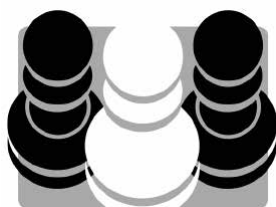


Boris Spassky's Best Games 2

By

Tibor Karolyi



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Preface

Welcome to the second volume dedicated to Boris Spassky's life and chess career. Having ended *Boris Spassky's Best Games 1* at the end of 1968, we will rejoin Spassky's story in the run-up to the second World Championship match in which our protagonist challenged Tigran Petrosian. Just like three years earlier, their match was closely contested, but this time Spassky was able to dethrone the great Armenian. Three years later, Spassky would face Bobby Fischer in Reykjavik, in what would become the most famous chess match of all time. I gave a detailed account of that match in *Fischer – Spassky 1972*, so this book will feature heavily shortened coverage of the match, focusing on Spassky's perspective.

Despite his historic loss to Fischer in 1972, Spassky remained an elite player for the next decade or so. The famously strong Soviet Championship had one of the most formidable line-ups in its rich history of 1973, and Spassky won the tournament a full point clear of his nearest rivals. However, he was defeated by a streaking Karpov at the semi-final stage of the next round of Candidates matches.

In 1975, Spassky married a French lady of Russian origin. He moved to France the following year and became a French citizen in 1978. He remained a top-ten player and tied with Karpov for first place at the 1978 super-tournament in Bugojno, as well as qualifying for further Candidates matches over the years.

Spassky enjoyed life in France with his family in the 1980s. His chess level remained high, although he played in fewer events and his openings lost some of their sharpness. In 1992, twenty years after the Reykjavik match, Spassky took part in a lucrative rematch against Fischer. Spassky lost the match but achieved a higher percentage score than in 1972; and even with the loser's share of the purse, Spassky was financially set for life. He still loved chess and continued to play in whichever events appealed to him.

This book contains many of Spassky's masterpieces, starting from his 1969 match against Petrosian, all the way through to the 2000s when he played some exhibition matches against fellow chess legends such as Karpov, Portisch and Korchnoi.

I would like to give special thanks to Spassky's youngest son, also named Boris, for providing some photos from the Spassky family archive.

On the 27th of February, 2025, while this book was being edited, Boris Vasilyevich Spassky passed away at the age of 88. His name will be remembered for as long as the game of chess exists.

Tibor Karolyi
Soltvadkert, March 2025

Publisher's Foreword

Like the rest of the chess world, every member of the Quality Chess team was saddened by the recent news of Boris Spassky's passing. Unfortunately, none of us had the pleasure of meeting the tenth World Champion; but during the course of publishing these two volumes, we greatly enjoyed learning about his remarkable life. (And let us recall that the young Boris barely escaped with his life when fleeing the siege of Leningrad in 1942, at the age of five, with his older brother and their mother.)

While editing the first volume, I loved reading the following quote from Miguel Najdorf, cited by Andrew Soltis, which can be found on page 196 of *Boris Spassky's Best Games 1*:

"Spassky will never become World Champion. He loves life too much!"

As we know, Najdorf's prediction was wrong – but the thing that made me happiest is not that Spassky became World Champion. It's the fact that he did it while living his life unequivocally on his own terms. Whether it was *"lying on a sun-drenched Cuban beach, enjoying a book"*, as Soltis puts it when framing the above quote from Najdorf, or driving his coaches crazy by playing tennis when he should have been preparing to face Fischer, Boris Vasilyevich always marched to his own drum. Of course, he must have loved the game of chess and worked hard, at least some of the time, to achieve what he did. But chess was not remotely close to being his whole life. Rather, my impression is that chess gave Spassky the means to live the kind of richly fulfilling life that made him happy. Travelling the world, enjoying the company of the ladies and – following the 1972 match with Fischer – becoming a wealthy man. Married three times, Spassky fathered a daughter (1960), a son (1967) and another son (1980) with each wife respectively. I would like to express our utmost gratitude to Boris Spassky junior, Boris Vasilyevich's youngest son, for supplying the photos found on the next five pages.

In the days following Spassky's death, I read numerous tributes posted on social media by members of our community. Some were written by players who knew him well, while others had only met him briefly at a tournament or simultaneous exhibition. Time after time, those who met him would refer to Spassky's warmth, sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct. I salute Spassky for his chess brilliance and, more importantly, for a life well lived.

Andrew Greet
Glasgow, April 2025



Spassky was well known to enjoy a game of tennis



*Spassky is to the left, wearing white. How many other chess players can you identify?
The player holding the football might be recognized by some...*



*Spassky at the opening ceremony of the 1973 IBM tournament,
with Petrosian (left of photo) and the Mayor of Amsterdam (centre)*

1978

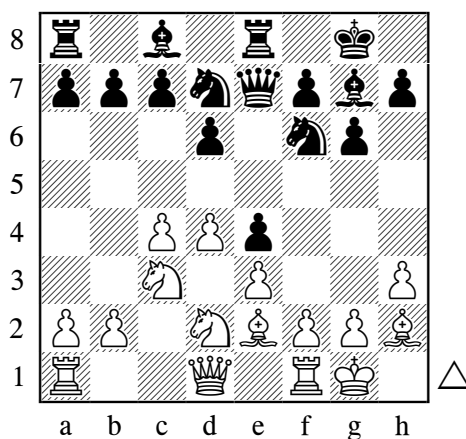
Spassky played in the extremely strong tournament in Bugojno, Yugoslavia, which started at the end of February. In Round 1 he sacrificed a pawn. In the beginning he had enough play, but gradually ran out of play and lost. In the next game he played a risky opening, but his opponent was looking to keep things balanced and the game ended in a draw. Then Spassky as White beat Vlastimil Hort in a long ending, which his opponent could have held. In the fourth round Robert Byrne caught him in a sharp Sicilian, but the American repeatedly failed to finish things off and before the time control Spassky took over and caught Byrne's king. We will take a look at Spassky's next game.

