

# **Grandmaster Ivan Bukavshin:**

A Chess Prodigy's Career in 64 Games

Jakov Geller

## **Grandmaster Ivan Bukavshin: A Chess Prodigy's Career in 64 Games**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>A Word About a Friend</i> .....	6
<b>CHAPTER 1. A Rising Talent</b> .....	10
No. 1. V. Plat – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Herceg Novi 2006 .....	11
No. 2. I. Bukavshin – M. Lugovskoy, Caro-Kann, Sibenik 2007 .....	18
No. 3. D. Kokarev – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Kazan 2008.....	22
No. 4. I. Bukavshin – D. Ayupov, French Defense, Kazan 2008.....	24
No. 5. I. Bukavshin – A. Isajevsky, Modern Benoni, Moscow 2008.....	26
No. 6. I. Bukavshin – M. Ozolin, Sicilian Defense, Moscow 2008.....	29
<b>CHAPTER 2. Childhood Success</b> .....	32
No. 7. K. Magadov – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Dagomys 2008.....	32
No. 8. V. Fedoseev – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Dagomys 2008.....	35
No. 9. I. Bukavshin – S. Bogner, King’s Indian Defense, Neustadt 2008 .....	39
No. 10. A. Feher – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Herceg Novi 2008.....	44
No. 11. I. Balakirev – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Dagomys 2009.....	48
No. 12. I. Bukavshin – A. Stukopin, Queen’s Gambit, Kirishi 2009 .....	50
No. 13. I. Bukavshin – K. Grigorian, Sicilian Defense, Fermo 2009.....	51
No. 14. I. Bukavshin – D. Vakhidov, Sicilian Defense, Akhisar 2009 .....	54
No. 15. V. Lyaskovsky – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Dagomys 2010 .....	57
No. 16. I. Bukavshin – V. Matveev, King’s Indian Defense, Dagomys 2010 .....	59
No. 17. G. Oparin – I. Bukavshin, Italian Opening, Kirishi 2010 .....	61
No. 18. I. Bukavshin – O. Gabuzyan, King’s Indian Defense, Batumi 2010.....	65
<b>CHAPTER 3. On his Way to the Grandmaster Title</b> .....	69
No. 19. I. Bukavshin – J. Geller, Dutch Defense, Moscow 2011.....	70
No. 20. D. Kryakvin – I. Bukavshin, Queen’s Gambit, Moscow 2011.....	74
No. 21. I. Bukavshin – B. Predojevic, Nimzo-Indian Defense, Moscow 2011.....	77
No. 22. A. Lastin – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Taganrog 2011.....	79
No. 23. K. Sakaev – I. Bukavshin, Slav Gambit, Taganrog 2011 .....	82
No. 24. R. Makhmutov – I. Bukavshin, Anti-Meran, Rybinsk 2011 .....	85
<b>CHAPTER 4. Collegiate Victories</b> .....	88
No. 25. I. Bukavshin – A. Smirnov, Sicilian Defense, Ulyanovsk 2012 .....	90
No. 26. I. Bukavshin – N. Shukh, Reti Opening, Saratov 2013.....	93
No. 27. A. Sharafiev – I. Bukavshin, Semi-Slav, Saratov 2013.....	96
No. 28. I. Bukavshin – T. Petrosian, Catalan Opening, Katowice 2014.....	100
No. 29. I. Bukavshin – A. Mikaelyan, Anti-Meran, Yerevan 2015.....	105

