



Mikhail Botvinnik

6th World Chess Champion
by Isaak and Vladimir Linder

Foreword by Andy Soltis
Game Annotations by Karsten Müller



The World Chess Champion Series

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2020
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

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ISBN: 978-1-949859-16-4 (print)
ISBN: 949859-17-1 (eBook)

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Published by:
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
P.O. Box 3131
Milford, CT 06460 USA

<http://www.russell-enterprises.com>
info@russell-enterprises.com

Cover by Janel Lowrance

Printed in the United States of America



Table of Contents

Foreword by Andy Soltis

Signs and Symbols

Everything about the World Championships

Prologue

Chapter 1

His Life and Fate

His Childhood and Youth

His Family

His Personality

His Student Life

The Algorithm of Mastery

The School of the Young and Gifted

Political Survey

Guest Appearances

Curiosities

The Netherlands

Great Britain

Chapter 2

Matches, Tournaments, and Opponents

AVRO Tournament, 1938

Alekhine-Botvinnik: The Match That Did Not Happen

Alekhine Memorial, 1956

Amsterdam, 1963 and 1966

Sergei Belavienets

Isaak Boleslavsky

Igor Bondarevsky

David Bronstein

Wageningen, 1958

Wijk aan Zee, 1969

World Olympiads

Hastings, 1934/35, 1961/62, and 1966/67

Groningen, 1946

Aleksandr Ilyin-Genevsky

Paul Keres

Team Events

Alexander Kotov

Grigori Levenfish

Levenfish – Botvinnik match, 1937

Leiden Match-Tournament, 1970

Leningrad, 1934

Leningrad championships, 1926, 1930/31, and 1932

Andor Lilienthal

Milan Matulovic

Matches

Matches for the world championship

Botvinnik – Bronstein, 1951

Botvinnik – Smyslov, 1954

Botvinnik – Smyslov, 1957

Botvinnik – Smyslov, 1958

Botvinnik – Tal, 1960

Botvinnik – Tal, 1961

Botvinnik – Petrosian, 1963

Match-tournament for the world championship, 1948

Match-tournament for the title of Absolute Champion of the USSR, 1941

Monte Carlo, 1968

Moscow championship 1935, 1936

Miguel Najdorf

Noordwijk, 1965

Nottingham, 1936

Palma de Mallorca, 1967

Tigran Petrosian

Ragozin – Botvinnik match, 1940

Sam Reshevsky

N. Ryumin

Lajos Szabo

Sverdlovsk, 1941

Vasily Smyslov

USSR championships

Mark Taimanov

Taimanov – Botvinnik match, 1953

Mikhail Tal

Tournaments

Salo Flohr

Flohr-Botvinnik match, 1933

Chigorin Memorial, 1947

Six-way tournament, 1927

Gideon Ståhlberg

Chapter 3

Chess Creations: His Play, Discoveries, and Trainers

Attack

Aphorisms and Thoughts On Chess

Opening discoveries

Defense

Famous Games

Combinations

Compositions

Method of Preparation for Events

Middlegame

Losses

Endgame

Esthetics

Trainers

G. Goldberg

Ilya Kan

Vyachislav Ragozin

Chapter 4

Writer and Journalist

A Literary Man

About His Matches

About His Tournaments

His Selected Games

“Achieving the Aim”

From the Electrotechnical to Cybernetics

“Analytical and Critical Work”

Chapter 5

Timeless Times

Epilogue

Literature

The world champions on Botvinnik

The “Mikhail Botvinnik” Fund

The Botvinnik Memorial

Significant Dates in the Life and Words of Mikhail Botvinnik

Tournament Record

Match Record

Bibliography

Game Index

Opening Index

Foreword

When Bobby Fischer was storming his way to the world championship, one of the obstacles in his path was Mark Taimanov. The Leningrad grandmaster was Fischer's first opponent in the 1971 Candidates matches. Taimanov badly need advice and he turned to the man he referred to in his writing as "my Teacher."

Botvinnik had only played Fischer once, in a 1962 draw which had become legendary. He was retired from competitive chess and rarely attended major tournaments and matches as a spectator. But he was an ideal adviser because of his ability to analyze players. He dissected them as well as he evaluated positions.

