Korchnoi Year by Year

Volume IV (1992-2016)

Hans Renette and Tibor Karolyi

Korchnoi Year by Year: Volume IV (1992-2016)
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Front cover: Korchnoi playing against Karpov at Mainz on 9 August 2005 during Wolfgang Unzicker's 80th Birthday Tournament. Photo taken by and courtesy of Harmut Metz
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At the 2011 San Sebastian tournament, 18 April. Photo by David Llada

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job. He would impress his colleagues when he spoke to them about his needs. At Ubeda, he shook his head and confessed to Yusupov that he hadn't sufficiently studied a line of the Nimzo-Indian, and when he missed a cheapo he promised to focus more on tactical exercises. When asked about the chess politics of the day, Korchnoi regretted the demise of the PCA and thought it bad that it had been dependent on just one person. He showed he could move with the times and had no objections to a novelty like a knock-out world championship.

At the Baden open, Korchnoi found three GM colleagues in the field: Tukmakov, Sher and Nemet, together with several IMs and local talents. For a long time, the field remained compact and, due to some draws against lesser gods, Korchnoi was unable to create a distance between himself and the opposition. Everything was decided in the final round. Korchnoi beat Liardet in just eleven moves (his shortest ever game, with the exception of one he won against Spassky, but then the latter was only ten years old). All other games on the top boards ended in draws, so with 7½/9, Korchnoi ended solely in first spot.

Anyone who would have predicted the next scene in the early 1980s would have readily been moved to a mental home, but now, in April 1997, a mass of spectators (among them many people of a certain age, who had known him for decades), witnessed it live: "the greatest villain of all times and nations", Viktor Korchnoi, was walking around on the stage of the Chigorin Chess Club (Barsky). He was not alone: another persona non grata – Genna Sosonko – was playing as well, while Boris Spassky visited his home city for the first time in fifteen years as a guest of honour. The "Absolute St. Petersburg Chess Championship", as it was officially called, could perhaps have been given a better name – Khalifman quipped: "Leningrad vs. St. Petersburg". All possible efforts were made to create a stellar field of players connected with the city, and for this purpose a considerable prize fund was put together. Even Yermolinsky and Kamsky were on the organisers' wish list, but they did not play.

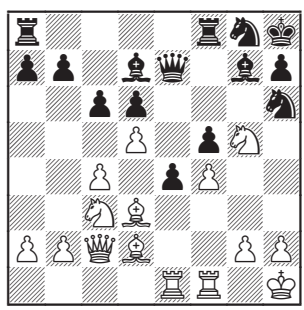
Korchnoi was easily the main attraction. In the beginning, his results were not too impressive – he won in round one against Tseitlin but then lost to Khalifman in round four, scoring draws in between and in the following games. His relentless energy was only rewarded between rounds seven and ten. In round seven, he played an absolute masterpiece against Peter Svidler. Svidler later declared to Chess24: "He played a fantastic game against me. At one point, in a position which looked very promising for him, he paused for about an hour, looking for a forced solution. That obviously also gave me an hour to calculate things, and I spent the entire hour looking for something for him and couldn't find a forced win. I was just about beginning to think that I might survive it, and then he finally sort of woke up and blitzed out an about 10-move sequence which does win by force. A very unusual and a very beautiful sequence. I like chess played well, even if it's played well against me, perhaps even more so when it's played

against me, because I'm a participant then. I said as much to him after the game and he took it rather well. I think he liked it when people complimented him when he played chess well – which was often." Svidler said to him when he resigned: "'If I had a hat, I would take it off to you!' I said it in complete sincerity, I was such an effusive young man. Korchnoi loved me ever since." For this game, Spassky awarded the beauty prize to his long-time antagonist.

Game 523
V. Korchnoi – P. Svidler
St Petersburg (7), 1997
King's Indian Defence (E94)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 0-0 5.♗e2 d6 6.♘f3 e5 7.0-0 ♘bd7 8.♗e3 ♕e7 9.♕c2 ♘g4 10.♗g5 f6 11.♗d2 c6 12.d5! f5 13.♘g5!

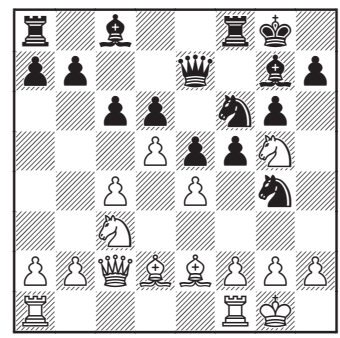
Korchnoi plays a predictable move as he had previously reached this position in a game: 13.exf5 gxf5 14.♘g5 ♘df6 15.f3 ♘h6 16.♗d3 (16.c5!?) 16...♗d7 17.♖ae1 ♔h8 18.♔h1 ♘fg8 19.f4 e4 (After 19...♘f6 White had a small edge.)



