

Max Euwe's Best Games

Jan Timman

Max Euwe's Best Games
The Fifth World Chess Champion (1935-'37)

New In Chess 2023

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Introduction

I already planned to write a book on Euwe's best games years ago. There were various motives for this. Firstly, I wanted to pay homage to the only World Chess Champion the Netherlands has ever produced. Moreover, there wasn't a representative collection of his games yet. *From My Games* from 1938 contains seventy games from 1920-1937. *Schaakpartijen van Dr M. Euwe*, which appeared in the following year, is the Dutch version of that book in which the translator, Lodewijk Prins, added five games from 1938 and 1939. This was the book I set my eyes on in my early years in Delft, my first introduction to Euwe's games.

Max Euwe. The Biography contains 116 games from his entire career, but many of these are not, or hardly, annotated. The selection does not represent his best games – it contains too many draws and losses. And then there is another book, which appeared only in Dutch: *Keuze uit zijn beste partijen*. This book contains a curious selection of 47 games, a significant part of them from 1950-1953; those were decidedly not Euwe's best years. I suspect the book's compilers had been raking Euwe's commentaries together from the federation's magazine of the day.

There was another vital motive – curiosity. How strong was he? Of course, I knew the stories about Alekhine's drunkenness that caused problems for the Russian during the 1935 match. Euwe labelled this as nonsense; during that match, Alekhine didn't drink more than he usually did. And he was used to achieving success after alcohol-filled evenings. In this respect, it's good to quote Vasily Smyslov, who said: 'Nothing accidental happens in life; whatever form Alekhine was in then, a match against him could only be won by a master of the highest class. Euwe played better and rightly became champion.' Kasparov cites Smyslov in agreement in *My Great Predecessors, Part II*. Yes, Euwe was indeed a worthy World Champion.

Kasparov writes: 'He was the first to begin preparing professionally for world championship matches.' It was nothing short of a paradox: a top player who distinguished himself from his colleagues because he had a regular job aside from chess, and he turned out to be an eminent professional. Of course, Euwe was of exceptional class not only in opening theory. Studying his games, I discovered that he was very good at concrete calculation, and combined this with fine positional feeling. Apart from that, I noticed he was a full-blooded attacking player. Whenever the



The subject and the author of this book meet at the European Club Cup, Rotterdam 1979.

position lent itself to attacking, he would direct his pieces toward the enemy king. It was a great pleasure to play through such attacking games.

Generally, Euwe had excellent endgame technique. Especially when the features of the position were clear, he wouldn't make any mistakes. However, sometimes he could act hesitantly, letting winning endgames slip out of his hands. Examples are Euwe-Réti, Bad Pistyan 1922, and Euwe-Bogoljubow, Zürich 1934. It is a sign of Euwe's willpower that he still managed to win both games. The game with Bogoljubow has been included in this book (Game 26).

I worked on selecting Euwe's best games for more than a month. It is a delicate process in which you have to weigh the quality of every game. For example, I have long doubted whether I should include Euwe's draw with Bronstein from Zürich 1953. This was a high-level fight in which both players successfully braved the complex problems in the position. Eventually, I decided to leave out this game, since it had primarily been Bronstein who had dictated the play; Euwe had a defensive role in this spectacle. I did include five other draws: two against Capablanca, and also draws against Fine, Botvinnik and Sosonko. In all these cases, Euwe outplayed his opponent in a superior way, only to fail in the last minute. In addition, I have selected 75 won games that show Euwe in optimal form.

I quickly determined the division into chapters. In the first chapter, we see the 19-year-old Euwe in the 1920s, growing from a promising young player into a candidate for the World Championship. In this period, Euwe succeeds various times in defeating top players in good style and works himself up to be a player of the highest level. In the second chapter, I discuss his games from 1930 onward: the run-up to the World Championship, the match, and then his games as the World Champion.

In an interview with Max Pam in 1975, Euwe said: 'When I was thirty, I kept thinking to myself: I've played enough chess by now. I'm going to focus on science.' Fortunately, these thoughts did not prevail eventually. We should also be grateful to Hans Kmoch for persuading Euwe to play the match with Alekhine. With hindsight, you might wonder how it is possible that someone who is on his way to the top is considering quitting chess. We have seen more often in history that world champions quit chess after having conquered the highest throne: Fischer, Kasparov, and Kramnik, for example. I think Euwe never seriously considered quitting chess. His games radiated too much enthusiasm. On top of that, he was becoming stronger and stronger in the 1930s. The high point, of

course, was his match victory over Alekhine in 1935, including the 'Pearl of Zandvoort' (see Game 34). The world title then gave him wings. He kept scoring well in tournaments, played good games, and wrote two tournaments to his name: Amsterdam 1936 (with Fine) and Bad Nauheim-Stuttgart-Garmisch 1937. A relatively large number of games from this period have been included in this collection.

The third chapter opens with the revenge match with Alekhine, in which Euwe started with a convincing win. However, what started so well ended in catastrophe. Alekhine soon got a grip on the match and didn't let go. The dethronement was bound to happen. 'For Euwe personally it was a bitter time,' writes his biographer, Alexander Münnhoff. It was hard for Euwe to recover completely, especially as the threat of war was becoming stronger and stronger. In 1941, however, he showed that you can still play at the top level after passing forty. He beat Bogoljubow 6½-3½ in a match.

The fourth chapter contains games from the period after the Second World War. It started excellently for Euwe. His comeback in the tournament arena, the Staunton Tournament in Groningen 1946, was impressive. It is very rare that a 45-year-old performs so well in a long tournament. In the period after this, however, lots of things went wrong, and the World Championship Tournament in The Hague/Moscow 1948 was a low point. In the 1950s, he managed to recover. His ambition had gone, but his enthusiasm for the game hadn't; the quality of Euwe's games remained excellent. The last two games from this book demonstrate that he was still extremely strong after passing seventy.

