

## CHESS

## The greatest?

by Murray Chandler

IT IS GENERALLY considered that Wilhelm Steinitz from Austria became the first World Champion in 1866 by defeating the German Adolf Anderssen. However, the first match in which both players agreed the title was at stake was Steinitz-Zukertort, 1886. In those days holders chose their opponents and set the stakes, which had to be raised by the challenger — who often found this "gold barrier", as Tartakover called it, insurmountable. In 1946 FIDE, the Federation Internationale de Echecs, took advantage of Alexander Alekhine's death to assume control of the competition. A five-man tournament was held, won by Mikhail Botvinnik, beginning an era of Soviet domination that lasted until 1972.

As to who was the greatest champion of them all, a comparison is extremely difficult. The present Elo rating system, as devised by Canadian professor Arpad E. Elo, came into operation only in 1970. Since then the American grandmaster Bobby Fischer has remained king at 2780 Elo points, although the present World Champion, Garri Kasparov, is fast approaching this statistical record.

Botvinnik made the most of a rematch clause in the rules to regain the title twice after losing it. It would be fascinating to see how Alekhine or Jose Capablanca would have adapted to today's sophisticated tournament play. But dogmatists like Steinitz and Nimzovitch, pioneers though they were, would be destroyed by modern grandmasters.

Comparing actual strengths, the modern champions must be stronger than their predecessors. An explosion in chess literature means that even club players now have access to opening and middle-game strategies unknown 40 years ago. My personal all-time list would begin something like: 1. Fischer, 2. Kasparov, 3. Karpov, 4. Spassky. All had (and still have, if one discounts Fischer, who hasn't played a serious game since 1972) some very special quality — even above the enormous technical mastery obviously needed to get anywhere near the chess summit. Tigran Petrosian had an especially unique style. But studying the ultra-subtle manoeuvring of his matches, I cannot believe one can afford the luxury of squandered tempi in today's dynamic game.

Mikhail Tal remains, for me, the most inventive and fearless combinations player, and he still ranks 10th equal in the Elo rankings along with Spassky. His sixth place in the Brussels super-tournament earlier this year was a reasonable finish, but even he found Kasparov a little hot to handle in the final round.

## NIMZO INDIAN DEFENCE

G KASPAROV	M TAL
1. d4	Nf6
2. c4	e6
3. Nc3	Bb4
4. e3	O-O
5. Bd3	d5
6. cxd5	

This is only an obscure sideline in the 463-page Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings,

volume D, but this game may start a new fashion.

6. ...	exd5
7. Nge2	c5
8. O-O	Nc6
9. a3	cxd4
10. exd4	Bxc3

10. ... Bd6 11.f3! is suggested in the Brussels bulletin.

11. bxc3

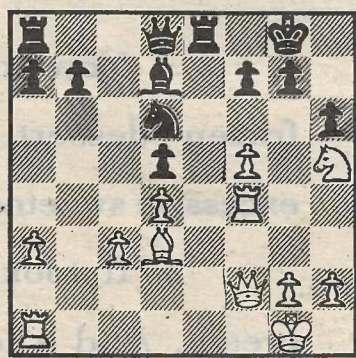
Theory only gives 11.Nxc3; can this obvious recapture with the pawn really be new? White bolsters his centre, and keeps the knight for attacking possibilities via g3 or f4.

11. ...	Ne7
12. Qc2	Bd7
13. Bg5	Ng6
14. f4!	

Surprising and strong; the Black knight on g6, relocated by Tal to bolster his king-side, will be forced to relocate somewhere else. Meanwhile the advancing f-pawn threatens to become a battering ram, smashing open the opponent's defensive pawn cover.

14. ...	h6
15. Bxf6	Qxf6
16. f5	Ne7
17. Ng3	Nc8
18. Rf4	Nd6
19. Qf2!	Rfe8
20. Nh5	Qd8

If 20. ... Qg5 21.Qf3 threatens 22. Rg4 with a winning attack. Now, of course, the logical follow-up 21. f6 is possible but Kasparov spots something even more decisive.



21. Nxg7! Ne4

Capturing the knight will lead to mate: 21 ... Kxg7 22.f6ch followed by 23.Qh4.

22. Bxe4	Rxe4
23. f6	Kh7
24. Rxe4	dxe4
25. Qf4	Bc6
26. Re1	Qf8
27. c4	Qxa3
28. Nf5	Qf8
29. Re3	Bd7
30. Rg3	Bxf5
31. Qxf5 ch	Resigns

31 ... Kh8 32. Rg7 and 33. Qh7 mate decides.

World champions: 1866-1894 W Steinitz (Austro Hungary), 1894-1921 E Lasker (Germany), 1921-1927 J R Capablanca (Cuba), 1927-1935 A Alekhine (Russia/France), 1935-1937 M Euwe (Holland), 1937-1946 A Alekhine (Russia/France), 1948-1957 M Botvinnik (USSR), 1957-1958 V Smyslov (USSR), 1958-1960 M Botvinnik (USSR), 1960-1961 M Tal (USSR), 1961-1963 M Botvinnik (USSR), 1963-1969 T Petrosian (USSR), 1969-1972 B Spassky (USSR), 1972-1975 R Fischer (US), 1975-1985 A Karpov (USSR), 1985- G Kasparov (USSR). ■