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Legendary Chess Careers

Yasser Seirawan



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Legendary Chess Careers – Yasser Seirawan
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KEY TO SYMBOLS

=	Equality or equal chances
±	White has a slight advantage
∓	Black has a slight advantage
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
∞	unclear
∞̄	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
↑	with initiative
→	with an attack
Δ	with the idea
□	only move
N	novelty
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
+	check
#	mate

PREFACE

My original idea was to publish my interviews with legendary players all together in one book. When I saw the Timman book, I realised that Chess Evolution's idea to publish them separately was the better choice.

Dear Reader, after the Timman and the Portisch book, I now offer an interview with Yasser Seirawan. The former long-time American number one had a quite different career. It had a different trajectory, the Dutch and the Hungarian player were very good at the early stages, but the peak of their career came in their mid thirties, while Yasser broke into the chess elite like a rocket, his peak came much earlier and his career was shorter. I find it very exciting to look into his best, and most important, games in detail and to learn about his personality. Listening to his words, in my opinion, can be very useful for those who want improve their chess.

For all of their help, I would like to express my gratitude to: John Donaldson, John Marble, and William Paschall.

Most of all, I'd like to thank Yasser for giving me the interview.

Happy reading!

STORY OF NIKOLAY MINEV

It was in 1983 that my wife Elena and I decided to immigrate to the United States. We had lived most of our lives in Bulgaria, except for a few transitional years in Greece and Austria. Upon arriving in our new home, we immediately had to decide where we would settle. Having no immediate family or close friends in our adopted country, it was somewhat by chance that we happened to choose Seattle, Washington as our new home.

Shortly after arriving in Seattle, I become professionally acquainted with a young rising chess star, Yasser Seirawan. While Seattle at the time was certainly not a chess mecca, it was nonetheless the home of some strong players, and a long tradition of strong regional chess. Yasser stood out well ahead of the rest of the local players at the time.

But it was not until several years later – in 1988 or so – that Yasser and I became friends. In that year, Yasser purchased a condominium in the same building where Elena and I lived. When we first met, I think he was a little bit “suspicious” that maybe I would be a competitor or rival. But then he came to understand that I had no chess ambition at that time, and we become good friends. Yasser was preparing for some international competitions and wanted a sparring partner and sounding board for his preparation. Thus began our friendship and collaboration that would last more than 20 years.

Starting slowly, we began to meet together every Friday night, whenever Yasser was not traveling. We would meet for several hours: first watching some boxing on television, then work at chess for 3 or 4 hours. We played over recent games; we analyzed openings; we discussed developments in the chess world. After competitions, he would show me his losses, in order to better understand why he lost. I didn't see all of his games, but I saw many, and many that were very well played. During this time, not only did we become close friends, but also I started to understand him very well.

First let me say that Yasser is an exceptional positional player: he is able to solve every position in a positional way. By this I mean that even in a difficult position or one in which his opponent is attacking very vigorously he

generally doesn't believe that he will be mated. Instead, he believes that positional elements of the situation on the board will prevail in the end. He believes in weak points, weak squares, the position of the pieces, open lines, and the like. This is something that I almost never saw in other players in the same degree. During my international career, I knew many big name players, but I consider Yasser to be exceptional in this approach.

When he would start to analyze a position, he would immediately find the strategic line. Sometimes he could be beaten with a tactic, but almost never would he be beaten in a positional way. He is also able to see that a position that looks very bad on the surface, is in reality good for him. This is why he was able to defend difficult positions: tactically it might appear that he should be in big trouble, but he would wait out the trouble and emerge with positional pluses.

In our skittles games, there were so many times when he would play moves against me like Kd7 (instead of castling), and I would be so mad that he could survive after this kind of move. But he would say, "No, the position is good for me," and in the end he would be right!

He is good with tactics also – as with other strong players, he is very good calculator – but every time his calculations are first and foremost calculation in a positional way. This is my impression.

I think that in the opening he had some holes, because his opening repertoire was a little bit narrow. He was interested with other things in his life: he started Inside Chess magazine, he made annotations of games for publication, he made several very good books, etc. All of this takes time and energy. He was not able to be single-minded in preparing only for chess competition, and this is what is required to be professional at the very highest level. A narrow opening repertoire is not good at the highest level – you must be able to play many things. But he was especially strong with those positions where he had experience and understood the needs of the position. And he made a very good transition from opening to middle game.

In the middle game he was fantastic and almost every game of chess has a middle game! It is not easy to play a player like Yasser. He was able to play equally with Kasparov and various high level tactical players, because his positional ability dampened all the tactical possibilities. And with the tactics,

one mistake and you are out. “Live by the sword; die by the sword.” This is why some players consistently had a “bad day” against him throughout their entire career.

As far as his endgame, I believe that Yasser was the equal of Kasparov in endgame skill, probably a little bit better. I was not able to see many endgame positions with him. He showed me some games with endgame mistakes where he wanted to understand the error. But anyone can make mistakes, even Averbakh who made 10 books on the endgame! I think he was the equal of other strong players and good enough for that level of play.

His best years were in the 1980's. This is perhaps a little controversial, but I would say he probably missed his opportunity to advance to the highest level at that time because he was living in the United States. There was a similar problem for many American players, because they cannot participate often in very strong tournaments, as is possible in Europe.

If he had the playing opportunities that existed in Europe to play in the best events and against the strongest competition, he would have been a consistent World Championship candidate. I think his talent would have allowed him to play at the highest level for much longer. He did have some opportunities to play in the Candidates matches, but he was very young and inexperienced at the time, and I suspect his preparation was not as good as it needed to be. But I am not certain of this. It was before we started to work together and to be friends, so this is only my impression.

The final thing I want to say about Yasser is that he is very good in his relations with people, in daily life. He is friendly with everyone, whether a strong or weak player. And his character is good. He would be an incredible teacher of chess because of the combination of a high level of chess skill, and good interpersonal skills.

Altogether I would say that Yasser is one very rare type of player!

Nikolay Minev
International Master
Former Bulgarian Champion

SOLVING THE SEIRAWAN MYSTERY

Yasser Seirawan (Yaz) and I have been close for decades. During those many years I've become acquainted with countless professional players, but I've never seen a grandmaster with greater chess talent, a sharper intellect, and a kinder disposition. In fact, I must admit that I can't think of anyone who isn't fond of him!

In general, it's my nature to unearth a person's quirks – quirks are what make someone interesting and give him/her character. Insanity is also a must – I can't get close to anyone that doesn't have at least a bit of madness lurking behind every word and/or act. Yasser though, doesn't fit my profile at all.

