

Mikhail Botvinnik

Botvinnik – Smyslov

Three World Chess Championship Matches:

1954, 1957, 1958

New In Chess 2009

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Foreword

My first chessboard encounter with Mikhail Moiseevich Botvinnik came at the final of the 12th USSR Championship in 1940. This was followed by various tournament games, the most important of which were at the match-tournaments of 1941 and 1948. But of course, our rivalry reached its zenith in our series of matches in the years 1954-58. In those days, the chess world had a well-organised system, under which World Championship matches were played every three years. I should point out that, whilst we had differing views on certain aspects of chess, we both looked on the game not merely as a sporting competition, but also as an art, and tried at the board to create finished works of art.

This book, containing the annotated games of all three matches, breaks new historical ground: until now, no book on the 1957 match has ever been published, at least not in Russian. Now the reader has the games of all three matches between one set of covers, and can get a full impression of the nature of our rivalry.

Despite the nervous tension that accompanies any match for the World Championship, these matches gave the chess world many moments of great creative achievement. Of course, these were accompanied by some serious mistakes, but these only serve to underline the extreme pressure of such matches. I remain convinced that these three matches played a significant role in the history of chess.

I believe that this book will be of interest both to lovers of chess history, and to those who are seeking to improve their own play.

Vasily Smyslov, *ex World Champion*
Moscow, January 2003

Botvinnik-Smyslov – The Three Matches

The Triple Crown

If one is being strictly accurate, one should say that Botvinnik and Smyslov actually played five matches against one another. However, the first two were played in the form of match-tournaments, one for the Absolute Championship of the USSR (Leningrad-Moscow 1941) and one for the World Championship (The Hague-Moscow 1948). Although the number of games played in these first two matches was small (four and five respectively), these short matches serve as a prelude to the subsequent main encounters. Botvinnik won two games in the first event, and one in the second, with the remaining games being drawn. It should be pointed out that in 1941, Smyslov was still a young and developing player, whilst starting from 1948, he proved himself a genuine contender for the World Championship. There was also the match-tournament at Sverdlovsk 1943, where they played two games, with a similar result – Botvinnik won one and the other was drawn.

Without doubt, the three World Championship matches represent some of the high points of the two players' careers, and are an important part of chess history. Without exaggeration, one can say that the whole country followed these matches, since chess occupied a major place in the nation's consciousness. Radio reports were given by the renowned football commentator Vadim Siniavsky, and in every location one could find out the chess news and obtain the scores of the games, or write down the adjourned position soon after the playing session was finished. The following day, all the national newspapers would publish the game, with expert commentary, whilst special bulletins, dedicated to the match, were also published.

The three World Championship matches all developed differently. The 1954 and 1958 matches were both marked by an outstanding start by Botvinnik: 3½ out of four! Although Mikhail Moiseevich's task in these two matches was a little different (in the first match, a 12-12 draw was sufficient, whereas in the last match, only a win would do), it is noteworthy that he stumbled at the finish both times, losing two games, alternating with draws. This may suggest a possible premature relaxation, thinking that the aim was already achieved, although more likely, it was simply the result of tiredness – it is well-known that Botvinnik claimed it was only possible to play at full strength in a World Championship match for a maximum of 16-18 games. Botvinnik usually based such opinions on his own personal experiences. In the 1954 match, for example, he suffered a catastrophe, losing three successive games, after which Smyslov assumed the lead in the match. One can only marvel at the strength of

will needed to come back from this, and in the next five games, to win four, with one defeat, and so preserve the status quo! This section of the match ended with Game 16, which only serves to underline the maximum number of games one can possibly play at full strength, when competing for the highest title.

