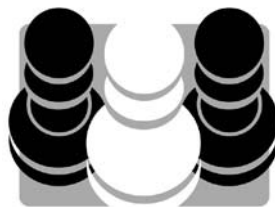


Reggio Emilia 2007/2008

The Golden Jubilee Tournament

By

Mihail Marin & Yuri Garrett



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Round 1

29 December 2007

Almasi - Harakrishna **1 - 0**

Ni Hua - Navara **½ - ½**

Landa - Korchnoi **½ - ½**

Tiviakov - Marin **0 - 1**

Godena - Gashimov **½ - ½**

Standings

- 1** Almasi, Marin
- ½** Gashimov, Godena, Korchnoi, Landa, Navara, Ni Hua
- 0** Harikrishna, Tiviakov

As we noted before, the players come from ten different countries and span distant generations (need we remind the reader that Viktor Korchnoi is 76 and Vugar Gashimov and Ni Hua are 21). Over the board, the differences are just as great: Almasi, Godena, Marin and Tiviakov can be considered to be positional players; Harikrishna and Gashimov have a more tactical style, whereas Landa, Ni Hua and Navara can be expected to play anything. Korchnoi, as usual, also defies any classification. However, attaching labels to such strong players is a dangerous exercise, as they are skilled in all styles of play.

It was difficult to guess which of the five games from the first round would be the most interesting. As we shall see, Almasi and Harikrishna were the most spectacular gladiators in the arena today, playing a very lively game that set the tone for their respective tournaments.

Actually, the manoeuvring had started a few hours before the round, in the pizzeria *Il Condor*, no more than a few steps from the Astoria Hotel. Rather than secluding themselves in their rooms to avoid any contact with the world (and their opponent), Zoltan and Hari opted to share a meal, not only together but also with yours truly and Luca Barillaro. Every well informed player knows that a light meal is the preferred choice before an important game, and so both the Hungarian and the Indian opted for a local specialty: pizza with gorgonzola for Almasi, and pizza with mushrooms, peppers and onions for Harikrishna. If you are wondering which of the two “bricks” is more beneficial to the royal game, all you need to do is read on...

At 2:30 p.m. International Arbiter Franca Dapiran started the fiftieth edition of the Reggio Emilia Capodanno Tournament. She was assisted by local arbiters Angelo Mancini and Antonio Sfera. As the clocks started, the time control was 1 hour and 40 minutes for 40 moves, then 50 minutes were added, with a 30 second increment from move 1.

The first game to end (in a draw) was the one between Korchnoi and Landa. Encouraged by Viktor’s satisfied look, I approached him and asked if he was willing to pay a visit to Miso Cebalo’s realm (the commentary room) and show his game. “Of course! Where shall we go to?” “Please follow me, Maestro.” Thus a cheerful yet combative Korchnoi entertained the public for almost three quarters of an hour, explaining the themes and tactics of his beloved French, and relating the twists and turns of his complicated draw. “Would you like to add anything?” I suggested to Landa. “How could I? He is a superstar.” Korchnoi briefly left the floor to his opponent to illustrate a line that they had analysed only minutes earlier. Landa had barely time to whisper a few words before Viktor took over again. “I can’t say I’m sitting pretty here, but I’ve found myself in this situation so many other times...” “Now White should have opened the centre with c2-c4, to give play to his most active pieces, but it is easier said than done. And after c2-c3 I understood that I would have achieved a draw: I simply needed to carry out my plan.” “Finally it would seem that I could even play for a win, but frankly I cannot see how. So after all, a draw will do.”

In my opinion this was a defining moment for the tournament because all the other players, following the doyen’s example, gladly agreed to demonstrate their games. This turned the commentary room into the beating heart of the tournament, under the skilful control of GM Cebalo.