<b>CHAPTER 5. Junior Medals</b> .....	109
No. 30. G. Oparin – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Loo 2013 .....	109
No. 31. I. Bukavshin – A. Predke, Queen’s Indian Defense, Loo 2014.....	112
No. 32. M. Chigaev – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Loo 2015.....	116
No. 33. I. Bukavshin – D. Yuffa, Bogo-Indian Defense, Loo 2015.....	119
<b>CHAPTER 6. The Big Leagues</b> .....	122
No. 34. V. Fedoseev – I. Bukavshin, Nimzo-Indian Defense, Taganrog 2013 ...	123
No. 35. I. Bukavshin – D. Kryakvin, Slav Defense, Samara 2013 .....	127
No. 36. A. Aleksandrov – I. Bukavshin, Anti-Meran, Izhevsk 2013 .....	132
No. 37. I. Bukavshin – M. Matlakov, Nimzo-Indian Defense, St. Petersburg 2013.	133
No. 38. I. Bukavshin – A. Genzling, Bogo-Indian Defense, Nancy 2014 .....	136
No. 39. I. Bukavshin – A. Predke, Queen’s Gambit Accepted, St. Petersburg 2014 ..	138
No. 40. A. Shimanov – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.	143
No. 41. I. Bukavshin – E. Inarkiev, Grunfeld Defense, Moscow 2015 .....	148
No. 42. I. Bukavshin – R. Rapport, Chigorin Defense, Moscow 2015.....	150
No. 43. B. Adhiban – I. Bukavshin, Slav Gambit, Moscow 2015 .....	152
No. 44. D. Andreikin – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Sochi 2015.....	154
No. 45. I. Bukavshin – I. Popov, Slav Defense, Kaliningrad 2015 .....	156
No. 46. I. Bukavshin – P. Svidler, Grunfeld Defense, Chita 2015.....	158
No. 47. S. Zhigalko – I. Bukavshin, Sicilian Defense, Baku 2015.....	162
No. 48. A. Goganov – I. Bukavshin, Catalan Opening, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015...166	
No. 49. I. Bukavshin – D. Khismatullin, Queen’s Gambit, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015...169	
No. 50. I. Bukavshin – A. Morozevich, King’s Indian Defense, Moscow 2015...181	
<b>CHAPTER 7. Magical Fragments</b> .....	196
No. 51. I. Bukavshin – Y. Dzhumagaliev, Dagomys 2009 .....	196
No. 52. I. Bukavshin – M. Krylov, Voronezh 2010 .....	197
No. 53. I. Bukavshin – N. Lortkipanidze, Batumi 2010 .....	197
No. 54. I. Bukavshin – V. Bologan, Moscow 2011.....	199
No. 55. G. Gajewski – I. Bukavshin, Warsaw 2012 .....	200
No. 56. I. Bukavshin – A. Demchenko, St. Petersburg 2013.....	200
No. 57. I. Bukavshin – N. Brunner, Nancy 2014.....	201
No. 58. E. Shaposhnikov – I. Bukavshin, Sochi 2014.....	203
No. 59. H. Nezdad – I. Bukavshin, St. Petersburg 2014 .....	204
No. 60. I. Bukavshin – A. Moiseenko, Jerusalem 2015.....	205
No. 61. I. Bukavshin – V. Babula, Jerusalem 2015 .....	208
No. 62. I. Bukavshin – I. Khairullin, Chita 2015.....	208
No. 63. I. Bukavshin – U. Eliseev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015.....	209
No. 64. I. Bukavshin – D. Kokarev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015 .....	210
<i>Major Accomplishments</i> .....	212
<i>List of Commentators</i> .....	215

## A WORD ABOUT A FRIEND

In late December 2015, two young men were strolling down the snowy streets of Togliatti. One could rather easily identify the travelers as two local grandmasters, Ivan Bukavshin and Jakov Geller. They were heading to one of the largest fitness centers in Russia's Motor City. Ivan could've easily passed for a "Bogatyr"—a kind-hearted warrior of immense strength from Russian fairy tales to whom younger colleagues would gravitate, seeking support and justice, and in whom girls would seek love and protection. My companion had recently completed a chess marathon and returned from his latest tournament, where he'd performed brilliantly, so it wasn't a tortuous workout in the gym that awaited us at the end of our route, but some ping pong, a nice swim, a session in the sauna, and a thirty-minute soak in the Jacuzzi. This was far from the first time we were taking this forty-minute journey together. We'd pass the time by talking about everything imaginable.

Ivan began his account of the daily tournament grind with the Nutcracker tourney. Boris Gelfand's cheerful nature astounded him, and he recalled his attempt to outplay the Israeli in the Najdorf with a smile on his face.

"So, it turns out that Mr. Gelfand analyzed the novelties I've been finding lately such a long time ago that he'd forgotten some lines. Actually, my biggest achievement in chess to date involves Gelfand. He noticed that I play a rare move in the Catalan—7...b6!?. He had time to prepare, yet he decided to steer clear of that. I was tremendously pleased after he played 8.♖a4!"

Alexander Morozevich garnered a great deal of my friend's attention, too.