Taimanov discovered that for years Botvinnik had been preparing what he called "dossiers" on each of the great players that he might meet one day over the board. His files went far beyond opening secrets and middlegame habits and included personality details and quirks that Botvinnik had detected and studied. The dossiers were so well researched that the methodology "could be instructive to the KGB," Taimanov said.

The files also revealed some of Botvinnik's idiosyncratic observations. For example, he concluded that if Max Euwe had a choice between two equally good candidate moves – and one of them moved a piece several squares, while the other moved a piece one or two squares – the former world champion would pick the "long" one. "Euwe is a tall man," Botvinnik wrote in the dossier, "and he needs room..."

Botvinnik's file on Fischer, which included improvements in some of Fischer's favorite openings, didn't help. Taimanov was trounced by Bobby 6-0 and his career went into a tailspin. Nevertheless, in 2003 when he wrote his memoirs (*Vspominaya Samykh, Samykh...*), Taimanov spoke of Botvinnik as if he had been the most important figure in his life, even more than his wife, who was also his longtime piano partner. "My entire chess fate is connected to the name Botvinnik," Taimanov wrote.

With the retirement of Vladimir Kramnik in 2019, it may appear that the Botvinnik era has finally ended. The “Patriarch” helped nurture three world champions, Kramnik, Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov. No one else in chess history can make that claim. But to players born since 1990 – and that means roughly half of the world’s top 50 grandmasters today – he is a figure out of the pages of history books.

This book by Isaak and Vladimir Linder will help ensure that he will be more than that to future generations. They will learn about Botvinnik’s pathfinding discoveries in the openings. He was perhaps two or three years ahead of his rivals in many variations. That is not possible today. But you can see how Botvinnik managed to do it with the Winawer Variation of the French Defense. Rival players were stumped by his Winawer in the late-1930s. When they played him years later, armed with improvements for White, they found that that he had discovered new strategies for Black. His opponents fought a losing battle to catch up, until Botvinnik virtually gave up chess for three years after winning the world championship in 1948. By the 1950s, his dominance was gone. Younger opponents had the advantage of energy, endurance – and adopting Botvinnik’s own pioneering method of preparation.

He was unique, even among world champions. He recognized the gap between the Marxist dream and the Soviet reality. But he remained a devout Communist – and Stalin apologist – even in his final days. In 1995, the 83-year-old Botvinnik telephoned another of his former students, Yuri Razuvaev. “I realized why I have lived so long,” he said. Razuvaev expected him to continue with words of wisdom, of why fate had chosen him for a long life. But Botvinnik said: “I was never a patient in a Soviet hospital.” (Three weeks later Botvinnik died, at home as he wished.)

Botvinnik was often super-secretive, even with friends. Taimanov recalled how Soviet sports officials had arranged a training camp for the national chess team before they were to leave for an international team tournament. Botvinnik had a natural loathing of these kinds of camps, where opening secrets were revealed. Instead, Botvinnik asked Taimanov to come to his home one evening, without telling anyone. Taimanov showed up on time. Botvinnik “was, as always, cordial” when he greeted him. But then he locked the door, closed the window and “confidentially” said, “Let us play a blitz match of ten five-minute games. But no one should know of them or the result.”

Taimanov was surprised because Botvinnik had made his hatred of speed games well known. Taimanov won the match 7-3. As he left, Botvinnik said, “Well, Mark Yevgenievich, not a word to anyone. Promise?” Taimanov, the faithful protege, kept the secret for four decades.

Botvinnik’s approach to life was unlike almost all modern grandmasters. He stressed study and self-criticism over tournaments. He told his students to limit

Mikhail Botvinnik: Sixth World Chess Champion

themselves to no more than 50 or so serious games a year. “It is not enough to play chess,” he liked to say. “One must leave time to think about it.” Another of his favorite sayings was, “If you choose a chess career for yourself, you have to learn your entire life.”

Viktor Khenkin, a veteran journalist, recalled how a foreign graphologist wanted to see if the personalities of the world champions could be detected by their handwriting. He got veteran master Yakov Estrin to try to obtain the signatures.

When Estrin asked Vasily Smyslov, Smyslov said, “Try calling me in a month.”

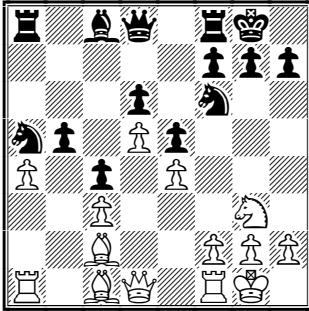
When Estrin called Tigran Petrosian, he answered, “Did Botvinnik agree to this?”

