

Kupreichik: The Maestro from Minsk



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Kupreichik: The Maestro from Minsk

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Foreword to the English Edition

Genna Sosonko

Throughout practically its entire existence, the Soviet Union was cut off from the West. The closed nature of this society, the isolation of it from the free world, was mainly the reason for the creation of an entire cultural stratum – the enormous world of Soviet chess. The names of Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, Karpov, Kasparov, Korchnoi, Geller and Polugaevsky were known by everyone in the country, and they were no less popular than film stars. But behind this cohort of champions, there were numerous very strong grandmasters, who were hardly known in the West. One of these was Viktor Kupreichik, whose almost entire career fell within the period of that enormous now non-existent empire.

Kupreichik also played on the stages of packed concert halls and theatres, and numerous fans, with bated breath, followed his stunning games. A master of attack, he demonstrated play that you rarely see nowadays. Even today when playing over many games by Minsk's favourite, an expression of Tal's comes to mind – "tasty chess".

Memories of him have been written by world champions, trainers, colleagues, friends and Viktor's pupils. They all remember not only a wonderful chess player, but also an extraordinary personality. Even in the world of Soviet chess, Viktor was distinguished by his independence.

Mikhail Tal, Viktor's idol, once said that his favourite squares on the chess board were d5 and f5. Viktor, who was similar to Tal not only in his constant striving for the initiative, but also the incredible boldness of his play, repeatedly placed his pieces en prise too on these very squares. And his most brilliant firework display began with a knight sacrifice on d5 in a game with Tal himself.

Viktor Kupreichik belongs to the category of player who is highly appreciated by the professionals of the game. They knew that one always had to be wary of him, because when he was on form no one could withstand the pressure of his imaginative ideas. On opening this book, you will also have the opportunity to become acquainted with the play of one such remarkable player.

Foreword to the Russian Edition

Anastasia Sorokina

The publication of this book is timed to coincide with the 70th birthday of an outstanding chess player, the first Belarusian Grandmaster, a true friend and a wonderful person, Viktor Davydovich Kupreichik. Kuprey, Vitek – that's what his friends and the fans called him.

In the distant 1980s the name of Kupreichik resounded throughout the country. He was recognised in the street, fans would queue up to watch him play, and largely thanks to him a chess boom began in the Republic.

A very modest man, he never prepared a serious autobiography. True, a brochure was published for his 55th birthday, but the games were only with variational comments, without words. And, after all, his brilliant ideas and fearless attacks with cascades of sacrifices still provide enormous pleasure to all chess lovers.

For me, Viktor Davydovich Kupreichik was a close person, my uncle, and when I was taking my first steps in chess it is probable that I involuntarily tried to imitate him. A sensitive and tactful person, he did not like boasting and bravado, so when the idea of this book emerged I wanted to make it modest, like him, but at the same time show all the power of his chess talent and the charm of his human character. I hope that we have succeeded. This book includes the memories of people close to him, and his friends and colleagues.

An enormous thank you to all those who responded and took part in the work on this book. These were Kupreichik's close friends Yuri Balashov and Rafael Vaganian, world champions Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov, grandmasters Genna Sosonko and Vladimir Tukmakov, Alexander Beliavsky and Adrian Mikhalchishin, Oleg Romanishin and Evgeny Sveshnikov, Andrey Kovalev and Vyacheslav Dydysenko, Boris Gelfand and Ilya Smirin, Alexey Alexandrov and Sergey Zhigalko, Vladislav Kovalev and Rauf Mamedov,

Alexander Motylev and Ashot Nadanian, Alexey Bezgodov and Dmitry Kryavkin, and USSR honoured trainer Anatoly Bykhovsky.

International Master Evgeny Mochalov studied thousands of Kupreichik's games and selected the brightest and most interesting ones. The young journalist Nadezhda Kravchuk helped to record and polish the memories of the grandmaster's relatives. The journalist Andrey Paneakh not only edited all the texts, but also checked the chess annotations, and if necessary corrected and amplified them.

Special words of gratitude to my friend Vladimir Barsky, without whom this book would not have come about. Many thanks too to Maxim Notkin for his professional and friendly support at all stages of the book's production. Absolutely all the people whom we approached for annotations or memories responded to our request. For me this is irrefutable proof of what enormous respect Viktor Kupreichik enjoyed.