"Did you see my win against him? I spotted the idea of playing 8.♗g5, 9.♗e3, 10.♗c1 a long time ago. White has an advantage in every line because the h6-pawn just gets in Black's way." Then he told me about a game he'd lost: "I'm so sick of that variation with 7.♖f3. I remembered everything I had written down, but I burned up the clock and fell apart under time pressure. That's it, Mr. Geller, no more Paulsens for me. I've had it already! Let's write a good book about it and never play it again! I'll show you what's changed, you'll systemize everything and put it all together. It'll be awesome!"

I must note that Ivan provided several rather compelling arguments in favor of co-authoring a book: Togliatti-based players had been employing that opening for years, I painstakingly analyzed that particular variation in 2011, and Ivan did the same in 2015, thereby reviving the Taimanov System for players in the 2650+ club. I even contacted a publisher several days later, but our hopes and dreams weren't fated to come true.... This book is a tribute of sorts to that promise, since it contains numerous excellent Sicilians, and Paulsens, more specifically.



*The Princes: Mikhail Antipov, Grigoriy Oparin, Vladislav Artemiev, and Ivan Bukavshin. Moscow, 2015*

Later on, we recalled Khanty-Mansiysk, where Ivan had to play 34 tournament games over the span of 20 days (he first won a qualifying round of the Russian Cup, then he came in second at a qualifying round for the Rapid Grand Prix, and then after that, he won the Russian Cup Final, a knockout tournament that year).

“I have no clue why the commentators were so delighted when I transferred my king to g3 in my game against Eliseev!” Ivan said. “By the time the final came around, I was so exhausted that I was on autopilot. I wasn’t the least bit surprised when Kokarev blundered in the game that proved decisive. I just saw the bishop pair and tried to keep the pressure up the whole time.”

We talked about the World Cup and discussed the twists and turns of the Scheveningen thoroughly analyzed in Game No. 47 against Sergei Zhigalko. Overall, Ivan was just as displeased with the outcome as he was with the amount of funds he’d spent on food and accommodation at the hotel for tournament participants. Nevertheless, he was already mulling over how to prepare most effectively to handle such a grueling tournament schedule so he could advance well beyond the first round the following time. Then we made a smooth transition to his national team prospects.

“Maybe it’s time you move up to the big leagues?” I asked.

“Nah,” he answered without vacillating for a second. “It’s too early for me to start thinking about that. I’m just going to focus on playing as well as I can.”

A big, fluffy cat greeted us in the warm lobby of the fitness center. Ivan instantly broke out into a wide grin and, as was his custom, stroked the purring

In 2006, Bukavshin fared slightly worse at the Russian Championship, tying for second in his age-group; however, he enjoyed a stellar performance at the U12 European Championship held in Montenegro. Bukavshin fiercely battled Vojtech Plat from the Czech Republic throughout the whole tournament. The game that determined the final standings took place during round seven. By that point, the rivals had lost a mere half point between the two of them, and the winner of their encounter would become the clear leader.

### No. 1

## V. PLAT – I. BUKAVSHIN

### *Sicilian Defense*

Herceg Novi 2006

*Commentary by Daniil Dubov*

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4  
4.♘xd4 g6!?

Ivan was always known for his remarkable opening preparation, but it reached a high level, by any set of standards, due, first and foremost, to his work with Yuri Yakovich and Jakov Geller. Ivan knew his openings pretty well even when he was very young, though. The move order he chose in this game allowed for the players to transpose into the Maroczy System, which offers White slightly better chances. It's highly likely that Plat practically always played 5.♘c3. Yet, I think that Black had a decent plan B up his sleeve if White had played 5.c4 instead.

5.♘c3 ♖g7 6.♖e3 ♘f6 7.♖c4 d6!?

A cunning move order. 7...0-0 is objectively stronger, but that's a moot point. Also, Ivan was probably shooting for a rare variation...

### 8.h3

And his calculation paid off! Now, Black doesn't have even the slightest hint of a problem.

Of course, 8.f3! is the principled reply, but then Black can go for 8... ♖b6!? 9.♘f5 ♖xb2 10.♘xg7+ ♔f8 with sharp play. Currently, White is considered to have sufficient compensation for the pawn; however, it's hard to directly challenge the soundness of this variation. And it's even harder to expect Ivan's opponent to do so. Let me remind you that this game was played at the U12 European Championship!

### 8...0-0 9.0-0 ♖d7

9...♘xe4!? was possible, too, and after 10.♘xe4 d5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♖d3 dxe4 13.♖xe4 ♖a6= further simplification followed by a draw is nearly inevitable. There's no need for Black to settle for that line, though, because he has an excellent position as it is.