Game 62

Boris Spassky – Enver Bukic

Bugojno 1978

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♙f4 ♙g7 4.e3 0–0 5.♙e2 d6 6.0–0 ♘bd7 7.h3 ♚e8 8.c4 e5 9.♙h2 ♚e7
10.♘c3 e4 11.♘d2 ♞e8



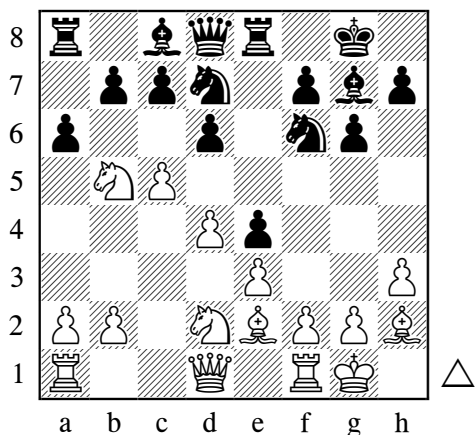
12.♘b5!

Spassky wants to open up the queenside.

12...♚d8

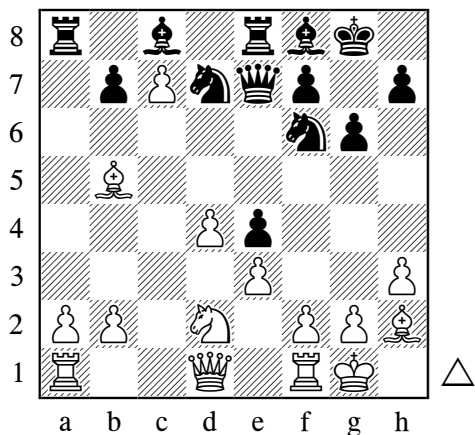
After 12...♘b8 13.b4 White would be clearly better.

13.c5 a6

**14.cxd6!**

Spassky trades a piece for three pawns, one of which will stand one step away from the promotion square.

14...axb5 15.dxc7 ♖c7 16.♙xb5 ♙f8

**17.♘c4**

Black's task is not easy. There is no direct threat and it is hard to tell what Black should be aiming for, as there is no way of removing the annoying c7-pawn.

17.♙b3!? would also be highly promising. After 17...♙g7 (or 17...♙b4 18.♙fd1 18.♙fd1 White may push the d-pawn.

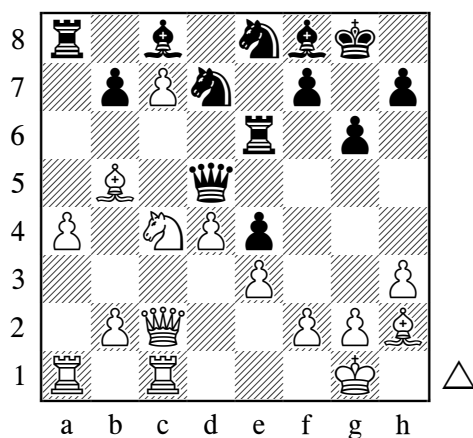
17...♙e6 18.♙c2

Spassky builds up the position patiently.

18.a4 ♘d5 19.a5 ♙e7 20.♙c2 ♙g7 21.♙fc1 would be another option.

18...♙d5?!

Possibly 18...♘d5 19.a4 ♙b4 would give Black better chances.

19.a4 ♙e6 20.♙fc1 ♘e8**21.♙c3**

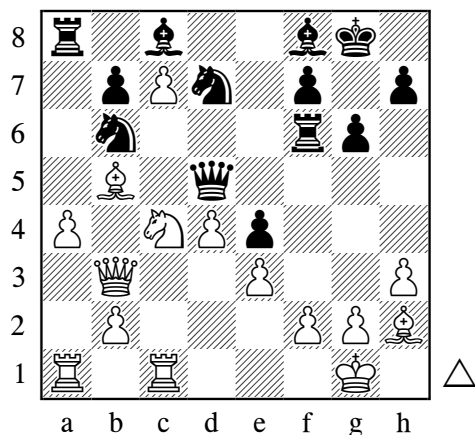
Spassky is playing in practical fashion and is in no hurry.

However, after 21.b4 ♙xb4 (or 21...♘ef6 22.♘e5 with the nasty threat of ♙c4) 22.♙ab1 ♙f8 23.a5 h5 24.♙xd7 Black is lost; the knight fork on b6 will win material.

21...♘ef6 22.♘e5 ♘b6 23.♘c4 ♘fd7

On 23...♘bd7, White is dominating on the queenside after 24.b4.

24.♙b3 ♙f6

**25.♙xd7?**

Spassky exchanges in order to invade, but doing it with 25.a5! is stronger. After 25...♘xc4 26.♙xc4 ♖f5 27.♗f1 ♙d6 (or 27...♗xa5? 28.g4! and the a5-rook loses the protection of his queen) 28.♙xd6 ♗xd6 29.f3 White is crashing through on the f-file.