While writing this piece, it suddenly struck me that I had no idea why Yaz and I have gotten along for so many years. He's a guy that clearly doesn't fit the chess or asylum mode that's so dear to me. Yasser facts:

- He's a master of social niceties (a shock since chess players are, for the most part, socially challenged).
- Women have fought over him since he was 14 (he became Cosmopolitan Bachelor of the Month in September, 1983).
- He's a tremendous public speaker and conversationalist and is able to discuss almost any subject with startling erudition.
- He's a good businessman and understands money in ways that most people never will.

All this makes him sound like a mixture of Warren Buffet, the Fonz, Capablanca, and Obama! Composites aside, I would think that the whole "women love him" thing alone is more than enough to make millions of men hate him, yet he doesn't seem to have an enemy in the world. What's going on; does any of this make sense?

I was facing a mystery, so I sought help from those that might prove wiser than myself. Perhaps they could shed some light on who Yasser the enigma really is.

IM Anthony Saidy –

Not everyone in chess can be a Tal. Not everyone pursues a competitive career to its logical conclusion. But Yasser Seirawan beat a Tal, and other world champs. For one who enjoys life, working away at openings morning and night was not his cup of tea.

I always viewed Yasser as a serious World Championship contender, but I was very much aware that if he had to choose between fine dining or staring at the latest variations of the Caro-Kann, the meal would win out. In a way this verified that “complete” talent isn’t just a penetrating insight into the game as a whole (which Yaz has in abundance), but is also the ability to hone that skill with obscene amounts of work. Not everyone is willing to give up the world and all its pleasures for chess.

GM Joel Benjamin (from his book, American Grandmaster) –

More than just a great player, Yasser achieved respect and accolades for his work away from the board. He published (and wrote, for the most part) the excellent magazine Inside Chess; he attempted to reunite the World Championship and create a more professional chess environment; he found a multi-year sponsor for the U.S. Championship. Yasser’s accomplishments – World championship Candidate, four-time U.S. Champion, and U.S. Chess Hall of Famer – might have been even greater if he had more of an appetite for chess study. He liked to live well, and he tried to make things better for other players.

Here Joel reaffirms Yasser’s enormous chess strength and love for life, but also highlights the Yaz-man’s attempts to put a bit of sanity into chess politics by saving the World Championship (only to have his head smashed repeatedly against the brick wall that is FIDE) and creating the finest U.S. Championship series ever seen.

Nevertheless, even though Seirawan doesn’t possess the “devote myself to chess and nothing but chess” gene, the next three accolades highlight a clear sense of awe concerning his playing strength:

IM Jack Peters –

My first games against grandmasters convinced me that I had a good shot at winning the U.S. Championship some day. Then I played Yasser, and my dream died. He was simply in a higher league.

Jennifer Shahade (2 time U.S. Woman's Champion) –

The first time I got to analyze with GM Yasser Seriawan made a major impression on me. I had just won a game I was proud of in the U.S. Women's Championship on the White side of a typical Sicilian (Classical Variation, Richter Rauzer). There were a couple other Grandmasters analyzing the game with me but when Yasser stepped in, he took Black and kept achieving crushing positions – right from the book variation. ‘Well, what did I do wrong?’ I asked after another failed attempt, ‘Black is just better,’ he told me, ‘she has the c-file.’ The over-arching positional statement combined with razor sharp analysis was hard to resist. After that experience, I took every chance I could to watch or hear Yasser analyze.

IM Cyrus Lakdawala –

For me Yasser was one of my early chess idols. I met him at the 1976 Canadian Open in New Brunswick and was in awe of this kid's blitz skills.

The word genius is thrown around a lot, but this guy is a genius, with a totally original style. He played like a Capa/Nimzo hybrid. His games were contorted and beautifully simple at the same time! And every game contained a new strategic idea. I have had a chance to play Yasser many times over the Internet Chess Club since then. He is one of the few players who consistently can outplay me strategically (pretty much everyone can outplay me tactically). I still look up his ICC games from time to time to mine them for new ideas.

Okay, Yasser's deep understanding of chess is well known, and his blitz skills are legendary, but now we suddenly get a taste of the American public's love affair with him. He was so accessible, so lacking in any form of elitism, that chess legends as well as chess fans found him impossible to resist. The following testimonials push that point home:

IM John Watson –

Yasser stands out for me because of his unbridled enthusiasm for the game and, of course, his immense talent. I think what most distinguishes him from his peers, as friendly as they may be, is his generous willingness to give of his time, both for the people and the issues he cares about.

GM Susan Polgar –

I first heard of Yasser Seirawan from reading Chess Life in the Hungarian Chess Federation's library in Budapest back in the late 1970's. Then, when I realized that I loved his positional style, I followed his games for many years – we even had several openings preferences in common!

During my first visit to the US at the 1985 New York Open, I met Yasser for the first time in person and we became friends instantaneously. He has such a charming and always happy personality. It is hard for anyone not to like him. I had the fortune to meet him many times after that over the chessboard as well as in a social environment. When Yasser established Inside Chess he invited me to write for his very prestigious chess magazine, which I gladly accepted.

Yasser really did it all in chess. He was the number one U.S. player for many, many years. He has consistently been above the magic 2600 rating mark in the days when that used to mean, "You are a super elite player." He is a fantastic chess author and publisher. He has a long history in chess organization, especially focusing in bettering the conditions for professional chess players. He is truly an American treasure!

GM Larry Christiansen –

I have known Yasser Seirawan ever since I encountered him in Los Angeles 1974 and noticed a very composed and mature youngster who had a very unusual (especially for a youth) playing style. Yasser loved to grind out positional squeezes and snatch pawns even at the tender age of 14.

In 1980 Yasser made a huge advance up the chess food chain with a brilliant tournament victory in the famous Wijk aan Zee tournament, sharing first with Walter Browne ahead of greats like Korchnoi and Timman. He won some spectacular games there and I will never forget actually playing over his wins against Timman and Korchnoi in the regional magazine (Northwest Chess) while I was in Seattle as a

stop on a Church's Fried Chicken simul tour. I remember having to talk about the hometown hero Yasser in the exhibition Q & A to the exclusion of any other topic.

Yasser has brought a lot of class to American chess and many of my most memorable moments in chess are associated with him.

