

TIBOR KÁROLYI

Legendary Chess Careers
Jan Timman



Responsible editor
Tibor Károlyi

Cover designer
Piotr Pielach

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Legendary Chess Careers – Jan Timman
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PREFACE

How well do we know the great players of the relatively recent past? Their names are certainly well-known in chess circles and even non-chessplayers may be aware of who they are. However only a very few people know their careers in detail and what exactly they achieved. We know about some facets of their style but in my opinion not as deeply as their chess deserves.

We all know that Timman played a world championship final match against Karpov – and that Portisch was a world championship candidate many times. But we still do not know about the richness of their play and the quality of their achievements in any great detail. I have noticed that chess writing has reached a significant junction from which it has several ways to develop. Yes, world champions' careers are well documented. Of course it possible to repeat that a certain world champion was an amazing attacking player, another crowned chess king was such a fine positional player, but it is difficult to say new things about such champions. By now most of the great chess games by the champions have been analysed with the help of the computers. Writers have to go into much greater detail, just as your author undertook with Nick Aplin, devoting a whole book to Karpov's endgame play.

In this book I take another direction. I investigate the chess of those players who were great, but whose status lies just below the level of the world champions. According to my knowledge, the style of this book is new and hopefully revelatory.

In most interviews, players usually reflect on their careers, but their talk is not combined with serious analysis.

Originally, I undertook 6 interviews with legendary players. I consider myself fortunate that players like Gaprindashvili, Hort, Portisch, Seirawan, Timman and Torre were ready to talk to me for this project. In this book the set of interviews with Timman is published. A similar series of exchanges with Portisch will follow and for the benefit of the readers, all of the interviews will be published.

These players each achieved an enormous amount of success. They were without doubt world-class players.

Actually, in combination, they comprise well over a century of the best players of their countries – nations which have great traditions and high levels of chess.

Why interview them? First of all, it is necessary to form an opinion about their achievements and also to give them an opportunity to share their colossal experience. In chess the best players of the present day will never talk sincerely about their opening preparation and will never share opinions on many chess matters. It would be senseless to ask Topalov or Anand, if they could tell us what the best line is against the Dragon.

The players I interviewed still play, but because of their age they can talk freely and sincerely about training and chess matters like building an opening repertoire.

Some of the great players analysed their best games in public but I feel it is still worth looking at their chess with the eye of a trainer and asking some searching questions.

Timman wrote many articles, but no summaries of their achievements were published in a book. In his case especially, I believe this book performs an important function. So I hope this has special value for players who would like to improve their game, not only because of the masterpieces. How these very successful players prepared for the chess contest can help everybody. I started my career when these great players were at their best, so I knew many of their games. But talking to them and looking deeply into their chess revealed many aspects of their play.

I very much enjoyed talking to them and I got the impression it was pleasant for the former giants of chess. It is hoped that reading these interviews with the players who forever put their names into the history of chess will provide you with many happy hours of reading. I would like to express my special thanks to Nick Aplin who provided some guidance on the nature of the written text. I would also like to express my gratitude to chessplayers like Yochanan Afek, and my countrymen Ivan Bottlik, Peter Gyarmati,

Tamas Schenker, Csaba Balogh who helped me with finding data and arranging meetings.

Also I would like to say thanks to my friends Ashot Nadianian and Andras Toth who followed through the process of writing and encouraged and inspired me that it was worth putting the effort into this book. Of course I very much appreciate the players who wrote an appraisal for the book.

Ultimately the biggest thanks are dedicated to the great players who consented to be interviewed.

INTERVIEW

Yochanan Afek was often a guest at my home, even my children have emotional ties with him. We didn't see him for quite some time, so we decided to drive all the way to Amsterdam to pay him a visit. Just a couple of weeks before our journey I had the idea to ask Jan Timman and Vlastimil Hort for interviews. Naturally, while devoting time to work on openings I have often examined Timman's games and in all the books that I have written about specific champions I have invariably selected some in which Jan was the opponent.

So I knew his games against Kasparov, Karpov and some with Judit as well.

I really felt compelled to ask him a few probing questions. I knew his writings in the *New in Chess* magazine and some of his analyses, such as the Karpov-Hort game from Waddinxveen 1979 or Kasparov-Ivanchuk from Linares 1999, are clearly masterpieces. Yochanan, who's a mutual friend, told me about his composing skills as well. In the interview I planned to ask Jan about all these matters and to request some advice for younger players.