25...♘xd7 26.♖b5 ♖f5 27.♙g3 ♗fa6

Black threatens to take the queen.

Stopping the d-pawn is also possible: 27...♗c6! 28.b3 (Not 28.d5? ♗c5.) 28...♘f6 29.♘b6 ♖xb5 30.axb5 ♗xa1 31.♗xa1 ♗xb6 32.♗a8 ♙e6 33.♗d8 ♘g7 34.♙e5 h5 Black is likely to hold.

28.d5

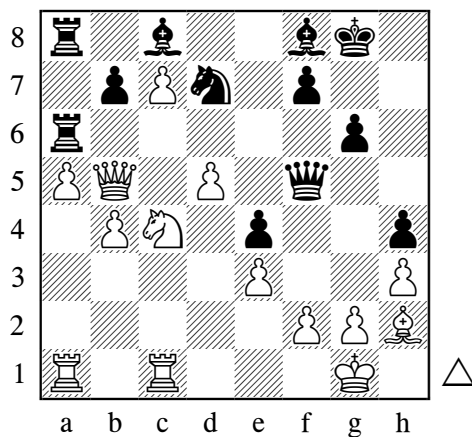
Spassky finally pushes a pawn, the first of several pawn moves.

28...♖f6??

There is no time for Black to delay his play on the kingside. He needs to act immediately: 28...h5! 29.♗f1 (Or 29.a5 g5.) 29...g5 30.f3 (Not 30.a5?? h4 31.♙h2 g4.) 30...h4 31.♙h2 ♗f6 32.♗ac1 ♖g6 Black is in the game.

29.a5! h5 30.b4

30.d6! is even stronger.

30...h4 31.♙h2 ♖f5**32.♗f1!**

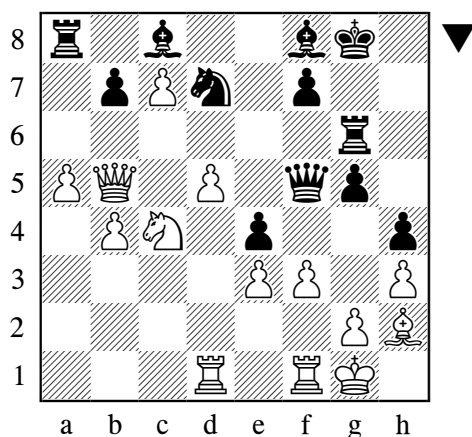
Opening the f-file will crack open Black's position.

32...g5

White will also win after 32...♗f6 33.♗ad1 g5 34.♗d4 b6 35.♖a4 g4 36.hxg4 ♖xg4 37.f3 winning the e4-pawn.

33.f3! ♗g6 34.♗ad1?

A mistake. After 34.fxe4! ♖xe4 35.♗ad1 g4 36.♗d4 White has activated his rook and wins.

**34...exf3! 35.♗xf3 ♖c2!**

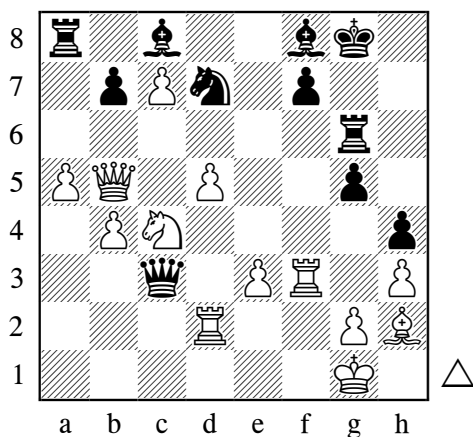
The queen attacks the rook, winning a vital tempo.

36.♞d2

36.♞f1 allows sufficient counterplay for Black with 36...g4!.

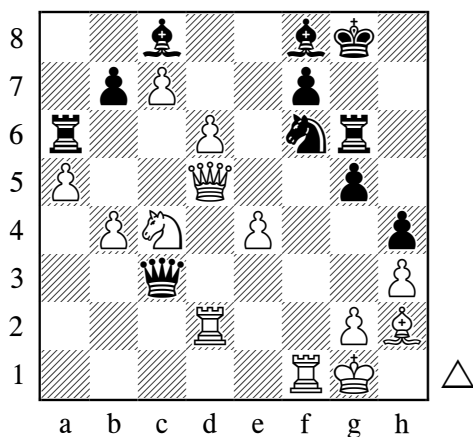
36...♞c3?

Bukic goes after the b4-pawn, but he does it too slowly. The check wins the b4-pawn: 36...♞b1†! 37.♞f1 ♞xb4 38.♞b2 ♞xb5 39.♞xb5 Black is in the game after either 39...♙c5 40.♞fb1 ♙h7; or 39...♞ga6 40.♞fb1 f6.

**37.d6!**

From now on this pawn paralyses Black.

37...♞a6 38.e4 ♞c1† 39.♞f1 ♞c3 40.♞d5 ♞f6

**41.♞xf6**

Bukic resigned.

1-0

After a draw against Portisch, Spassky met Larsen. It would prove to be a short encounter.