Over the past few years the popularity of chess in the Republic of Belarus has been steadily increasing. The chess traditions laid down by Viktor Davydovich Kupreichik are alive. The Chess Academy which operates in Minsk bears the name of the first Belarusian Grandmaster, and tournaments in his memory are held. I hope that the creative legacy of Viktor Kupreichik will bring joy and benefit to new generations of chess players.

*Anastasia Sorokina,
President of the Belarus Chess Federation, FIDE Vice-President*

Part One: The Hussar from Minsk

Friendship Made by a Moscow Blizzard

Anatoly Karpov, 12th world champion

I made the acquaintance of Viktor Kupreichik in 1963 at the USSR Junior Championship. We even lived in the same hotel room, but didn't become close. I was then 12 years old, he was 14, and the difference of two years was still appreciable. But we became firm friends three years later during a trip to Czechoslovakia, although I was still a schoolboy, and he was a student.

At that time in our Chess Federation there was not a very well organised secretary – Yuri Zarubin (he now lives in Berlin, and publishes a Russian newspaper there). Our Czech colleagues sent a telegram, inviting two young masters to take part in a tournament, but he mixed things up – he decided that it was a junior tournament. And so the players sent abroad were a 17-year-old first year student at Minsk University and a 15-year-old schoolboy.

It was a New Year tournament, and it began at the very end of 1966. And it just shows how much the climate has changed in the intervening half a century: now it is even hard to imagine that a blizzard was raging in Moscow, and Sheremetevo Airport was closed for three days. At that time the Aeroflot Company had only just built its own hotel alongside the Sports Centre on Leningrad Prospect, and it was considered one of the best in Moscow. Viktor and I were accommodated in a double room, we were given food vouchers, and we spent three days and nights in this hotel.

But at last we flew to Prague, where it was almost like spring. We were met by staff from the Czech-USSR Friendship Society; it turned out that from the capital we still had to travel 400 kilometres to Ostrava, and then by bus to Trinec.

When the organisers saw me and Kupreichik, they were extremely surprised: it was two youngsters who had arrived for an adult men's tournament, and also we were late! Perhaps it was for the best that things turned out this

way: if we had arrived on time they could well have found replacements.

But since we had arrived, there was nothing to be done: we had to play and 'catch up' after the delay. On each of the first few days we played two games: one in the morning from 10am to 3pm, and another after dinner from 5pm until 10pm. Nearly all the strongest Czech players took part in the tournament, apart from Vlastimil Hort and the members of the country's men and student teams.

In the first game I had to play one of the strongest Czech players, Jan Smejkal. In a hard battle I managed to win, and this greatly inspired me: in the evening I won my second game against my friend Viktor Kupreichik. Friendship is friendship, but chess is chess – we always engaged in a principled fight at the board. In the end I finished first with 11 points out of 13, far ahead of the second and third prize-winners – my friend Viktor and the Czech master Kupka.

In subsequent years Viktor and I rarely met at the board, but playing against him was always interesting: he was an exciting and creative player. But I am glad that I was able to help the players of his native city first to obtain a Chess Palace, and then to uphold it.

It happened like this. At the end of 1979 the 47th USSR Championship was held in Minsk – the very one where Kupreichik established a record by winning five games in a row. I didn't take part in the tournament, but I came to the Belarusian capital on business of my own. One day I met with Masherov, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Republic's Communist Party. "Pyotr Mironovich, the interest in chess is enormous, every day there is a huge number of spectators, but Minsk chess players still don't have their own club!". Masherov was a very resolute man, and he promptly said: "I promise that there will be a club!"

At the next meeting of the Politburo, Pyotr Mironovich raised the question about a Chess Palace in Minsk, and he offered to give chess players a fine and newly-constructed building in the city centre. It was objected that the building had been constructed for writers.

"But they already have a building", Masherov replied. "Writers want to improve their conditions, but chess players have nothing."

After this meeting the Council of Ministers changed its decision, and the building was handed over to chess players.

And then, by the will of fate, many years later it so happened that I was in Minsk precisely at a time when they were trying to take this building away from chess players. Fortunately, I was able to convince Alexander Grigorievich Lukashenko to keep the Chess Palace.

A Memorable First Meeting

Grandmaster Alexander Beliavsky

This was my first tournament meeting with Viktor. Subsequently we played many games, the last one 27 years later.