### 10.♖b3 ♘a5

This is the standard plan—Black's preparing to post the knight on c4.

### 11.♖e2?!

An imprecise move. Once again, it's hard to criticize a 12-year-old for making it, though. White prevents Black from posting a knight on c4, but he overlooks a much more dangerous positional idea.

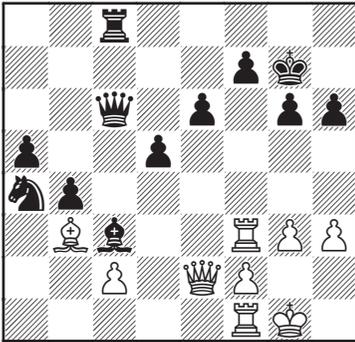
11.♖d2 ♖c8 12.♖h6 was possible, too. Similar positions oftentimes arise out of a reversed English. White is no

Before transferring the knight with decisive effect, he doesn't forget to improve his king position slightly.

37. ♔g2 ♕g7 38. ♖f3 ♞d6  
39. ♗e1 ♖c6!

Probing the weak a4-pawn.

40. ♔g1 ♞c4 41. ♖e2 ♞b2!  
42. ♗f3 ♕c3 43. ♗f1 ♞xa4



White's position is absolutely hopeless, and Black calmly converts.

44. ♕xa4 ♖xa4 45. ♖e3 ♖c6  
46. ♖a7 ♖c7 47. ♖a6 ♗b8 48. ♗d1  
♖b6 49. ♖e2 ♔g8 50. ♗dd3 ♖c5  
(50...a4!?) 51. ♗xc3 bxc3 52. ♖e5  
♗c8

Black is up three pawns, so White can resign without any reservations, but youth players often fight on in positions like this... Incidentally, Ivan rarely had trouble converting winning positions, even at the age of 11.

53. ♖f4 ♖c7 54. ♖xh6 ♖e5

54...e5!?—Black can just queen his pawns!

55. ♖h4 ♖e1+!? (55...d4-+)

56. ♔h2 ♖e5! 57. ♖e7 ♖g7

57...♖c7! would've been more logical. Now Black needs to demonstrate some precision.

58. ♖d7 ♗f8 59. ♖a7 d4 60. ♖xa5  
e5



*Ivan Bukavshin and Daniil Dubov face off nine years later at the Russian Super Final. Chita, 2015*

away, yet despite that, Black still had to defend with precision, which Ivan did wonderfully.

\*\*\*

One could rightfully call 2015 Ivan Bukavshin's best year in terms of his chess career. In the spring, he played in the European championships, where he demonstrated superb defensive skills (see game No. 60 Bukavshin – Moiseenko) and qualifying for the World Cup for the first time. Then he had a fantastic showing at the Aeroflot Open (3<sup>rd</sup> place with a performance rating of 2803).

### No. 41

#### I. BUKAVSHIN – E. INARKIEV

*Grunfeld Defense*

Moscow 2015

*Commentary by Evgeny Alekseev*

This game was played at the Aeroflot Open. Ivan's opponent was a future European champion and one of Russia's strongest grandmasters.

**1.d4** ♖f6 **2.c4** g6 **3.♘c3** d5 **4.cxd5**  
 ♜xd5 **5.e4** ♜xc3 **6.bxc3** ♙g7 **7.♞f3**  
**c5** **8.♙e3** ♜c6

8...♞a5 is more popular.

**9.♞c1** cxd4 **10.cxd4** e6?!

Too passive. Now Black won't have any counterplay involving ♙g4. Ernesto plans to put his bishop on b7, and White gets time to develop his initiative.

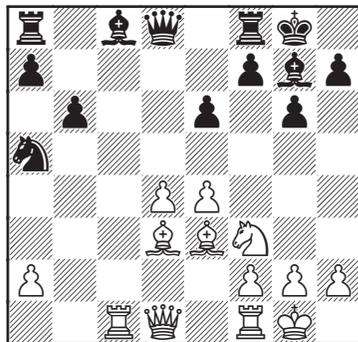
If 10...0-0, then 11.d5.

**11.♙c4** 0-0 **12.0-0** ♞a5

If 12...b6, White has a lot of interesting options: 13.♙xe6 (or 13.d5 ♞a5 14.dxe6 ♙xe6 15.♙xe6

fxe6 16.♞g5 ♞e7 17.♞g4 with a clear advantage) 13...♙xe6 14.♞xc6 ♙xa2 15.d5 f5 16.♞g5 fxe4 17.d6 h6 18.♞d2 ♙b3 19.♞b1 with an attack.