I didn't know whether he would agree to an interview. I was very

happy that he agreed instantly when I called him. We had an accident in Amsterdam and so Yochanan and I were a bit late in arriving. Since the time of Max Euwe, the Netherlands has produced many very strong grandmasters but only one truly world-class player – Jan Timman. Not long ago Giri broke into the the top 10 in the world, but has not achieved anything remarkable at the World Championships. In a way that fact shows there's something wrong with the way time is spent on Dutch juniors, but also underlines how special Timman's achievements as a player really are. But he did even more than that. I think very few players in history contributed to making chess popular in the Netherlands more than him.

To my first question.

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T.K.: Could you talk about how you started to play chess? It's known your brother is a decent player.

J.T.: *Yes, basically he taught me the rules, but my father was also a chess-player, though not very active. He could play*

quite well, but he didn't have much spare time as a mathematician. He had a lot of chess books at home. He bought chess books before the war. He had the series by Euwe which came out in 1938. Later on when I started to play we bought new editions of opening books. My father, my brother and I played each other.

T.K.: What caught your imagination in chess when you were a junior?

J.T.: *The fascinating pieces. I have just written an article on the subject. I had the first book on Botvinnik. I started to study chess more or less seriously quite soon after I started to play and once I knew the rules.*

T.K: Your third place at the World Junior was an amazing result for a fifteen year old player? What kind of support did you receive after that? Did the federation treat you specially? Did they provide a personal trainer for example?



Before his answer let me show the game I like the most from that event!

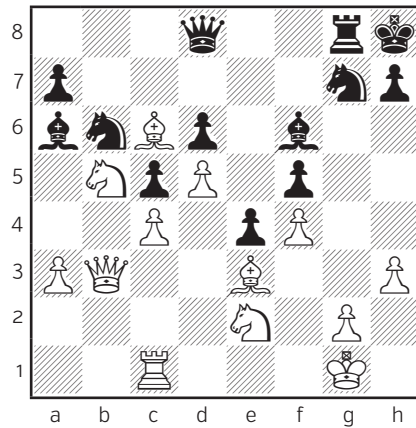
• **Timman J.**
• **Balshan A. [A56]**

WCH U20 FIN-A JERUSALEM [4], 1967



1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e5 4.♘c3 d6 5.e4 ♕e7 6.♕d3 o-o 7.♗ge2 ♖e8 8.o-o ♗d7 9.a3 g6 10.b4 ♗g7 11.♕e3 b6 12.♖b1 f5 13.exf5 gxf5 [13...♗xf5]

14.f4 e4 15.♕c2 ♗f6 16.h3 ♔h8 17.bxc5 bxc5 18.♕a4 ♗d7 19.♕c6 ♖b8 20.♗a4 ♖b6 21.♖xb6 ♗xb6 22.♗b3 ♕a6 23.♗b5 ♖g8 24.♖c1 ♕f6



25.♗xa7

Up until this capture, White's play on the queenside had been quicker than Black's on the kingside. However, now Black's play will soon be felt in a few moves as well. Timman goes for sharpening matters at once.

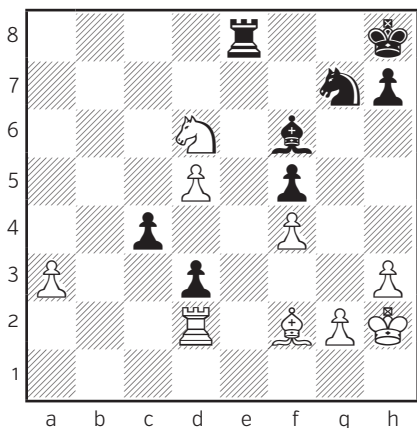
The position becomes rather tactical. I think a typical Karpov-like prophylactic move 25. ♖h2!? was objectively stronger and would decrease the chance of the kind of counterplay that occurred in the game.

