

MIKHAIL BOTVINNIK (17.8.1911–5.5.1995)

6th World Champion: 1948–1957, 1958–1960 and 1961–1963

During the legendary tournament in Moscow 1925, World Champion José Raoul Capablanca gave up one of his free days, to make the exhausting train journey to Leningrad to give a simultaneous exhibition. He lost one out of 30 games – against the 14 year old Mikhail Botvinnik, who would later become the sixth World Champion in the history of chess. After the game, Capablanca is supposed to have predicted to a third party that a great future lay ahead of the boy who had beaten him. Mikhail Moiseevich Botvinnik himself doubted this version of events years later. He still remembered the silent, thin-lipped way in which Capablanca pushed the pieces together to indicate his resignation.

Whatever may be the truth, such a historical moment would be hardly imaginable in today's circumstances, since nowadays 14 year old "prodigies" are in the habit of giving their own simultaneous exhibitions. However, Botvinnik was no prodigy. He grew up in a dentist's family in Leningrad and in fact came to chess at the unusually late age of 12. "After learning chess too late," he once said, "I would make childish mistakes when I was much more mature." Botvinnik's tiny lack of tactical skills was however seldom apparent because of his powerful strengths. In positional chess and also in the endgame, there was no one who could hold a candle to him. His name became a byword for chess erudition and is irrevocably linked to the successes of Soviet chess.

Although chess had been intensively promoted by the state since the 20s, Botvinnik himself never had such a teacher as he would become for the following generations. "My teachers were chess books, chess magazines and of course my opponents at the board, that is people of my own



Ill. 6: Mikhail Botvinnik

age and chess masters of the older generation. I myself decided what to assimilate from this corps of teachers, and what to reject." Responsibility for oneself and scientific thinking were characteristics, which marked him away from the chess board as well. Professionally speaking, he was an electrical engineer and later held a doctorate in the technical sciences.

METICULOUSLY PLANNED DAYS

The key contribution by this auto-didact was making chess a more scientific game. He subjected above all his own games to pitiless analysis. His investigations into openings sometimes went – and that was unusual in those days – well into the middlegame. This way, he developed a deeper positional understanding than most of his rivals. Botvinnik developed professional methods of preparing for matches and games, some of which appeared comical. For example, in order

to harden himself against noises and smells in matches, he allowed himself to be deafened by loud music, whilst his second Viacheslav Ragozin was asked to blow cigarette smoke into his face.

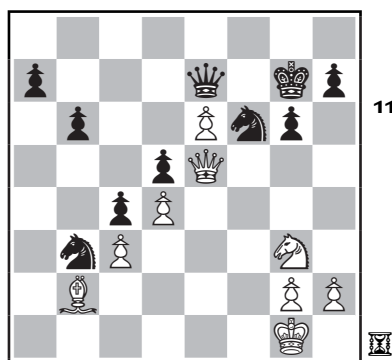
Like a man who loves order in all things, Botvinnik, who was married to a dancer from the Bolshoi Ballet, planned his days meticulously and valued at the same time most highly conscientious physical training. Right into old age, he would do his gymnastic exercises every morning.

He could celebrate his first great success as a twenty year old, when he won in Moscow in 1931 the Championship of the USSR (a title he would win six more times between then and 1952). He managed the breakthrough to being a world class player in the middle of the 30s, with brilliant results in important tournaments. In Moscow 1935, Botvinnik shared first place with Flohr, in Nottingham 1936 he won together with Capablanca, in Moscow 1936 he was second behind Capablanca and in the AVRO tournament of 1938 “only” third (behind Paul Keres and Reuben Fine, but ahead of World Champion Alexander Alekhine and Max Euwe). During the latter tournament in the Netherlands, he played one of

the most famous combinations in the history of chess:

BOTVINNIK – CAPABLANCA
 AVRO-Tournament, Holland 1938
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e3 d5 5 a3 ♘xc3+
 6 bxc3 c5 7 cxd5 exd5 8 ♘d3 o-o 9 ♗e2 b6
 10 o-o ♘a6 11 ♘xa6 ♗xa6 12 ♙b2 ♜d7 13 a4
 ♞fe8 14 ♜d3 c4 15 ♜c2 ♗b8 16 ♞ae1 ♘c6 17
 ♘g3 ♗a5 18 f3 ♗b3 19 e4 ♜xa4 20 e5 ♘d7 21
 ♜f2 g6 22 f4 f5 23 exf6 ♗xf6 24 f5 ♞xe1 25
 ♞xe1 ♞e8 26 ♞e6 ♞xe6 27 fxex6 ♜g7 28 ♜f4
 ♜e8 29 ♜e5 ♜e7



Botvinnik sees red

Mikhail Botvinnik came across as a dry scientist and hardline communist. In an essay written after the sufferings of the Second World War, he even came out, and not for the first time, as an admirer of Stalin. The pamphlet ended with the lines: “Our best masters have a duty to play even harder and to produce even more meaningful works of art for the reputation of our fatherland, the Bolshevik party and our great Stalin.”

But he was humorous and in no way against the good things found in the west. This was made clear, for example, when in 1973 he was on a tour of simultaneous exhibitions throughout Germany. Botvinnik, who had a Mercedes in Moscow, bought a spare part in a garage in Bremen for the car which of course had remained at home. On the occasion he expressed amazement that his noble carriage was beginning to rust and asked about possible causes.

“In Moscow you probably put cattle salt on the roads,” guessed his companion from the Delmenhorst Chess Club.

“Please, what is cattle salt?” asked Botvinnik.

“It is a reddish salt for putting on roads.”

“Everything is red back home, but not the salt!”

Looking at things superficially, Black has no complaints. He has an extra pawn, apparently the white pieces cannot become too dangerous and the passed pawn on the e-file is blockaded. But after the totally surprising... **30 ♖a3!!** ... the cogs in White's machine suddenly mesh. It is fascinating to see how it becomes obvious that the e-pawn is only insufficiently blockaded by the queen. **30... ♗xa3** Nothing was to be hoped for after **30... ♗e8 31 ♖c7+**, e. g. **31... ♖g8 32 ♗e7! ♗g4 33 ♗d7 ♗a8 34 ♗d6** and wins. **31 ♗h5+!** That was the actual point of it all. Botvinnik uses a little combination to swap off the knight on f6, the last defender of Black's king. **31... g×h5 32 ♖g5+ ♖f8 33 ♗×f6+ ♖g8 34 e7** Now the e-pawn's way is cleared, whereas the white king can escape from the checks of the black queen. Computer programs show another way to the win here: **34 ♗f7+ ♖h8 35 g3!**, to hide the king on h3; e. g. **35... ♗×d4** (Or **35... ♗c1+ 36 ♖g2 ♗c2+ 37 ♖h3.**) **36 e7! ♗c1+ 37 ♖g2 ♗c2+ 38 ♖h3. 34... ♗c1+ 35 ♖f2 ♗c2+ 36 ♖g3 ♗d3+** There would be no real difference after **36... ♗×c3+ 37 ♖h4 ♗e1+ 38 ♖h3 ♗e3+ 39 g3. 37 ♖h4 ♗e4+ 38 ♖×h5 ♗e2+ 39 ♖h4 ♗e4+ 40 g4 ♗e1+ 41 ♖h5 1-0.**

MAJESTIC WIN OF THE TITLE

There could be no doubt: like the other young grandmasters Keres, Fine and Flohr, Botvinnik was now a potential WCh candidate. He also came to an agreement with World Champion Alekhine about a match, but the Second World War put paid to such ambitions.

Interestingly, there arose at this time the idea of setting up a chess school, although there were still two and half decades to go until the foundation of the famous Botvinnik School. "The methods of teaching which I use today I had already discovered in 1939," Botvinnik would explain in the 70s. "In the chess club in the Palace of Pioneers in Leningrad they brought together exceptionally talented young chess players, for

example Mark Taimanov. I recognised that theoretically speaking, they were in no way at all inferior to me. So, I decided to treat each one as an individual. But it was always in the presence of the others. Each student received his own homework. The analysis of that homework was then conducted in common."