The 1957 match, which brought Smyslov the title, followed a different scenario. Botvinnik did not manage to establish the lead at the start, and the match remained balanced, but from Game 8 onwards, Smyslov took the lead, and despite his opponent's great efforts, he conducted the match to a successful conclusion. At the very end of the match, Botvinnik even gave up trying to change the inevitable outcome, and made several short draws. A similar situation arose in his 1963 match against Petrosian, in which Botvinnik also went down with a number of short draws, effectively acknowledging defeat. What is the mystery here? Botvinnik was a fighter to his very bones, but he was also a realist. Once he understood that there was no chance of saving the match, he simply, in his own words, wanted 'to get the thing over with'.

But in the return match of 1958, Vasily Vasilievich found himself facing the Botvinnik of old, with his fierce will to win, armed to the teeth and, most importantly of all, full of energy and motivation.

Mind you, even in the return match, there was one unfortunate episode, resulting from a diminished sense of danger and premature relaxation. Botvinnik never forgot this incident, and was reminded of it whenever he entered the White Hall in the Moscow Central Chess Club, where the incident occurred. Before the 15th game, his lead was 4 points, and the game was adjourned in a winning position for him. His first mistake was to remain in Moscow, rather than going to his country dacha, where he usually analysed adjourned positions. The second mistake was to analyse the position sloppily; even so experienced a fighter as he allowed himself to be sucked into a false sense of security, starting with the breaching of his usual competitive regime. And thirdly, Botvinnik simply forgot about the clock, during the adjournment session, and failed to make his 56th move at the second time-control. As a result, the game was lost, and the lead shrunk to three points, instead of the 'rightful' five.

There is no book on the 1957 match in our Russian chess literature. The other two matches were the subject of books by Botvinnik, but with the passage of time, these have become bibliographical rarities. On the other hand, there are obvious benefits in having within one cover the games of all three matches between these two great rivals. The majority of games are given with notes by Botvinnik, whilst in other cases, where the commentaries are by Smyslov or other well-known masters, this is indicated in the text.

Botvinnik's original notebooks, containing analysis of opening variations, are especially valuable. Of course, since that time, theory has taken giant steps forward, but even so, there is no doubt that in these notebooks there is still much interesting material to be found. In addition, the contents of these little books show just how diligently and systematically Botvinnik worked on chess, even for somebody who was acknowledged as the world's leading player. The quantity of his analytical work shows that Botvinnik significantly strengthened the whole system of preparing for World Championship matches.

That the chess world was so well organised in those days is due in no small measure to Botvinnik, who first suggested to FIDE the system for running World Championship matches. This system was still proving its worth when Botvinnik himself had already been out of competitive chess for some 20 years. What a striking contrast it all is to the way these events are organised nowadays! It is interesting that many grandmasters were opposed in general to the idea of return matches, and these have now disappeared from practice. The metamorphosis of Garry Kasparov in this regard is highly interesting – having been fiercely opposed to return matches at one time, he became their most passionate advocate. However, because there were no proper rules by then, and his match with Kramnik was played outside the auspices of FIDE, there was no documented right to a return match.

In his last years, there was much that Botvinnik disliked in the way chess was run. When he could no longer influence such affairs, and his published articles did not help, he fell back on what was for him the saving argument: ‘And what if I were dead? Would I have any influence then?’.

Now Mikhail Moiseevich is no longer with us, but his classical creative heritage remains, including his contribution to organising the World Championship. A return to its basis might not be such a bad thing for those now running world chess, and for those still fighting for the world title.

During work on another Botvinnik project, Botvinnik’s regular translator Ken Neat began sending in comments on Botvinnik’s annotations. At first it was hard to understand how a translator could find mistakes in the analysis of a great player. Soon we realised that the English specialist was using the help of a computer. These computer comments were added at the end of each volume. There were not a huge number of them, and in the main they related to secondary variations. Even so, I believe that Mikhail Moiseevich himself, had he lived to see this day, would not have objected to these inaccuracies being pointed out, since his greatest concern in chess was always the search for the truth. We have therefore also presented the translator’s comments on those games played in these matches.