When Estrin encountered Mikhail Tal in a coat room at the Central Chess Club, Tal said “Give me a piece of paper.” With one hand he scribbled his name and used the other to put on his coat.

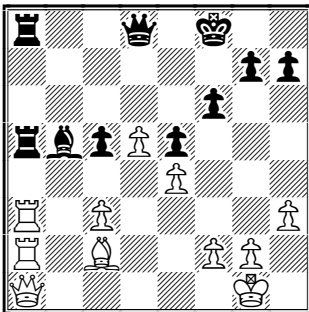
And when Estrin called Botvinnik, he replied, “Tomorrow at 10:35 I will be waiting for you in the laboratory.”

Estrin reported all this to the graphologist. But he didn’t need the handwriting samples anymore. Estrin’s experience revealed all he needed to know about the signers.

Andy Soltis
New York
March 2019

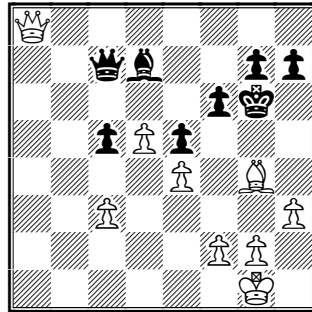


15...bxa4? Regrouping the misplaced knight with 15...d**b7** was better, e.g., 16. d**g5** bxa4 17. d**a4** (17. d**h5** d**g4** 18. d**xf6**+ g**xf6** 19. d**xcg4** f**cg5** 20. d**xa4** d**c5** 21. d**b5** d**cf6**=) 17...h**6** 18. d**xf6** d**cf6** 19. d**e2** d**c5** 20. d**b5** d**b8** 21. d**xc4** d**d7** with compensation for the pawn. 16. d**xa4** d**d7** 17. d**e3** d**c5**? This leads to a strategically lost position. 17...d**xc7** was necessary. 18. d**xc5** d**xc5** 19. d**h5** f**6** 20. d**fa1** d**d7** 21. d**4a3** d**b6** 22. d**d1** d**a7** 23. d**f1** d**fa8** 24. d**e3** d**cf8** 25. d**1a2** d**a6** 26. h**3** d**d8** 27. d**xc4** d**b5** 28. d**xa5** d**xa5** 29. d**a1**



Bondarevsky has installed Alekhine's gun on the a-file. 29...d**xa3** 30. d**xa3** d**xa3** 31. d**xa3** d**c7** The defense 31...d**b6** 32. d**a8**+ d**cf7** 33. d**d1** d**a6** is parried by 34. d**b8** d**e2** 35. d**b3** c**4** 36. d**6** d**e6** 37. d**f8** d**xd6** 38. d**g8**+ d**d7** 39. d**a4**+ d**c7** 40. d**xcg7**+ d**b6** 41. d**d7**+ 32. d**a8**+ d**f7** 33. d**d1**

d**g6**?! 33...d**d7** 34. d**a4** d**xa4** 35. d**xa4** d**e7** 36. d**a6** d**d7** 37. d**b6**+ 34. d**g4** d**d7**



35.d6!? d**xd6** 36. d**d8** The pin is decisive. 36...d**d2** 37. d**xd7** d**e1**+ 38. d**h2** 1-0

In 1948, Bondarevsky participated in the first interzonal tournament, at Saltsjobaden, where he shared sixth/ninth places with Najdorf, Flohr and Ståhlberg. But he did not play in the candidates' tournament because of illness. In the future, Bondarevsky mostly confined himself to trainer's work. He led the student team at the world student Olympiads. He worked with two eventual world champions –



Igor Bondarevsky

Smyslov (1956-1959), and over 10 years later, Spassky. He also prepared three candidates – Keres, Geller, and later Kozlovskaya, who became his wife.

“The main thing a trainer needs,” he said, “is strong nerves and a strong heart!” One day, when a journalist asked Bondarevsky whether he had ever had a “knockdown” in his training work, he replied: “Yes. It was during the ninth game of the Spassky-Keres match. I had already settled in. The game, which would decide the match, was an easy win for Spassky. And suddenly, Spassky made a “long” queen move, after which Paul Petrovich was nearly winning. Any queen move of one or two squares would have won easily...”