NEW REGULATIONS FOR THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

In the war and early post-war years, Botvinnik won all the tournaments in which he took part, with as high points the Soviet Championships of 1940 and 1944, as well as Sverdlovsk 1943 and Groningen 1946. In that same year, the Soviet government supported the idea of a WCh match between Botvinnik and World Champion Alexander Alekhine. But these plans came to nought on the death of Alekhine.

Within five short years, three of the heroes of the history of chess had died: Lasker, Capablanca and Alekhine.

The WCh title was now vacant. At this point there occurred a change in the organisation and staging of World Championships: whereas the previous title holders had chosen or turned down their challengers almost according to their whims, the world chess federation FIDE decided at its congress in the Hague 1947 to be responsible for the regulation of the World Championships.

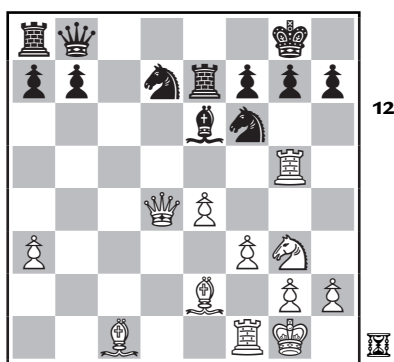
Firstly the new World Champion would be decided in a tournament between the six best players in the world. It would be played from the beginning of March till the middle of May in the Hague and Moscow. The US American Reuben Fine, a practising psychoanalyst, withdrew for professional reasons, so that finally there were only five players, who would play against each other 5 times each. As well as Botvinnik, there were Max Euwe, Paul Keres, Vassily Smyslov and Samuel Reshevsky.

Indicative of what would be Botvinnik's majestic tournament victory was a brilliant final com-

ination against Keres, with which he distanced himself from his pursuers in the second of the five rounds:

BOTVINNIK – KERES
 WCh-Tournament, the Hague 1948
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♘b4 4 e3 o-o 5 a3
 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♗e8 7 ♗e2 e5 8 ♗g3 d6 9 ♗e2
 ♗bd7 10 o-o c5 11 f3 cxd4 12 cxd4 ♗b6 13
 ♘b2 exd4 14 e4 ♗e6 15 ♖c1 ♗e7 16 ♗xd4
 ♗c7 17 c5 dxc5 18 ♖xc5 ♗f4 19 ♗c1 ♗b8 20
 ♖g5 ♗bd7



21 ♖xg7+! ♗xg7 22 ♗h5+ ♗g6 There was also no hope after 22...♗h8 23 ♗xf6 ♗e5 (Or 23...♗e5 24 ♗b2.) 24 ♗b2! ♗xd4+ 25 ♗xd4. 23 ♗e3! There is nothing left against 24 ♗g5 mate or 24 ♗h6 mate. 1-0.

Three rounds before the end of the tournament, Botvinnik had already won it. He finally collected 14 points out of 20 games – three points ahead of Smyslov (11), followed by Reshevsky and Keres (10.5) and Euwe (4).

LACK OF MATCH PRACTICE, IMAGINATIVE CHALLENGER

Botvinnik was World Champion – and had a rest from competitive play of three years. During that time, he devoted himself much more to his scientific work, the construction of power stations and

high energy technology. And he wrote his dissertation, which was later published under the title “Theory and possible uses of unsynchronised synchronous machines”.

As usual, Botvinnik prepared meticulously for the forthcoming WCh match in 1951, but his lack of playing practice would be felt by the now 39 year old champion. The challenger was his 13 year younger compatriot David Bronstein, who had surprisingly won the Interzonal Tournament in 1948, although he only gained entry as a substitute. Bronstein had also come through the 1950 Candidates Tournament in the lead, together with Isaac Boleslavsky, whom he eliminated in a tie-break which was set for 14 games.

State promotion of chess in the Soviet Union had long since borne fruit. This would become even clearer in the future: all nine WCh matches between 1951 and 1969 were played between Soviet grandmasters, always in the spring in Moscow.

