

# BORIS SPASSKY:

## TWO-TIME BIDDER FOR WORLD CHESS CROWN

By Yevgeni Bebchuk  
Master of Sport



I FLEW INTO SUKHUMI the day the whole thing was over: Boris Spassky had won with a couple of rounds still to go.

Needless to say, when I finally found Yefim Geller down at the beach in the late afternoon, he didn't look very happy. I hesitated for quite a while before I went over to him. We were good friends, having played together for several years on the Soviet Armed Forces chess team. The Odessa grandmaster has been the team leader for a good many years.

We smoked our cigarettes and looked out at the sea, turning dark after sunset. The silence was broken by the third member of our group. As though hearing the question I hadn't asked, Ukrainian Master Yuri Sakharov, who groomed Geller for the match with Spassky, replied thoughtfully:

"So you wonder why the match ended so quickly. You can take my word for it, we lost Boris before the match began. We lost in the food store."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said: the food store. You know that Yefim has to be worked up to a fighting mood before getting down to a match. Well, we were resting in Sochi, where I did my best to get him to work up that fighting spirit. But one day we went into that food store to buy something

for supper, when somebody grabbed us both round the shoulders. We turned around and there was Spassky, smiling and cheerful. 'You boys going back to the hotel?' he asked. 'Let's take a walk, it's a lovely evening!'

"I could almost see our Geller melting away; all of my effort to work up a fighting spirit wasted."

I told Boris this story after his match with Bent Larsen. He burst out laughing: "Yes, I remember that meeting, but I had no ulterior motive at all, honestly!" Turning serious, he added: "I simply believe and always will that heart-to-heart relations come first. Winning points should have nothing to do with it."

He has always been that way. Fifteen years ago, at a junior tournament, I remember Boris flatly refusing to congratulate his teammate for a victory. It turned out that this chap, finding himself in a tight position, played a mean trick. He wrote down the same move twice, and pushed the sheet of paper over to the other side of the table. His opponent was having time trouble and fooled by those two written moves, thought that the crucial moment had passed. He pondered over his reply and the flag went down before he made that control move.

"No matter how important that win was for our team victory, it wasn't fair," Spassky, a young master at the time, told the trainer of Leningrad juniors, Vladimir Zak.

Even then he felt that the respect due an opponent came first. Boris showed the utmost courtesy and tact to challengers of any age and class. Credit for that goes to Honored Trainer of the USSR Vladimir Zak, his mentor at the Leningrad Pioneer Club where he began playing at the age of nine. A little more than two years later young Spassky, with the rating of a first-category chess player, made the city junior team. Another two-year cycle of intensive training and millions of chess fans heard of a new 14-year-old master candidate. Boris played a great amount of chess willingly, and the experts were amazed at his style on the chessboard, most unusual for a player of schoolboy age. It was not an impulsive combination-type style, but restrained, and, at times, prudently cool, stripped of all surplus emotion and ornament.

Boris' next coach was Grandmaster Alexander Tolush, a first-rate tactician, who tried to put life into his young charge's game. As he put it, "to make the pieces dance on the board."

The gifted player made rapid progress,

and in 1953 he participated in a big international tournament in Bucharest. In the first round this sensational 16-year-old student defeated the aspirant to the world throne, Vasil Smyslov. Later came a dazzling win in a bewildering King's Indian Defense against Hungarian Grandmaster Laszlo Szabo, and the final scorecard showed that he tied with grandmasters for third place and the title of International Master.

Spassky's openings now included a very sharp King's Gambit and puzzling positions of the Janisch Variant in the Ruy Lopez, as well as the complicated systems of the King's Indian and Sicilian Defenses. With his youth, energy and talent his game flourished apace. Judge for yourself: In 1955 he tied Mikhail Botvinnik and Tigran Petrosyan for third place in the national championships, captured the world junior crown shortly thereafter, and a month later, won the coveted International Grandmaster title at the Interzonal Tournament in Goteborg.

The world realized that a new brilliant star had appeared on the chess horizon, that Spassky was steadily ascending the rungs to the world throne.

His third place in the Amsterdam Challengers' Round should have confirmed these radiant forecasts, but it did not turn out that way. No, there were no disastrous setbacks. Spassky moved ahead with ease and elegance to the Soviet Championship Finals, stayed up front for a long time and . . . failed to reach the interzonal stage. This was in 1958, when he lost in the very last round of a national title play to a friend of his own age, Mikhail Tahl. It happened again three years later when, in the course of 17 rounds in the USSR title tournament, he alternately held first and second places, only to earn big goose eggs in the last two rounds, in games with Victor Korchnoi and Leonid Stein.