A mysterious phenomenon in Euwe's career is the blunder. This is what he said about it: 'During my chess career I have made quite a few oversights. In fact I have probably made more silly blunders than any other world champion.' It is great to see Euwe first coming up with an understatement, only then to tell the bitter truth. Indeed, even in his best years, his tournament results were negatively influenced by blunders: against Lasker in Nottingham 1936 and – even worse – against Lilienthal in Stockholm 1937, where he lost an easily winning bishop ending due to an unfortunate move. The most dramatic, however, was his defeat at the hands of Smyslov in The Hague 1948. Indeed, Euwe would doubtlessly have won the brilliancy prize if he had rounded off his attack in style. The game would also have been a show-piece in this collection.

It was sour that Euwe allowed the great Russian to escape again five years later in Zürich, due to a blunder in a winning position. Had he won that game, his victory over Geller (see Game 71) would have put him on 3 out of 3. Would Smyslov still have won the tournament in that case? Probably, yes; he was clearly the strongest player, and this nearly always

tells in such long tournaments. And even after this unfortunate loss, Euwe still managed to produce a magnificent attacking game against Najdorf (see Game 73).

In this book, I have focused exclusively on Euwe's career. For my personal memories of Euwe, I refer you to my book *Timman's Titans*. There is, however, a dream I would like to mention briefly since it contains a reference to the book. The date of the dream was 22 April 2022.

In my dream, Euwe and I were talking. A pile of hand-written paper sheets lay in front of me, and I said: 'These are the first pages of a collection of your games I'm writing; you may have heard of it.'

With these words, the dream ended.

Jan Timman,
Arnhem, May 2023

30.e6!

The coup de grâce.

30...♖h7 31.e7 ♜e8 32.♞c1 ♔h6

33.♝e6

And Black resigned.

The fourth traditional tournament in Carlsbad – today, Karlovy Vary – had a strong field, but Alekhine and Lasker were missing. Aron Nimzowitsch celebrated the greatest triumph in his career. He stayed half a point ahead of Capablanca and Spielmann with 15 out of 21. Euwe ended up three points behind the winner; this was a slightly disappointing result in this phase of his career.

In Carlsbad, there was a curious time control: 30 moves in 2 hours, then the game was adjourned, and the players got an hour for the next 15 moves each. Thus, the players had an exceptionally large amount of thinking time for the opening phase.

Euwe won his second Black game against Paul Johner in Carlsbad. His opening choice was curious: Euwe repeated what Bogoljubow had played against him in the previous game. He must have found an improvement on Black's play somewhere – but where? This question never came up for discussion, since Johner deviated first. When White put his queen on the wrong square, Euwe struck, winning an exchange with a deeply calculated combination.

Game 17 Queen's Gambit Declined

Paul Johner

Max Euwe

Carlsbad 1929

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♝c3 d5 4.♙g5
♜bd7 5.e3 ♙e7 6.♜f3 0-0 7.♞c1 c6
8.♙d3 a6 9.cxd5 cxd5**



It's curious that Euwe now plays this with Black.

10.♝e5

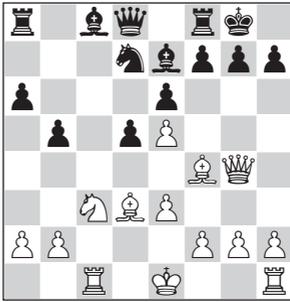
In principle, this knight sortie is premature. It was better to castle first, as Euwe had done.

10...♜xe5 11.dxe5 ♜d7 12.♙f4 b5

Euwe is following in Bogoljubow's footsteps. However, in these circumstances, it was not necessary to fianchetto the queen's bishop. Black could have obtained equal chances with 12...♞b6; for example, 13.♞b1 f5 14.exf6 ♜xf6 15.0-0 ♙d7 and Black has completed his development in a satisfactory way.

13.♞g4

White could have steered the game into Euwe-Bogoljubow waters with 13.0-0. In these circumstances, the text move is less strong since the black bishop is still on c8.

**13...f5!**

An adequate reaction. Black could also have chased away the knight first with 13...b4, but the text move is more precise.

14.exf6

In the tournament book, Alfred Brinckmann provides this move with a '?' and gives 14.♖h3 as stronger. However, this was certainly not an improvement; after 14...♗c5 15.♕b1 g5 16.♕g3 ♕d7, Black has a large advantage.

14...♗xf6 15.♖g3

An unfortunate square for the queen. Correct was the modest 15.♖d1. Here, Black hardly has any problems, but White has some advantage after 15...♕d6 16.0-0 ♕xf4 17.exf4 ♕b7 18.♖e1.

**15...e5!**

A sharply calculated push.

16.♕xe5

The only move to avoid material loss was 16.♕g5, unattractive though it is. White is completely pushed back: 16...e4 17.♕e2 b4 18.♗d1 and now Black has various promising options. I will give two:

A) 18...♗h5 (the same combination as in the game) 19.♕xe7 ♗xg3

20.♕xd8 ♗xe2 21.♖c5 (21.♖xe2 ♕g4+ 22.♖e1 ♖axd8 is also clearly better for Black) 21...♖xd8 22.♖xe2 ♕d7, with a large advantage for Black. He will bring his bishop to b5; White's knight has no squares;

B) 18...a5 19.♕f4 ♗d7 20.♕c7 ♖e8 21.0-0 ♕a6 and here too, White is in big trouble. He will always be plagued by the poor position of his knight.

So, would 18.♗a4 have been better? Also then, Black could have taken firm control: 18...♕d7 19.♗c5 ♖c8 20.♗b3 ♖xc1+ 21.♗xc1 ♗h5 and this looks cheerless for White.

16...♗h5

The first point of the previous move; White's queen has no squares.

17.♕c7

The only chance.

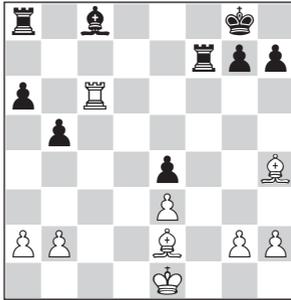
17...♗xg3 18.♕xd8 ♗xh1 19.♕xe7



19... ♖xf2!

