

## From the author

The idea of a follow-up to the autobiographical volume *Steps* [published in English as *Victor Bologan: Selected Games 1985-2004* – Editors] arose practically from the moment the latter was written. Despite the notable full stop at the end of the book, in the shape of a victory over Magnus Carlsen, my chess career continued for a full fourteen more years, and my subsequent stormy social and political career is only just gaining momentum. And so, the question arose: how to organically combine the sincere, as if written in spirit, *Steps* with the subsequent accumulated life material? What scarlet thread runs through my life – my infancy, adolescence, youth, maturity? What is my life credo? Actually, what should be the name of the book?

My numerous master classes, which I give in different languages in every corner of the world, came to the rescue. At them, I try to convey to the audience not only the specific chess knowledge I have accumulated over forty years, but also my philosophical concept of decision-making, both in a specific game/position and in general life situations. You need to believe in yourself, you need to trust yourself, you need to develop a sense of confidence in the decisions you make. With all this, in no case should you turn off critical thinking for a minute. You should not become set in stone but rather must admit your own mistakes, because working on mistakes is the only path to perfection – as has been proven over centuries.

Of course, the content of *Steps* itself had to be reconsidered: in some places the opening variations were outdated, in others the memory suggested a vivid episode that had not been described before. And sadly, people close to me continue to pass away: Inna and Mark Dvoretsky, Mikhail Podgaets, Alexander Klepikov, Naum Rashkovsky, Ivan Solonar...

At the time of writing *Steps* I was an active athlete, so I could not disclose all the ‘names-appearances-passwords’, that is, tell about everyone with whom I worked and how I worked. Of course, there were no special trade secrets, but even so. Now I am relieved of this burden and I can tell you in more detail, for example, about my collaboration with Garry Kasparov, Judit Polgar, Mikhail Podgaets and some other chess players. In addition, computers have become much stronger these days. A simple mobile phone with the most common program now plays more strongly

than any grandmaster, so I had to check and correct old comments on games here and there.

As regards the foreword to the first edition, I have decided to leave it as it is. After all, it was written by the great World Champion, Garry Kasparov – for me it is both a great honour and very flattering.

Victor Bologan,  
Doha, March 2024

# **Foreword to the book ‘Selected Games 1985-2004’**

by Garry Kasparov, 13th World Champion

In our computer era, few strong chess players ever think of writing a book. This work is extensive, it takes a lot of time and, from the point of view of a chess professional, it is not rewarding enough financially. In addition, writing a book requires some ideas that make it interesting for a wide chess audience. Therefore, I accepted Viorel Bologan’s manuscript with great interest. The sheer volume of the manuscript was already impressive; knowing Viorel, I had no doubt that I would find many interesting chess ideas in it.

I think that the book should be read by all chess players who would like to continue their improvement. First of all, of course, this means young chess players who are sure that they can download all chess knowledge on the Internet or find it in modern chess databases. In fact, nothing can replace the printed word, because improvement requires an understanding of what has been done before, as well as the ability to process the information received and adapt it to your own stylistic and chess character features.

Viorel tells in detail about his development, about how he absorbed the chess experience in Chisinau, where he was lucky to work with such an outstanding person as Vyacheslav Chebanenko, who created his own, if not ‘mainstream’, then very extraordinary chess philosophy, and then in Moscow, where he collaborated with Zigurds Lanka and Mark Dvoretsky. Chess players are usually divided into those who calculate variations, and those who think in schemes, focusing on the strategic elements of a chess game.

What unites Chebanenko, Lanka and Dvoretsky (and Viorel also talks about this in the book) is not only the ability to think in schemes, but also a type of thinking that is quite rare now – thinking in general philosophical chess categories, when a specific move or even a complex plan fits into a certain general concept. In many of the games in the book, such an inseparable connection can be traced, which makes it possible to draw up the most complete picture of the development of both a particular game and chess as a whole. Each of these coaches contributed to the formation of the chess and human image of the author, who, after

a short creative break (working on the stock exchange), entered the chess elite, confirming this with a brilliant victory at the super-tournament in Dortmund.

It is very important that there are many properly annotated games in the book. I specifically emphasize the word 'properly', because today most of even the leading chess players limit themselves to the simplest notes to their games in the Informant format or write a rather primitive text in *New in Chess*. More complex texts can be found in the magazine 64, which is written mainly, of course, by the Russian-speaking chess guard, but in general the texts are limited to commentary on the game itself, and it is rather difficult to find a connected series of well-annotated games. Even in the books that the leading grandmasters still publish (albeit less and less regularly), their games are usually presented in the form of an internally unrelated 'chocolate box', where just different 'candies' are laid out in a beautiful package.