The same was the case in 1951. After falling behind at one point, by the half-way point of the 24 game match Botvinnik was leading Bronstein 6.5:5.5. This seemed to be enough, since the titleholder only needed a 12:12 draw. Botvinnik did not seem to have the same certainty as before his pause from chess, and moreover he had to deal with an imaginative, tactically well-versed opponent. A bitter struggle ensued, and after two defeats in games 21 and 22, to everyone’s surprise Botvinnik trailed by 10.5:11.5.

THE ADJOURNMENT OF HIS LIFE

Only two more rounds to play. Botvinnik was about to face, as he formulated things later, the most difficult and important game in his life. After a rather barren 23rd game, in which Botvinnik had White, it came down to an ending in which he had the bishop pair and five pawns, whilst Bronstein held a (meaningless) extra pawn and a passive knight pair. The game was adjourned after 41 moves. In analysing the adjourned game,

Botvinnik noticed that he had not sealed the strongest move. With best defence, Bronstein could reach the draw and move one big step closer to winning the title. But two moves after the restart, Bronstein committed an imperceptible error, with the result that Botvinnik could manage to win the endgame in masterful fashion. (Rumours arose later, claiming that Bronstein had had to lose this game on purpose on orders from “above”, because Botvinnik certainly had influence in the highest state and political circles. These proved to be unfounded.)

In the last game, Botvinnik reached a draw from a stronger position – he had an extra pawn – in order to retain his title. Result 12:12.

Botvinnik recognised that by having so little playing practice he was gambling with his title. So he began to play in tournaments again. He was only fifth in the USSR Championship in 1951, but a year later he would recover his title as national champion (after a tie-break match with Mark Taimanov).

BOTVINNIK MAKES TWO COMEBACKS

It is a curious fact that between 1948 and 1963, Botvinnik held the world title with two interruptions of one year each, but that he could only win 2 out of his 7 WCh matches (in 1958 against Vassily Smyslov by 10.5:8.5 and in 1961 against Tal by 13:8). Two of the matches were drawn 12:12 (1951 against Bronstein and 1954 against Smyslov) and he lost three (1957 by 9.5:12.5 against Smyslov, 1960 against Tal by 8.5:12.5 and 1963 against Tigran Petrosian by 9.5:12.5). In the traditional pattern, the World Champion had the right to a return match should he be defeated in the World Championship match. That had been the decision of the 27th FIDE congress in 1956.

Botvinnik twice resorted to this right to a return match, and on both occasions (against

Smyslov in 1958 and against Tal in 1961) he won back the title he had lost a year before. But what was possible against a Tal struck by illness in 1961 could not be repeated two years later: in 1963, Botvinnik had to bow to his new challenger Tigran Petrosian and with him the younger generation. The right to a return match had been taken away in the meantime. Botvinnik never made another attempt at the title.

IN THE LEGENDARY BOTVINNIK SCHOOL

He did successfully participate in a few tournaments in the years which followed, but in 1970 the patriarch, as he was respectfully called by his compatriots, ended his career. From now on he dedicated himself above all to two projects: the development of a valid chess computer that could “think” like a grandmaster, and the chess school which was named after him.

The latter provided pioneering successes. Three times a year, the 20 most talented schoolboys and schoolgirls from the whole Soviet Union met in a single place. Many brought their parents or their local trainer with them. The courses mainly lasted for 10 days in winter and 30 days in summer. Gently but firmly, the pupils were given instruction by Botvinnik and his assistants. They were called on to give proof not only of their chess performance, but also of school work and physical fitness. At the end of each course, when people’s individual strengths and weaknesses had been determined, each student received from the master himself individual homework to take away.

The concept proved itself: among the graduates of the famous Botvinnik school were the later World Champions Karpov, Kasparov and Kramnik.

Botvinnik died on the 5th May 1995 at the age of 83.

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GAME TWELVE: LEKO’S PREFERENCE FOR DOUBLED F-PAWNS

For days, we have not seen the sun in Tessin. Heavy clouds hang about the peaks around Lake Maggiore. It has become cool and damp. In the minutes before the twelfth game, there appears to be a special tension in the air, although things look as they usually do. Firstly, Kramnik comes quickly into the CENTRO DANNEMANN with his second Miguel Illescas. As has been the case in the earlier games, his two other seconds Peter Svidler and Evgeny Bareev have remained in the Hotel Ascona.