Vance Aandahl (legendary science fiction author) –

I'm a lowly woodpusher, and lowly woodpushers need heroes. For two decades Bobby Fischer dazzled us with his genius at the board, but Fischer was withdrawn and hostile, and that made it hard to view him as a personal hero. Then, in 1972, a 12-year-old boy with a black crown of hair and a huge, relaxed, genuinely friendly grin began a quick climb to the top. When I learned that Yasser Seirawan loved to surf and ski and play baseball, that he actually liked girls (and they liked him!), and that he had coached the other players on his high school team until they were good enough to win the state championship, I knew I finally had my American chess hero.

David Weinstock (National Master and regular Yaz blitz victim) –

Yasser has that uncanny ability to help put those around him at ease, regardless of whatever else might be going on in their lives at the time. He is one of those singular individuals who it is always a pleasure to be around and who makes you feel right at home – even when he is trouncing you mercilessly in a game of speed chess.

Dennis Monokroussos –

I'm not Mr. Seirawan's chess peer and I've only met him in passing, as an adult, so my perspective is that of an attentive fan. Seirawan came up at a great time for American chess players. It was the late '70s and early '80s. Fischer had disappeared and was embarrassingly eccentric, but here came this talented and personable young man we could all root for. He made it to the Candidates twice, defeating both Karpov and Kasparov when each was World Champion, and – the pain! – destroyed my all-time favorite player, Mikhail Tal, on a regular basis.

His style was unique: a sort of hybrid of Ulf Andersson's technique, Viktor Korchnoi's materialism (probably not a coincidence, as he was Korchnoi's second in the early 80s), and the confidence of a Bent Larsen. Perhaps that should be the overconfidence of a Larsen – I suspect that his boundless optimism cost him some points over the years, and that may have contributed to his never reaching the

ultimate prize. All the same, he was a great player and a hero to American chess fans, especially in the 1980s.

Something he's probably less well known for – unfortunately – is Inside Chess. It was a biweekly chess magazine he founded that was a huge boon to American players. The quality was consistently high, featuring serious and timely coverage (by pre-Internet standards) of top-level events. Many of the games were annotated by Seirawan himself, and those were salad days for subscribers! Qualitatively, they were what you'd expect from a top player, but these weren't soulless Informant-style comments. Seirawan's idiosyncratic, opinionated and dramatic inscape came through in every issue. Alas, Inside Chess is gone and Seirawan has quit the scene. It's a real loss for American chess.

I have to say that Yasser and his wonderful wife Yvette are two of the most decent and real people I've ever met – no pretensions, no posturing, no ego games to sift through. And perhaps these traits are so hard to find nowadays, so far removed from the accepted norm, that this can be construed as a form of insanity in and of itself! Yes, Yasser is clearly deranged.

So the mystery has been solved, Seirawan the madman has been deconstructed, and he's finally completely understood. When all is said and done, how can you not care for a fun loving pleasure junkie who is also a chess genius, a brilliant public speaker, and a man-about-town that isn't afraid to stand up to injustice one day and play hours and hours of blitz with a roomful of adoring amateurs the next?

Jeremy Silman
International Master
Former US Open Champion
Highly-respected Chess author

YASSER SEIRAWAN PHOTOGALLERY



1. Washington State Championship, 1975 (photo by Dan Bailey).
2. Skien, 1979 (photo by Oystein Brekke).
3. Skien, 1979 (photo by Oystein Brekke).
4. Wijk aan Zee, 1980 (photo by Rob C. Croes/Anefo).
5. US Championship, 2002 (photo by Val Zemitis).

INTERVIEW

I met Yasser for the first time at the 1978 World Junior Championships in Graz.

That was my very first visit to the West. My strongest memories about him from that time are not strictly chess-related. I remember he had long hair and he wore trousers that gradually became very wide close to his shoes. Also, I remember Jim Plaskett and him discussing some position over the board. In Hungary they usually dub films, so, even though I'd already met a few English players, it was the first time I had heard an American accent. I was surprised, and I found it quite interesting. I also remember his game against Dolmatov. It was adjourned, but they agreed to a draw without analysing the game.

In 2003, at the World under 16 team championships, the organisers provided an excursion, and I happened to be in the van with the US team. As a trainer, I had used some of his king marches. But I didn't know these were well-known and I was surprised when I heard the American captain, Carl Haessler, talking to the team about Seirawan's special king moves in the centre. Yasser was the top American player for a decade and certainly a world-class player, yet

I didn't realise that his games were so well-known and so much a part of the American chess-culture.

A good 25 years after Graz, I saw him analysing again; for me, it was memorable as well. At the 2002 Chess Olympiad I joined Yasser's post mortem analysis with Jonathan Rowson. Of course, it's always a joy to see what very strong players do in the post mortem. The game transposed to an endgame early on. I knew that Yasser was a very strong endgame player, so I was curious to see him analysing; and it was indeed very interesting; he lived up to my expectations.

However, my strongest memory remained that he was happy with such an innocent-looking line against the QGA. It indirectly showed confidence in his middle game strength. Another striking thing was that his energy level was remarkably high; almost all players composure levels drop at least a little bit, he looked like he was ready to start another game.

By the way, the Bled Olympiad was his tenth; he was a world championship candidate and four times US champion. The number of Olympiads in which he represented his country underlines how important his accomplishments were for American chess.

I asked him to take part in an interview via email; I was really happy and excited when I received his positive response.

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T.K.: Through an internet search one can find out that you were born in Damascus and your family moved to the US when you were 7 years old. What generated the idea to move?

Y.S.: *I was born March 24, 1960 in Damascus where the family lived for four years. My mother is British, my father Syrian. In 1964 we moved to the UK and lived in Nottingham, my mother's birth place and where my father went to school. In 1967 my father was hired by Boeing, the airline manufacturing giant, headquartered at that time in Seattle. The family moved there, where we all nationalized (became US citizens) with the exception of my mother.*

T.K.: Could you talk a bit about your family?

Y.S.: *I have an older sister and younger brother. In 1969, my mother and father divorced and both remarried. My father has two children from his second marriage, a girl and a boy, so I have two more "half-siblings" but I consider them as sister and brother too!*

My family all have very good relations with one another and we try our best to keep in close contact.

In November 1996, I married a Dutch lady, Yvette and in 2006 we moved from Seattle to live in Amsterdam."

T.K.: When and how did you start playing chess?

Y.S.: *In 1972 I lived with my mother and siblings in Virginia Beach, Virginia. After the school year ended in June, my mother's relationship with her second husband was breaking apart and the family decided to move back to Seattle. I loved Virginia Beach and considered it heaven on Earth. Moving back to Seattle was a crushing blow. Mark Twain would have said about Seattle, "The finest winter I've ever spent was a summer in Seattle." In hindsight it seems that the summer of '72 had the worst weather Seattle ever saw. We spent a lot of time in-doors.*

1972 was also the year of the Olympics. An upstairs neighbour, David Chapman, who was wheel-chair bound had a TV and we went to his apartment to watch the Games. To idle away our time we played board games. The routine was simple, he would pull out a new game, teach us the rules and when we won, it was time for a new game. We nearly exhausted his closet before he pulled out a chess set.