**13.♙d3** b6



**14.h4!**

White has a lead in development, and he builds up his initiative by pushing the h-pawn.

**14...♙b7**

14...h5 is dangerous because of 15.e5 ♙b7 16.♞g5, and later on, White will seek to push g4 and reach the Black monarch.

**15.h5** f5?!

Not wishing to defend passively, Ernesto tries to drum up some counterplay, thereby worsening his king position and weakening the e6-pawn.

15...♞d7, looking to meet 16.h6 with 16...♙h8, with a small advantage for White, looked more solid.

**16.e5**

This is a calm, positional continuation that provides White with a minor edge and relegates the g7-bishop to the sidelines. Now the threat of 17.h6, burying the bishop, looms.

16.♘g5, with complications, was even stronger: 16...♚e7 17.d5! exd5 18.exf5 gxf5 19.♙f4!, and White has a potent attack, but that wasn't easy to see over the board.

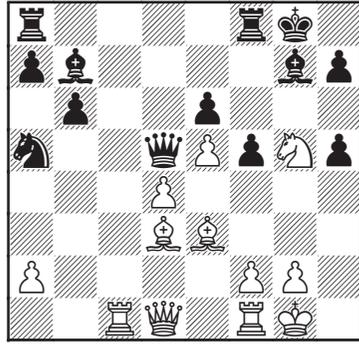
### 16...gxh5

This is a good idea; however, it seems to be coupled with a gross miscalculation.

16...♖f7 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.♘g5 ♗e7 19.♘h3 ♗f7 20.♚e2! (20.♘f4? ♙h6!) 20...♖c8 21.♘g5 ♖xc1 22.♖xc1 ♗e7 23.♙a6!, with an advantage for White, was worth considering.

### 17.♘g5 ♚d5??

The decisive mistake. It seems as though Black didn't even contemplate his opponent sacrificing the piece. He should've gone for 17...♚e8 18.♖c7 ♖c8 19.♙b5 ♗g6 20.♖xc8 ♙xc8 21.♘h3. White has a nicer position, but the battle has only begun.



### 18.♙e4!!

Black would've been in fine shape if not for this move. One blunder basically ruined everything. That doesn't happen all that often in chess.

### 18...♚d7

18...fxe4 19.♚xh5 h6 20.♖c7! loses on the spot, and Black gets mated quickly, since there's no defense against 21.♗g6.

### 19.♙xb7 ♘xb7 20.♚xh5 ♙h8



*Daniil Dubov, Ian Nepomniachtchi, and Ivan Bukavshin. Moscow, 2015*

Or 20...h6 21.♘h3, and Black has too many weaknesses.

**21.f4!**

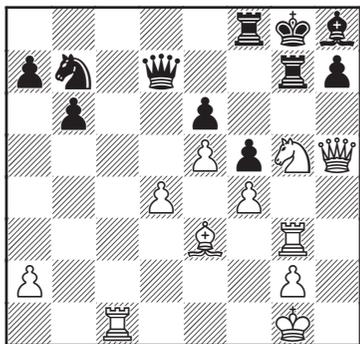
An excellent move! White prepares a rook maneuver—♖f1-f3-g3—thereby depriving Black of any possible counterplay involving 21...f4 and 22...♖f5.

There were a lot of alternatives. For instance, 21.♖c6!? looks interesting.

**21...♖ae8 22.♖f3**

22.d5!, breaking up his opponent's pawn chain, was even stronger: 22...exd5 23.♖f3 ♖e7 24.♖g3 ♖g7 25.♘xh7 ♖xg3 26.♘xf8, and Black's position collapses.

**22...♖e7 23.♖g3 ♖g7**



**24.♗f2!?**

A quiet positional move that prepares ♘xh7. Black doesn't have any counterplay; all of his pieces have to defend.

**24...♖e8 25.♖h3**

25.♖xe8 ♖xe8 26.♘xe6! ♖xg3 27.♗xg3 ♖xe6 28.♖c8+ ♖g7 29.♖c7+-, with a decisive advantage, was very strong, too. Well, it's hard to ruin White's position here.

**25...♗d8 26.♘xh7! ♖xg3 27.♗xg3 ♖f7 28.♘g5 ♖d7 29.♖c8**

Black's down a pawn and being attacked. The rest isn't too hard—White finishes his opponent off.