Boris will remember that game with Stein for a long time. The national press insisted that Spassky, not Stein, be allowed to continue fighting for the world title, claiming that although something had gone wrong with him, he was still the stronger of the two.

The "unlucky" player's new tutor at the time, Grandmaster Igor Bondarevsky, raised strong objection.

"You've got to understand that Boris must prove to himself what he is really capable of doing. He, himself, has to believe in his ability to win."

Everyone now remembers how Boris shared first place with two other contenders in the national championships, how he later became the sole titleholder, and how he went on to win in international tournaments in Britain, Cuba, the United States and Yugoslavia.

And then came that match with world sovereign Tigran Petrosyan. Boris lost, but not like he did in the early sixties. True, he made a bad start: his game was erratic, while his opponent was in top form. Suddenly, a new Spassky emerged. He showed everyone that he had pluck and the will to win. Although he did not completely make up for lost ground, the fans and experts already saw a different man—concentrated, smiling and optimistic. . . .

Soon after his triumph over Bent Larsen, we went over to Spassky's apartment.

"What did you find toughest in your match with the Dane?" we asked him. "Were you bothered by his statements to the press that he would beat you?"

"Not at all. I even like to read such statements to figure out what's behind them. But Bent is a very decent, open-hearted chap. He really believed in his lucky star, and that's why he talked that way. He wasn't boasting at all."

"Before he took you on in the elimination match, Korchnoi said that you play better than Tahl and, perhaps, better than he did too. Yet he'd find it easier facing you than Tahl."

"I suppose that's true if he says so. After all, he and I received our initial chess training from Vladimir Zak at the Leningrad Pioneer Club. We know each other well, and we played together on the same team so long. . . . Hard to say, when you know your partner too well, you find that it's easy and difficult at the same time."

And so, ahead of Spassky is his clash with Tigran Petrosyan in another bid for the latter's world laurels. And behind Boris are victories over such world-famous ace players as Yefim Geller, Bent Larsen and

Victor Korchnoi. The coming tilt with Petrosyan will be stubborn, and I, for one, believe Spassky will win.

Here is Spassky's favorite game with his own analysis to give you an idea of both his chess and literary styles.

#### CARO-KANN DEFENSE

White—B. Spassky Black—A. Reshko

1. P-K4 P-QB3

The Caro-Kann Defense is quite popular now, but it is usually employed by passive-minded players. The main idea of this system is that Black temporarily declines a Pawn battle in the middle and strives, instead, as quickly as possible, to finish deploying his forces, especial the Queen's Bishop, before the King's Pawn move, P-K3. Only after this does he launch vigorous operations in the center. The result is that Black's position is solid, even though passive. The weakness of this system is that it offers White much too wide a choice of possible patterns of development, which provides not only chess, but also psychological, trumps.

2. Kt-QB3 P-Q4 4. P-KR 3 BxKt  
3. Kt-KB3 B-KK15 5. QxB Kt-KB3

Despite its seeming simplicity, this position is very interesting. Black has exchanged his Queen's Bishop for a strong Knight on KB6, believing, and rightly so, that the presence of both White Bishops in a position of a closed nature, is of no essential importance. Following 6. . . .P-K3, Black intends to put his pieces in a more convenient position with moves of Kt(QKt)-Q2 and B-K2.

6. P-K5

By replying here, with 6. P-Q4, White could have made his Bishops more active, having in mind a sacrifice of his Queen's Pawn in the event of 6. . . .PxP; 7. KtxP. However, I selected another scheme, and endeavored first of all to prevent a convenient deployment of the rival forces.

6. . . . Kt (KB)-Q-2  
7. Q-KK13

A reply of 7. P-K6 would yield nothing, because of 7. . . .PxP, with Black being able, and to his advantage, to effect a Pawn advance, P-K4.

7. P-QK14 P-K3  
8. B-K2 Q-QB2

This is a stereotyped reply, after which Black begins to have difficulties in developing his pieces on the Queen's Wing. A stronger reply would be a natural 8. . . .P-QB4, to which I intended to respond with 9. P-KB4, Kt-QB3; 10. P-QK13 with an interesting game following such a continuation.

9. P-KB4 P-QR3

The consequences of a poor eighth move. The reply to an immediate 9. . . .P-QB4 will, of course, be 10. Kt-QK15.

10. . . . P-QK14

This is the start of a distracting demonstration on the Queen's Wing. White is ready for a sacrifice in an effort to get his scheme working.

10. . . . P-QB4

The following Pawn sacrifice deserves attention: 10. . . .BxP; 11. QxP, R-KB1; 12. QxP, P-QB4, with a subsequent Kt-QB3 and castling to the Queen's Wing.

11. P-QK15 P-QB5

This frees the QB4 square for pieces on the Queen's Wing.