This is the actual point of his 15th move; Black will eventually emerge an exchange to the good.

20. ♖e2 ♜f7 21. ♖h4 ♗e4 22. ♗xe4 dx4 23. ♜c6



Even though Black is a full exchange up, his technical task is anything but easy. For the time being, White's bishop pair is a formidable force to be reckoned with.

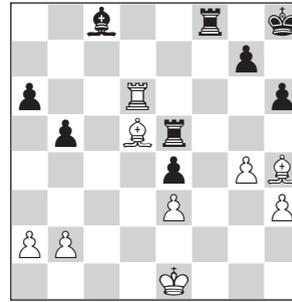
23... ♖b7 24. ♜d6 ♜c7

It is a good idea in itself to occupy the c-file, but Black cannot maintain his rook there in these circumstances. More accurate was 24...h6, so as only after 25. ♖g4 ♗h8 26. ♖e6 to resort to 26...♜c7.

25. ♖g4 ♗h8 26. ♖g3 ♜e7 27. ♖h4 ♜ee8 28. ♖h5

After this move, White loses all control of the position. 28. ♖e6 offered better saving chances; here the black rooks cannot become active yet. Black's best reaction would have been 28...h6 to create luft for the king. After that, he can slowly make progress.

28... ♜e5 29. ♖f7 ♜f8 30.g4 ♖c8 31.h3 h6 32. ♖d5



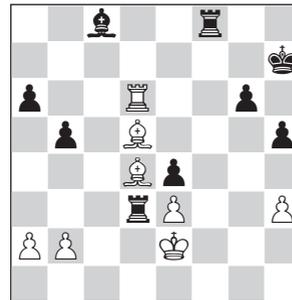
32...h5

Euwe opts for breaking open the position, to further activate his bishop. An alternative path to the win was 32...♜ee8, to prepare the invasion on f3 by the other rook.

33.g5

White was also lost after 33.gxh5 ♖xh3 34.h6 g6! 35. ♜f6 ♜d8.

33...g6 34. ♖g3 ♜xg5 35. ♖f4 ♜g1+ 36. ♖f2 ♜d1 37. ♖e2 ♜d3 38. ♖e5+ ♖h7 39. ♖d4



39... ♜xd4

Simplest. Euwe gives back the exchange, to eliminate the bothersome bishop pair, after which his kingside preponderance will decide. Also convincing enough was 39...♖f5, vacating the c8-square for the rook.

40.exd4 ♖xh3 41. ♖xe4 ♖f5 42. ♖xf5 ♜xf5 43. ♜xa6 h4 44. ♜a3

g5 45. ♖f3 ♔g6 46. ♗d3 g4 47. d5
 h3 48. d6 h2 49. ♗d1 g3 50. d7 ♖f8
 51. ♖f1 ♖xf1 52. d8 ♚ h1 ♚ 53. ♚g8+
 ♔h5 54. ♚e8+ ♔g4 55. ♚d7+ ♖f5
 56. ♚d4+ ♔h3 57. ♚h8+ ♔g2 0-1

In the 9th round of the tournament in Carlsbad, Euwe played against Capablanca for the third time. He had lost to him in London 1922, and in Bad Kissingen one year before Carlsbad he had escaped miraculously with a draw. In Carlsbad, Euwe seemed to be on his way to beating the great Cuban. This would, of course, have given an enormous boost to his self-confidence. Also, he would have overtaken Capablanca in the tournament rankings, as Euwe was trailing by half a point on 5 points. Of course, chess-technically the eventual draw was a serious disappointment as well, since Euwe had played superbly up to a certain point. He must have been plagued by nerves. It would take another nine years before Euwe managed to defeat the Cuban!

Game 18 Nimzo-Indian Defence

Max Euwe

Jose Raul Capablanca

Carlsbad 1929

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♗b4 4. ♚c2
 d5 5. a3 ♗xc3+ 6. ♚xc3 dxc4 7. ♚xc4
 0-0 8. ♗g5 c6

A passive continuation. Nowadays, 8...b6 is played here, with good chances of equalizing.

9. ♘f3 ♘bd7 10. e3 ♚a5+ 11. b4 ♚d5



12. ♚c2!

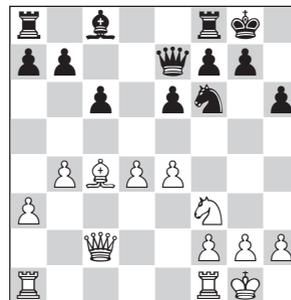
A strong move. White keeps the queens on the board, and will develop his king's bishop with gain of tempo.

12...h6 13. ♗c4 ♚d6 14. ♗xf6

After this trade, the larger part of White's advantage crumbles away. It looked logical to win another tempo with 14. ♗f4, 'a promising alternative', as Euwe called it. After 14...♚e7 15. 0-0 b6 (if 15...♘h5, 16. ♗e5! is very strong) 16. e4 ♗b7 17. ♖fe1 (or 17. ♗d3), White has a large advantage.

Also worthy of attention was 14. ♗h4. Now, if 14...a5, 15. e4! is unattractive for Black.

14...♘xf6 15. e4 ♚e7 16. 0-0



16...a5

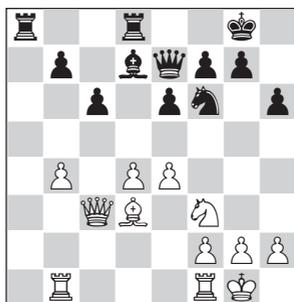
Euwe gives a '!' to this move, and adds that it is 'of essential importance'. Opening the a-file is indeed strategically sound, but the computer has a slight preference for the alternative 16...b6, to fianchetto the queen's bishop. It's hard for White to claim an advantage. Probably, 17.♘e5 ♘b7 18.f3 is the best option, but then Black has the neutraliser 18...♘d7.

