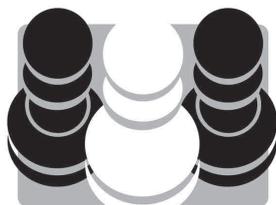


THE ANAND FILES

THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP
STORY 2008-2012

By

MICHIEL ABELN



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Preface

What is this book about?

This book describes three World Championship matches won by Viswanathan Anand: in 2008 against Vladimir Kramnik, in 2010 against Veselin Topalov, and in 2012 against Boris Gelfand. It is written from the point of view of a spectator who was in the room with Anand and his team: Peter Heine Nielsen, Rustam Kasimdzhanov, Surya Ganguly and Radek Wojtaszek, though other big names outside the core team also helped Team Anand.

The coverage begins at Anand's training camp before each match and includes an overview of the match strategy, specific opening choices and the seconds' responsibilities. For each match all the games are annotated, with many references to other grandmaster games that were relevant for that particular opening.

Why have I written this book?

Books describing the inner workings of a world title match are rare, though of course I have a copy of Team Kramnik's *From London to Elista* – which is undoubtedly a great book, but is rather different to the one you have in your hands; in particular I will put more emphasis on chess content and opening strategy.

I had the idea for this book for a while, but I had doubts because I had no experience in writing and a more than full-time job. At some point I discussed it with my friend Grandmaster Ian Rogers, and he encouraged me to pursue the idea. So I contacted Peter Heine Nielsen and interviewed him in 2013 and 2014. We had ideas of working on a book together, but this project with Nielsen came to a standstill for various reasons. Several months later, I started working on this book from scratch on my own, and emailed Ganguly – the interviews with him over Skype were a great success.

I subsequently reached out to Rustam Kasimdzhanov with whom I have played on the same team in the Dutch Meesterklasse. After some initial hesitation he agreed to participate in the project and over the next year and a half I visited him in Germany three times for interviews. Meanwhile I continued writing and analysing, throwing away the first draft, the second draft and so on. I managed to develop a full version by the end of 2017, which I then used for a long and inspiring interview with Radek Wojtaszek. Many further updates and changes were made, and you have before you what I hope is the best version I can produce of the story of Anand's match victories.

What do I want to share with the reader?

First of all, a number of fantastic games. I have analysed them deeply, combined with insights from the seconds on what was prepared, and their views on the rest of the game.

Secondly, the strategy that was developed before the match, how it was implemented in different openings and how it changed and had to be adapted game by game as the matches progressed.

Thirdly, what it is like to be part of Team Anand – how you work, how you find novelties, what the role of the engine is, how you work with Anand and how you deal with stress, fatigue and emotions.

Last but not least, there is some top-notch theory shared in this book; opening lines that were a real breakthrough back then, but are still topical today, including previously unpublished novelties. In fact, I think the book gives a good historical overview on how opening theory has changed since 2008: where in the Kramnik match it was a decisive factor, Gelfand became great in avoiding most pitfalls. This trend has continued in the subsequent Carlsen matches.

This book has been a labour of love; a project that grew and grew. I received fantastic help. First of all, a big thank you to Team Anand: Viswanathan Anand, Peter Heine Nielsen, Rustam Kasimdzhanov, Surya Ganguly and Radek Wojtaszek. Secondly, I would like to mention Ian Rogers, who spent an enormous amount of time in improving the quality of the text. Thirdly, there are some wonderful pictures in the book that were created and made available by Cathy Rogers and Eric van Reem.

Writing this book has been a wonderful journey. I have decided that any profit I make from the book will be used to support a charity. I hope you enjoy reading it, and if you have suggestions or questions, please do send me an email!

Michiel Abeln
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October 2019

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Foreword by Viswanathan Anand

A book about a World Championship match can be written by an insider or an outsider. By insider, I mean someone who was a member of one of the teams and got a good look into the decision-making process, the critical moments, the emotional highs and lows, and is able to write an informed perspective.