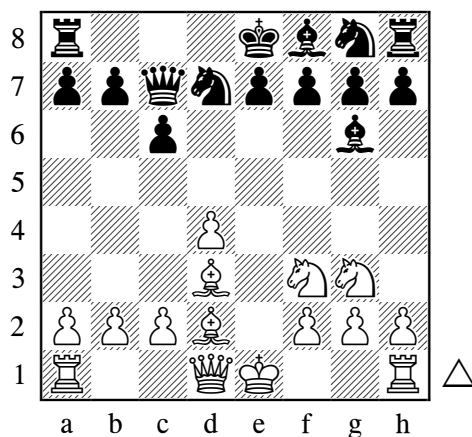
Game 63

Boris Spassky – Bent Larsen

Bugojno 1978

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♙f5 5.♘g3 ♙g6 6.♘f3 ♘d7 7.♙d3 ♞a5†

Larsen meets a rare move with a new idea. But all of 7...♘gf6, 7...e6 or 7...♙xd3 8.♞xd3 ♘gf6 look simpler.

8.♙d2 ♞c7**9.♙xg6!?**

This capture slightly changes the structure compared with the Caro-Kann main lines. A white knight may now stand well on the g5-square.

9...hxcg6 10.♞e2 e6 11.♘e4!

Spassky uses the chance to place his knight on e4, already eyeing the g5-square.

11...0-0-0?

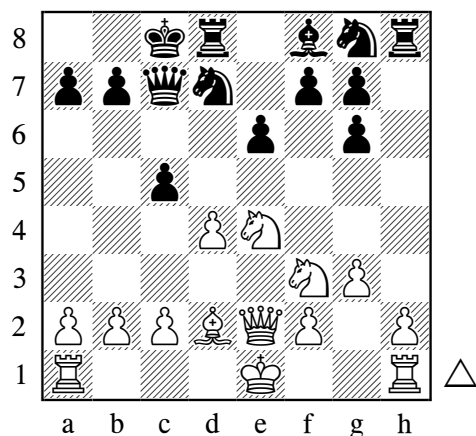
Long castling in this position is rather risky.

11...♖gf6 12.♗eg5! is unpleasant for Black; better is 11...♙e7!, although after 12.0-0-0 c5 (or 12...♗gf6 13.♗eg5) 13.d5 exd5 14.♗c3 d4 15.♗d5 ♖d6 16.c4 ♗f8 the position is dangerous for Black.

12.g3! c5?

Larsen is seriously behind in development, so opening the position is suicide. It is hard to speculate what Larsen missed as this move so badly loses.

With 12...♗df6 13.♗eg5 ♗h7 Black would be worse, but not lost.

**13.♙f4! ♖c6**

On 13...♖a5† White wins with 14.c3 cxd4 15.♖c4†!.

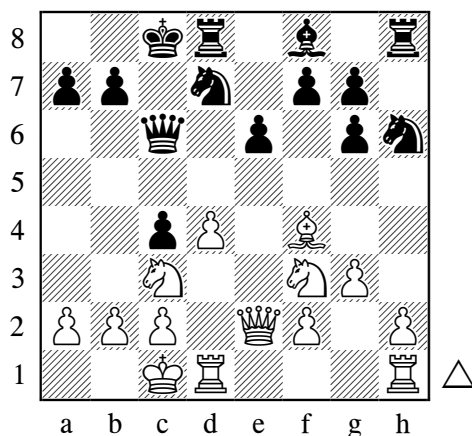
14.0-0-0 c4

Larsen tries to keep the position closed, but it is another move which doesn't contribute to his development.

But White also wins after either 14...♗gf6 15.♗eg5 when Black is unable to defend the f7-pawn, or 14...cxd4 15.♗xd4 when the knight is coming next to the b5-square.

15.♗c3 ♗h6

On 15...♗gf6 the familiar 16.♗g5 is, yet again, strong.

**16.d5!**

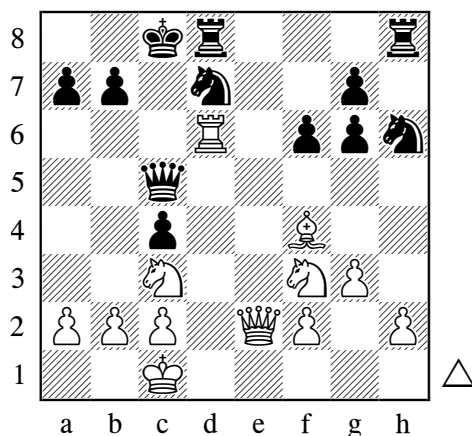
Spassky's lead in development makes opening up the position the natural choice.

16...exd5 17.♖xd5

White also wins after 17.♗d4 ♖b6 18.♗db5 a6 19.♖xd5 axb5 20.♗xb5, with carnage on the queenside.

17...♙c5 18.♖hd1

Spassky can win at will: 18.♗e5 ♗xe5 19.♖xe5 also wins; Black has to lose material in order to prevent mate on b8.

18...f6 19.♖d6 ♙xd6 20.♖xd6 ♖c5

21.♞d5

Black's only reasonable move is 21...♞c6 but then 22.♜b5 wins instantly, so Larsen resigned. It was a complete rout.

1–0

In the next four rounds Spassky risked little and made four draws, one against Karpov and another against Timman, who were both fighting for first place. In round twelve Spassky outplayed Gligoric. At one point he let him back in the game, but Gligoric missed his only chance and lost. After a quick draw against Hübner, Spassky met Tal. Boris as Black beautifully outplayed Misha. Spassky missed many wins and Tal was somehow able to hold in 66 moves. In the last round Spassky beat Miles. Karpov won his last two games, so he and Spassky tied for first place scoring 10/15. Timman finished third, a full point behind them.