I Y Botvinnik, Editor-compiler

1 December 2003

A note on the English edition

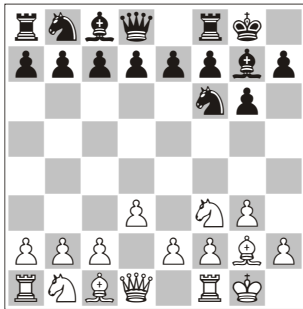
We have given Ken Neat’s abovementioned comments as footnotes in this English edition. Apart from these, there are a few new comments added by Steve Giddins, the translator of the present book, and the editorial staff.

Peter Boel, Editor

1 March 2009

GAME 17 22 April
Smyslov - Botvinnik
King's Indian Attack

1. ♖g1-f3 ♗g8-f6
 2. g2-g3 g7-g6
 3. ♕f1-g2 ♕f8-g7
 4. 0-0 0-0
 5. d2-d3



White attempts to play the King's Indian Defence with colours reversed. However, as Black this defence is successful only if White has already played d2-d4. In the present case, if Black proceeds carefully and does not hurry with the move ...d7-d5, it is difficult for White to achieve any advantage.

5. ... c7-c5
 6. e2-e4 ♗b8-c6
 7. c2-c3 d7-d5

As noted above, there was no hurry for this move, by which Black allows his opponent to reach a normal King's Indian structure with reversed colours. More prudent was 7...d6 and, on 8.♗bd2, 8...e5, as occurred in our meeting at the 22nd USSR Championship (1955).

8. e4-e5

White fixes the structure prematurely, and falls into a difficult position. Better was 8.♗bd2.

8. ... ♗f6-e8
 9. d3-d4 ♕c8-g4!

This simple manoeuvre completely refutes the premature central advance. The white pawns on d4 and e5 prove to be a convenient object of attack for Black.

10. h2-h3

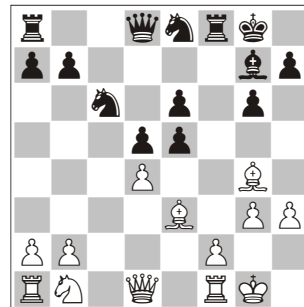
This reaction is forced by the threat of 10...♙d7.

10. ... ♗g4xf3
 11. ♕g2xf3 e7-e6
 12. ♕c1-e3 c5xd4
 13. c3xd4 f7-f6

If White were now forced to exchange on f6, his position would be very bad. However, by attacking the e6 pawn, he can try to win a valuable tempo to support his centre by means of f2-f4.

14. ♕f3-g4 f6xe5

Black must not permit 15.f4. The text move is attractive, because White cannot afford to take on e6: 15.♕xe6+ ♖h8 16.dxe5 ♗c7 17.♕g4 d4 18.♕d2 ♗xe5, and Black has a clear advantage. Smyslov, however, defends very coolly, and shows that there is no hurry to take on e6. Instead, he renews the threat of f2-f4.



15. d4xe5!

An accurate move-order. Now Black cannot capture the central pawn with his knight, because of 16.♙xe6+ and 17.♙xd5, nor with the bishop, in view of 16.♙xe6+ ♖h8 (16...♙g7 17.♚d2) 17.♘d2 with double-edged play. On 15...♘c7 there follows 16.f4, and so there remains only the forced, but by no means unfavourable advance of the d-pawn.

15. ... d5-d4

16. ♙e3-d2!

Again he should not grab the e6 pawn: 16.♙xe6+ ♖h8 17.♙f4 ♘c7 18.♙b3 ♘d5! 19.♙xd5 ♚xd5 would favour Black.

16. ... ♘c6xe5

Now this move cannot be delayed any longer, in view of the threat of 17.f4, and White likewise cannot continue to keep the capture on e6 in reserve.

17. ♙g4xe6+ ♖g8-h8

18. ♙d2-f4!

The saving move for White! The f3-square is covered, and White threatens to capture on e5, removing Black's most active piece.