17.♖ab1 axb4 18.axb4 ♘d7 19.♘d3 ♖fd8

In hindsight, Capablanca considered 19...♖a3 would have been stronger, to double the rooks on the a-file. However, it is questionable whether this is useful. After 20.♘e5 ♖fa8 21.♖fd1 ♘e8 22.h3 ♖a2 23.♖c3 ♖8a3 24.♖b3 White has the advantage; he has maintained his preponderance in the centre.

20.♖c3

Euwe explains that he made this move to keep the black rook from a3. The computer slightly prefers 20.♖fc1, when play could develop as follows after 20...♖a3: 21.♘e5 ♘e8 22.♘c4 ♖a7 23.e5 ♘d5 24.♘d6, with a clear advantage for White. He has a mighty knight on d6.



20...♘e8!

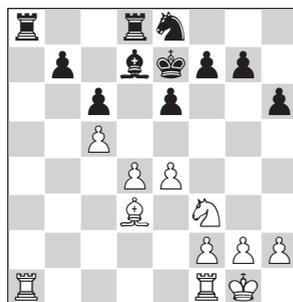
Sharply spotted by Capablanca. In such positions, Black often withdraws his bishop to e8 to exert pressure on White's d-pawn. Capablanca withdraws his knight instead, to direct it to b5 via d6 or c7. Black doesn't mind being saddled with a doubled pawn by an exchange on b5, since in that case his bishop will become strong.

21.♖c5 ♖f8 22.♖a1 ♖xc5

Black could also have obtained equal play with 22...♘c7. It seems as if White can go pawn-hunting undisturbed with 23.♖xa8 ♖xa8 24.♖b6, but the result is disappointing; after 24...♘e8 25.♖xb7 ♖a3 26.♖d1 ♘b5, Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn.

23.bxc5 ♖e7

The most accurate move was 23...♘c7 to be able to play the knight to b5. After 24.♖fb1 ♖xa1 25.♖xa1 ♘e8 26.♖b1 ♘b5, we get the scenario I sketched in my comment to Black's 20th move; Black doesn't have to fear the exchange on b5 at all, since then his bishop will get a strong square on c6.



24. ♖fb1!

Forcing Black to trade on a1 and thereby cede the control of the a-file to White.

24... ♜xa1 25. ♜xa1 ♙c8 26. ♜f1 e5

This liberating attempt was sharply condemned by Tartakower in the tournament book. However, it is the first move of the engine.

Nimzowitsch's recommendation 26... ♘c7 is not bad either, but after 27. ♜e2, Black will have to go for 27... e5 anyway. After 28. ♘xe5 ♘e6 29. ♘f3 ♘xd4+ 30. ♘xd4 ♜xd4, White has 31. ♜d2! to play the king to c3. White is in command, but probably Black can just hold.

27. ♘xe5 ♜xd4 28. ♜e2**28...f6**

The sharp 28...f6! was Black's best defence. The point emerges after 29. exf5 ♜d5; Black regains the pawn. White keeps the upper hand with 30. ♘g6+ ♙d8 31. g4 ♜xc5 32. f3, but probably this is insufficient to win. 28... ♜b4, to activate the rook, came into consideration too. After 29. ♜d2 ♜b2+ 30. ♜e3 ♘f6 31. h3, White remains ahead.

29. ♘c4 ♜d8

Slightly more precise was 29... ♘c7, so as only after 30. ♘b6 to withdraw the rook with 30... ♜d8. After 31. ♜a7, the play is similar to that in the game.

30. ♜a7

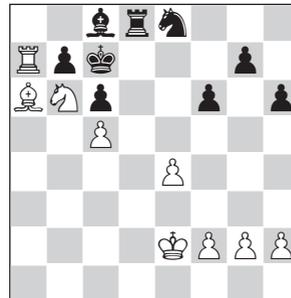
An interesting alternative was 30. f4, with the intention of constricting Black's play after 30... ♘c7 with 31. f5!. Here, White has good winning chances.

30... ♜d7

Capablanca brings his king to the menaced wing, but Euwe refutes this plan in a sublime way.

30... ♘c7 was absolutely necessary. The intention behind the knight move is to surrender the b-pawn and then create counterplay.

Indeed, 31. ♘b6 ♘e6 32. ♘xc8+ ♜xc8 33. ♜xb7+ looks cheerless for Black, but he has 33... ♜d8! 34. ♙c4 ♘xc5 35. ♜xg7 ♘xe4 and despite the active position of his rook and his superior structure, it is not clear how large White's winning chances are. 36. ♜h7 is met by 36... ♜b8, when Black threatens to invade with his rook.

31. ♘b6+ ♙c7 32. ♙a6!

This diagram position is one of my earliest chess memories. I thought all those pieces huddled together on the queenside looked fascinating. My knowledge was insufficient to realize that the text move is in fact the decisive blow. Also interesting is that the game was adjourned precisely at this point. Capablanca had to seal a move; he faced a difficult choice.

32...♟d6

An ingenious saving attempt which is, however, insufficient. The point of White's previous move becomes clear after 32...♟b8 33.♞xc8 bxa6 34.♞e7! and White liquidates into a winning knight ending.

In the tournament book, Tartakower gives 32...♞d4 as the best defence. Generally, active counterplay in a pressurized position is to be recommended, but in this case it wouldn't have helped Black. White can react as follows:

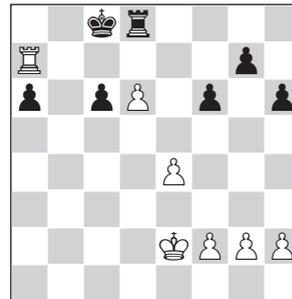
A) The capture 33.♞xc8 was indicated by Euwe, and his variation is cited by Kasparov with approval. Here, Black gets good drawing chances by simply taking back: 33...♟xc8! (and not 33...♞xe4+, on account of 34.♟d3 ♞a4 35.♟c4! and wins, according to Euwe) 34.♟xb7+. The problem for White is that he wins the b-pawn, but loses the initiative. After 34...♟d7 35.♟a6+ ♞c7 36.♟d3 ♞b4, Black has active play, and some compensation for the pawn;

B) 33.♟e3! is the right move that has a hidden point. Black can

now protect the pawn indirectly with 33...♞b4, but then White changes plans: 34.♞a8 ♟d7 35.♟d3. White has abandoned the siege of the b-pawn, and now confronts Black with other problems: the poor coordination of his pieces. The mighty knight on b6 plays the starring role here. Closer investigation also teaches us that the black rook is threatened to be surrounded.