This was one of the best tournament performances of Spassky's entire career. I would rate only his win at Santa Monica in 1966, ahead of Fischer, as a greater achievement. Spassky was probably relaxed and the hard work he put in during his five matches in 1977 had raised his level.

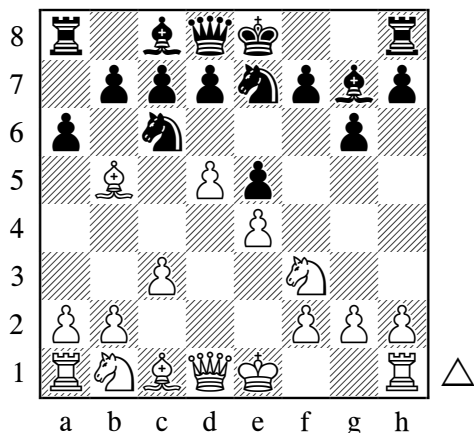
The next tournament in Montilla took place in August. Spassky started with a win and a loss, after which he met Sanz Alonso.

Game 64

Boris Spassky – Francisco Sanz Alonso

Montilla 1978

1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♞b5 ♞ge7 4.c3 g6 5.d4 ♞g7 6.d5! a6



7.♞e2!

Spassky plays a new move for the time against Black's unusual opening. His move is natural and strong.

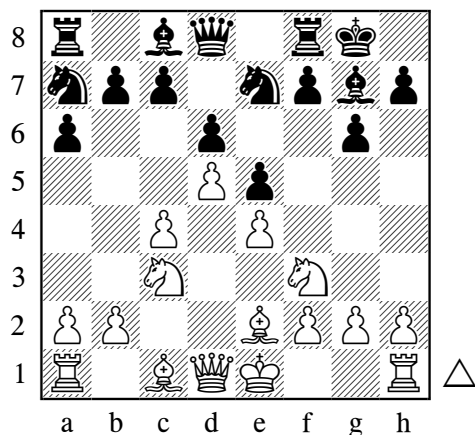
7...♞a7

The knight is misplaced here.

8.c4

Spassky treats the position like a King's Indian Defence.

8...d6 9.♞c3 0–0

**10.h4**

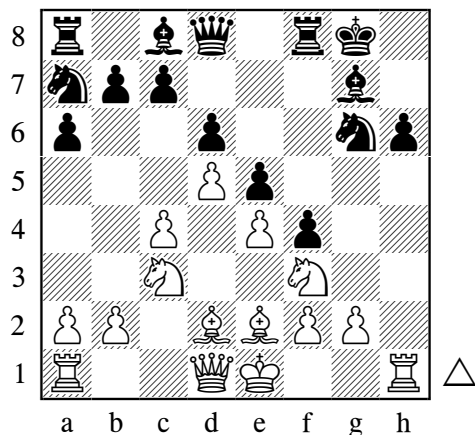
Spassky turns his attention to softening up Black's king, but playing on the queenside with 10.b4 would be equally powerful.

10...f5?!

10...h6!? looks slightly preferable.

11.h5 f4

The pawn storm by Black is not dangerous, as the white king is not on the kingside.

12.gd2 h6 13.hxg6 g6xg6**14.Qb3!**

Spassky starts the strong plan of making progress on the queenside. The queen might

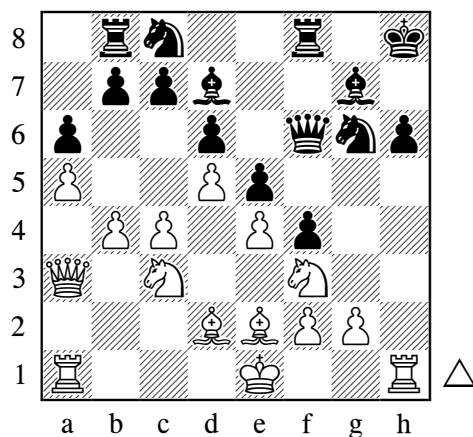
have an influence on the diagonal leading to the black king, and it also stops ...d7.

14...Bb8 15.a4 d7 16.a5 Ch8

16...c6 would be met by the strong 17.c5.

17.Qa3!

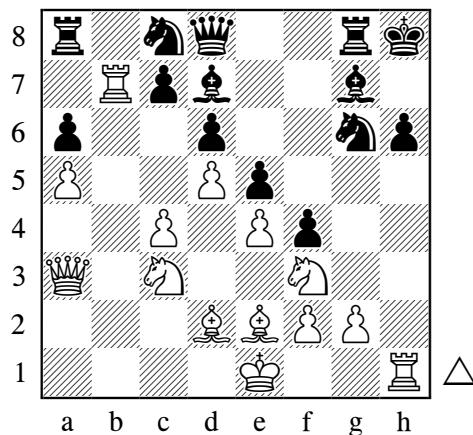
It looks like the queen stands well on the a3-square to carry out c4-c5. But Spassky has another idea.

17...dxc8 18.b4 Qf6**19.b5!**

Spassky wants to open the b-file.

19...Bg8 20.Bb1 Ba8 21.bxa6 bxa6 22.Bb7!

The rook invades.

22...Qd8

23.♔d1!

Spassky improves his king first, but 23.c5! would already be strong.

23...♘a7

Black has nothing to play for.

24.♕c2 ♖c8 25.♞bb1!