T.K.: What captivated you in chess in the beginning?

Y.S.: *At the time, I thought 'nothing special'. I merely 'expected' to beat David once and move on. It didn't happen. Quite the contrary, after many games, the losses*

seemed to be even more lopsided. This was deeply confounding and annoying.

Again, in hindsight, David was about 1200 strength on an ELO chart. Players forget how incredibly strong someone of this rating can be. Firstly, they know all the rules and movement of the pieces. They understand opening strategy and are aware of tactical tricks. For me, it was awkward to remember how each piece moved much less try to “coordinate” my army.

After yet another afternoon of being trounced, I complained to David and asked, “How did you become so good?” He told me that, at a coffee shop in the University of Washington district, they played chess and the players were really good.

The coffee-shop, “The Last Exit on Brooklyn”, turned out to be the place where the best in Washington State came to blitz one another. I had never seen a chess clock before and was intrigued. Eventually, I was “allowed” a game or two and was duly crushed.

It then occurred to me that I truly had no talent for the game and was about to give up in despair. I had reconciled myself to play, “one last game” with David and to give up. Amazingly enough I managed a draw! A perpetual check! I was elated and went back to the coffee-shop.

T.K.: Do you remember your first perpetual check?

Y.S.: I was black. It was a standard ♖g3 check against a castled position with Rook on f1; ♔h1 ♚h3+, ♔g1 ♚g3+ and so on.

T.K.: Do you have any recorded game against David Chapman?

Y.S.: No. I didn't know how to keep score.

T.K.: Did your parents encourage you to play chess?

Y.S.: As I lived with my mother, she was “tolerant” to “encouraging.” Our deal was simple. Good marks at school and she would help me (financially) play in tournaments. Poor marks and no chess. Fortunately, I was an excellent school pupil and brought home very high grades.

T.K.: Who was (were) your trainer(s) in your junior years?

Y.S.: I had nothing of the sort. I had many friends who played chess and we would blitz, analyze and share ideas. That is, they would teach me what I was doing wrong! My first “teacher” at the Last Exit was Jeffrey Parsons, an 1800 player. Then James (Jim) Blackwood, a strong expert 2100 player. I developed a cadre of chess friends, Leo Stefurak, Bill McGeary, Duane Polich, Michael Spiegel, Arnie Garcia, Victors Pupols, James McCormick and many, many others. Seattle also saw the very strong BC players from Canada swoop down to win our tournament prizes, Peter Biyiasas, who became a grandmaster, Bruce Harper, Robert

Zuk, Jonathan Berry, who became a correspondence chess grandmaster and many others became friends.

T.K.: Do you think their effect can be seen on you as a world-class player?

Y.S.: *Hard to say. Chess learning is an evolutionary process. You get an idea that a certain plan is a good one. You stick with it until you discover that it really wasn't very good after all! For example I loved to play the French Defence building an "imagery" for myself that I was luring my opponent forward that I would make a pincer movement and crush his centre from the flanks. I was very successful with the French at the "class levels" and right up to the GM ranks. At the highest levels however I could feel myself being suffocated. It was a sad day when I had to give up the French.*

T.K.: In the French you still beat world-class players like Ljubojevic, Beliavsky, Timman, and have even outplayed Karpov. It seems to me you had problems in the French only against 3.Nd2. Did you think of learning the 3...Nf6 line against it?

Y.S.: *I didn't like the positions after 3...Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.f4 c5 6.c3 etc.*

T.K.: I remember a good 20 years ago John Donaldson told me that you were ready to give simulms at a cheaper rate in the Pacific Northwest because chess was less developed there.

How much was the state of Washington behind other parts of the US, and how much do you think it was a disadvantage for your chess coming from Seattle?

Y.S.: *The centre of chess activity in those days was really New York City. Seattle was about as far away as I could get without living in Alaska or Hawaii. Even so, Seattle had a robust chess scene with many events, thanks to the nearly-single handed efforts of one man, Robert A. Karch. Robert was an enthusiastic chess organizer, opening a chess centre and running tournaments year around. Without his events I would never have been able to develop my chess skills. I owe the Seattle chess community everything.*

T.K.: Was Fischer your chess idol?

Y.S.: *No, not an idol as we hardly knew anything about him! He was certainly a hero for having won the World Chess Championship title.*

T.K.: In your 1976-77 games remarkably you often undertook to suffer an attack against your king, often even walking into the centre. I even got the impression you provoked your opponents. In 1978 those games become much fewer. Was there any particular game which led you to play much safer with your king?

Y.S.: *If I had a "style" it would be one of provocation. Indeed, I liked to avoid*

castling for as long as possible in order not to give my opponent an “address” so to speak where they could visit my King. By being flexible and keeping open the possibility for castling on both sides I thought I was being clever. Sometimes being sophisticated meant that my King ended up being stuck in the centre of the board!

T.K.: By the way do you have any memorable game from this period when you survived a huge attack and went on to win?

Y.S.: Many. But in keeping with your previous question, I once had a game against Nigel “Mad-dog” Fullbrook from Vancouver BC (As John Donaldson found out it was played in Oregon Open 1976). I was White in an English and played Ra1-b1, b2-b4, a2-a4, b4-b5, prised open the a-file and played Rb1-a1, challenging control over the a-file and Nigel played Ra8-b8. While I was busily expanding on the queen side, Nigel was doing similar things on the king side, f7-f5, h7-h6, g6-g5, f5-f4 and so on. At a certain moment I realized that castling King-side meant certain death and it occurred to me to castle queen side instead which is what I did.

Nigel looked and looked at the board for several minutes and I could see him getting irritated and I asked him what was the matter? He said, “I don’t think you can do that. You moved your Queen Rook already.” I was horrified! Of course he was right. I immediately re-pressed by

own clock, undid my move and started to think. Nigel then politely informed me, “But you did touch your King!” Oh dear. I had no choice but had to play Ke1-d2 which turned out to be the best move in the position. I skipped away from the King-side and withstood his assault.

T.K.: Who was the first grandmaster and world-class player you defeated?