The other option is to have the book written by an outsider, who lacks this perspective and often has to go by the result and outward appearances. The advantage of the second person is that they find a certain balance easier to achieve. It is easier for a member of the team or the player himself to lose this perspective of the opponent's decision-making and focus too much on their own.

When I was asked to review this book, I really enjoyed it. For me it was a journey back in time. The incredible level of detail meant that it was not only reading about three matches that I knew very well – a journey if you like – but also constantly being reminded of things I had forgotten or that had faded from memory. Nowadays I remember well the general trends of the matches: the flow of emotions, the euphoria, the disappointments, what worked and what didn't. However, to have it presented at an almost day-to-day level, and to remember what we were worried about before a game and what happened during a game – needless to say that my memory of many of these events had faded.

What happens as time goes by is that you gain some perspective and distance. So my conclusions about the match are now informed by how I play chess, how chess has evolved. With distance you are able to see matches in a bigger light, yet it lacks detail.

This book manages the unique task of having fabulous insights into the workings of one team while at the same time keeping the balance of the perspective of the outsider. Someone who sees it from outside and is not therefore trying to defend this decision or that decision or to feel that events hinge too much on a single moment.

There are decisive moments, but generally the course of a World Championship match will be determined by a lot of moments that you have forgotten; what appeared to be the one defining moment was just the visible end of the moments that led to it. To give some examples: I remember that one of the openings that we prepared for the Kramnik match was the Dragon Variation, but I had forgotten the level of detail, the preparation we did, the worries we had at the last minute.

When reading this book, the idea that a couple of days before the match began in Bonn we were sitting and panicking about something as unlikely to occur as the Dragon Variation hit me very hard. And there are thousands of moments like this. The second thing is that the player, and every second, remembers incidents they were involved in more strongly than other aspects. The book manages the very important detail of interviewing all the seconds and therefore getting the most detailed map of what happened. This allows you a very complete perspective.

Basically, I love this book. The level of detail is fabulous, and as I read it I felt I was reliving the entire five-year period during which these three matches happened. Once you think about how little insight you have into Kramnik, Topalov or Gelfand's decision-making processes during the matches, you understand how detailed the work Michiel has done for this book is. Michiel has also revealed a lot of the opening ideas we never got to use, just to show the creative process during a match. No two books are the same, but in my opinion this is the definitive book on my matches from 2008-2012.

The book also shows a certain progress. During the first match we are all fresh, we are all creative, we are all eager to play, and this was the peak; the best performance I had was against Kramnik.

After that a certain slow gradual decline sets in. One reason is that other players have now seen a blueprint of how my team works and they become better at neutralizing that.

However, there is also a process where playing these matches year after year wears you out. At the very least this happened to me. There was not a sufficiently big gap between the matches – in the nineties there used to be three-year gaps between matches. Whether that is a desirable situation for the chess world as a whole is a separate subject, but it did allow the participants to recharge themselves. Instead I finished a match in October 2008, played the next one in April 2010, and the longest gap was before the match in May 2012.

Some of the differences between the matches are also explained by my own mistakes in directing the team. The book tracks how the team evolved: if I were to go back, I would do things differently. By the third match we worked too hard; there was a certain lack of freshness, and we suffered an inability to change our approach or even to see what we were doing wrong. Nonetheless, I actually think the 2012 contest was my greatest triumph, because in the Gelfand match nothing really worked.