There could follow 35...g5 36.♟e2 ♞b3+ 37.♟d2 ♞b2+ 38.♟d3 ♞b3+ 39.♟c2 ♞b4 40.♟d3 and Black's rook is rounded up. He will have to give up the exchange by taking on b6; White has a technically winning position here.

33.♞xc8 ♟xc8 34.cxd6 bxa6



35.♞c7+!

An accurate *zwischenzschach*; Black's king is driven to an inferior square.

35...♟b8 36.♞xc6 ♟b7 37.♞c7+ ♟b6 38.♞xg7 ♞xd6 39.♞g6

White has time to collect a second pawn; Black's a-pawn is not dangerous yet.

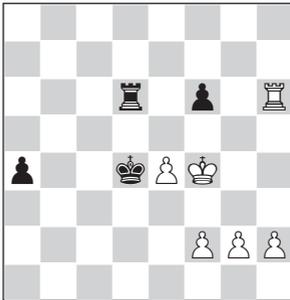
39...♟c5 40.♞xh6 ♟d4 41.♟f3 a5 42.♟f4

There is nothing wrong with this move in itself, but White will have to play accurately after this. He had two alternative paths to the win:

A) Firstly, 42.♖h8 ♖a6 43.h4, with the intention to start a pawn race. After 43...a4 44.h5 a3 45.h6 a2 White first gives check: 46.♗d8+ ♔c4 and then follows 47.h7 a1♚ 48.h8♚. Even though it is Black's turn here, there are absolutely no saving chances for him;

B) 42.g4 also sufficed, since after 42...a4, 43.e5! is the coup de grâce. The technical phase after 43...♔xe5 44.♖h5+ ♔e6 45.♖a5 ♗d3+ 46.♔e4 ♖h3 47.f4 is easy.

42...a4



43.♖h5

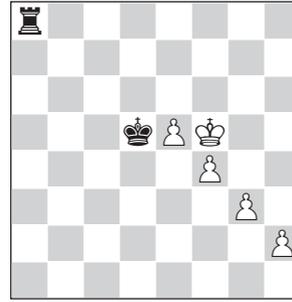
What a pity! The win was up for grabs here. White could have stopped the enemy a-pawn effectively with 43.♖h3. Then, after 43...♖a6 44.♖a3 ♔c4 45.h4 ♔b4 46.♖a1 a3 47.h5, White's pawn supremacy brings about the decision.

43...♖a6 44.♗d5+ ♔c3 45.♗d1 a3

46.♔f5 a2

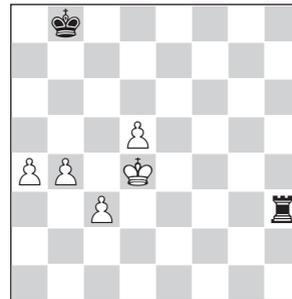
Black is just in time.

47.f4 a1♚ 48.♖xa1 ♖xa1 49.♔xf6 ♖a6+ 50.♔f5 ♔d4 51.e5 ♔d5 52.g3 ♖a8 53.♔f6 ♖a6+ 54.♔f5 ♖a8



This diagram position, in which the draw was agreed, fascinated me as well. The white pawn phalanx is just as strong as Black's rook, mainly because the pawns have not advanced far enough.

Later I also got a position with the same material, which I managed to decide in my favour:



Timman-Deze, Sombor 1974, position after 67...♖xh3

There followed 68.c4 ♔c7 69.♔c5 ♖h8 70.b5 and here, Deze made the decisive mistake. He could have held the draw with 70...♔b7, but instead played 70...♖c8?, after which White won: 71.b6+ ♔b8 72.♔b5 ♖h8 73.a5 ♖h1 74.a6 ♖b1+ 75.♔c6 ♖a1 76.d6 1-0.

Apart from being a chess player, Sir George Alan Thomas was also an excellent tennis and badminton player. It was in this latter sport that he even excelled the most. While he won the English Chess Championship twice, he collected 21 badminton titles. Thomas was the co-founder of the International Badminton Federation in 1934 and badminton's world men's team championships cup, equivalent to the Davis Cup in tennis, is named the Thomas Cup after him. As a chess player, he was certainly not to be underestimated. He won the Hastings 1934/35 event together with Euwe, ahead of Capablanca and Botvinnik, whom he both defeated. You can imagine how fresh and fit he would be sitting behind the board at 9 o'clock in the morning in Hastings – that was how early the games started at the time! Euwe played twelve games with Thomas, winning nine and losing one – an overwhelming score. Euwe's best known win against the sports-loving Englishman is the one from Carlsbad. Not every move in the game is equally convincing, but Euwe's play makes a powerful impression.

Game 19 English Opening

George Thomas

Max Euwe

Carlsbad 1929

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 b6 5.♘d2

Euwe correctly calls this a 'timid continuation'.

The common way for White to play for an opening advantage is 5.♘c3 ♙b7 6.f3 and now White is ready for the push 7.e4, creating a strong centre.

5... ♙b7 6.♘2f3 g6 7.e3 ♘g7 8.♙e2 0-0 9.b3



9...d5

White's set-up is modest, giving Black plenty of space in the centre, and he has at least equal play already.

10.0-0 ♘bd7 11.♙b2

The computer prefers 11.♙a3.

Indeed, the bishop is a little more active on the a-file. After 11...a6 12.♖c1, White can just maintain the balance.

11...a6 12.cxd5

The curious 12.♘g5 came into consideration, with the point being that after 12...h6 13.♘ge6 fxe6 14.♘xe6 ♖b8 15.♘xf8 ♘xf8 the position is dynamically balanced. Black can prevent the penetration of the knight with 12...♖b8, after which he can claim some advantage.