25... ♖xc4 26. ♖xc4 ♔a5! 27. ♖b5

Timman plays adventurously and keeps things more complicated. 27. ♖b5 Exchanging the bishop reduces Black's attacking chances: 27... ♖xb5 28. ♖xb5

a) 28... ♔e1+ taking the pawn at once was much less convincing: 29. ♖h2 ♖xe2

a1) 30. ♖c2 ♖d3! and with this subtle move Black gets some dangerous passed pawns: 31. ♖xd3 (31. ♖xd6?! ♖e8!) 31...exd3 32. ♖d2 ♖e8! 33. ♖f2 c4 34. ♖xd6

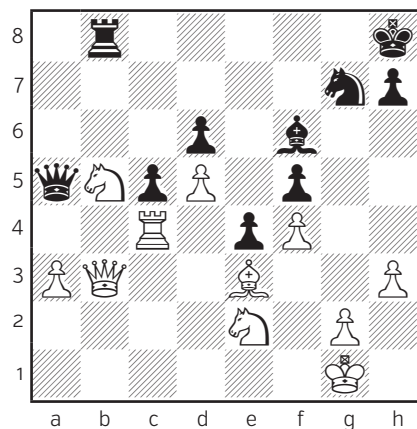


34... ♖e4!! Black sacrifices an exchange in addition to keeping his passed c-pawn: (34...c3 35. ♖xd3 c2

36. ♖xe8 c1 ♔ 37. ♖xf6 and White has decent winning chances because of his d-pawn and Black's weak king) 35. ♖c5 c3 36. ♖xd3 c2 37. ♖f7+ with an interesting perpetual check.

a2) 30. ♖xd6 ♖h5 31. ♖f7+ ♖g7 32. ♖g5 ♖h8 (32... ♖h6?! 33. ♖c2 ♖b8! (33... ♖e1 34. ♖f2 and Black's attack came to an end) 34. ♖xe2 (Against 34. ♖xb8 34... ♖xc2?? would be a major mistake as, 35. ♖g8 leads to a checkmate, but instead 34... ♖xe3 and Black's attack is sufficient to avoid losing) 34... ♖xb3 35.d6 White is clearly better) 33. ♖c2 ♖e1 34. ♖d2 ♖f1 (34...c4 35. ♖e3) 35. ♖c1 ♖e2 36. ♖d1 and with an exchange of queens White has good chances to convert his pawn advantage into a win.

b) 28... ♖b8! Black paralyses the knight creating serious difficulties for White to get the advantage:



b1) 29. ♖ec3 ♙xc3 30. a4 (30. ♖a4 ♖xb5) 30... ♙d2 and Black gets counterplay.

b2) 29. a4 ♖e1+ 30. ♖h2 ♖xe2 31. ♖c2 ♖e1 and Black's queen is annoying.

b3) 29. ♖f2 ♖xb5 30. ♖a4 ♖e8 and Black has lovely play here.

b4) 29. ♙xc5!! It's anything but easy to spot White's chances on the back rank. White has to see an upcoming finesse as well. 29... dxc5 30. ♖xc5 ♖e1+ 31. ♖h2 ♖xe2 32. ♖d4!! ♖xb3 33. ♖c8+ ♖e8 34. ♖xe8+ ♖g7 35. ♖xe2 ♖xa3 and Black has decent drawing chances despite the pawn deficit.

27... ♖e1+ 28. ♖h2 ♖xe2

28... ♖h5! Attacking with this subtle move prevents White's intermediate move in the game and provides Black with a pleasant game: 29. ♖xd6 (29. ♖c2 ♖g3! 30. ♖xg3 ♖xg3+ 31. ♖h1 ♖e1+ 32. ♖h2 c4 and again Black has nice attacking chances so he doesn't need to force a perpetual.) 29... ♖xe2 30. ♖f7+ ♖g7 31. ♖d6 (31. ♖c2 ♖d3) 31... ♖g3 32. ♖c1 ♖h6 33. ♖f7+! White must keep the black king off balance to hold the position. (33. ♖g1? ♙c4!! Black diverts the queen or the knight with this stunning move: 34. ♖xc4? (34. ♖xc4 ♖xe3 35. ♖c1 ♖f2 and Black has a huge attack) 34... ♖f1+ Now Black finishes the attack nicely. If 35. ♖h1 then

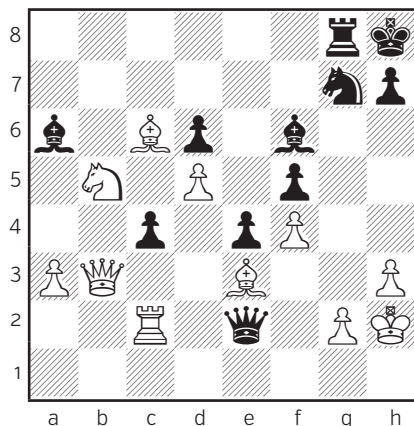
♖g3!) 33... ♖h5 34. ♖g5 and White is safe as d6 will give him his own play.