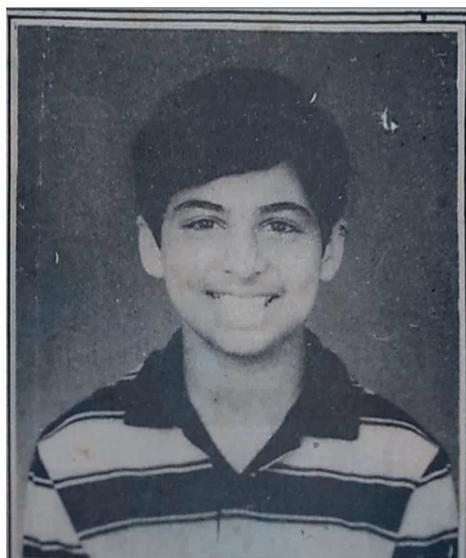
Somehow as a team we were not working well and yet, when pushed to the wall, we delivered. Of course, I needed some luck to beat Gelfand, but you need to be able to give yourself that luck as well. And the team, under severe pressure in a match that was going badly after the loss in Game 7, managed to develop good ideas and give them to me. I was able to use these ideas to equalize the match and then win the tiebreak. The ideas in Game 8 and then the switch to the Nimzo-Indian Defence and the Rossolimo Variation were all made under pressure and at the last minute. This ability to react in an adverse situation was very, very special.

As I said, this is the definitive book on those three matches, which gives an inside view into how a team functions during a match, and how and what it prepares.

From the outside it all looks like well-ordered mechanisms and people generally say: “*They must have prepared this or that because they had so much time.*” Our own experience was there are a lot of things that we must have worked on, but eventually you have to prioritize what you think will happen. You have to take wild guesses in other areas; you need a lot of last-minute patches, and it is very, very difficult to keep control. So what my team most of all did for me was try to keep things as manageable as possible and let me go to the game without a severe disadvantage.

And there you have it. I recommend you buy this book if you are interested in what a World Championship is like, both from the outside perspective as well as the inside view of the team.

Viswanathan Anand
Chennai 2019



Chapter 2

Preparing for Kramnik and a World Championship Match

A drastic decision...

“I don’t want him to play this 1.d4 stuff,” Peter Heine Nielsen said with a red face. Rustam Kasimdzhanov shrugged his shoulders and responded, *“Well what can you expect when you don’t start with 1.e4?”* We are in Anand’s living room in Bad Soden, Germany, in June 2008.

In the mid-1990s Anand became friends with Hans-Walter Schmitt from Germany. Schmitt organized the Mainz Chess Classic (featuring rapid and Fischer Random games) between 1994 and 2010 – a tournament Anand won a record 11 times.

Because the Indian was not only playing many tournaments in Northern Europe but also in the German club competition, Anand wanted to find a base to complement his home near Madrid. Schmitt owned a house close to Frankfurt in the small town of Bad Soden and, with his help, Anand bought an apartment right next to Schmitt’s. It was there where the first training camp was organized for Anand’s World Championship match against Kramnik. The question Anand and his seconds attempted to answer was: How to beat the unbeatable Russian?

Forming a team

Grandmasters Peter Heine Nielsen and Radek Wojtaszek met in the lobby of their Bad Soden hotel. Taking their laptop bags, they walked over to Anand’s apartment; Nielsen had been there before and knew the way. It was a beautiful warm sunny morning.

After Anand had opened the front door, the gentlemen installed themselves at the dining table. An ordinary German living room now looked more like the computer section of an internet cafe. One could observe laptops, cables and a group of men in sweatpants and odd t-shirts talking in coded language: *“Have you looked at 23. ♖xb7?”*

This was the first day Anand's team met Radek Wojtaszek. Just 21 and with a rating around 2600, Wojtaszek was surprised Anand had asked him to join his team. Wojtaszek was young, relatively unknown and far from being one of the world's highest-rated players, so why did Anand select him?

At the end of December 2007, Anand and Wojtaszek had played each other in Germany in a Bundesliga match, after which Anand had asked for the Pole's email address. This was nothing unusual in itself; lots of chess players keep in contact between tournaments. Still, Radek felt honoured by the request.

What Wojtaszek did not know was that Anand was impressed by the creative opening ideas in the Polish player's games, which Anand saw when he was preparing for their Bundesliga game. Anand understood why Wojtaszek played a certain new move in the same way some aficionados understand the intentions of a master painter. Wojtaszek's logic and reasoning were clear to Anand and his ideas were deep.