Game 1

V.Kupreichik-A.Beliavsky

USSR Team Championship, Riga 1968

Ruy Lopez

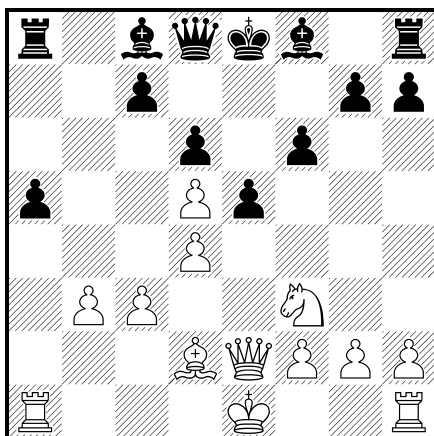
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 ♘f6 5 ♚e2 b5 6 ♙b3 ♘a5 7 d4

White could have obtained a better endgame after 7 ♘xe5 ♘xb3 8 axb3 ♚e7 9 d4 d6 10 ♘c6 ♚xe4 11 ♚xe4+ ♘xe4 12 f3 ♘f6 13 c4, but already then an early exchange of queens was incompatible with Kupreichik's attacking style.

7...♘xb3 8 axb3 d6

8...exd4 9 e5 ♘d5 10 ♘xd4 ♙b7 11 ♘f5 g6 12 ♘d6+ cxd6 13 exd6+ ♙e7 would have led to an equal position.

9 ♘c3 b4 10 ♘d5 ♘xd5 11 exd5 f6 12 ♙d2 a5 13 c4 bxc3 14 bxc3



14...♖b8

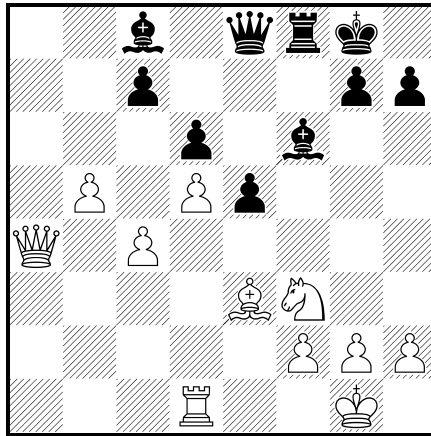
Better was 14...♙d7 15 c4 a4 16 0-0 ♙e7 17 bxa4 ♖xa4 18 ♖xa4

♙xa4 19 ♖a1 ♗d7 20 c5 ♜b8 21 c6 ♗c8 22 h3 0-0 23 ♜d3 ♜e8 24 ♗e3 e4! 25 ♜xe4 g6 26 ♜d3 (if 26 g4 f5) 26...♗f5 27 ♜a6 g5, although even here White retains an advantage.

15 0-0 ♗e7 16 dxe5

Also in the event of 16 ♖a3 0-0 17 c4 a4 18 b4 ♜e8 19 b5 ♜g6 20 ♖xa4 ♗g4 21 ♜e3 the advantage is with White.

16...fxe5 17 ♜c4 ♖a8 18 b4 a4 19 b5 ♗b7 20 ♗e3 ♗f6 21 ♖fd1 0-0 22 ♖xa4 ♖xa4 23 ♜xa4 ♜e8 24 c4 ♗c8



25 ♘d2

It was correct to include the queen along the fourth rank and push the passed b-pawn: 25 c5 ♜g6 26 cxd6 cxd6 27 ♘d2 ♗h3 28 ♜e4 ♗f5 29 ♜c4 ♗d3 30 ♜b4 ♗g5 31 b6 ♗xe3 32 fxe3 ♜g5 33 b7 ♜xe3+ 34 ♔h1 ♜a7 35 ♖c1 ♗a6 36 ♖b1 ♖b8 (White also wins in the event of 36...♜b8 37 ♜b6 ♗d3 38 ♖a1 e4 39 ♖a8 ♜xa8 40 bxa8 ♜xa8 41 ♔g1) 37 ♜xd6 ♖xb7 38 ♜e6+ ♔f8 39 ♖a1 ♜b6 40 d6 ♖b8 41 ♘f3 h6 42 ♖c1 ♜b3 43 ♜e7+ ♔g8 44 ♖c7 ♜b1+ 45 ♘g1 ♜g6 46 d7 and White wins.

25...♜g6 26 ♘f1 h5 27 ♔h1 ♗g5?