It is slightly surprising that the plan is not to double rooks on the b-file. Boris has another idea in mind.

25...♙f8 26.♞h2!

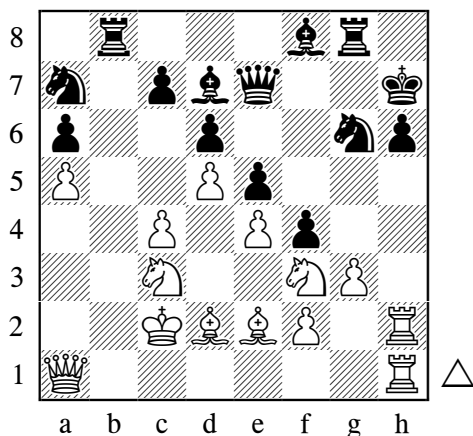
Spassky starts building an attack on the kingside.

26...♔h7 27.♞a1!

White gives up the b-file as late as he can.

27...♞e7 28.♞bh1! ♞b8 29.g3

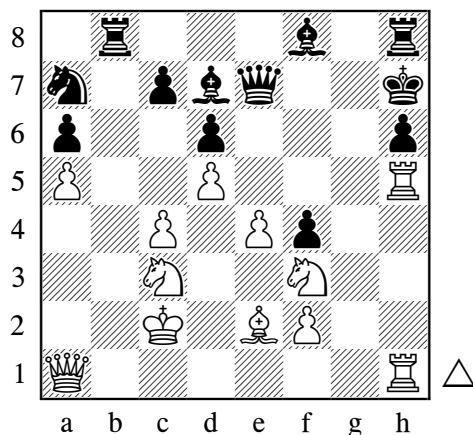
This slightly weakens Black's kingside.

29...♙d7**30.♞h5!**

The rook seeks to control the f5-square.

30...♞h8 31.gxf4!

Spassky opens the centre.

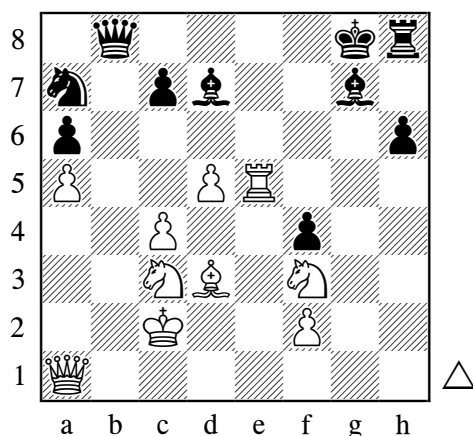
31...♘xf4 32.♙xf4 exf4**33.e5!**

And now the diagonal is opened for the bishop.

33...♙g7 34.♞g1 dxe5 35.♞xe5 ♞b4 36.♙d3† ♔g8 37.♞b1!

Spassky diverts the queen.

37.♘e4 ♙a4† 38.♔c1 would win as well.

37...♞f8 38.♞xb8 ♞xb8**39.♞e7!**

Spassky has used his rooks in a wizardly fashion in this game, and it is only fitting that now the coup de grace will be delivered by that piece.

39...♖d8 40.♞xg7† ♔xg7 41.♜e4†

Sanz had seen enough and resigned.

1–0

Black played this game poorly, as his rook on h8 and the knight on a7 did nothing, but credit is also due to Spassky who played the game artistically.

After beating Gligoric, Spassky made two quick draws. Spassky finished with two wins in a row, winning the event with 6½/9. Four players, Miles, Bellon, Hort and Gligoric, were all half a point behind him.

Spassky played in the Interpolis tournament in Tilburg in September.



In Round 1 at Tilburg, Spassky will go on to draw with Miles in 37 moves

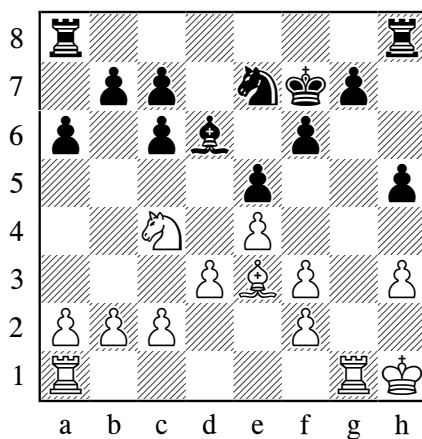
He started by drawing five games and losing to Larsen. We shall look at his seventh game.

Game 65

Ljubomir Ljubojevic – Boris Spassky

Tilburg 1978

1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♜c6 3.♞b5 a6 4.♞xc6 dxc6
5.0–0 ♞g4 6.h3 h5 7.d3 ♞f6 8.♞e3 ♞xf3
9.♞xf3 ♞xf3 10.gxf3 ♞d6 11.♜h1 f6
12.♜d2 ♜e7 13.♞g1 ♜f7 14.♜c4



14...♜g6

Spassky plays a new move. In Gheorghiu – Szabo Kecskemet 1964, Black played 14...g5.

15.♞g3 ♜h4!

Spassky places his knight originally.

16.f4?!

Ljubojevic gets rid of the doubled pawns, but the ensuing ending is slightly worse for him.

After 16.a4 b5 17.♜xd6† cxd6 18.f4 the position would be equal.

16...exf4 17.♜xd6† cxd6 18.♞xf4 d5

Black has a little more space.

19.♔d2 ♖ae8 20.f3 g5

20...c5! is preferable.