20.♘cxe4! fxe4 21.♗xe4 (After 21.♖xe4!? ♕d8 22.dxc6 bxc6 23.♘xh7 White had a nice advantage.) 21...cxd5 22.♗xd5 ♗f5 23.♖xe7 ♗xc2 24.♖xb7 ♖ab8 25.♖xg7 ♔xg7 26.♘e6+ ♔g6? (26...♔f7! would lead to a more or less balanced position.) 27.♘xf8+ ♖xf8 28.♖f3. Korchnoi got a big advantage in the game Korchnoi-Mestel, Beer Sheba 1984, and went on to win.

13...♘df6

This move gives Black a pretty bad, almost losing position, but it would not be much better after 13...♘c5 14.b4 or 13...♘b6! 14.♕b3 either. Maybe this game shows why Svidler did not become an even greater player, as his position is already very bad. It is odd that the opening went wrong for him in this game.



14.f3!

This is a novelty. Korchnoi's move gives White an even bigger advantage than 14.h3, which was played in Treppner-Tischer, Germany 1980. White could have also tried the even stronger move 14.c5! as well.

14...♘h6 15.c5!

Korchnoi opens up the diagonal for his bishop.

15...cxd5

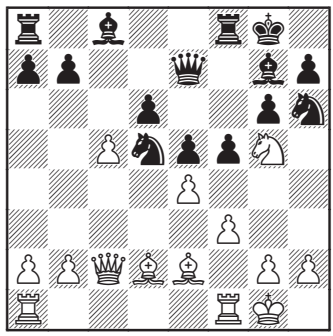
After 15...dxc5 16.dxc6 b6 (or 16...bxc6 17.♘a4) 17.♘d5 or 15...♔h8 16.dxc6 bxc6 17.cxd6 ♕xd6 18.♗e3

Black's position is on the verge of lost.

16.♘xd5!

Korchnoi's problem is choosing which way to get a huge advantage. Another choice is 16.♘b5! dxc5 17.exd5 ♘f7 18.d6 ♘xd6 19.♕xc5 ♘fe8 20.♘xd6 ♘xd6 21.♗c4+ ♔h8 22.♘f7+ ♖xf7 23.♗xf7 and Black loses.

16...♘xd5



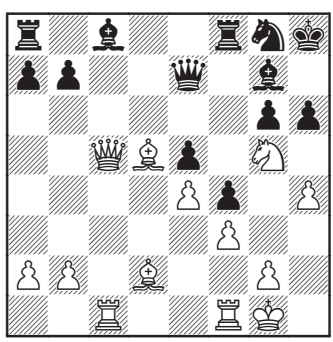
17.♗c4!

The bishop becomes a powerhouse, and it will virtually win the game.

17...f4?!

17...dxc5 would be slightly more tenacious. 18.♗xd5+ ♔h8 19.♖ac1 ♘g8 20.♕xc5 h6 21.♕xe7 ♘xe7 22.♘f7+ ♔g8 23.♗b3 ♖xf7 24.♖c7 ♗f6 25.f4 and White still wins.

18.♗xd5+ ♔h8 19.h4 dxc5 20.♖ac1 ♘g8 21.♕xc5 h6



22.♕xe7!

Korchnoi finds the way to win.

22...♘xe7 23.♘f7+!

Not 23.♘e6 ♘xd5 24.exd5 (24.♘xf8 ♘e7 25.♖c7 ♗xf8) 24...♗xe6 25.dxe6 ♖fe8 26.♖c7 ♖xe6 27.♖xb7 ♖b6 28.♖xb6 axb6 29.a3 e4 30.fxe4 g5 and Black holds.

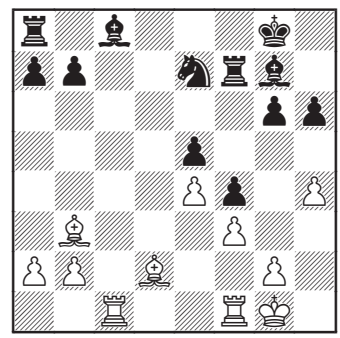
23...♔g8

23...♔h7 24.♗b4 ♖e8 (24...♘xd5 25.♗xf8) 25.♘d6 (25.♖c7 also wins.) 25...♖d8 26.♗xb7 and White wins.

24.♗b3!

Korchnoi's move gives him a clear cut win according to my program. 24.♘xh6+ ♔h7 25.♘g4! (25.♘f7? ♘xd5) 25...♘xd5 26.exd5 ♖d8 would give Black a glimmer of hope.

24...♖xf7



25.♖c7

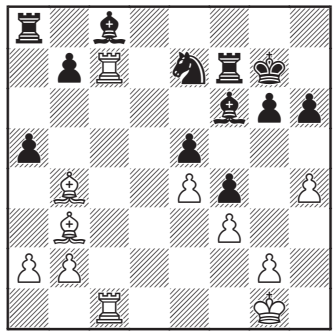
Korchnoi ties up Peter with a natural move.