18. ... ♘e8-c7

19. ♙e6-b3

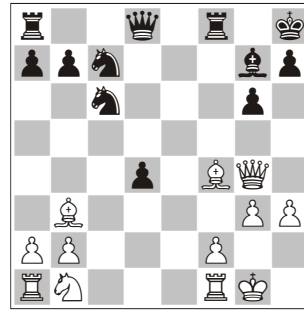
White has achieved a good deal, and as is clear from the preceding commentary, this is mainly because he refrained from the premature capture on e6.

19. ... ♘e5-c6

Black has no choice, since he must not permit the exchange of his centralised knight.

20. ♚d1-g4

Ensuring the g5-square for the dark-squared bishop; otherwise, after 20...♘d5 it would have to retreat all the way to c1 (the d2-square is needed for the knight).



How should Black exploit his temporary and small advantage in development? In the event of 20...♘a5 21.♘d2 ♘xb3 22.♘xb3 he does not obtain any real advantage, whilst after 20...d3 21.♘c3 ♘d4 22.♚ad1 or 22.♙c4 White also stands satisfactorily.

20. ... ♘c7-d5

In principle, this is the correct decision, but it should have been preceded by the move 20...♚f5, after which there would follow 21.h4 (securing g5 for the bishop) and only after 21...♘d5 22.♙g5 there is the reply 22...♙f6. By contrast with the game, White cannot then win a tempo with 23.♙h6, whilst 23.♙xf6+ ♘xf6 gives Black a good game.

This moment proves to be a turning point in the game.

21. ♙f4-g5 ♚d8-a5

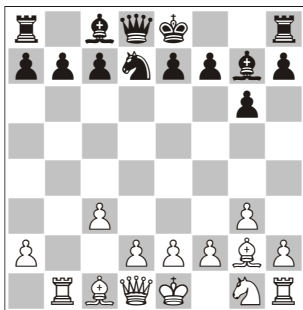
It is clear from the previous note that White would have answered 21...♙f6 with 22.♙h6 and 23.♘d2. Now, however, it appears at first sight that White's development is stopped, since after 22.♘a3 there is the reply 22...♘b6 (but not 22...♘e5 23.♘c4) with the threat of 23...♘e5, whilst against 22.♘d2, a small combination had been prepared.

22. ♘b1-d2!

Nevertheless!

GAME 14 8 and 9 April
Botvinnik - Smyslov
English Opening

- 1. c2-c4 ♘g8-f6
- 2. ♗b1-c3 d7-d5
- 3. c4xd5 ♘f6xd5
- 4. g2-g3 g7-g6
- 5. ♖f1-g2 ♘d5xc3
- 6. b2xc3 ♖f8-g7
- 7. ♖a1-b1 ♗b8-d7



In this way, the b7 pawn is indirectly defended (8. ♖xb7 ♖xb7 9. ♖xb7 ♗b6), but now the black knight turns out to be poorly placed.

8. c3-c4

This plan cannot give White any advantage. In the 16th game of the match, I continued 8. ♗f3 with the idea of later establishing a pawn centre by d2-d4 and e2-e4.

- 8. ... 0-0
- 9. ♗g1-f3 ♖a8-b8

There were no grounds to avoid the advance ...e7-e5, so as to prevent d2-d4.

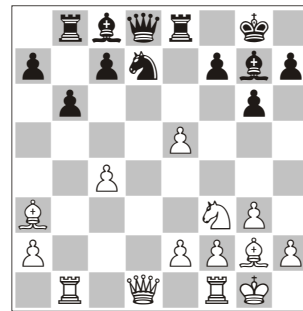
- 10. 0-0 b7-b6
- 11. d2-d4 e7-e5

Sooner or later, this will be necessary, otherwise White will take over the centre.

- 12. ♖c1-a3 ♖f8-e8
- 13. d4xe5

Played with a lack of attention. I had counted on the continuation 13... ♗xe5 14. ♗xe5 ♖xe5 15. ♖c6, which is the best White could dream of⁶, but I failed to notice my opponent's thoroughly convincing retort.