Immediately after Korchnoi, the audience was treated to the straightforward and logical commentary of Zoltan Almasi, who had overcome Harikrishna in one of the three “Italian” openings of the day. The Hungarian’s pressure was so intense that I think Harikrishna felt relieved when he was finally freed from the painful task of finding yet another move to play. If you want to feel the young Indian’s suffering during the game, all you have to do is glance (yes, only a glance is needed) at the diagram after Black’s 29th move.

In the second Italian Game of the day, Mihail Marin once again displayed his mastery of the open games and outplayed (with the black pieces) the bookmakers’ favourite Tiviakov. The game reached its climax around move twenty, when the Dutchman decided to take Black’s h5-pawn. After this inaccuracy, Black built his advantage with great confidence by seizing the dark squares on the kingside and immediately thereafter in the centre of the board.

Michele Godena also started well by forcing a draw against Vugar Gashimov. The young Azeri adopted the Pirc Defence, and in reply Godena chose his pet move c2-c3 and emerged from the opening with a comfortable position. A couple of inaccurate moves relegated the Italian to a slightly worse position, but from then onwards White bravely went for complicated play and caused his opponent to err. The ensuing simplifications finally allowed Godena to grab a well-deserved half point. In a tournament where the average rating of his opponents is almost 100 points higher than his, Godena must capitalize on every chance to add to his score, and so his renowned solidity with the white pieces will prove quite useful.

The last Giuoco Piano of the day was Ni Hua – Navara, a well-played draw. This game has the added merit of introducing the reader to David Navara’s remarkable analysis.



Game 1

Zoltan Almasi – Pentala Harikrishna

Italian Game

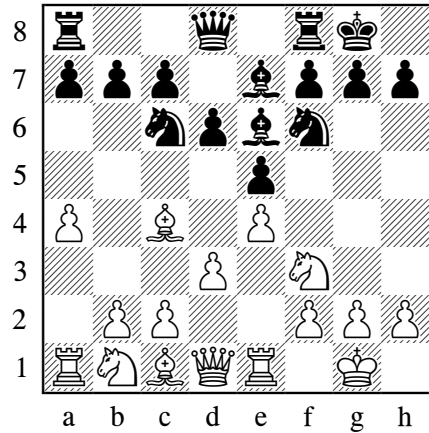
Annotations by Zoltan Almasi &
Mihail Marin

Zoltan Almasi won the tournament quite deservedly. His stability and ambition throughout the nine days of play as well as the strategic and tactical complexity of his games placed him above all his rivals in Reggio Emilia. Zoltan took the lead as early as the first round and never surrendered it, although at times he had to share it with other players.

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4

I did not have much time to prepare, so I selected the Italian Game instead of allowing the Marshall Attack, which has been analysed to death these days. I know the text offers a very solid and playable position.

3...♗f6 4.d3 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.♞e1 d6 7.a4 ♗c6



8.♘c3

The main alternative here is 8.♘bd2. The following are some possible developments:

8...♗d4 9.♗xd4 exd4 10.c3 dxc3 11.bxc3 ♗xc4 12.♗xc4 d5 13.♗d2 dxe4 14.dxe4 ♗d7 15.e5 ♗c5 16.♗a3 ♗d3 17.♞e4 ♗xa3 18.♞d4 ♗xf2 19.♞h5 ♞e7 20.♞h4 h6 21.♗xf2 ♞c5† 22.♗e2 ♞ae8 Black soon won in D. Kontic – Z. Markov, Tivat 1995.

8...♞e8 9.a5 ♗f8 10.c3 ♞b8 11.b4 a6 12.♞b3 h6 13.h3 ♞d7 14.♗b2 ♗e7 15.♗xe6 ♞xe6 16.♞xe6 fxe6 17.c4 ♗d7 18.♗c3 g5



19.♖ab1 ♔g7 20.♗f1 ♜f8 21.♗3d2 ♗g6
22.g3 ♗e7 23.♗e3 ♗c6 and Black won in
49 moves, Tkachiev – P. Nikolic, Paris (rapid)
1994.