12...♘xd5 13.♖c1

CHAPTER 4

After the war

The first great tournament after the war took place in Groningen: the Staunton Tournament. A strong Soviet delegation of five players came, headed by Botvinnik. Other top players like Reshevsky, Najdorf and Szabo were also present. In total, there were twenty participants, who played from 13 August to 7 September. This was one of Euwe's best tournaments. He was engaged in a race for first prize with Botvinnik from the start. In the first round, Euwe defeated the youngest participant, Abe Yanofsky. This game is especially known for the brilliant move 28. ♖c5!. However, the truth about the finish of the game is different than was long thought.

Game 62 Nimzo-Indian Defence

Max Euwe

Daniel Abraham Yanofsky

Groningen 1946

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♖b4 4.e3 d6
5. ♘ge2**



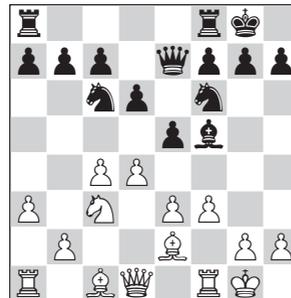
5...0-0

It is often logical to castle in this type of position, but here, it is a serious mistake. The only way to create counterplay is 5...c5, to answer 6.a3 with 6...♙a5. Practice has already borne out that it is not easy for White to obtain an advantage in this position.

**6.a3 ♙xc3+ 7. ♘xc3 e5 8. ♙e2 ♚e7
9.0-0 ♙f5 10.f3**

A solid move, confirming White's advantage. An alternative was the ambitious 10.g4. Now, on 10...♙g6, White has 11.f4, and Black gets swept off the board.

10...♘c6



11. ♘d5

Euwe opts for a direct clash in the centre. The alternative 11.d5 was also strong. After 11...♘b8 12.e4 ♙g6 13. ♙e3, White has a mighty space advantage.

**11... ♘xd5 12.cxd5 ♘b8 13.e4 ♙c8
14. ♙e3 exd4 15. ♚xd4**

The alternative 15. ♙xd4 was probably even stronger, i.e. 15...c5

(15...f5 16.♖b3 fxe4 17.fxe4 (17.♖ae1 is also very strong) 17...♗d7 18.♖c3 and Black is unable to free himself) 16.♙c3 b6 17.f4 ♖xe4 (also after 17...♙a6 18.e5, White wins) 18.♙d3 ♖e3+ 19.♗h1 and White wins in the attack.

15...f5

More chances of obtaining some counterplay were offered by 15...c5. After 16.♖c3 b6, Black has the plan of exchanging bishops with ...♙a6. White's strongest move here is 17.♙f4!, to aim for the e4-e5 push. Black has great problems, for example:

A) 17...♗d7 18.♖ae1 a5 19.♙g3 ♙a6 20.♙xa6 ♖xa6 21.f4 f6 (21...b5 22.e5 c4 23.♙f2! is clearly better for White as well) 22.a4 and White holds all the strategic trumps;

B) 17...♙a6 18.♙xa6 ♗xa6 19.e5 dxe5 20.♙xe5 f6 21.♙g3 and White is winning; the passed d-pawn is extremely strong.



16.♖ac1

Euwe writes: 'White has to play accurately to maintain the advantage he has obtained. If, after the exchange on e4, Black managed to bring his knight to the e5-square,

then he would get a perfectly satisfactory position. Hence the text move, which prevents a possible ...♗d7.' However, 16.♖c3! would have been stronger for that purpose. The point is that now, 16...c5 fails to 17.e5!, when after 17...♖xe5 18.♖xe5 dxe5 19.♙xc5, White wins easily, e.g. 19...♖e8 20.♙b4 ♗d7 21.♖fd1 ♗f6 22.♖ac1 a5 23.♙e1 and the white pieces dominate the board.

16...c5



17.dxc6

In itself, it's a good idea to open the position when you have the bishop pair. However, White allows his opponent to untangle with the text move.

Very strong would have been 17.♖d2, when Black would have had great trouble developing his queenside. He won't manage to carry out the strategic plan that Euwe mentioned in his comment to White's 16th move. On 17...fxe4, White has the zwischenzug 18.♙g5. If the black queen budges, White gets a decisive attack via the open f-file; and after 18...e3 19.♙xe3 ♖e8 20.♖c3, White has a large, probably winning advantage.

17... ♖xc6 18. ♔a4 fxe4 19. ♔xe4
 ♔xe4 20. fxe4 ♖xf1+ 21. ♕xf1 ♕e6
 22. ♕b5 ♖c8

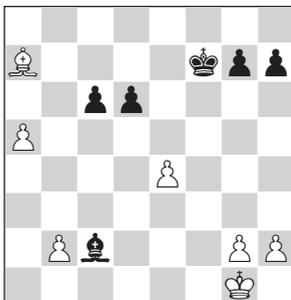


23. ♕xc6

Euwe decides to liquidate into an endgame with opposite-coloured bishops in which he has an extra pawn. He will be successful with this plan, but objectively, 23. ♖d1 was stronger, to keep the rooks on the board. After 23... ♖d8 24. ♕xc6 bxc6 25. ♕xa7 ♕b3 26. ♖d4, White has excellent winning chances.

23... ♖xc6 24. ♖xc6 bxc6 25. ♕xa7
 ♔f7 26. a4 ♕b3 27. a5 ♕c2

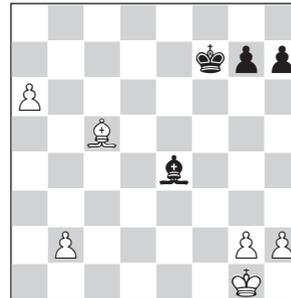
An oversight, handing White the opportunity to play an elegant, study-like trick. Black could have held the draw without any problems to speak of with 27...c5 or 27...♕c4.



28. ♕c5!

Euwe calls this fantastic move 'a little nicety' in his comments. Another example of the modesty that was so characteristic of Euwe. This bishop move has become famous in chess history.