Soon after the 2007 World Championship in Mexico finished, Anand had started thinking about building a team of seconds to help him. This was new territory for him; until then Nielsen had been his main assistant. The Dane, almost 2 metres tall and with a rating well over 2600, was an obvious choice as a team leader, but Anand figured it could be useful to add some young blood to the team; new perspectives could never hurt. Wojtaszek certainly met the requirements.

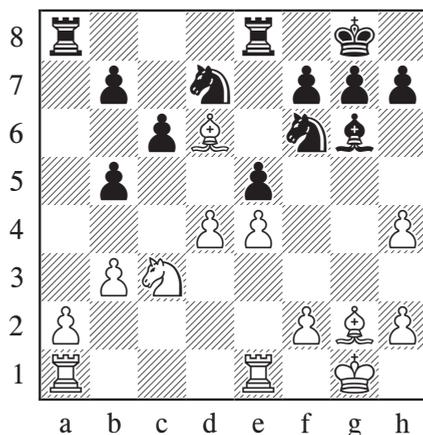
After the Bundesliga game had ended in a draw, the two of them analysed together. Anand was ready to make an offer, but hesitated. Anand feared that if he asked Wojtaszek to join his team, Wojtaszek might get excited and lose focus for an upcoming tournament. Therefore Anand only asked for contact details, with the result that Wojtaszek kept wondering why Anand made the request.

When Wojtaszek was 3½ years old, he received his first chess magazine. Not being able to read yet, it was explained to him that it was Anand on the cover. Ever since then the Indian had been his childhood chess hero. Playing against Anand in the Bundesliga was already a dream, but now the World Champion had asked for Radek's email – why? Wojtaszek completely lost focus! Only a few weeks later the two connected via Skype and the mystery was solved: Radek said 'yes' immediately to the possibility of being part of Team Anand. No financial details were discussed; Wojtaszek had no idea what he had said 'yes' to, but he was certainly excited!

Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Viswanathan Anand

Bundesliga 09.12.2007

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♖c2 dxc4 5.♗xc4 ♙f5 6.g3 e6 7.♙g2 ♘bd7 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.♘c3 0-0 10.♞e1 ♘e4 11.♗b3 ♗b6 12.♘h4 ♙xh4 13.gxh4 ♘ef6 14.♗xb6 axb6 15.e4 ♙g6 16.♙f4 ♞fe8 17.♙d6 b5 18.b3 e5

**19.d5**

White could have maintained the initiative with 19.dxe5 ♖xe5 20.f4 ♗eg4 21.h3 ♖h6 22.a4.

19...b4 20.dxc6 bxc3 21.cxd7 ♗xd7 22.♞e2 ♗f6 23.♙b4 ♗h5 24.♙xc3 ♗f4 25.♞e3 ♗xg2 26.♗xg2 f6 27.a4 ♞ac8 28.f3 ♙f7 29.b4 ♞c4 30.♗f2

1/2–1/2

Before coming to Bad Soden, Wojtaszek visited Nielsen at his home in Aarhus, Denmark. Wojtaszek felt rather insecure. He had no previous experience working with a strong player, let alone a superstar like Anand. How could he contribute? What was expected of him? What should he do at home to prepare before going to the training camp? Wojtaszek was relieved when Nielsen proposed to meet, so he could learn from Nielsen's rich experience working with Anand. The visit to Denmark was useful. It turned out that both men have similar personalities and could get along well. Wojtaszek liked the idea that against Kramnik, Anand should play aggressive openings: he suggested the Benko Gambit but when Peter Heine asked what to do against the main line, he was silent. At this level it is a must to bring new ideas; copying existing theory is not sufficient. In the end, all Radek's key queries about working as a second were clarified and from then on Nielsen and Wojtaszek worked closely together, in Bad Soden and during the matches.