**29...♗g7 30.♗f2 ♖g6 31.♖b3 ♗f8 32.♖a4 ♖g7 33.♖c3! ♖c7 34.♖g3 ♖c1+ 35.♘h2 ♖h6+ 36.♖h3 ♖g7 37.♖e8 ♖e7 38.♖h5 ♗g7 39.♖g6 ♖f8 40.♘h7+ ♖g8 41.♘f6+ ♖f8 42.♖h8+**

**1-0**

Black resigned a move before mate. Ivan Bukavshin played an interesting and excellent game. A blunder on move 17 basically robbed Inarkiev of any chances at salvaging his position.

## No. 42

### I. BUKAVSHIN – R. RAPPORT

*Chigorin Defense*

Moscow 2015

*Commentary by Daniil Yuffa*

**1.d4**

During the tournament, our whole crew genuinely wanted Ivan to qualify for Dortmund (*the winner of the Aeroflot Open earned a trip to a major tournament in Dortmund—editor's note*). Defeating Richard Rapport enabled Ivan to come as close to achieving that goal as possible.

**1...d5 2.c4 ♘c6**

The Chigorin Defense is part of the Hungarian player's opening repertoire.

**3.cxd5 ♖xd5 4.e3 e5 5.♘c3 ♗b4 6.a3**

This makes more sense than the more popular 6.♗d2 ♗xc3 7.bxc3 ♘f6 8.f3, since after 8...e4 9.♖b3 ♖g5 Black has good piece play.



*Geurt Gijssen gives Ivan Bukavshin his award. Salekhard, 2007*



*The Samara Region Team. Salekhard, 2007*

Adult Russian Rapid Chess Championships – 4<sup>th</sup> place, 2745 performance rating

Tsherkovsky Memorial – 3<sup>rd</sup> place

Chigorin Memorial (qualifying round for the Russian Cup) – 2<sup>nd</sup> place, 2725 performance rating

Yugra Governor's Cup (qualifying round for the Russian Rapid Chess Cup) – 2<sup>nd</sup> place, 2688 performance rating

Nancy Chess Festival (France) – 1<sup>st</sup> place, 2686 performance rating

## **2015**

Winner of the Stars of the Samara Region 2011 (for the Best Athlete of a Non-Olympic Sport)

Russian Youth Championships, U21 – 1<sup>st</sup> place

European Universiade (as a member of the Ural State Mining University's team) – 1<sup>st</sup> place team, 3<sup>rd</sup> place individual

Yugra Governor's Cup (qualifying round for the Russian Cup Rapid) – 2<sup>nd</sup> place, 2656 performance rating

Yugra Governor's Cup (qualifying round for the Russian Cup) – 1<sup>st</sup> place, 2676 performance rating

Aeroflot Open – 3<sup>rd</sup> place, 2803 performance rating

Russian Higher League – 3<sup>rd</sup> place, 2751 performance rating

European Championships – 29<sup>th</sup> place, 2664 performance rating, advanced to the World Cup

Russian Cup – 1<sup>st</sup> place

Participant at the Russian Super Final

Participant at the World Cup

## **LIST OF COMMENTATORS**

*The numbers signify the game number*

- |                                                                               |                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Evgeny Alekseev – 41                                                          | Dmitry Kryakvin – 20, 35    |
| Vladislav Artemiev – 40                                                       | Igor Lysyj – 28, 29         |
| Maksim Chigaev – 32, 44                                                       | Maksim Matlakov – 37        |
| Daniil Dubov – 1                                                              | Alexander Morozevich – 50   |
| Vladimir Fedoseev – 34                                                        | Grigoriy Oparin – 17, 30    |
| Dmitry Frolyanov – 21, 23, 43                                                 | Vasily Papin – 9            |
| Jakov Geller – 2, 4, 6-8, 10, 11, 13-15,<br>18, 19, 22, 24, 25, 38, 47, 51-64 | Pavel Ponkratov – 5, 26, 27 |
| Denis Khismatullin – 49                                                       | Alexandr Predke – 31, 39    |
| Dmitry Kokarev – 3                                                            | Andrey Stukopin – 12        |
| Vladislav Kovalev – 36, 45                                                    | Yuri Yakovich – 46, 48      |
|                                                                               | Daniil Yuffa – 16, 33, 42   |