28... ♕d3 29. ♕xd6 ♕xe4 30. a6 c5
 31. ♕xc5



31...h5!

Euwe and Kasparov correctly provide this push with an '!'. It fits into a plan in which Black is able to build up a reliable defensive line.

32. ♔f2 ♕d3

Again, an '!' from Euwe and Kasparov. Indeed, the text move fits into the plan of building up an impregnable fortress. This looks as follows: Black forces the a-pawn to a7, so as to move the bishop back to the long diagonal next, now that the connected passed pawns are blocked. However, there was something else Black had to take care of first: centralizing the king, to prevent White from penetrating decisively with his king. Only with 32...♔e6!, could Black have narrowly held. The main line runs 33.g4 hxg4 34.♔e3 ♕c6! (the only square for

the bishop) 35.♔f4 ♕d7 36.♖xg4 ♖c7 37.♖f5 ♗e8! 38.♗d4 g6+ 39.♖f6 ♖b8 and White cannot win. Black cannot be put in zugzwang, as his king will always have a square available.

33.a7 ♗e4



34.g3

Not energetic enough. White could have won in a study-like way with 34.g4!!.. The main idea behind this pawn sacrifice is that White deprives the black king (for the time being) of the f5-square. It is of secondary importance that White loses his g-pawn, since he keeps the h-pawn, and it will eventually decide the game. There could have followed 34...hxg4 35.♖g3 ♗f3 36.♖f4 ♖e6 37.♗d4 g6 38.♖g5 ♖f7 39.b4 and the rest of the winning process is automatic.

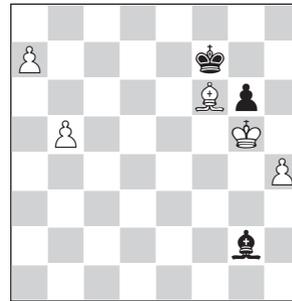
34...♖e6 35.♖e3 ♗g2

Yanofsky neglects his defensive line after all, which he could have maintained with 35...♖f5. After 36.h3 ♗g2 37.♖d4 ♖e6, White doesn't get any further.

36.♖f4!

Breaking through the defensive line.

36...g6 37.g4 hxg4 38.♖xg4 ♗h1 39.♖g5 ♖f7 40.♗d4 ♗g2 41.h4 ♗h1 42.b4 ♗g2 43.b5 ♗h1 44.♖f6 ♗g2



45.h5!

The decisive breakthrough, giving the white king free passage to the queenside.

45...gxh5 46.♖f5

And Black resigned.

Euwe won also in the second and third rounds. In round 4, he played a magnificent game against the Argentinian Carlos Guimard and was awarded the second brilliancy prize for it. This was mainly due to the gorgeous move 34...♗d2!. Otherwise, it was in every respect a strategic struggle that took place on both wings.

Thus, Euwe was on 4/4, but Botvinnik too had won all his games!

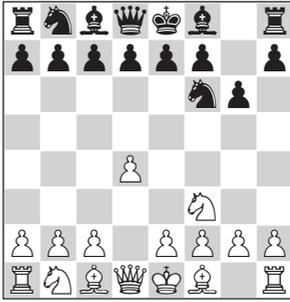
Game 63 King's Indian Defence

Carlos Guimard

Max Euwe

Groningen 1946

1.d4 ♗f6 2.♗f3 g6



A remarkable opening choice: in his younger years, Euwe had often played the King's Indian, but he had given it up in 1934. Apparently, he didn't consider it a suitable opening in the fight against Alekhine. After the war, he picked up this beloved weapon from his youth again.

3.g3 b6

The double fianchetto, which had already been played before the war by Nimzowitsch and a very young Botvinnik.

4.♘g2 ♗b7 5.c4 ♘g7 6.O-O 0-0 7.♘c3

The critical move is 7.d5, when it is difficult for Black to create sufficient counterplay in the centre.

7...♘e4 8.♘xe4 ♙xe4 9.♙f4 d6

10.♚d2 ♘d7 11.♙h6 e6 12.♙xg7

♙xg7 13.♘e1 ♙xg2 14.♘xg2 ♘f6



15.d5

A superficial move, passing up any chance of an advantage. White had several options that offered better prospects. Botvinnik recommended 15.♚c2, to prepare the e2-e4 push. Black can thwart this plan with 15...d5!, when White has no advantage after 16.♚ac1 ♚c8 17.c5 c6. Euwe's recommendation of 15.f3, with the same purpose, was probably White's best option. Black can react in the centre in two ways:

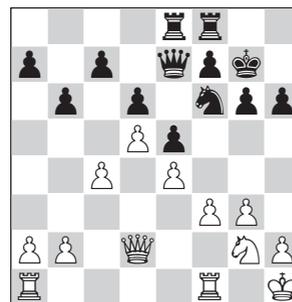
A) 15...d5 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♚fc1 or 17.♚ac1 and White has the advantage; he will double his rooks on the c-file;

B) 15...c5 16.e4 b5 17.dxc5 (after 17.cxb5 ♚b6, Black wouldn't have any problems) 17...dxc5 18.♚ad1 and White is slightly better.

15...e5!

The right reaction. Black closes the centre, and prepares to play on the king's wing.

16.f3 ♚e7 17.e4 ♚ae8 18.♙h1 h6



19.b4

Euwe writes: 'this move, made without the certainty that c4-c5 can be carried through, will only manifest itself as a slight weakening.' A correct observation,

but there is one snag: if White managed to march with his a-pawn to a5, there would be nothing wrong with the push of the b-pawn. This theme will appear further on in the game. The alternative was 19.♘e3, with roughly equal chances. **19...♘d7 20.g4**

A strategic error. Apparently, White wants to hinder the ...f7-f5 push, but the text move weakens his position on the kingside. Thereby, he limits his own possibilities, since in principle, the f3-f4 push is now off the table.