21.♖f1 ♜g6 22.♔g1 ♜f4 23.♔xf4

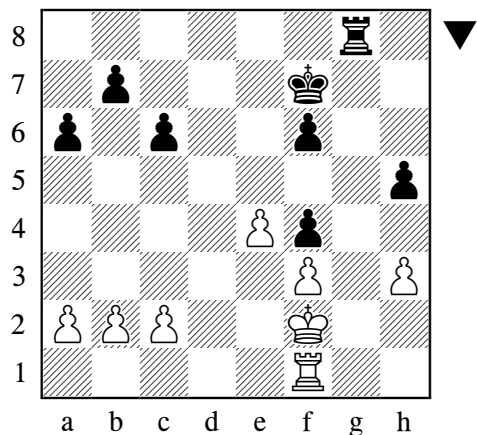
23.♔h2 is also playable.

23...gxf4 24.♖g2 ♖hg8 25.♖xg8

If 25.h4 ♖xg2† 26.♔xg2 ♖g8† 27.♔f2 ♖g3
28.exd5 cxd5 29.♖h1 the position is a draw.

25...♖xg8† 26.♔f2 dxe4 27.dxe4?!

After 27.fxe4 ♖g3 28.♔e2 White has nothing to worry about.



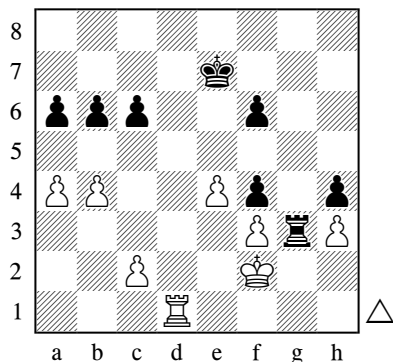
27...h4!

Creating an outpost on g3 makes White's position unpleasant.

28.♖d1 ♔e6 29.b4?

Ljubojevic finds the right idea, but with the wrong execution.

White should start sealing the queenside with 29.a4!. Play might continue: 29...♖g3 (Or 29...a5 30.c3, preparing b2-b4.) 30.♖h1 ♔d6 (Again on 30...a5 there would follow 31.c3 ♔e5 32.b4.) 31.b4! b6 32.♖d1† ♔e7

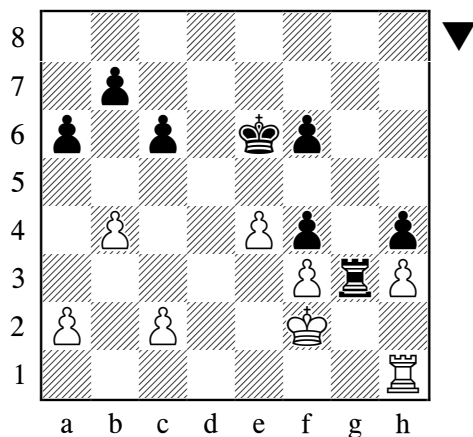


33.♖h1 White can hold as he can toggle his rook between h2 and h1. If Black ventures ...c6-c5 or ...a6-a5, White will exchange pawns and liberate his rook.

29...♖g3

Black also wins with 29...a5 30.a3 a4.

30.♖h1



30...b5?

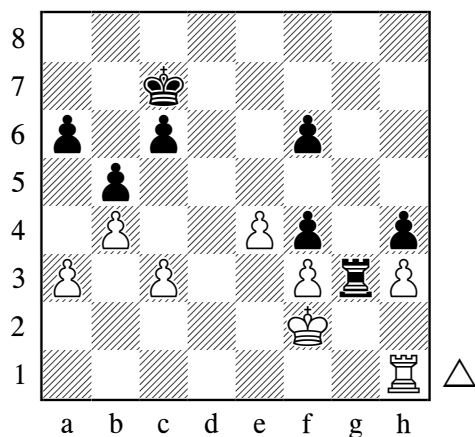
A good move, but it misses an incredible win: 30...a5!! 31.c3 a4 32.a3 ♔e5 (Black also wins with 32...♔d6 33.♖d1† ♔c7 34.♖h1 ♔b6 35.c4 c5, weakening the white queenside.) 33.♖h2 (33.b5 is met by the subtle 33...♔e6 when White has run out of useful moves.) 33...♔d6 34.♖h1 ♔c7 35.♖h2 c5 (35...♔b6 also works.) 36.b5 c4 Black wins, as the white

rook is unable to defend both the b- and h-pawns at the same time.

31.c3 ♖d6 32.a3 ♜e6 33.♞h2

Ljubojevic has placed his queenside pawns perfectly, and can now just keep moving his rook.

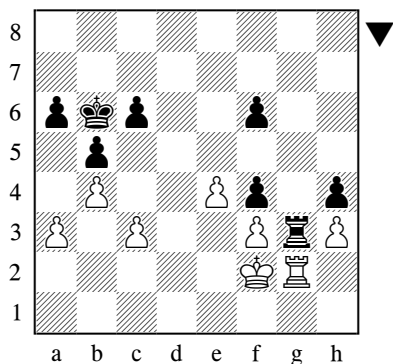
33...♙d7 34.♞h1 ♙c7



35.♞g1

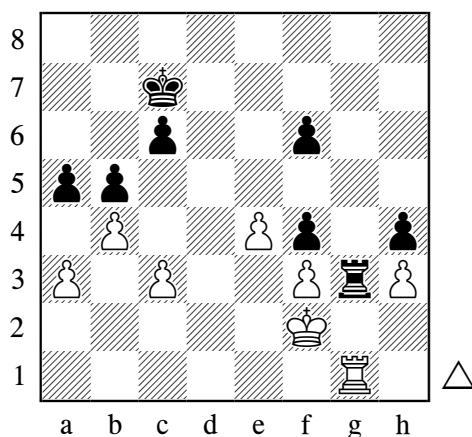
In this rook ending there are some surprisingly deep ideas.