By contrast, in Bologan's book it is quite obvious that the games are chosen precisely as milestones on the path of his creative improvement. In addition, the reader will find many interesting observations that reveal the originality of the grandmaster's personality. And although I cannot agree with a number of them, they nevertheless reflect the author's position, which is also rather unusual in the chess world today, when many things are presented in a very smoothed and generalized form.

The book presents diverse games starting with a wide variety of openings. Nowadays it is fashionable to expand your repertoire, including different openings, often contradictory in structure, and in this book you can get a recommendation on how to choose the right opening, from the point of view of the author. He talks about the decision-making method and the specific philosophy behind each of these decisions. These may be elements of chess psychology associated with a particular opponent, some changes in creative views as a result of cooperation with one or other coach, or may simply be compliance with modern chess fashion, because any chess player, even the most creative one, must closely follow the development of chess thoughts and try not to lag behind, to be always at the forefront of modern chess development. And here in almost every game one can find general recommendations 'adapted' to the specific features of a particular position. I think these are the most valuable tips, because by itself, general advice, not illustrated by a specific example, loses most of its practical usefulness.

Of particular interest in the book are quotes from the author's diary, which tell not only about chess events, but also about the author's personal experiences. Perhaps it is this combination of chess analysis and the

presentation of personal feelings recorded in the tensest moments when one or another event is experienced that allows one to more correctly feel the very technology of decision-making and, most importantly, those lessons that were learned both from defeats and from victories. Although the book makes it quite clear that it is much more difficult to learn from victories, this idea of the difficulty of the test posed by victories is presented very well: the drop in results is naturally associated with the peculiarities of human psychology, which is not adapted to objectively evaluate winning streaks. We react much more adequately to defeats that force us to use our minds again and find out the reasons for our failure.

The book also describes well the complex contemporary relationship between teacher and student. Today, chess players often change roles, helping, assisting each other, and in addition to the traditional 'teacher-student' relationships, there are also relationships between chess players and sparring partners who help either in a particular tournament or in preparation for a series of important competitions. Since Viorel has been 'on both sides of the barricade', he talks about this system of relationships in sufficient detail and in an interesting way. The story about the process of the birth of ideas in creative teams is also interesting, when a group of chess players works in one direction, and thanks to a productive mutual exchange they manage to advance both their own and our common understanding of chess to some new level.

In any case, one can hope that this book will inspire young chess players to a deeper study of the chess classics, to more focused work not only with computer databases, but also with chess books. But most importantly, they will have a desire to comment on their own games. Although many today probably perceive the advice of the classics with a certain sneer – in our computer age, the recommendations of the 19th-20th centuries often look outdated – nevertheless, Botvinnik's insistence on analysing one's own games remains relevant today. Because only commenting on the games played helps creative growth. And of course, one can only dream that reading this most interesting book will inspire some of the strongest chess players to also spend their precious time writing another extraordinary chess book.

## Introduction to ‘Selected Games 1985-2004’

In my first year at the Institute of Physical Education, I turned to Zigurds Lanka for help in mastering the craft of writing. This experienced chess journalist, after a brief pause, issued the following advice:

‘Well, I’ll give you a pen and paper.’

Fifteen years have passed since then; I became a grandmaster and I write for various chess publications. In a word, the aphorism of the ‘old coach’, as Lanka calls himself, helped.

Chess journalism is, first of all, facts. Mostly dry, sometimes unbelievable, but still facts: I came to the tournament, played, looked around, wrote about it, went to the next tournament. And yet, despite the comfort of the niche occupied, it is natural for a person to move forward, to search for something new. So, I wanted to not just write about the next tournament and comment on the games played, but to dig deeper, to get out of the shallows of a magazine article and into the deep sea of an autobiographical book. Moreover, chess experience – more than twenty years of it – allows this, and work on your own games cannot interfere, because it is the cornerstone of the growth of any chess player.

Writing about yourself is both simple and difficult at the same time. On the one hand, the best that comes out of a writer’s pen is always his personal, deeply felt experience. On the other hand, it is difficult to maintain objectivity when it comes to your beloved self. And yet, I made up my mind! I dismissed right away the idea that the book would take a lot of my time and effort and, as a result, would negatively affect my chess level. The positive example of Shirov, Kramnik and Anand (who have already painted chess self-portraits) had convinced me that I was trying to dig in the right direction. Of course, I could not have done it without a little trick, which greatly facilitated my work. Many games were commented on for 64, *New in Chess*, *Europe Echecs*, *Schach*, *Peon del Rey*, *Chess Informant*. Naturally, the best of the published games formed the basis of this book. It was thanks to the work carried out on a fresh trail that it was possible to preserve both the considerations that guided me during the game and the conclusions drawn afterwards.