The alternative 20.♘e1, indicated by Botvinnik, also has its drawbacks. After 20...f5 21.♘d3 fxe4 22.fxe4 ♘f6 23.♖e2 ♖d7, the black queen can make a sally to either h3 or a4; the situation is not easy for White. The alternative knight move 20.♘e3 was more worth considering. Now, Black can act on two wings:

A) 20...f5 21.exf5 gxf5 22.♖ae1 (after 22.♘g2 ♖f7 23.f4 e4, the position is about equal) 22...f4 23.gxf4 ♖xf4 24.♖g1+ ♘h7 25.♖c2+ ♘h8 26.♖g6 ♖f6 27.♖eg1 and White's initiative compensates his inferior pawn structure;

B) 20...♖a8 21.♖c2 a5 22.a3 ♖a7 and Black keeps some pressure. Probably, 20.a4 was White's best option. He allows ...f7-f5 and seeks to create counterplay on the queenside. Chances are even after 20...f5 21.exf5 ♖xf5 22.a5.

20...♘h7

A slight hesitation, which could have cost Black his initiative. He

could have secured control on the queenside with 20...♖a8; after this, Black is ready for the ...a7-a5 push.

21.♘e3

White doesn't profit. Stronger was 21.a4, with the threat of 22.a5, taking hold of the initiative on the queenside. Black's best reaction now is 21...a5. After 22.bxa5 ♖a8 23.axb6 cxb6 24.♖a3 ♘c5 25.♖fa1 ♖d7 26.♖b4 ♖a6, Black will eventually regain the pawn, but he cannot hope for an advantage.



21...♖a8!

Now, Euwe finds the right plan.

22.♖g1 a5 23.b5

'This direct release of the c5-square is not good either,' comments Euwe. Indeed, pushing this pawn is a strategic concession, but did White have anything better? After 23.a3 ♖a7, Black will double on the a-file, after which White will eventually be forced to push his b-pawn anyway. White then gains time, as Black will have to regroup his rooks. On the other hand, the little move a2-a3 has made the b3-square available for the black knight, which constitutes a strategic disadvantage.

23... ♖g5

More accurate was the obvious 23... ♖c5, with a solid advantage.

24. ♜g3

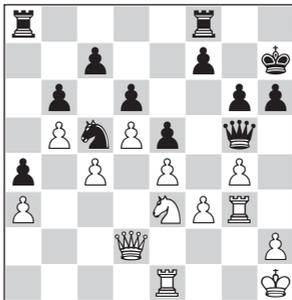
Stronger was 24. ♖f2, to chase away the black queen as quickly as possible. After 24... ♖c5 25. h4 ♖f4 26. ♜g2, Black's advantage is not so big.

24... ♖c5 25. ♜e1 a4

An interesting move. Euwe wants to push his pawn through to a3, and then eventually invade White's position with his rook via a4. The alternative was 25... ♜h8, which is the first choice of the computer.

26. a3

Guimard prevents Black's plan, but this has the drawback that Black gets control of the b3-square. The alternative was 26. ♖g2. Black retains a small plus after 26... a3 27. h4 ♖f4.

**26... ♜h8!**

Euwe understands the position very well; by playing his second rook to a corner square, he prepares an offensive on the kingside.

27. ♖e2

27. ♖c3 would have been a better defence, after which Black has the

following options to strengthen his position:

A) 27... ♖g7 28. ♖g2! and now 28... h5 is wrong, in view of 29. f4 and White takes over the initiative;

B) 27... h5 28. h4 ♖h6 (not 28... ♖e7, on account of 29. gxh5) 29. ♖g2 (or 29. g5) and Black has no good way to make progress;

C) 27... ♜ag8! 28. ♖g2 h5 29. h4 ♖e7 or 29... ♖d8, and Black keeps his advantage.

27... ♖g7

Now, this king move is possible.

28. ♖g2 h5 29. h4

After this, White's position goes rapidly downhill. The only defence was 29. ♖e3. After the queen trade, Black's task of breaking through the white defensive line would still have been difficult.

29... hxg4 30. fxg4

White would also have been lost after 30. ♜xg4 ♖e7; Black holds all the strategic trumps.

**30... ♜xh4+**

A strong exchange sacrifice, opening the h-file for a decisive attack.

31. ♖xh4 ♜h8 32. ♖g2 ♖xh4 33. g5 ♖b3

See the comments to White's 23rd and 26th moves. The black knight joins the attack with decisive force.

34. ♖g1



34... ♖d2!

'A so-called "epaulette" position,' comments Euwe.

35. ♖f2 ♖xe4+ 0-1

In the fifth round, Euwe ceded half a point to Najdorf, but in the sixth round, he struck again. His victory over Szabo is convincing enough, but I was quite surprised by the bad preparation of the Hungarian. Without knowing the finesses, he went for a variation with which Euwe had a lot of experience with both colours. As a consequence, Euwe was able to deliver another smooth attacking game. Botvinnik ceded half a point to Flohr in this round, so both titans were on an equal footing again. In the following nine rounds, Euwe scored 7 points, taking the lead by a point. However, when he made three consecutive draws, Botvinnik managed to overtake him. Then followed a dramatic final round. Botvinnik lost, and at that moment,

a draw would have been sufficient for Euwe to catch up with him. However, he blundered and lost as well.

Game 64 Queen's Gambit Accepted
Laszlo Szabo
Max Euwe
 Groningen 1946

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3. ♘f3 a6 4.e3 ♘f6 5. ♙xc4 e6 6.0-0 c5 7. ♖e2 ♘c6 8. ♞d1 b5 9. ♙b3 c4 10. ♙c2 ♘b4 11. ♘c3 ♘xc2 12. ♖xc2



12... ♙b7

Curious. Euwe had been successful with 12... ♘d5 against Keres (see Game 58). Apparently, his analyses after that game had convinced him that the text move was more reliable after all. Both moves are roughly equally strong.

13.e4

This is curious, too. At the time, it was already known that 13.d5 was the best move. Incidentally, the text move is not as bad as Euwe makes it appear; in the following, White will just be able to maintain a delicate balance.

13...b4 14.e5