Developing a match strategy against Kramnik

Earlier in the year, Anand had come up with a shocking idea: he decided to open with 1.d4 throughout the match. Having primarily relied upon 1.e4 for all his life, this was a drastic decision. The choice to go for 1.d4 hadn't been easy, but it avoided two of Kramnik's main drawing weapons after 1.e4: the Petroff Defence and the Berlin Variation of the Spanish Opening. Moreover, hopefully the opening would come as a surprise to Kramnik and unsettle him.

However, nothing comes for free, let alone a major shift in your opening repertoire. Top-level openings are researched for years, and new refinements are constantly found. It takes a long time to get acquainted with all the finesses, yet there were less than four months to go. Anand had played 1.d4 from time to time so he had some prior knowledge; but raising his 1.d4 repertoire to the level needed for a world title match was a huge undertaking. The pressure was on immediately –

had Anand taken too much of a risk? Nielsen and Kasimdzhanov certainly had their moments of doubt, while Ganguly and Wojtaszek felt too junior to form a proper assessment.

The seconds had all studied Kramnik's games in detail at home, and reached similar conclusions. Kramnik excels in opening preparation and with White is great at converting a small edge from a stable position into a full point. A good example is his many discoveries in the Catalan Opening. He is a principled player who believes in healthy pawn structures and who has strong intuition; understanding what is a risk worth taking and what is dodgy.

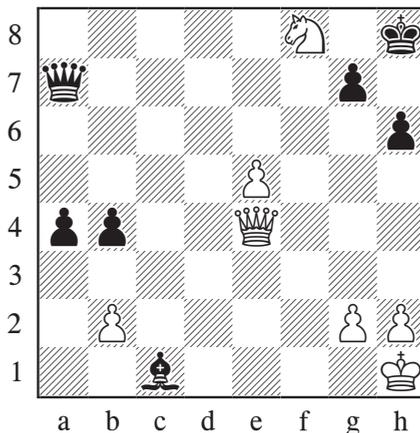
On the Black side, he is famous for analysing many lines to dead equality; creating drawish positions after 1.e4, both in the Petroff and in the Berlin Defence. Against 1.d4 he has ample experience with the solid Queen's Gambit and the Slav Defence. He rarely wins a game with Black but also rarely loses – with either colour, in fact.

Over the years it has become clear that occasionally Kramnik suffers oversights which lead to blunders. In nearly all cases this occurred in games where he was outside his opening knowledge at an early stage. If subsequent play led to complications, then things could go wrong in the fourth hour of play. A shocking example is his game against Deep Fritz in 2006 where he allowed mate-in-one instead of making a draw.

Comp Deep Fritz 10 – Vladimir Kramnik

Bonn Man-Machine 27.11.2006

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e4 b5 4.a4 c6 5.♘c3 b4 6.♘a2 ♘f6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♙xc4 e6 9.♘f3 a5
 10.♙g5 ♖b6 11.♘c1 ♙a6 12.♗e2 h6 13.♙e3 ♙xc4 14.♗xc4 ♘d7 15.♘b3 ♙e7 16.♗c1 0-0
 17.0-0 ♜f8 18.♗e2 c5 19.♘fd2 ♗c6 20.♗h5 ♗xa4 21.♘xc5 ♘xc5 22.dxc5 ♘xe3 23.fxe3
 ♙xc5 24.♗xf7† ♖h8 25.♗f3 ♜f8 26.♗e4 ♗d7 27.♘b3 ♙b6 28.♞fd1 ♗f7 29.♞f1 ♗a7
 30.♞xf8† ♞xf8 31.♘d4 a4 32.♘xe6 ♙xe3† 33.♖h1 ♙xc1 34.♘xf8



34...♗e3??

34...♖g8 was the right move.