On the whole, the Spassky-Bondarevsky collaboration would go down in history as one of the most fruitful ones, reminiscent of the duets Botvinnik-Ragozin, Tal-Koblents, Petrosian-Boleslavsky. Bondarevsky brought a valuable contribution to the theory of openings, working out, together with Tartakower and Makagonov, an original system of play in the Queen’s Gambit. Bondarevsky Memorial tournaments have been held in Rostov-on-Don.

Books: *Twenty Games from the 12th All-Union championship*, Rostov-on-Don 1941; *Soviet Chessplayers in the USA, England and Sweden*, 1955; *1955 Göteborg Interzonal Chess Tournament*, Moscow 1957; *Learn to Play Chess*, Leningrad 1966; *Petrosian-Spassky 1969*, Moscow 1970 (co-author); *Combinations in the Middlegame*, 2nd ed., Moscow 1982.



David Bronstein

Bronstein, David Ionovich (February 19, 1924, Belaya Tserkov, Ukraine-December 5, 2006, Minsk) Russian chessplayer, international grandmaster (1950), played a match for the world championship with Botvinnik in 1951.

In childhood dreams, he would, quite often, promote his pawn to a queen in a game against the second world champion, Emanuel Lasker. In this way, the dream of winning the title of the world’s strongest chessplayer was impressed upon the consciousness of the youngster. At that time, he was studying in the Kiev House of Pioneers, under Alexander Konstantinopolsky, who was destined to become his supporter and trainer in his match against Botvinnik. At 16, David received the silver medal of the Ukraine champion. After the war, he moved to Moscow, where he quickly achieved great successes. 1946 Moscow champion, third prize in the 1945 USSR championship, national champion in 1948 and 1949, winner of the 1948 Stockholm international tournament,

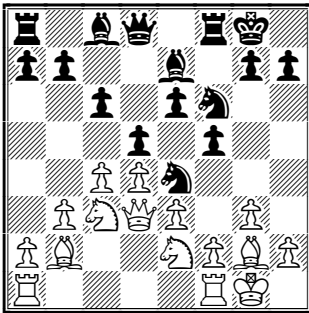
and finally, he shared first and second places with Boleslavsky in the 1950 Budapest candidates' tournament, and victory in a playoff match against Boleslavsky.

In 1951, Bronstein played his match with Botvinnik. This was the first world championship encounter in 14 years – since the Alekhine-Euwe match of 1937. And the grandmasters gave the world a grandiose spectacle. In strategy, tactics, and finally, in the delicacy of their endgame play (many of the games finished deep in the endgame), they proved themselves worthy opponents. We now present one of the best games of the match.

(16) Bronstein – Botvinnik

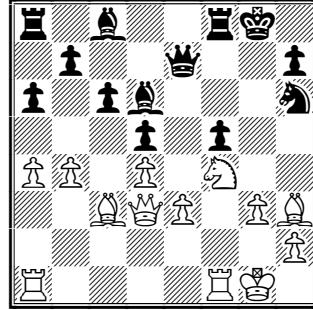
Moscow (m22) 1951
Dutch Defense [A91]

**1.d4 e6 2.c4 f5 3.g3 ♖f6 4.♔g2
♙e7 5.♗c3 0-0 6.e3 d5 7.♗ge2 c6
8.b3 ♗e4 9.0-0 ♗d7 10.♙b2
♗df6 11.♙d3**

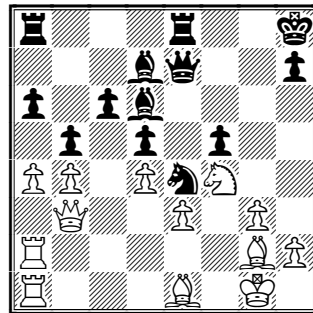


11...g5?! This bold advance is too optimistic. A more solid alternative is **11...b6 12.cxd5?! This exchange frees Black's position.** The direct **12.f3 ♗xc3 13.♙xc3** is more logical. **12...exd5 13.f3 ♗xc3 14.♙xc3 g4 15.fxg4 ♗xg4 16.♙h3 ♗h6** The computer

prefers **16...a5, e.g., 17.♙xg4 fxg4 18.e4 dxe4 19.♙xe4 ♙g5 20.♙xf8+ ♙xf8 21.d5 ♙f5 22.♙d4 ♙e8 23.♗f4 c5 24.♙d2 ♙d6= 17.♗f4 ♙d6 18.b4 a6 19.a4 ♙e7**