12. R-QK11 P-Q5  
13. Kt-K4 PxP

And so, Black has won a Pawn, but at the same time, White has noticeably activated his own pieces.

14. 0-0

Naturally, 14. RxP is impossible in view of 14. . . .Q-QB3. And, in general, White's plan is not winning back sacrificed material, but most acutely mobilizing his forces for a decisive offensive on the entire front.

It is of interest to note that the White Rook on QK1, while not making more than one move, has, nevertheless, played a vital part in the further course of struggle.

14. . . . RxP

Black captures a second Pawn, and later a third, but slows up still more in his own deployment. I believe it more sensible to to have replied with 14. . . .Kt-QB3 with my planned response of 15. P-Q3 providing a sharp game.

15. P-Q3 RxP  
16. B-Q1 R-QR7

It is strange that Reshko still does not sense danger, otherwise he would have tried at this point to give his pieces more vigor by sacrificing the exchange through 16. . . .PxP. For instance, 17. BxR, PxB; 18. RxP, Q-QB3, 19. Q-Q3, Kt-QB4; 20. KtxKt, BxKt, with Black, despite the inevitable loss of the Pawn on QB7, having two Pawns for the sacrifice of exchange. Besides, he would be able to complete his deployment. As regards White, he evidently could have made a better reply, 18. R-QK12, and not hasten to force events. In this case, a complicated situation would shape up, where, in my opinion, his chances would be preferable.

What are the results of White's demonstration on the Queen's Wing? It will suffice to compare the first and second diagrams. White's army is now fully mobilized and ready, at the first signal, to rush into attack, whereas Black has not had time to carry out his deployment to the end. Despite the material advantage Black enjoys, his position is most unreliable.

With his next move, White shows that the distracting operations on the Queen's Wing are over, and that the center of battle swings over to the opposite flank, where the Black King is the target of a direct attack.

17. P-KB5 KtxP

Black is unable to repel the onslaught of half a dozen White pieces plus a pair of Pawns. Here is where other continuations would lead: 17. . . .QxP; 18. P(KB)xP, QxP; 19. R-K1, with a winning attack following this; 17. . . .P(K)xP; 18. R(KB)xP with decisive threats of R(KB)xP, Kt-Q6ch, P-K6.

18. P(KB)xP P-KB3

No great hopes are promised by 18. . . .P(KB)xP, because of 19. B-KB4, Kt(QKt)-Q2; 20. RxP, R-QR4; 21. PxP, with Black being unable to beat off the threats of 22. B-KKt4 or 22. Kt-KK15.

19. RxP(KB)!

This Rook sacrifice smashes the Black King's cover, and White launches an assault on the enemy's last stronghold, the K4 square. The White Rook has to be removed, otherwise the fight will be over at once following 20. R-KB7.

19. . . . PxR 21. Kt-Q5 Q-Q3  
20. KtxPch K-Q1

Should the reply be 21. . . .Q-KKt2, then the continuation would be 22. P-K7ch, K-Q2; 23. B-KKt4ch, K-K1; 24. B-KR5ch, etc.

22. B-KK15ch K-QB1

It is impossible to reply with 22. . . .K-K1, because of 23. B-KR5ch, K-Kt-KKt3; 24. Kt-QB7ch.

23. B-KK14!

The idea of the Rook sacrifice is in this move. The threat now of 24. P-K7ch is mortal. Here are possible variants: 23. . . .B-KKt2; 24. Kt-K7ch, K-QB2; 25. Kt-KB5, QxP; 26. KtxB, Q-Q4; 27. B-KB6, followed by 28. Kt-K6ch and 29. BxKt; 23. . . .Kt(QKt)-Q2; 24. PxKtch, KtxP; 25. R-K1, P-QKt3 (or 25. . . .R-QR8; 26. B-KB4, Q-QR3; 27. Kt-QKt6ch, QxKt; 28. RxR, K-Q1; 29. B-KKt5ch with White going on to win); 26. Q-KB3, B-KKt2; 27. Q-KB7; 23. . . .QxKt; 24. P-K7ch, K-QB2; 25. P-K8 (Queen) etc.

23. . . . KtxB 24. P-K7

This is the only, but sufficient, move for a victory.

24. . . . BxP

Stiffer resistance could arise from 24. . . .RxPch; 25. QxR, B-KKt2; 26. QxKt, Kt-Q2. But in this case, too, White, continuing with 27. RxP, should win, in view of the threat of 28. Kt-QKt6ch.

25. QxKtch Kt-Q2 28. Q-KK17 K-QK13  
26. KtxBch K-QB2 29. BxKt Q-K3  
27. B-KB4 Kt-K4 30. BxPch

Black resigns.