35. ♖h7#

1–0

Anand and Nielsen had agreed that Anand's aim should be to go for complicated, sharp lines with both White and Black against Kramnik, and that 1.d4 was a good way to avoid the Petroff and Berlin variations. Secondly, they decided to look for novelties early on, to deviate from established theory as soon as possible to avoid being hit by a novelty from Team Kramnik. These guiding principles were used consistently. During the training camp, certain opening lines were rejected because either there would be a clear way for Kramnik to avoid complications or it was a deeply-analysed variation where it was impossible to deviate early.

The team is not yet complete

Previously Anand had only worked with Nielsen, but now he needed to manage a team, and inevitable but unanswerable questions arose: Had he selected the right team? Would they be able to cope with the stress? How would they work together?

Anand's idea was to have a team of four, with a mix of experience and young talents. The most obvious option was to select players from India. For many years Anand had been working with strong grandmasters back at home in Chennai; not as an official training camp, but analysing as a group of friends. Most players were happy to collaborate and felt honoured to be working with and learning from their hero.

In March 2008 Anand was working with the Indian Grandmasters Sasikiran and Ganguly, and considered selecting one or both for the Bonn team. However, Anand felt that the team composition was missing something. Certainly there could be one or two Indian players helping, and certainly he had Wojtaszek and Nielsen, but none of them had experience at the highest level – playing for the world title.

Anand discussed the matter with Nielsen who, after some thought, suggested Rustam Kasimdzhanov. The Uzbek had become FIDE World Champion in 2004 from a knockout competition, had played in the 8-player, double-round World Championship tournament in San Luis in 2005, and had lost a Candidates Match against Boris Gelfand (who later qualified for the World Championship tournament in Mexico City in 2007 that Anand won).

Clearly Kasimdzhanov would bring plenty of experience to the team, yet Anand had some doubts; most pertinently, would it be respectful to ask a former World Champion for help? Perhaps Kasimdzhanov was still ambitious as a player himself and didn't want to work for someone who could be seen as competition? Nielsen pointed out that Kasimdzhanov had worked as Morozevich's second in Mexico 2007, and that perhaps he would be willing to act as a second again. When asked, Kasimdzhanov was happy to join the team.

Meanwhile, for the fourth and final position in Anand's team of seconds, an invitation was sent to Kolkata, India, asking 25-year-old Surya Ganguly.

Courage

The day before Game 1 saw the opening ceremony and a technical meeting. The arbiter confirmed the time control: 40 moves in 2 hours, then 1 extra hour to reach move 60. After move 60 another 15 minutes would be added and a 30-second increment applied for each move. Most important was the drawing of lots, which determined that Kramnik would have White in the first game.



A few days earlier there was a heated discussion amongst Team Anand about the right opening with which Anand should start the match. In Bad Soden two repertoires had been developed against Kramnik's 1.d4. One set-up was based on 1...d5 – using the Meran system or, if Kramnik played 5.g5, then the Botvinnik Variation. The second system was based on 1...d6 2.c4 e6 and then on 3.d3 the Nimzo-Indian and on 3.f3 the Vienna Variation. This second system was an equal alternative to the Meran/Botvinnik complex because multiple new ideas had been found. Moreover, the character of play in this latter option was far less dangerous than in the Meran and therefore it might fit better if the match became, as anticipated, a war of attrition.

Two days before Game 1, Nielsen made a plea for Anand not to use the Meran. He judged it to be too risky. Wojtaszek didn't have a preference, nor did Ganguly, but Kasimdzhanov was heavily in favour of hitting Kramnik with the Meran immediately, saying: *“If you start with the Vienna system and Vlad wins, in later games when you change to the Meran, he will always sidestep the main lines. And if you win an early game, you will be the one unwilling to take risks any more [and will therefore turn to the Nimzo-Indian]. So why don't you show some balls and start with the Meran?”*

The rest of the team were stunned, wondering how Anand would react to this kind of language. Yet, surprisingly, Anand immediately bought into the concept, intuitively feeling that Kasimdzhanov was right. (Even so, later Anand had a chat with Nielsen to confirm that he was also happy with the plan.)