25...♗f6

On 25...♗f8 26.♗b4 would win, or 25...♔f8 26.♗b4 ♗f6 27.♖d1.

26.♗b4 ♔g7 27.♖fc1 a5

If 27...♗xh4 28.♗xf7 ♔xf7 29.♗xe7 ♗xe7 30.♖xc8 and White wins.



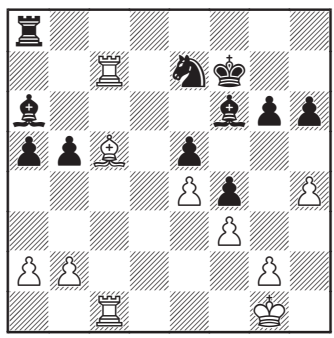
28.♗a3!

Korchnoi avoids a pitfall, as 28.♗d6? ♖a6 would keep Black in the game.

28...b5

If 28...♗xh4 29.♗xf7 ♔xf7 30.♗xe7 White would win.

29.♗c5 ♗a6 30.♗xf7 ♔xf7



31.h5! 1–0

Korchnoi opens up the sixth rank for his rook with devastating effect. Svidler resigned, as on 31... gxh5 32.♗xe7 ♗xe7 33.♖1c6 ♔f8 34.♖xh6 Black loses at least one of his bishops.

Khalifman: "After the game Svidler was shocked. He told me later: 'Look what's going on: in 1984 Korchnoi played quite well, now he plays even better, so what will happen in 2010?'" Peter's words were witty indeed, but the game also had much to do with his own weak preparation.

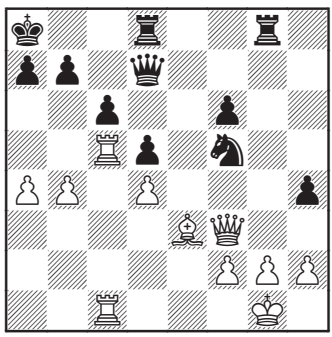
After another draw, Korchnoi beat Sakaev and Epishin in succession. The encounter with the former was a bit of a grudge game, for Korchnoi had criticized Sakaev before the tournament for a lack of fighting qualities. Sakaev was tested by a novelty. He initially fought well, but then weakened his kingside and was devastated in a swift attack.

In the tenth round, Epishin played a novelty, but he followed up badly. His position was soon worse and he stood no chance from then on. Suddenly, with one more round to go, the long-time leader Khalifman had been caught up by Salov and Korchnoi, with the latter having the better chances for victory as his co-leaders were to meet in round eleven. Their game indeed ended in peace. To the surprise of many, Korchnoi didn't try at all against Komarov, one of the players suffering in this event. It bothered him that the game was played at an early hour and he felt luck was leaving him – Korchnoi realised it was time to stop fighting. As a result, he was one of three players sharing first place.

From 5 until 15 May, Korchnoi defended first board for Switzerland at the 11th team championship in Pula (five years after its previous edition in Debrecen). As the countries were responsible for covering their teams' costs, several strong players remained absent. Still, Russia – with far lesser names than usual – was close to

victory, and only England had a better tie break at the end. Switzerland, scoring mostly rather even results, ended 13th-17th out of 33 countries. Korchnoi played in all nine rounds. Timman beat him in round five, but with victories against Stanec and Beliavsky he moved into a slight plus score.

Game 524
A. Beliavsky – V. Korchnoi
European Team Championship, Pula (9), 1997



24...h3

The pawn on h3 will be unpleasant for the white king.

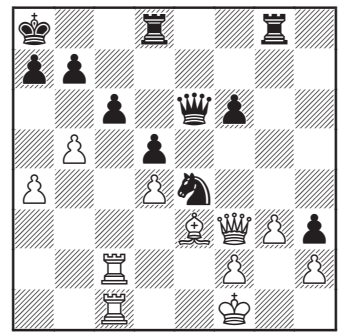
25.g3 ♕e6 26.♔f1!

Beliavsky senses the danger. 26.b5? ♘h4! 27.♕f4 ♖g4 (27...♘g2 28.♕f3) 28.♕c7 ♘f3+

a) 29.♔h1 ♖c8 30.♕h7 ♖h4!! 31.♕d3 and Black's advantage is very big after 31...♖hh8 or 31...♖e4.

b) 29.♔f1 ♘xh2+ 30.♔g1 ♖c8 31.♕h7 ♘f3+ 32.♔h1 (32.♔f1 ♖xg3! wins.) 32...♘xd4 33.♗xd4 ♖xd4 and Black would be a pawn up.

26...♘d6 27.b5 ♘e4 28.♖5c2



28...c5!