29. ♖c2 c4?

The Israeli junior probably missed White's riposte.

a) 29... ♖d3 Exchanging queens leads to a 'pawn-down' ending with chances to hold for Black: 30. ♖xd3 (30. ♖xd6 ♖e8 31. ♖xd3 exd3 32. ♖xe8 ♖xe8 33. ♙xe8 dxc2 with quite an unusual bishop endgame in which Black has some drawing chances) 30... exd3 31. ♖c1 ♖e8 32. a4 and White's extra pawn gives him winning chances.

b) 29... ♖e1! Keeping the queen on keeps Black in the game as White must pay attention to defending his king: 30. ♖xd6 (30. ♖c1 ♖e2 31. ♖xd6 ♖h5 32. ♖g1 ♖g3 Black's attack is strong) 30... ♖h5 31. ♙xc5 ♖xf4 32. ♖e3 ♖e2 Black doesn't lose as he keeps his attack alive.



30. ♔c3!!

This beautiful and stunning move exchanges queens and simplifies to a winning endgame. It must have been a special joy to make such a move.

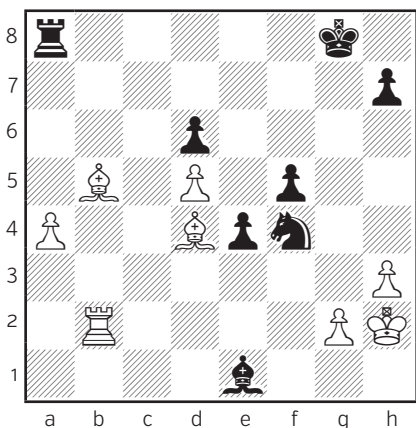
30... ♕xb5 31. ♖xe2 ♕xc3 32. ♕xb5 ♖a8 33. a4 ♕b4
33... ♕f6 34. ♖a2 wins.

34. ♕d4 ♔g8 35. ♖b2!?

Timman interestingly would rather activate his rook than try to win more material. 35. ♖c2!?

35... ♕e1 36. ♕xc4 ♖h5 37. ♕b5 ♖xf4?

37... ♖b8! Pinning the bishop would have at least temporarily stopped the a-pawn. 38. ♖c2 ♔f7! (38... ♖xf4 39. ♖c7 wins) 39. ♖c7+ ♔g6 Black at least can resist, White still has difficulties to overcome to win the game.



38. ♕c6

Now Timman opens the file for his rook to invade decisively.

38... ♖a5

38... ♖f8 39. ♔g1 ♕a5 40. ♔f1 h6 41. ♖b7 and White wins.

39. ♖b8+ ♔f7 40. ♖b7+ ♔f8 41. ♕g7+ ♔g8 42. ♕h6 ♖h5 43. ♕e8 ♕g3+ 44. ♔h1 1-0

In the opening phase Timman probably could have injected more power. Nevertheless the game shows strong features of him as a junior. Despite having minus one in the event as a fifteen year-old amongst twenty year-old players Timman was ready to go for extremely sharp variations. He was able to find moves requiring great imagination and still come out as the winner. I think it shows the first signs of many of the good features that he demonstrated as an adult player.



J.T.: When I went to Jerusalem I had somebody to accompany me. He was ..., he was quite well-known in chess-circles. He was not an active player anymore. He knew these tournaments. He was a nice man and knew a lot about chess. He joined me to go to Jerusalem. I was fifteen at the time and I had training sessions with Bouwmeester. Actually it wasn't exactly organised by the federation, it was a private initiative.

T.K.: Was it Bouwmeester's initiative?

J.T.: *No it wasn't. I think the plan was quite good. Wednesday afternoons were suitable. I was free from school so I went to visit him. He lived in Leiden. I usually stayed for dinner. He always prepared some good material, or he showed me a lot of serious games from the past. In the evening I went home.*

T.K.: Did you have any other trainers during your junior years?

J.T.: *No, I didn't.*

T.K.: According to the database after the 1967 European Youth championship (Karpov won and Timman was 4-5th) you never participated again. Could you explain why? You certainly would have had a chance to win the European or the World Junior title wouldn't you?

J.T.: *Yes. The point is, I came third at the age of fifteen. I thought that it wasn't interesting to play in it again. I won the Dutch under twenty title in 1966 and 67. I felt that was enough and I didn't play the championship in Holland in 68. Normally a federation sends the junior champion to the world events but I had no ambition.*

T.K.: When did you decide to become a professional player?