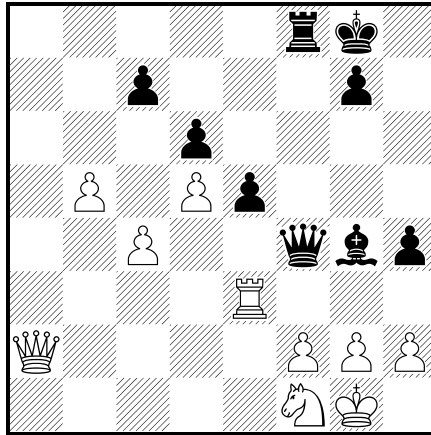
Black should have transferred his bishop to an active position on d3: 27...♗f5 28 ♜a2 ♗d3 29 ♘d2 e4 30 h3 ♗e5. In this position he has full compensation for the pawn and the chances are equal.

28 ♗xg5 ♜xg5 29 ♜a2 ♗g4 30 ♖e1 ♜f4 31 ♔g1 h4 32 ♖e3?!

This move allows counterplay, which could have enabled Black to equalise. After 32 h3 ♗h5 33 ♘e3 ♗g6 34 ♖e2 ♔h7 35 ♜a1 ♜d4 36 ♖a2

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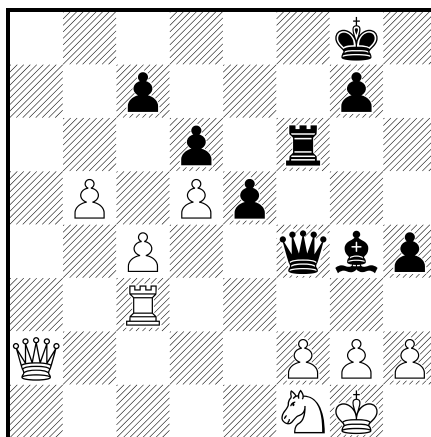
♖f4 37 ♕e1 ♖f8 38 ♕c1 ♙d3 39 ♕d1 ♙g6 40 ♕g4 ♖f4 41 ♕g5
 White retains a big advantage.



32...♖f6

Black misses his opportunity. He should have considered 32...h3 33 ♖g3 (or 33 g3 ♕d4 34 ♖a3 ♕d1 35 ♕d2 ♕b1 when Black has full compensation for the pawn) 33...hxg2 34 ♘e3 (after 34 ♙xg2 ♙f5 35 ♙g1 ♕c1 36 ♕a7 g6 37 ♕xc7 ♖a8 38 ♕xd6 ♖a1 White has to be satisfied with a draw) 34...♙f3 35 h3 ♕d4 36 ♘xg2 ♙xg2 37 ♙xg2 ♖f4 with an equal game.

33 ♖c3



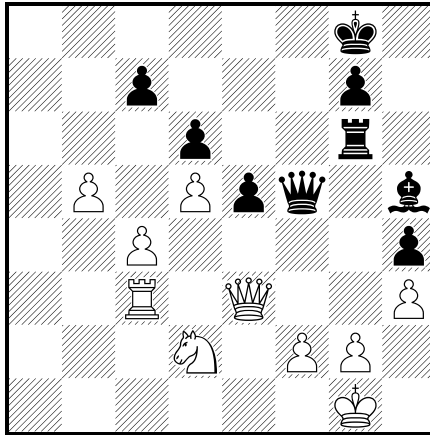
But White allows another chance.

33...♖g6?

The decisive mistake. Now White deprives his opponent of counterplay on the kingside, and the extra pawn decides the game.

34 ♖d2 ♗f5 35 ♖c2 ♗g5 36 ♖c1 ♗f6 37 ♖e3 ♗f5

With the rook on the g-file, play with ...h3 is too late: 37...h3 38 g3 ♕f5 39 f3 ♖d8 40 ♖a3 ♗f6 41 ♗g5 ♗b8 42 ♘d2 ♗b6+ 43 ♖e3 with a won endgame.

38 h3 ♕h5 39 ♘d2

White activates his knight, and Black is completely deprived of counterplay against the white king. His position is hopeless.

39...♗f6 40 ♘e4 ♗f8 41 ♖a3 ♕g6 42 f3 ♕h5 43 ♘g5 1-0

Not bad technique by the 19-year-old Viktor and excusable errors for the 15-year-old Alexander.

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