A pretty move.

29.dxc5?

Beliavsky takes the pawn, so he probably misses something. If 29.♖e2 c4 30.♕f4 ♖g5 31.♕f3 the game looks balanced. Or if 29.♕f4! ♖ge8 (The position would be even after 29...c4 30.f3 ♘d6 31.♖e2 or 29...♖g4 30.♕c7 ♖c8 31.♕h7 ♖gg8 32.dxc5 ♖h8 33.♕g7 ♖hg8 with a repetition.) 30.f3 ♘xg3+ 31.hxg3 ♕xe3 32.♕xe3 ♖xe3 33.♔f2 and White keeps the position together.

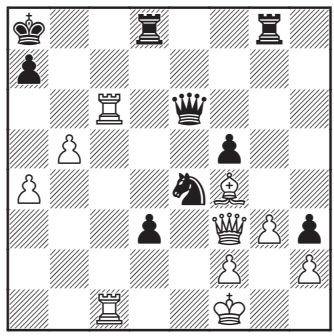
29...d4 30.♖c4 f5!

A good move, although 30...♕d5! would win quickly. 31.♔g1 (31.♖xd4 ♘d2+) 31...dxe3 32.♖xe4 e2 33.♕xe2 f5.

31.♗f4 d3

The d-pawn is far too strong. Black also wins with 31...♕d5! 32.♔g1 d3 33.c6 bxc6 34.bxc6 d2. Sosonko wrote: "He liked positions with a passed pawn, and would push it further forward, without worrying that it might become a weakness. 'What did Levenfish teach? That a passed pawn needs to advance!' he would say."

32.c6 bxc6 33.♖xc6



33...♕d5!

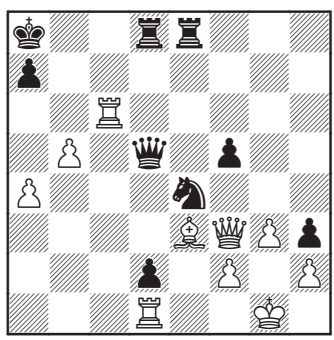
Korchnoi threatens to win the white queen.

34.♔g1 d2! 35.♖d1 ♖ge8!

This move reveals that White has problems with the back rank as well.

36.♗e3

If 36.♖c2 ♘c3! 37.♕xd5+ ♖xd5 38.♖cxd2 ♘xd1 Black wins.



36...f4!!

This sweet move ends the game.

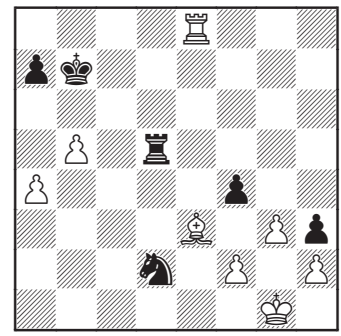
37.♖xd2

Beliavsky's move leads to an endgame a piece down. Other moves also lose: 37.gxf4 ♖g8+, 37.♕xf4 ♘g5 or 37.♗xf4 ♘c3.

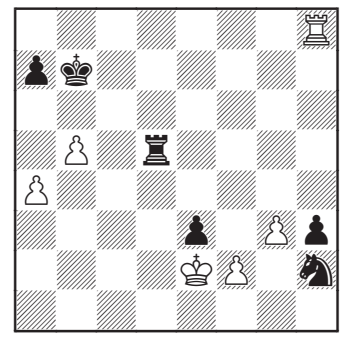
37...♘xd2 38.♖c8+

Pretty, but not effective.

38...♔b7 39.♕xd5+ ♖xd5 40.♖xe8



40...♘f3+ 41.♔f1 ♘xh2+ 42.♔e2 fxe3 43.♖h8



43...♘g4 0–1

Beliavsky resigns, as if 44.fxe3 h2 Black wins after 45.♔f3 ♖d1 or 45.e4 ♖c5.

In the penultimate round at Pula, Korchnoi faced Cvitan of Croatia – a player who solely defended with the King's Indian. Facing this opening, Korchnoi was always a little aggressive. They played a long variation and he moved instantly, almost not allowing his opponent to press the clock. He thus wanted to show his opponent that he knew it all. And when he stopped banging, he was often worse – but this game ended in a draw.

Odesa, 4 January 2007. Viktor was commentating at the ACP World Cup tournament being held there. Courtesy of the Odesa Regional Chess Federation

Odesa, 3 July 2007. At the opening ceremony of the Geller Memorial with Vladimir Tukmakov. Courtesy of the Odesa Regional Chess Federation

Odesa, 3 July 2007. At the opening ceremony. Courtesy of the Odesa Regional Chess Federation

Odesa, 4 July 2007. Playing against Vladimir Tukmakov. Courtesy of the Odesa Regional Chess Federation