Another ritual is repeated when Leko and his entourage get out of their limousine. On this occasion the two obligatory kisses which Leko receives from his wife Sofia before and after each game were to occur on either side of an almost four hour long struggle, during which the 25 year old seemed to be at a clear disadvantage.

“I underestimated the strength of the move queen to h7,” said Leko after the game during which he had taken two very bold decisions. On move 23 – to general astonishment and just as he had done in the tenth game – he allowed his pawn structure to be ruined and soon afterwards followed up with an apparently foolhardy pawn push.

Kramnik went on to admit that he had overestimated his chances. “I thought that from the strategic point of view the game had to be over

after the bishop took on f6.” But tactical reasons meant that things were not as simple as that. “It was difficult for me to organise some play for my pieces and to get my knight on to f5 or c4 or e4.” He felt that finally the game had slipped out of his control a little. “Objectively speaking, Black is somewhat better in the final position,” thought Kramnik. “OK, perhaps I can find a few tricks, but I am two pawns down.”

But despite his advantage in material, Leko did not want to take any risks and offered a draw shortly before the first time control. “All sorts of things might still have happened in time trouble.” He said he had had nightmares at points during the game, “so I was pretty happy to bring this very, very difficult game to a conclusion.”



Ill. 42: Vladimir Kramnik is pleased with himself

GAME TWELVE

VLADIMIR KRAMNIK – PETER LEKO

14.10.2004

Caro-Kann Defence

Notes by Artur Yusupov & Christopher Lutz

1 e4 c6

Leko changes his defence again, trying to avoid the preparation of the Kramnik team. That sounds like a reasonable strategy, but it turned

out that the world champion is very well prepared anyway.

2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 d×e4 4 ♘×e4 ♙f5

Black plays the classical line which has undergone a new boost in popularity recently.

4... ♘d7 has been the long-time favourite of former world champion Anatoly Karpov.

5 ♘g3 ♙g6 6 h4 h6 7 ♘f3 ♘d7 8 h5 ♙h7 9 ♙d3 ♙×d3 10 ♖×d3 e6 11 ♙f4 ♖a5+

11... ♘gf6 12 o-o-o ♙e7 is the modern line, with

Black castling short and White trying to attack on the kingside. Leko settles for an older, more solid line.

12 ♔d2 ♖c7

It is important for Black to control the diagonal b8-h2.

13 0-0-0 ♘gf6 14 ♘e4

The main move in this position, which Leko played himself with White. White wants to prepare g2-g3.

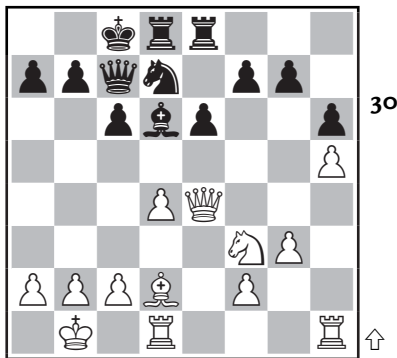
14...0-0-0 15 g3 ♘xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♔d6

Black prevents ♔f4.

17 ♖b1

17 ♖e2 is an alternative.

17...♗he8



Black brings his rook into the game and is ready to meet c2-c4 with ...c6-c5. Kramnik thought for some time now and came up with an inspired idea.

18 ♖h7!? ♗g8

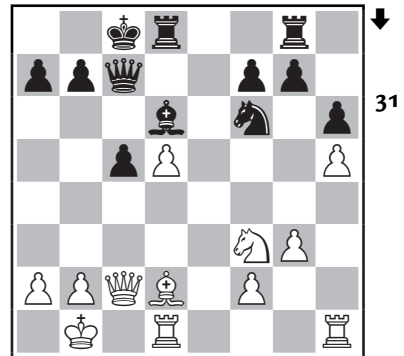
18...♔f8 is possible, but then Black must be ready to deal with 19 ♔f4 ♖b6 20 c4;

18...♗h8 is an interesting move. Leko was not sure if the whole line was a home analysis of Kramnik and was afraid of 19 ♖xg7 ♗dg8 20 ♖xf7 ♗f8 21 ♖g7 ♗fg8 22 ♔xh6 ♗xg7 23 ♔xg7 with a very strange position.