J.T.: *Actually I decided that after finishing high school. Then I still was unsure about it. My father thought it was a better idea to do some studies. Finally I decided not to.*

T.K.: Do you remember who your first grandmaster victim was?

J.T.: (after a long time thinking) *I have to think, I didn't play many grandmasters early on. Probably...Who was a grandmaster then?*

T.K.: Maybe somebody at the Dutch championship. I think Donner was a grandmaster.

J.T.: *But I beat him maybe in 1969. I know Damjanovic, for sure, was a grandmaster. But I'm looking for somebody before that. It is difficult to tell.*

T.K.: Yochanan Afek was present at the interview and asked Timman: Do you know the well-known story about Damjanovic? They say that when a young Soviet player made his grandmaster title he proudly told Korchnoi that they were colleagues but Korchnoi merely replied "Your colleagues are Damjanovic and Janosevic".

J.T.: *Yes, I know the story. Maybe this isn't the best example, but he's probably the first grandmaster I beat. I started to play grandmaster tournaments in 1971. Of course I played at Hastings earlier in*

1969 when for the first time I played very strong grandmasters like Smyslov, Portisch, Unzicker who I drew against, Gligoric who I lost to. I didn't beat any of them in Hastings. I played in the grandmaster section of the IBM tournament for the first time in 1971. There I started very badly but later I beat more than one grandmaster like Bobotsov and Ivkov.

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Let's have a look at the Damjanovic game! The Yugoslav player in this game lived up to the expectations of a grandmaster.

• Timman J. • Damjanovic M. [D38]

DELFT MATCH [1], 1969

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1.d4

In the sixties Timman played 1.d4 much more than anything else with just a few games with 1.e4.

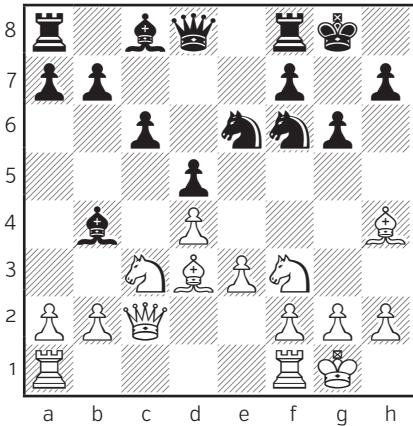
1...♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 d5 4.♗c3
♙b4

The Yugoslav grandmaster hopes to confuse his young opponent. According to the database he had never used the Ragozin before.

5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙g5 c6?

This is a passive move and the bishop doesn't stand better on b4 than the usual e7 square. Black should play either 6...h6 or 6..c5 or ♗bd7 followed by c5.

7.♚c2 ♗bd7 8.e3 ♗f8 9.♙d3 ♗e6
10.♙h4 g6 11.o-o o-o



12. ♖a4!?

An interesting idea. White wants to isolate the bishop from the centre by ♖c5.

12... ♗e7 13. ♖ab1

White settles for the minority attack.

13... a5 14. ♘e5 ♗g7

Playing g6 helps to exchange the c8-bishop but leaves Black with few chances to attack on the kingside.

15. ♘c5

15.a3! Starting the minority attack with this now or on the previous move seems stronger to me as it gives Black less time to improve his pieces. The last two moves suggest that Timman usually prefers piece-play.

15... ♗fe8!?

This is an interesting decision. The knight aims for d6, which is not at all a bad square for it.

16. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 17. a3 ♘d6 18. b4 axb4 19. axb4 f6

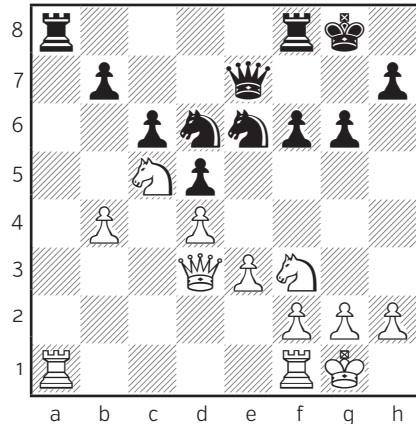
Black is weakening his king slightly to force the knight to retreat. Another option was to postpone this move and play 19... ♗f5!?

20. ♘f3 ♗f5!

Black gets the c4-square.

21. ♖a1 ♗xd3 22. ♖xd3 ♘e6

22...b6 23. ♘a4 ♖b7 and Black is not worse here.