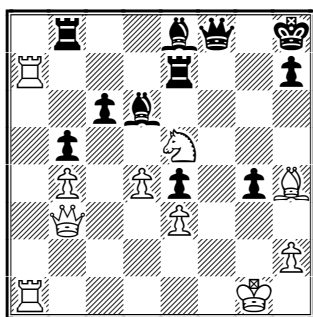


20.♙ab1 The direct **20.b5?!** is probably somewhat stronger. **20...b5 20...♙d7**, to meet **21.b5** with **21...axb5 22.axb5 ♗g4 23.bxc6 bxc6 24.♙b7 ♙fb8=**, was the alternative. **21.♙g2 ♗g4 22.♙d2 ♗f6 23.♙b2 ♙d7 24.♙a1 ♗e4 24...bxa4!?** **25.♙ba2 ♙fb8 26.♙xa4 ♙xb4 27.♙xb4 ♙xb4 28.♙xa6 ♙ab8** is also almost equal and might be easier to play for Black than the game continuation. **25.♙e1 ♙fe8 26.♙b3 ♙h8 27.♙ba2**



27...♙f8?! 27...bxa4 28.♙xa4 ♗f6 29.♙d2 (29.♙xa6 ♙xa6 30.♙xa6 ♗g4=) 29...♗e4 30.♙xe4 fxg4= gives Black sufficient counterplay on the

kingside. **28.♠d3 ♖ab8?!** Now Bronstein can invade on the a-file with gain of time. 28...♗h6! is more active. **29.a×b5 a×b5 30.♖a7 ♖e7 31.♗e5 ♗e8 32.g4 f×g4?** This loses by force as now the floodgates are open. After 32...♗g7, White still has a dangerous initiative as Black's light-square bishop and rook are passive, e.g., 33.♖×e7 ♗×e7 34.♗×e4 f×e4 35.♗g3 ♖c8 36.♗b2 ♗g8 37.♗f2, and White is for choice, but a draw is also still possible. **33.♗×e4! d×e4 34.♗h4**



The awakening of White's sleeping dark-square bishop decides the game. **34...♖×e5 34...♖×a7 35.♖×a7 ♗h6 36.♗g3 ♖c8 37.♗f4 ♗f6 38.♖f7 ♗×f7 39.♗×f7+ ♗g7 40.♗×d6+- 35.d×e5 ♗×e5 36.♖f1 ♗g8 37.♗g3 ♗g7 37...♗×g3? 38.♗c3+ ♗e5 39.♗×e5+ ♗g7 40.♗×g7# 38.♗×g8+ 1-0**

“A beautiful conclusion. Bronstein played the concluding attack excellently, and makes a powerful impression.” (Lilienthal)

Neither Botvinnik nor Bronstein was able to obtain a decisive advantage in the course of the match. In the 23rd game, Botvinnik evened the score. Now it was down to the final encounter, which ended up drawn. With the score 12-12, the champion retained his title.

“I understood,” admitted Bronstein, “that it was impossible to play logical chess against Botvinnik: he would easily break down whatever I could set up. And I constantly set before my opponent non-standard tasks – perhaps, at some point, I overreached. Whatever the outcome, it was an interesting match.”

Here's Botvinnik's opinion of his opponent: “A brilliant master of the attack, able to make original decisions, he flung himself into the match for the world championship, shouldering aside such talented masters as Keres, Smyslov, Boleslavsky etc.

Bronstein did a good job with complex piece play, setting up his pieces quite accurately according to general considerations. In the middlegame, he was dangerous. But where exact analysis was required, where it was necessary to find the exceptions to the rules, Bronstein was weaker. There was also another factor, which allowed me, in circumstances that were unfavorable to me – I had not played one tournament game in the past three years – to hold the match to a draw. This was a matter of personal and competitive shortcomings of my challenger: a tendency to a sort of extravagance and self-satisfaction, and also naivete in his competitive tactics...

Improvisation, playing by inspiration, breadth of view, the desire to introduce something new – these were all characteristics of the young candidate. He experienced a nostalgia for the discarded King's Gambit, and the “pre-rating” times, when the creative approach to chess was valued more than anything, when the spirit of combinations continuously flew over the board.