However, even after 13. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 14. dxe5 ♖xd1 15. ♖fd1 ♖f5 16. e4 ♖g4 17. f3 ♖e6, Black would easily equalise.



13. ... ♖c8-b7!

The pawn on e5 will not run away, so Black first completes his development. The variation 14. ♖a4 ♗xe5 15. ♗xe5 ♖xe5 16. ♖fd1 ♖c8 is not dangerous for him.

- 14. ♖d1-c2 ♗d7xe5
- 15. ♖f1-d1 ♖d8-c8
- 16. ♗f3xe5 ♖b7xg2
- 17. ♖g1xg2

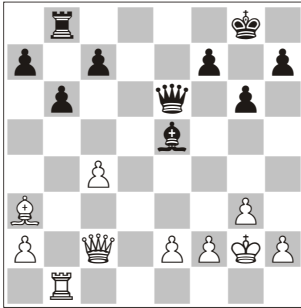
On 17. ♗xg6 there is the reply 17... ♖e4.

16 Note Ken Neat: It seems Black is OK after 15... ♖h3 16. ♖xe8 ♖xe8 17. ♖e1 ♖c3 18. ♖b2 ♖xe1 19. ♖d4 ♖xf2+ 20. ♗xf2 f6 21. ♖xf6 ♖f8.

17. ... ♖e8xe5
 18. ♖d1-d5

White had prepared this well in advance, stopping the move 18...♗h5.

18. ... ♖c8-e6
 19. ♖d5xe5 ♙g7xe5



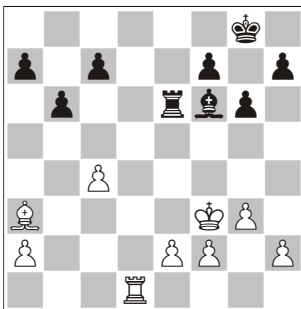
20. ♖b1-d1

Completing the manoeuvre begun with 18.♖d5. The continuation 20...♗c6+ 21.♖d5 b5 is not dangerous for White, since he can favourably reply 22.♗e4.

20. ... ♖b8-e8
 21. ♗c2-e4

White accurately strives for exchanges (with a match lead of three points, playing for a draw was psychologically the right approach, since my opponent must attempt to win).

21. ... ♙e5-f6
 22. ♗e4xe6 ♖e8xe6
 23. ♙g2-f3



23. ... ♖e6-c6

Smyslov tries to win an equal endgame, a dangerous thing to do. Although White has some weak pawns on the queenside, the activity of his king fully makes up for this.

24. ♖d1-c1 ♙f6-d4
 25. e2-e3 ♙d4-c5
 26. ♙a3-b2

Of course, with bishops on the board, the activity of the black rook is somewhat limited, and it is easier for White to defend his isolated pawns.

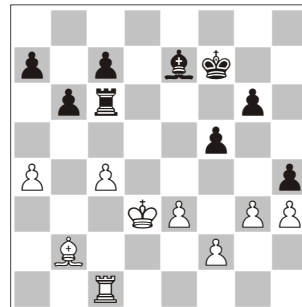
26. ... f7-f5
 27. ♙f3-e2 ♙g8-f7
 28. h2-h3

At the right moment, White can attempt to exploit his pawn majority, hence he sets up the move g3-g4. At first, Smyslov quite sensibly takes account of this threat.

28. ... ♙c5-e7
 29. a2-a4

Now the white pawns will be reliably defended. For example, 29...♖c5 30.♙d3 ♖a5 31.♖a1 ♙f6 32.♙c3 ♙xc3 33.♙xc3 ♙e6 34.♙b4.

29. ... h7-h5
 30. ♙e2-d3 h5-h4



When one is determined to win a drawn position, it is easy to play a bad move without really noticing it. Black believed