23. ♖b3!

Timman tries to take control of the a-file. It's not easy to exert pressure here.

23...b5

23...b6! I prefer this so as to force the knight back from c5.

24. ♖a2! ♘xc5

Black decides to exchange pieces instead of matching White's play on

the a-file. If 24...♘c4 25.♙fa1 ♘c7 26.♙a7 and White is a bit better.

25.dxc5 ♘f5?!

25...♘c4!? and Black still could hold the a file: 26.♘d4 ♙b7 27.♙fa1 ♙fe8 when it's not easy for White to exert pressure.

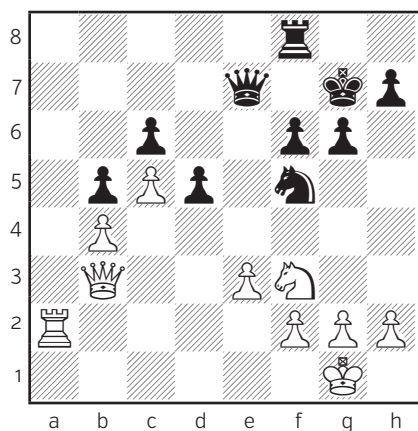
26.♙fa1

Now Timman takes the a-file. It's still not that much but still a step in the right direction.

26...♙xa2

26...♙b7 27.e4 is unpleasant.

27.♙xa2 ♙g7



28.♙b1!

A nice multifunctional move. It prepares ♙a1 and stops g5.

28...h5 29.h3 h4

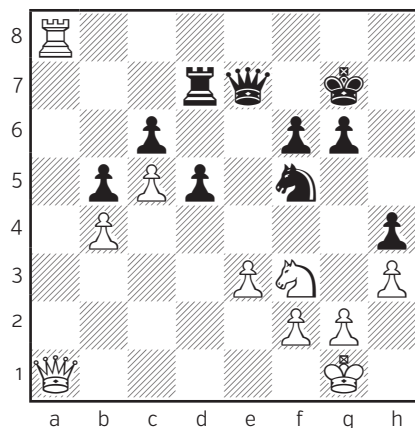
It's difficult to recommend something better for Black. Whatever he does he's somewhat worse.

30.♙a1 ♙c8 31.♙a7 ♙c7 32.♙a8!

It's not well appreciated yet that in the minority attack, not only can the obvious target of the c6-pawn become weak but also Black's back rank.

32...♙d7?

An unfortunate waiting move. Instead 32...♙d7 33.♙a6 g5 (33...♙h7) 34.♙b6 ♙b7 and Black can stop the direct invasion on the queenside.



33.♙a6!

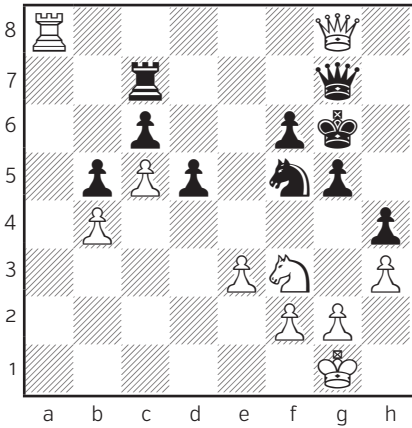
Suddenly White invades with a couple of energetic moves.

33...♙c7 34.♙b6! g5 35.♙b8!

Black simply can't stop White's attack.

35...♙g6 36.♙g8+ ♙g7

36...♙h6 37.♘h2 wins.



37. ♖e6!

Now Black loses material.

37... ♗f7

37... ♘h6 38. ♖e5+ ♔h7 39. ♖xc6
wins.

38. ♖e5+ 1-0

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T.K.: I checked the database and found out that in the sixties you usually didn't start tournaments very well and yet you came back strongly. Did you notice that yourself?

J.T.: Yes, that's true. Also in the World Junior championship.

T.K.: What do you consider your first international success and tournament win?

J.T.: *The first tournament in Hastings where I drew Smyslov and Portisch with Black.*

T.K.: Do you remember who was your first world-class victim?

J.T.: *That's a tough question. Who did I play in the early seventies? Against Keres I lost. I think it was Polugaevsky in 1973, he blundered a queen.*

T.K.: I found an Ivkov game. I don't know whether you consider him a world-class player.

J.T.: *Oh, yes, I beat Ivkov at the 1971 IBM tournament. Ivkov actually was quite good.*

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