Y.S.: In 1975 I played at the US Open in Lincoln Nebraska and played my first GM, Arthur Bisguier, on stage. It was a grand experience and I won the game. I had a fantastic result scoring something like 8.5 from 12 games against an average 2500 field. In those days, folks just didn’t have “big” ratings. I recall my prize for such an excellent result was \$33.33. I told my mother glowing stories about my tremendous performance and throughout she kept asking, “And what did you win? How much did you win?” When I told her the amount she was crestfallen. Giving her time to recover she eventually said, “Yasser are you sure you want to be a chess professional?”

T.K.: This particular game of yours against Bisguier is not in Megabase? Do you have all your games on computer?

Y.S.: These are still in score sheet form and have to be converted to digital. It is a future project. I think my 1975 game versus Bisguier was published in Informator but am not sure.

T.K.: I have found it in the Informator; of course we look at it. Let's see the game, which earned roughly one eighth of the \$33,33, that is \$3,92...

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• Y. Seirawan • A. Bisguier [A28]

USA OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP, 1975

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1.c4

This is virtually Yasser's only first move during the seventies.

1...e5 2.♘c3

In the mid eighties he did not try 2.g3, which later brought a victory against Karpov.

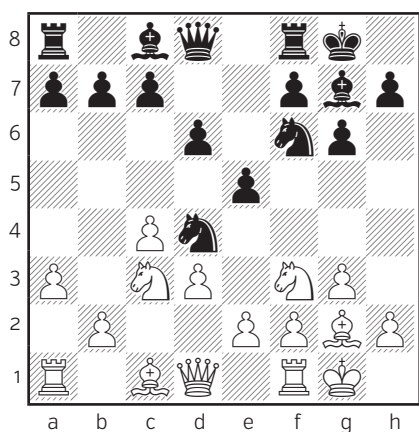
2...♘f6 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.a3!?

This move stops 4...♙b4. Yasser had periods when he preferred 4.g3 or 4.e3. How does this move compare with White starting the expansion with ♖b1? If Black plays a5 after ♖b1 it is a transposition. If Black allows expansion on the queenside, ♖b1 is a bit preferable as later White can play a4 in one move.

4...g6 5.g3 ♙g7 6.♙g2 o-o 7.o-o d6 8.d3 ♘d4!?

There are not many examples of this attempt at simplification. Something striking about it is that only strong players seem to play it, not club players. Bisguier was a decent player who bothered to play proper opening moves against his young opponent. By the way, in 1997 at the Las Vegas K.O. World Championship

when Yasser beat Ivanchuk with White and needed to draw to eliminate his formidable opponent he employed a $\text{N}d4$ simplification. He firmly held that game.



9. $\text{N}xd4$

Yasser doesn't play a testing line; $9.\text{N}d2\text{ c}6$ is the main line. His first published position in the Informator was against Shamkovich in the endgame section. Even in that endgame, his position reminded one of this game; he had $c4$ and $d3$ pawns and took the opponent's knight on $d4$ who took back with a pawn.

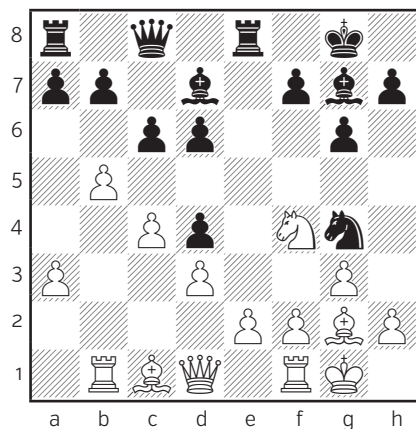
9... $\text{exd}4$ 10. $\text{N}d5$ $\text{N}g4$

Black has several playable continuations, but the experienced grandmaster chooses this move, which leads to a complicated position.

11. $\text{b}4$ $\text{c}6$ 12. $\text{N}f4$ $\text{R}e8$ 13. $\text{b}5$

White naturally expands on the queenside.

13... $\text{Q}d7$ 14. $\text{R}b1$ $\text{Q}c8$



15. $\text{R}e1!$

Rooks belong on the open file, however White has to defend the $e2$ pawn once more if he wants to use the queen.

15... $\text{Q}e5$ 16. $\text{Q}d2$ $\text{R}b8$ 17. $\text{bxc}6$ $\text{bxc}6$ 18. $\text{Q}a4!$

The somewhat unambitious handling of the opening doesn't mean that White is not playing for something or just wanting to hold his well-known opponent.

18... $\text{R}b7$ 19. $\text{h}4$

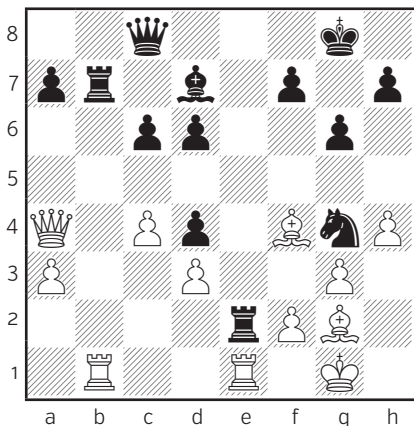
Yasser stops $g5$. After a few moves on the queenside, he turns his attention to the kingside. He plays the whole board. R. Byrne and Mednis mention $19.\text{h}3$ with an $!?$ mark. Instead of their $19...\text{N}h6$ the retreat, $19...\text{N}f6$ gives a playable position.

19... $\text{Q}xf4$

Bisguier sharpens up the position, hoping to have chances to outplay his opponent in the complications. Black could equalise by 19...♖b8, but it would lead to a dry position where he is fighting for the only open file. 20.♖xb7 (20.♖c2 ♖b6) 20...♖xb7 21.♖b4 ♖b8 22.♖b1 ♖xb4 23.♖xb4 (23.axb4 a5) 23...♖xb4 24.♙xb4 ♖f8 The endgame is drawish.

20. ♙xf4 ♖xe2!

A witty move which gives a playable complicated position.



21. ♙f3!?

Seirawan is ready to enter into complications. White can take the pawn by 21.♙xd6 as well. 21...♖xf2 (21...♖xb1 22.♖xb1 ♖e8 the position is balanced) 22.♖a5 ♖xb1 (22...h5!?) 23.♖xb1 ♖e8 White positionally stands well, but his king is a bit open; because of these elements the position is balanced.