19 c4 c5 20 d5!

White starts to put a lot of pressure on the black position. Kramnik likes positions with a passed pawn and plays them really well.

20...♘f6 21 ♖c2 exd5 22 cxd5



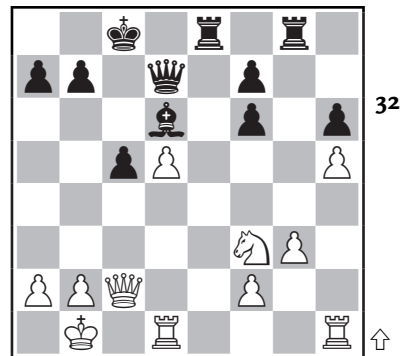
22...♖d7?!

An interesting idea to solve Black's problems was 22...♔e7! (22...♘d5? loses to 23 ♖f5+). Then 23 ♔f4 ♔d6 24 ♔e3 avoid a repetition of moves, but then the white bishop is not on the long diagonal!

23 ♔c3! ♗de8

A very unusual decision, which resembles game 10. Again Leko gets a terrible pawn structure, but hopes to get some dynamic compensation.

24 ♔xf6 gxf6



25 ♖d3

White wants to control the e2-square and to bring the knight into the game. If that knight could reach the f5-square, Black's position would be hopeless. 25 ♘d2 ♗e2 26 ♖d3 (26 ♖h7 ♗ge8 27 ♘c4 ♗xf2 28 ♘d6+ ♖xd6 29 ♖xh6 ♗ee2 -+) 26...♗ge8 27 ♘c4 ♗xf2 28 ♗hf1 fails

to 28...♙xg3. An interesting option was 25 ♖h4 ♜g5 26 ♜g2 ♜ge5 27 ♜e3 ±.

25...f5

If 25...♜g4, then 26 ♜he1 ±.

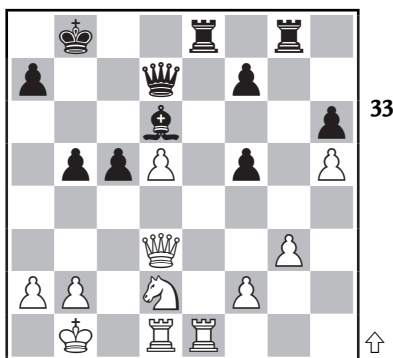
26 ♜d2

26 ♜h4 ♜e4 (26...f4 27 ♜f5) 27 ♜f3 ♜g5 is not clear.

26...b5!

Another brave decision. Black has such a strategically dangerous position that he cannot be afraid anymore! If 26...f4, then 27 ♜e4 ±.

27 ♜he1 ♝b8



33

28 ♜c3

Kramnik creates two threats: ♜b3-a5 and ♜f6, but perhaps this move is too sophisticated.

But also 28 ♜f3!? (If 28 a3, then 28...c4 29 ♜d4 f4) 28...f4 (28...♜xe1 29 ♜xe1 f4 30 ♜e5 ♙xe5 31 ♜xe5 ± looks very promising for White.) 29 ♜xe8+ (29 gxf4 c4) 29...♜xe8 30 gxf4 c4 31 ♜c2 ♙xf4 32 a4 a6 33 axb5 axb5 gives Black counterchances.

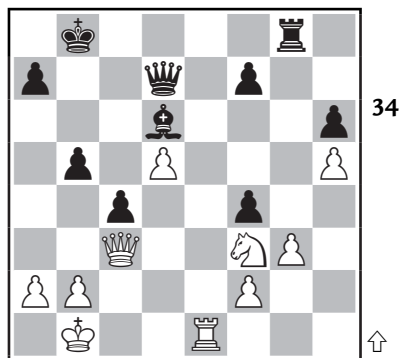
28 a4! with a clear advantage might be better; with this intermediate move White weakens the square b6 (after 28...a6) and in some variations the white king could escape to a2 too. Compared to the game continuation this could be a certain improvement.

