion is found! Of course it would be tough for, say, Boris Spassky to lose in rounds one or two. But, like Boris Becker, he'd just have to toddle home and watch the rest of the competition on TV.

Although the occasional quick-play tournament is run on such a knock-out format, top grandmaster tournaments are almost invariably all-play-all. Traditionally, these involve 10 to 16 participants who play each other once. Whoever gets the most overall points wins, so it is perfectly possible (and not unusual) to finish ahead of an opponent you lost to in an individual game. Recently a refined version has become popular — the double-round all-play-all. Here the number of participants is halved, but they meet each other twice, once with Black, once with White.

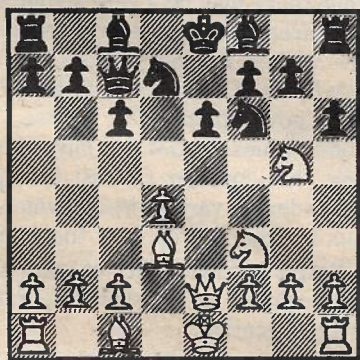
The most recent double-rounder was the third Euwe Memorial mini-tournament in Amsterdam. This comprised only four players: Jan Timman and John van der Wiel from Holland, Soviet ex-world champion Anatoly Karpov and ex-Soviet Viktor Korchnoi, who now represents Switzerland. Korchnoi was effectively out of contention after he lost to his long-time rival Karpov in round four. In the last round Timman survived an endgame a pawn down against Karpov to tie for first place and 12,500 guilders (over \$10,000).

If this following game was played in a knock-out event, it would have to be replayed as it ended in a draw. Yet it was the game of the tournament in Amsterdam. Playing Black, Karpov defended with a variation he used with success in his Candidates match with Andrei Sokolov. But 27-year-old John van der Wiel succeeded where Sokolov had failed, by springing a stunning opening surprise. Only four defence plus an inaccuracy by van der Wiel deprived White of a spectacular quick win.

CARO-KANN DEFENCE

J VAN DER WIEL A KARPOV
 1. e4 c6
 2. d4 d5
 3. Nd2 dxe4

4. Nxe4 Nd7
 5. Bd3! Ngf6
 6. Ng5! e6
 6... h6 7. Ne6! is strong, as 7... fx e6 8. Bg6 mates! 6... g6! is a possible alternative.
 7. N(1)f3 Qc7
 Here 7... h6 8. Nxe6! Qe7 9. 0-0 fx e6 10. Bg6 ch Kd8 11. Bf4 gave White a strong attack for his piece in Geller-Meduna, Sochi 1986.
 8. Qe2 h6



9. Bg6!
 A very nasty shock for Mr Karpov; 9... fxg6 10. Qxe6 ch Be7 11. Qf7 ch Kd8 12. Ne6 is checkmate.

9... hxg5
 10. Bxf7 ch! Kd8
 Again forced, as 10... Kxf7 11. Nxe5 ch Ke8 (11... Kg6 12. Qd3 ch) 12. Qxe6 ch leads to mate as before.

11. Nxe5 Nb6
 12. Bxe6!
 This small mistake allows the former world champion to wriggle out. Instead 12. g3! (preparing for 13. 0-0 or 13. Bf4) is extremely strong. White will inevitably win a third pawn for his sacrificed piece and the Black king is living on borrowed time in the centre.

12... Rxe2!
 13. 0-0 Rh5!
 14. g3

Castling was a clever reply to a clever Karpov defence, but now Black manages to force an endgame. Possibly van der Wiel had assumed 14.Nf7 ch was crushing here, but Black can survive a discovered check with 14... Ke8 15. Bxc8 ch Kxf7.

14... Qe7
 15. Re1 Rxe5
 16. Bxe5 Bxe6
 17. Qxe6 Qxe6
 18. Rxe6 Kd7
 19. Rae1 Nbd5
 20. Bxf6 Nxf6
 21. R(6)e5 b5
 22. c3 a5
 23. Kf1 a4
 24. a3 Nd5

Black's knight occupies the nicely secured outpost on d5. White's nominal advantage (rook and two pawns v bishop and knight) is not enough unless the rooks can properly infiltrate.

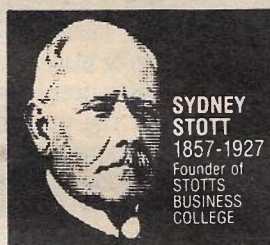
25. Rf5 Be7
 26. Rf7 Rg8
 27. Re2 Ke8
 28. Rf5 Kd7
 29. Rf7 Kd6
 30. Kg2 Kd7

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