21... ♖xe1+

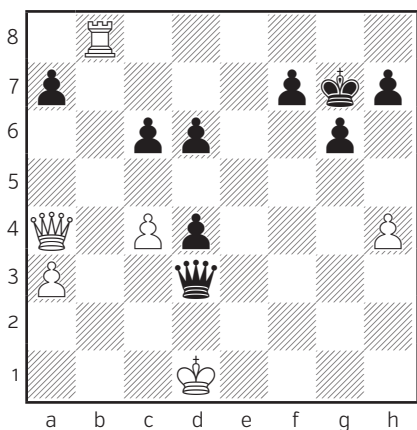
There was no point going for the complications with 19...♙xf4, if his intention was to follow up with this move. After this exchange Black's position becomes hard to play. However the 21...♖xf2!? rook sacrifice was worth a try. It rarely happens that one gets four pawns for a rook: 22.♙xg4 ♖xf4 23.♙xd7

a) 23...♖xd7 24.♖xb7 (24.gxf4 ♖g4+ 25.♙f2 ♖xf4+ 26.♙g2 ♖g4+ and Black has a perpetual if he wants or can transpose to 23...♖xb1) 24...♖g4 25.♖e8+ ♙g7 26.♖b2 ♖xg3+ 27.♖g2 ♖xd3 28.♖e1 with a highly unusual position; Black's pawns and White's somewhat open king give enough play for the rook in my opinion.

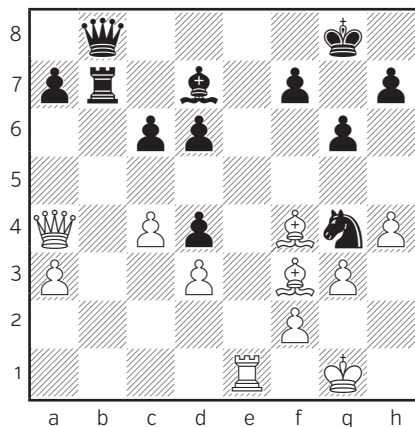
b) 23... ♖xb1

b1) 24.♙xc8 Going for material allows Black to give a perpetual. 24...♖xe1+ 25.♙g2 ♖e2+ 26.♙g1 (26.♙h3?? White can't escape from the checks: 26...♖ff2 27.♖xc6 ♖h2+ 28.♙g4 h5+ 29.♙g5 ♙g7 30.♖xd6 ♖hf2 31.♖c7 ♖e5+ and Black wins) 26...♖f3 27.♙g4!! The bishop must help his king. (27.♙d7 ♖xg3+ 28.♙f1 ♖b2 29.♖xc6 ♖xd3 and White's king is caught) 27...♖xg3+ 28.♙f1 ♖a2 29.♖xc6 ♖xd3 30.♖xd6 h5 31.♙e2 ♖dd2 32.♖b8+ White holds the game with his active queen.

b2) 24. ♖xb1! 24... ♗xd7 Black will have compensation for the rook:
 25. ♖b8+ ♔g7 26. gxf4 ♗g4+
 27. ♕f1 ♗xf4+ 28. ♕e2 ♗e3+
 29. ♕d1 ♗xd3+



25. ♕g2 (25. ♕xc6?? ♗f6 wins) 25... ♗f6
 26. ♗a5 ♖b3 27. ♕e2 ♖xa3 28. ♗c5
 and the position is even) 25. ♕g2 (25.
 ♕h2 ♖b2) 25... ♕h3+ 26. ♕h2 ♕f1!?
 After this witty manoeuvre Black has
 nothing to worry about.



30. ♕c1 R. Byrne and Mednis evaluate the position as plus/minus but I disagree. I think because his king needs one of the pieces to save him from perpetual; Black can think of carefully pushing his pawns. Because of these elements Black should not be worse and it should end in a draw.

22. ♖xe1 ♗b8?!

22... ♗c7? 23. ♕xg4! When one can attack, one should look for opposite coloured bishop middlegames as the bishop usually becomes a powerhouse. (23.c5 ♗e5) 23... ♕xg4 24.c5 ♕e6 25. ♕xd6 White is winning.

22... ♗e5! Giving back the pawn was the right way. Black has tactical resources at his disposal. 23. ♕xe5 dxe5 24. ♖xe5 ♖b1+ (24... ♗d8!?) Black has time to transfer the queen to f6:

23. ♕xg4!

White gets a clear advantage with the opposite coloured bishops.

23... ♕xg4 24. ♗xc6 ♖b1 25. ♕c1!

The young Yasser dares to play for a win against a well-known player. He needs the rook to go after Black's king. 25. ♖xb1? Exchanging rooks wins a pawn but not the game: 25... ♗xb1+ 26. ♕g2 (26. ♕h2 ♗f1!) 26... ♗b6 27. ♗a8+ (27. ♗d5 ♕d7) 27... ♕g7 28. ♗d5 ♕e6! 29. ♗xd6 ♗xd6 30. ♕xd6 ♕f5 31. ♕c5 ♕xd3 White will end up with an extra pawn but because of the opposite bishops the endgame is drawn.

25... ♕e6 26. ♗e4 ♗b6 27.h5!?

This is a very difficult move to judge. From a practical point of view it is very reasonable to stop Black from playing h5 but objectively it is not best.

27.♔h2!! Stepping aside with the king first was stronger. Black has several approaches:

a) 27...h5 Stopping h5 by playing this is too slow. 28.♖a8+! (28.♙h6!? White can sacrifice a rook; it is more beautiful but less effective. 28...♖xe1 29.♖a8+!! ♔h7 30.♗f8 ♖h1+! 31.♔xh1 ♗b7+ 32.♔h2 f6 33.♙f4 White wins a pawn; it should be enough) 28...♔h7 29.♗f3 ♔g7 (29...♗c7 30.♗f6 ♗d7 31.♙h6 Checkmates in two) 30.♗f4 White's attack is decisive. For instance on 30...a6 31.♗h6+ ♔g8 32.♖xe6 White's attack breaks in.

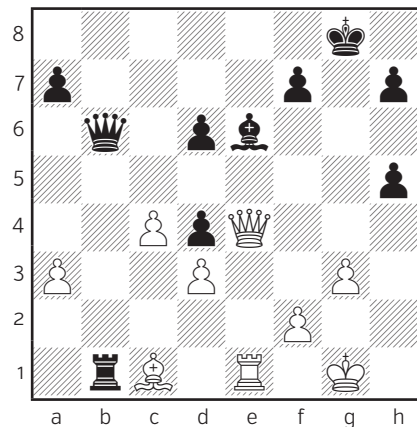
b) 27...♔g7 Just waiting for his fate gives no chance. After 28.♗f4 White threatens h5; by the way 28.h5 gxh5 29.♗f4 also wins. 28...♔f8 (28...a5 29.h5; 28...♗c5 29.♙e3) 29.♖xe6 wins.

c) 27...♔f8! Only running away with the king from the zone puts up resistance.