The seconds did not attend the opening ceremony. For the last few days they had been working hard: the pressure was already on. Peter Heine had instructed the team to recheck the whole repertoire and Wojtaszek had only slept for three hours.

Outsiders would have expected a relaxed atmosphere; after months of preparation, what more could they do? Reality turned out to be very different. The team was going crazy – some sort of madness or paranoia had hit them and no one could calm them.

The next morning at breakfast the seconds tried small talk but it was clear Anand's mind was elsewhere – the start of Game 1. Anand hadn't slept well and normally when he is nervous, Anand calms down only once the clocks start.



Vishy and Aruna left at 14.30 for the playing hall, whereupon lunch was ordered for the seconds. Together they watched the first moves of the match from the training room.

Vladimir Kramnik – Viswanathan Anand

Bonn (1) 14.10.2008

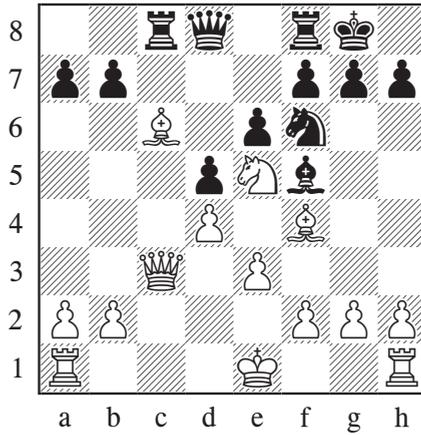
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5!

The team expected Kramnik to head for main lines and had not seriously analysed the Exchange Variation of the Slav Defence. Nevertheless, they still felt lucky as, the day before Game 1, they had asked Anand to have a quick look at his old notes on the Exchange Slav!

4...cxd5 5.♙f4 ♘c6 6.e3 ♙f5!?

Although 6...a6 is played more often, Anand's move is also very common in practice and would hardly be a surprise for Kramnik.

7.♘f3 e6 8.♞b3 ♙b4 9.♙b5 0-0 10.♙xc6 ♙xc3† 11.♞xc3 ♞c8 12.♘e5



12... Nf4!

A surprising-looking move, but just the start of Anand's prepared line.

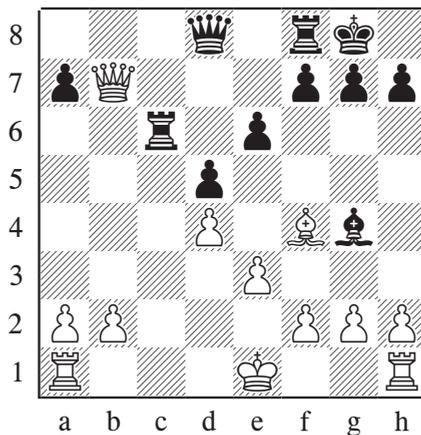
13. Nxcg4 Qxcg4 14. Qb4!

Kramnik's novelty; he later said he tried this – dismissed by most of the press as a wimpy drawing line – because he saw no clear equality for Black and wanted to cause Anand some trouble in an unexpected line.

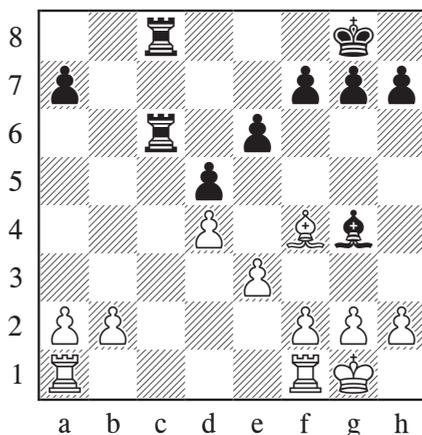
Previously known was 14. Qa3 Bxc6 15. Qxa7 Bc2 16. 0-0 Qe2! 17. Bfc1 Bxb2 with easy equality, as in Vera – Morovic, Havana 2002.