28...♜xe1 29 ♜xe1 c4! 30 ♜f3

Leko was afraid that White might play the useful a2-a3, but could not indicate when would be the right moment for this move.

Also here 30 a4!? creates some serious problems for Black (30 ♜f6 ♙c7; 30 b3 cxb3 31 ♜xb3 f4). He must try 30...♙c5!? (30...a6 31 axb5 axb5 32 ♜d4 ±) 31 ♜f3 ♜d8 32 axb5 ♜xd5 33 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 34 ♜e2 f4 35 g4 f5 ±.

30...f4!



34

Black must not hesitate. 30...♜e8 31 ♜d4 is better for White (31 ♜e5!? ♙xe5 32 ♜xe5 is also better for White).

31 g4

An interesting attempt to keep the the kingside closed. 31 ♜d4 fxg3 32 fxg3 ♝b7 gives Black good counterplay. 31 ♜e5!? ♜f5+ 32 ♝a1 fxg3 33 fxg3 is interesting.

31...♙c7!

The right defence. Black attacks the d5-pawn and wins time to consolidate his position. Black's bishop will be well placed on b6, covering the black king. 31...♜xg4 32 ♜f6 ♜d7 33 ♜e5 ♙xe5 34 ♜xe5+ ♝a8 35 d6 ± is very dangerous for Black.

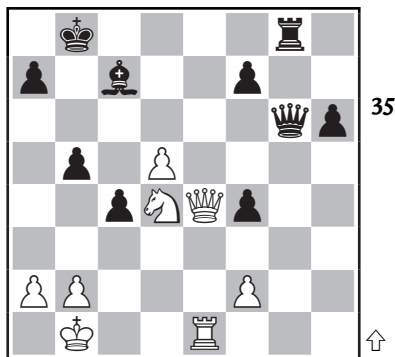
32 ♜d4

It looks like Kramnik missed something. The position starts to get out of control. 32 ♜d1 ♜xg4 33 d6 (33 a4!? ♜xh5 34 axb5 ♜d8 35 ♜d4 ♜f5+ 36 ♝a2 ♜xd5 37 ♜xc4 ♜d3 with counterplay) 33...♙b6 34 a3 (34 ♜d5 b4!) 34...♜xh5 is also very complicated.

32...♜xg4 33 ♜e4

33 d6 ♜f5+ 34 ♝c1 ♙b6 35 ♜d2 ∞.

33...♜xh5! 34 ♜d4 ♜g6



Here Leko offered a draw, both sides had about 7 minutes left here. Kramnik accepted the draw since he does not want to risk all of his remaining chances. Black has the very annoying resource ... Re8 here which makes White's task difficult. If White wants to play for a win, he must play 35 Nf5 , but probably Black is sim-

ply better then. The line 35 Kxg6 looks more reasonable, but White cannot get more than a draw there. Perhaps Leko should not offer a draw here, but should play the move and leave Kramnik with a difficult decision. As in game 10, Kramnik came close to winning the game, but Leko defended really well and held the draw.

- 35 Nxb5?? Re8!! -+ ;
- 35 d6?? Re8 36 dxc7+ (36 Nc6+ Qb7 37 Na5+ Qb6 -+) 36... Qc8 -+ ;
- 35 Nf5 Nd8 (35... $\text{Nd6!?$);
- 35 $\text{Kxg6!?$ fxg6 36 Re7 a6 (36... g5 37 d6 Qxd6 38 Nc6+ Qc8 39 Nxa7+ = ; 36... Qb6 37 Nc6+ Qa8 38 d6 Rc8 39 Ne5 is risky for Black, because the d6-pawn could be very dangerous.) 37 d6! Qxd6 38 Nc6+ = .

1/2-1/2

Match score: Kramnik - Leko **5.5:6.5**



Ill. 43: Post game analysis