8...♖d7 9.c3 ♜fe8 10.♗b3 ♗f8 11.a5 ♗xb3
12.♖xb3 a6! 13.♗f1 d5 14.♗g5 dxe4 15.dxe4
♖e6 16.♖xe6 ♜xe6 17.♗xf6 ♜xf6 18.♗e3
♜e6! 19.♜ed1 ♜d6 20.♗d5 ♜c8 21.♗d2 f6
22.♗c4 ♜dd8 23.b4 This was agreed drawn in
A. Grosar – Gostisa, Slovenia (ch) 1994.

A different approach for White is to exchange
bishops: 8.♗xe6 fxe6 9.c3 ♗h8 10.♖b3 ♖d7
11.♗bd2 ♗a5 12.♖b5 b6 13.♖xd7 ♗xd7
14.b4 ♗b7 15.d4 ♗f6 16.♗a3 ♜fd8 17.♗c4
a6 18.b5 axb5 19.axb5 ♗a5 20.♗cd2 ♜a7
21.♗b4 ♜da8 22.♖ab1 ♗g8 With a draw in 45
moves, Movsesian – Kholmov, Czech Republic
1995.

8...♖d7 9.a5 a6 10.h3

I looked at a few games in my preparation,
among them Anand – Carlsen, Reykjavik
(blitz) 2006, and Malakhov – Tomashevsky,
Russia 2006. I think White was a little bit
better in both games.

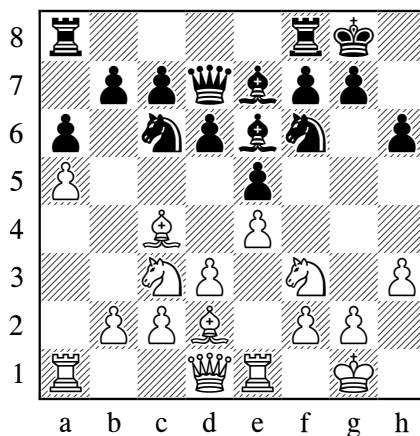
10...h6

This was a new move to me, albeit a very
logical one. Afterwards, I discovered it had
already been played in Anka – Z.J. Szabo,
Hungary 2004.

11.♗d2

White should not play 11.♗d5? in view of
11...♗xd5 12.exd5 ♗b4 13.c3 ♗bxd5 14.♖b3
c6.

[Editor's note: Perhaps it is not so simple as
13.d4! looks good for White. For example,
13...e4 14.♗d2 or 13...exd4 14.♗xd4 ♗bxd5?
15.♖f3 c6 16.♗xh6! gxh6 17.♗f5.]



11...♖ae8?

This natural move looks okay, but it is in fact
wrong! White should not be allowed to play
♗d5. Possible alternatives were 11...♗d4 or
11...♗xc4 12.dxc4 ♗d4.

12.♗d5 ♗d8

This was the idea behind 11...♖ae8, so that
the rooks are not cut off from each other. This
manoeuvre is very typical in the Ruy Lopez.

13.♗b3!

Better than the “ordinary” 13.c3 ♗xd5
14.exd5 ♗e7 15.♖b3 c6 16.dxc6 ♗xc6. Of
course White has to play on the queenside and
Black has to try on the kingside.

13...♗h7?!

A better choice was 13...♗xd5 14.exd5 ♗e7
15.♗a4 c6 16.c4.

14.♗a4

The situation is now very unpleasant for
Black. It is not easy to stop White's attack on
the queenside.

14...♖c8

Black has to step out of the pin.

15.b4

It's time to get going!

15...f5

Hari is trying to find some counterplay on the kingside, but he is much slower.

16.c4

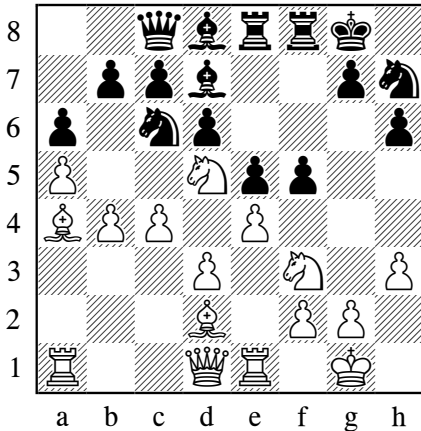
The idea is to stabilize the d5 knight and prepare b4-b5.