14... Bxc6 15. Qxb7

Kramnik and his team believed that capturing this pawn could lead to a small but lasting edge: exactly the kind of position that suits him so well. However, the move did not come as a surprise to Anand, since it had been tried in a blitz game by German grandmaster and Exchange Slav expert Jan Gustafsson! The team had for some time made it a habit to download thousands of internet blitz games from top players and check them against the opening files. Thanks to the Gustafsson game, Anand's Exchange Slav file had been updated to include analysis on this move.



15...♖c8! 16.♗xc8 ♜fxc8 17.0–0



17...a5!

“A very important move,” said Anand. “After 17...♙e2 18.♞fe1 ♝c2 19.b4 I didn’t see what I was doing. If his bishop comes to c5 from d6 then I am really worried. White has the idea of 20.a4, 21.b5 and if 21...axb5 then 22.a5.”

17...a5, which was mentioned in Anand’s Slav file, is critical to understanding this game. Most engines, certainly the ones used in 2008, come up with other moves for Black and give White, who is a pawn up, an edge of about +0.3: a marginal advantage. However, it is hard for a computer to foresee that White’s position has the potential to create a passed pawn on the queenside in the manner indicated by Anand. Black’s last move is pure prophylaxis, stopping White’s pawns and neutralizing any initiative for White.

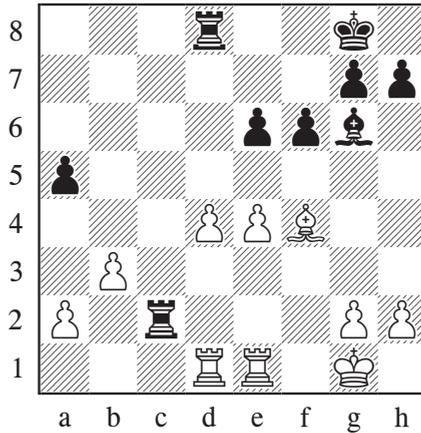
18.f3 ♙f5 19.♞fe1

Kramnik acknowledges that he is not making any progress on the queenside and starts to focus on the centre. “I couldn’t see what to do if I didn’t [continue] in forcing style with the e4 advance,” Kramnik said, “but it seems that with accurate play Black can make a draw.”

19...♙g6 20.b3 f6!

Giving the g6-bishop the option of helping out on the queenside, if needed to stop White’s pawns.

21.e4 dxe4 22.fxe4 ♜d8 23.♞ad1 ♝c2

**24.e5**

After 24.a4 then 24...♞c3 wins back the pawn anyway.

24...fxe5 25.♙xe5 ♜xa2 26.♞a1 ♞xa1 27.♞xa1 ♞d5 28.♞c1 ♞d7 29.♞c5 ♞a7 30.♞c7 ♞xc7 31.♙xc7 ♙c2 32.♙xa5 ♙xb3

1/2–1/2

“This was a typical first World Championship match game,” said Kramnik. *“I was trying to press today and I obtained a certain slight advantage. However, a draw is a normal result if players play without mistakes – it is not our fault.”*



It was a good start to the match for Anand. Kramnik tried to surprise him with an idea in a sideline, but it turned out to be an idea Anand was already familiar with. Several outsiders opined that Kramnik had “thrown away” a White. But if Anand had not known about 17...a5, he might not have traded queens on move 15, in which case he could easily have drifted into difficulties.

From Kramnik’s point of view this variation looked like a valid strategy. He had a new idea in a system Anand had not faced in a long time, and it would lead to the type of play that suited Kramnik well. In the end it didn’t work out, but it was only Game 1 and he did find out that on 1.d4 Anand had prepared the Slav. In fact, as we know, the team had also prepared other options against 1.d4 but they had deliberately chosen to start with the Slav.