35.♞h2? loses as follows: 35...♙b6! (After 35...♙b7 36.♞h1! ♙b6 37.♞g1 Black only draws.) 36.♞g2 (If 36.♞h1 Black wins with 36...a5.)



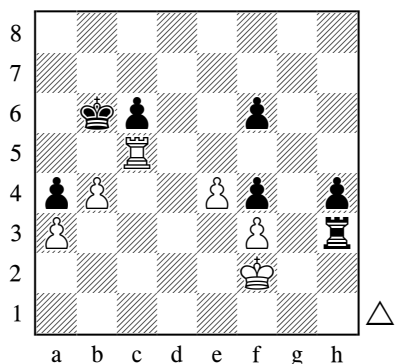
36...♙b7!! The king steps back so that a subsequent pawn capture on a5 will not come with check. (36...a5 37.bxa5† ♙xa5 38.♞xg3 Crucially, Black is unable to recapture with his h-pawn as his king is now outside the square of the white passed h-pawn. 38...fxg3† 39.♙e2 White has sufficient play with his central pawns.) 37.♞g1 (Or 37.♞h2 a5 and Black wins.) 37...a5! White has no move. On 38.♞xg3 hxg3† and the black king marches to the h4-square. On 38.bxa5 ♞xg1 Black will clean up on the queenside. Or if 38.♞h1 then 38...a4 wins, as Black will centralize his king and then push ...f6-f5, after which the pawn exchange will leave the path open for the black king to invade the queenside.

35...a5



36.♞h1?

The losing mistake. Ljubojevic missed the hidden idea 36.♞c1!! The rook supports the opening of the position with c3-c4. Another example to add to the collection of the importance of rook activity in rook endgames. 36...a4 (the alternatives do not win either: 36...axb4 37.axb4 ♞xh3 38.c4; 36...♙d6 37.bxa5; or 36...♙b6 37.c4) 37.c4 bxc4 38.♞xc4 ♙b6 39.♞c5 ♞xh3



40. Ra5! Bg3 41. Rxa4 Bg5 42. Ra8 h3 43. Rh8
White survives.

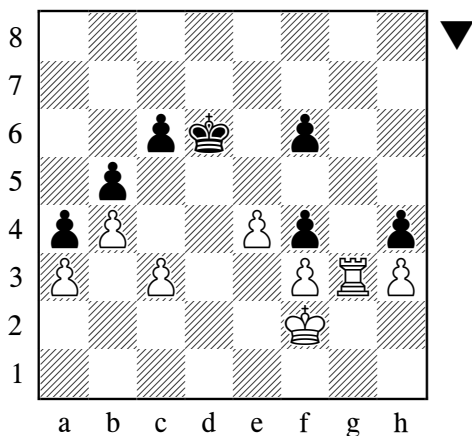
36...a4!

Pushing the pawn closer to the promotion square in order to help with winning a race if the starting gun is fired.

37. Bg1

On 37. Bg1 we have already seen how Black wins – he transfers his king to e6 and plays ...f6-f5.

37... Qd6 38. Bxg3



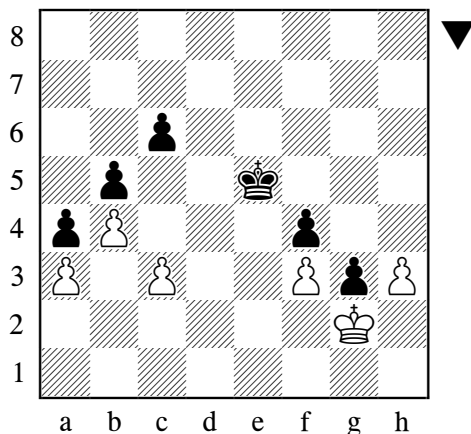
38... hxg3†

38... fxg3† would also win.

39. Qf1 Qe5 40. Qg2 f5!

The familiar motif, removing the e4-pawn which opens the path to the queenside.

41. exf5 Qxf5 42. Qf1 Qe5 43. Qg2



43... Qd5

Ljubojevic resigned, since if 44. Qf1 Qc4 45. Qe2 (or 45. h4 Qd5 when Black is inside the square of the h-pawn and will simply march over and capture it) 45... Qxc3 (45... Qb3 would lead to a completely winning queen ending for Black.) 46. Qf1 (or 46. h4 Qd4 and Black is still in time to stop the h-pawn) 46... Qd4 47. Qe2 c5 Black wins.

0-1

In the last four rounds, Spassky scored two draws, one win and one loss. Spassky tied for 6th-8th places with Walter Browne and Vlastimil Hort, making 5½/11. It looks as though Spassky had not been able to rest enough after his tournament in Montilla.

The Chess Olympiad in Buenos Aires started at the end of October. Karpov and Tal did not join the Soviet team after the draining Baguio match against Korchnoi, so Spassky played on Board 1.



Round 1 at Tilburg 1981, where Spassky will draw with Beliavsky in 26 moves