I also calculated the immediate 16.b5 but it looked rather complicated and unnecessary to me: 16...axb5 17.♙xb5 fxe4 18.dxe4 ♖xf3!? 19.♗xf3 ♘d4 20.♚d3 c6 (20...♘xb5 21.♗xb5 c6 22.♗a4) 21.♙a4 ♖f8 22.♘b6 ♙xb6 23.axb6 ♙xh3

16...♙d7

I did not understand this move, but I cannot see how Black can hold his position.

It may seem that Black has regrouped his forces harmoniously and his kingside counterplay is developing without problems. However, White's space advantage in the centre and on the queenside should not be underestimated. Eventually, it will become the telling factor in the final part of the game.



17.b5!

17.exf5 also seems promising: 17...♖xf5 18.b5 ♘e7 19.♘e3 ♖f7 and White has a great advantage.

17...♘e7 18.♗b3

My idea was to put pressure on Black's position.

18...axb5?

In my opinion this was the final mistake! After this, White has a very fast passed a-pawn that is not easy to stop.

To a certain extent, this can be considered the decisive mistake. Harikrishna may have evaluated the position from a static point of view and even slightly dogmatically. From a structural point of view, the capture on b5 is correct because it makes White's pawn chain less compact. However, the passed pawn White will soon create on the a-file will decide the battle in his favour.

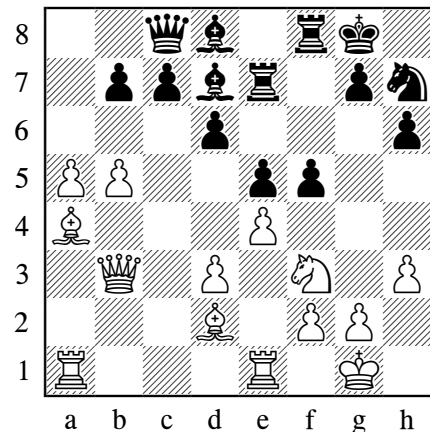
19.♘xe7†

An important zwischenzug.

19...♖xe7

It was probably better to take with the bishop.

20.cxb5†



20...♖ef7

By placing the rook in this pin, Black loses an important tempo for his attack.

20...♙e6 looks more natural, but after 21.♗c3

fxe4 22.dxe4 ♖ef7 White manages to exchange the enemy bishop, which could eventually become a dangerous attacking piece, with 23.♗b3! After 23...♞xf3 24.gxf3 ♗xb3 25.♞xb3† Black has to lose a tempo with 25...♖h8 anyway, when 26.♞a3 keeps things under control on the kingside, while the threat of a6-a7 is very strong. For instance, 26...♞xb3 27.f4! ♞g4† 28.♞g3 and Black can resign.

21.a6 fxe4 22.dxe4 ♖h8

Black tries to start an attack against the white king, but he is too late. 22...♗e6 is met by 23.axb7 and 22...bxa6 23.bxa6 is even worse for Black because another line opens.

It seems that everything is ready for the thematic sacrifice on f3, but...

23.a7!

After this move, Black will have to use his strongest piece for the passive job of blocking the pawn. Without any contribution from the queen, the kingside attack will lack power. In fact, it will soon be White who will start active operations on that wing, taking advantage of his local material superiority.

23...♞a8

If 23...♗xh3 then 24.♖e5! dxe5 25.♞xh3.

24.b6

White's position is winning because of the a7-pawn.

24...c6

Black plays without his queen and keeps the position closed, but this is just hopeless. However, 24...♗xh3 25.♖xe5 or 25.bxc7 ♗xc7 26.♖h4 were no better.

25.♞e3

Safety first – why not defend everything?