28.♙h6+ ♔e7 29.♙g5+ ♔d7 30.♖xb1 ♗xb1 31.♗xd4 ♗b6 32.♗f6 White is a pawn up and much better.

27...gxh5?

Black faces a difficult task. Maybe he was worried about h6 followed by ♗f6 which is why he took the h-pawn. 27...♔f8! Black should leave the danger zone. If one wants to improve his or her understanding of how a king can walk away and how to stop the king walking away, they should look at Kasparov's attacking masterpieces. 28.a4 (28.♙h6+ ♔e7; 28.h6 ♔e8 29.♗f4 ♗a5 White is too tied up to hurt Black) 28...♔e8 29.a5 ♗c5 White can press but Black has reasonable chances to get away with the king in the centre.



28.♖a8+!

This is a very subtle check. It stops the black king going to the centre. 28.♔h2 Stepping aside was possible but allows for Black to escape to the centre and obtain a position where he is just a pawn down: 28...♔f8 29.♗xh7 ♔e8 30.♗xh5 ♔d7 and White definitely has chances with the extra pawn but it is not clear whether he can win.

28...♔g7

28...♖b8 29.♗f3! In opposite coloured bishop middlegames one must play very purposefully. Here White intends to play ♗f6. 29...♗d8 (29...♔f8 30.♗f6) 30.♔h2! White now threatens 31.♕g5. On 30...♗b6 31.♕h6 Black's king is in big trouble.

29.♗f3! ♖b3

29...♔f8? Black can no longer run to the centre with the king as 30.♗xe6 wins.

30.♗e4 ♖b6 31.♗f4!

Yasser gets closer to Bisguier's king very nicely.

31...♖c5

31...♗a5 32.♔g2!! ♗xe1 (32...♗f5 33.♗xd4+ is hopeless for Black) 33.♗g5+ ♔f8 34.♗d8+ ♔g7 35.♕h6+! and White checkmates next move.

32.♗h4!

If 32.♗h6+ ♔g8 33.♗f6 h6 34.♔g2 ♗f5 35.♗xd4 ♕d7 36.♗xd6 h4 Black has counter-chances.

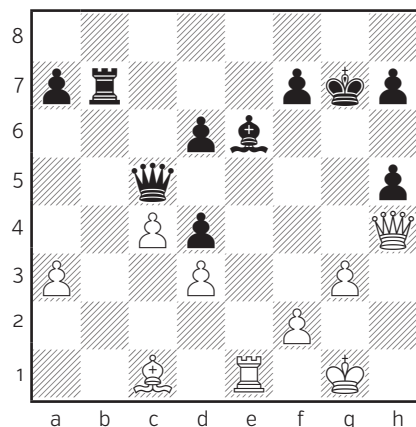
32...♗b7?

Black has to act against the discovered check of the bishop. Black moves the rook to a defended square. 32...♔g6! Black should step aside with the king instead. It is not easy to continue White's play.

a) 33.♔g2 ♗f5 34.♗xd4 ♗b3 35.♕b2 f6 36.♗e4 ♕d7 and Black is kicking.

b) 33.♗d8 ♗xc1! (33...f6 34.♗xe6 ♗xc1+ 35.♔g2 (35.♔h2 ♗f5) 35...♗c6+ 36.♗e4 and Black's king is in danger) 34.♗xc1 ♗xa3 35.♗e1 ♗xd3 36.♗xd6 ♗xc4 and Black has not been put aside.

c) 33.♗e4+ 33...♕f5 34.♗f4 f6 35.♗e7 ♗xc1+ 36.♗xc1 ♕xd3 37.♗e1 ♗xc4 38.♗xa7 h4 and Black is living dangerously.



33.♕h6+!

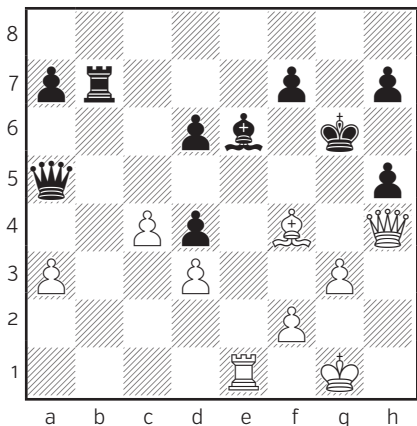
White gets closer to Black's king with this lovely check.

33...♔g6 34.♕f4?!

Yasser keeps going after the king. Maybe Black was in time trouble. Winning material by 34.♗e4+! is more convincing: 34...♔xh6 35.♗xb7 ♗xa3 36.♗e4 White is winning here as well.

34...♔a5?!

Black has the very tough task of defending his king. This move loses relatively easily. 34...h6 35.♙xd6 wins or 34...♖g7 35.♗e5!! dxе5 36.♙h6+! and White checkmates in three. Black should bring his queen to the defence: 34...♗f5! 35.♗d8 f6 36.♗xd6 ♙d7 37.♗xd4 Black can still resist with 37...h4 38.♗c3 ♙a4 or with 37...♖b3 38.♗xa7 ♗xd3.



35.♗e5!

The young player sends a knock out punch. He forces Black to give up his queen to avoid checkmate.

35...♖b1+ 36.♙g2 ♗xe5 37.♙xe5 dxе5 38.♗e4+ ♙f6 39.f4!

Black loses the d- pawn and therefore has no chance to survive. Here he could have resigned.

39...♖b2+ 40.♙g1 ♖b1+ 41.♙f2 ♖b2+ 42.♙e1 ♖b1+ 43.♙d2 exf4 44.♗xf4+ ♙g6 45.♗xd4 ♖b6 46.c5 ♖a6 47.c6 ♖xa3 48.c7 ♖a2+ 49.♙c1