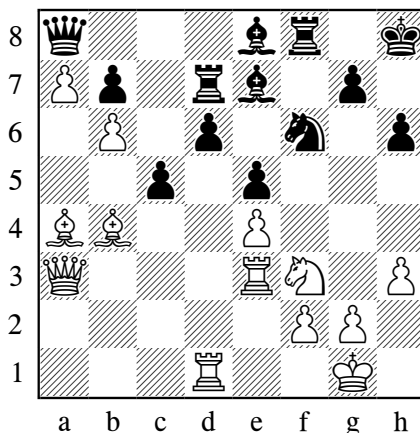
25...♖f6 26.♞d1

There's a weakness on the horizon!

26...♗e8 27.♗a5 ♞d7 28.♞a3 ♗e7 29.♗b4

This move provokes more weaknesses in Black's position.

29...c5



30.♗a5 ♞d8 31.♗xe8 ♞fxe8 32.♖h4

Now the white squares are very weak and it is time to penetrate Black's position.

32...♖h7

Another possible continuation with a similar assessment was 32...♖g4 33.hxg4 ♗xh4 34.♞h3 ♗g5 35.♗d2.

33.♞b3

Now everything is rolling.

33...♗f8 34.♞f7 ♞c8 35.♞f3 ♞d7 36.♞g6† ♖h8 37.♗d2 d5

Activity in the centre is not always an adequate solution to a flank attack. In this case White has an overwhelming superiority on both wings; in order to compensate for it, Black would need something like two connected passed pawns on the second rank...

38.♞xf6 gxf6 39.♞a1 dxe4 40.a8=♞ 1-0

Reggio Emilia 2007/8 - Table of results

		Elo	Perf.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	pt	cl
1	Tiviakov Sergei	2643	-88		½	½	1	0	½	0	½	½	0	3,5	8°
2	Landa Konstantin	2678	-49	½		½	½	½	½	½	0	½	1	4,5	5°
3	Almasi Zoltan	2691	+56	½	½		½	½	1	½	1	½	1	6,0	1°
4	Godena Michele	2535	-10	0	½	½		½	0	½	0	½	½	3,0	10°
5	Ni Hua	2641	+70	1	½	½	½		½	½	½	½	1	5,5	3°
6	Navara David	2656	-63	½	½	0	1	½		0	0	1	½	4,0	7°
7	Gashimov Vugar	2663	+45	1	½	½	½	½	1		½	½	½	5,5	2°
8	Harikrishna Pentala	2668	+40	½	1	0	1	½	1	½		½	½	5,5	4°
9	Korchnoi Viktor	2611	-13	½	½	½	½	½	0	½	½		½	4,0	6°
10	Marin Mihail	2551	+13	1	0	0	½	0	½	½	½	½		3,5	9°

Reggio Emilia 2007/8 - Table of progressive scores

				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	cl	
1	Tiviakov Sergej	NED	2643	0	½	1	2	2	2½	2½	3	3½	8°	
2	Landa Konstantin	RUS	2678	½	1	2	2½	3	3½	4	4½	4½	5°	
3	Almasi Zoltan	HUN	2691	1	1½	2	2½	3½	4	4½	5½	6	1°	
4	Godena Michele	ITA	2535	½	½	1	1	1½	2	2½	3	3	10°	
5	Ni Hua	CHN	2641	½	1	1½	2	3	3½	4	4½	5½	3°	23,25
6	Navara David	CZE	2656	½	1	1	1	2	2½	3	3	4	7°	15,50
7	Gashimov Vugar	AZE	2663	½	1	2	2½	3	3½	4½	5	5½	2°	23,50
8	Harikrishna Pentala	IND	2668	0	1	1½	2½	3	3½	4	4½	5½	4°	22,50
9	Korchnoi Viktor	SUI	2611	½	1	1½	2	2	2½	3	3½	4	6°	18,50
10	Marin Mihail	ROM	2551	1	1½	1½	2	2	2½	3	3½	3½	9°	14,50

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