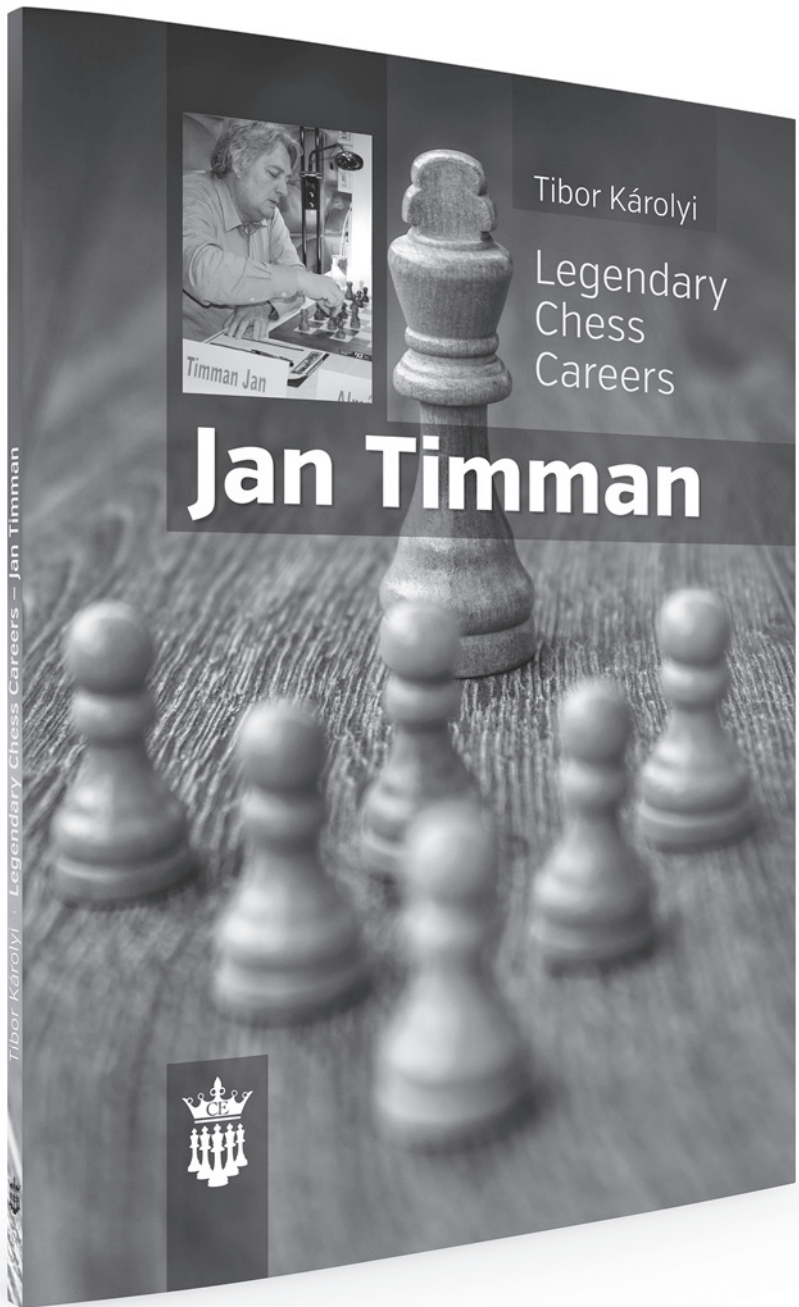
♖a6 50.♗e4+ ♙g7 51.♗xe6 ♖xe6 52.c8 ♗ ♖e3 53.♗f5 1-0

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T.K.: According to the database, your win versus Timman was your first against a world -class player. Is that right?

Y.S.: *Hmm. I think that is correct.*

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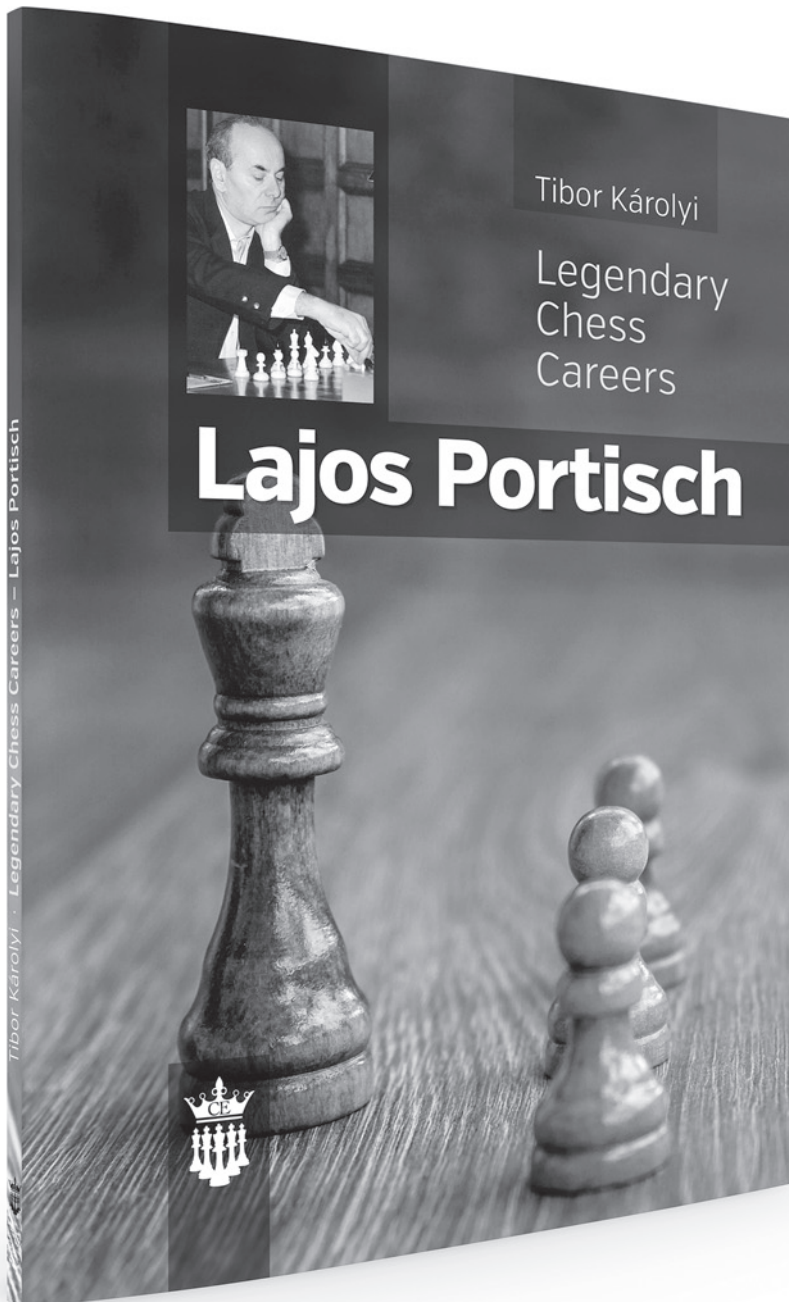
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Best attacking games of 2012–2015

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Aronian vs Anand
16...  de5!!



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Caruana vs Gelfand

33... ♖e3!!



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