A special topic in the book concerns my coaches: Ivan Solonar, Viacheslav Chebanenko, Zigurds Lanka, Mark Dvoretzky and Mikhail Podgaets. All unique personalities, they certainly left their recognizable

salutary imprint on my game. It is to them that I owe most of my achievements. Being by role more of a creative performer than a painstaking composer, I was happy to absorb Chebanenko's ideas in whole systems; from the first moment, the 'templates' of Lanka were obtained; having solved a huge number of problems from Dvoretsky's card index, I threw myself into the most complex calculations without fear.

Most of the games presented in the book, especially in the opening part, are connected with coaches. Unfortunately, the limited volume of the book did not allow a more detailed account of these extraordinary personalities. And if Dvoretsky's teachings are more than accessible, thanks to his exceptional ability to work, which led to the writing of a number of books and many articles, then books about the chess views and worldview of my other coaches are yet to come.

*Victor Bologan*

| Chisinau 1988 |               |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |
|---------------|---------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|
|               |               |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |    |
| 1             | Titov         |  | * | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 9½ |
| 2             | Itkis         |  | ½ | * | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 9  |
| 3             | Bologan       |  | 0 | 1 | * | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 8  |
| 4             | B. Nevednichy |  | 0 | ½ | 1 | * | 0 | 1 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1  | ½  | 0  | ½  | 7  |
| 5             | Gornyak       |  | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 7  |
| 6             | Figler        |  | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | ½ | * | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 7  |
| 7             | Sandulyak     |  | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | 1 | * | 0 | ½ | 1  | 1  | ½  | 1  | 6  |
| 8             | V. Nevednichy |  | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | * | 0 | 0  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 5  |
| 9             | Solonar       |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | * | 1  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 5  |
| 10            | Zayarny       |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | 0 | *  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 5  |
| 11            | Shofman       |  | 0 | 0 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0  | *  | 0  | 1  | 4½ |
| 12            | Baranechky    |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0  | 1  | *  | 0  | 2½ |
| 13            | Fedotov       |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0  | 0  | 1  | *  | 2½ |

Since I finished school at sixteen and a half, and in the Soviet Union one was drafted into the army from the age of eighteen, I had an extra year to enter a university. I had to think about what to do next. After consulting with my parents, I made a non-standard and, most importantly, completely unexpected decision for those around me – I postponed my studies for a year and went to work in a chess club under the supervision of my first coach. All instructor positions were taken by other professional chess players, and I got the position of a simple worker. Of course, I had to change the light bulbs and do other work around the club, but mainly I gained chess strength. Ivan Yakovlevich created good conditions for growth for me, and also German Titov, Boris Itkis, and many others who were at the club. I was surrounded by the Yugoslav Informants, I studied and played blitz a lot. As I remember now, we played for cups of coffee. My colleague, a worker, Volodya Zhidko, at some point lost a whole bucket of coffee to Vladik Nevednichy! But there were almost no tournaments, and there were no workshops at all, although I travelled a little around the country, even visiting Tashkent for the Khodzhaev Memorial, which was held in April-May 1989.

The tournament itself was quite interesting, but the master norm was not available there (although it was assumed that I was going for the





**A game with Dmitry Chuprikov (right) at the Petrosian Memorial, Moscow 1988.**

norm). I remember the Memorial itself for two events. Firstly, on April 28, my youngest brother Radu was born, the one who later became a successful football player, kickboxer and eventually a businessman. And the second event was a significant meeting.

The end of the tournament coincided with Easter, which was very late that year. In early May it suddenly snowed – in Tashkent! And now I was standing at the bus stop, waiting for the bus, and rare flakes of unexpected snow rushed past me to the insatiable wet asphalt. In a word, the most philosophical atmosphere. And then a woman with big kind eyes came up to me and gave me a Bible – a storehouse of wisdom, a real life-guide.

I don't remember what we talked about, but since then I have already read the Bible three times, and it helped me a lot in life, especially during my student years.

Work in the club, tournaments – all this is good, of course, but it was necessary to decide on plans for the future.

Around February 1989, I realized that I needed to enter the Moscow Institute of Physical Education. I consulted with both Chebanenko and my parents, but again I made the decision myself. My parents were great; they respected my right to choose, although I was only seventeen years old.

To be honest, at first I was going to enter the MGIMO (Moscow Institute of International Relations), but I was told that in order to enter an elite university, in addition to knowing a foreign language, I would need to start making a career along the Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young

Communist League) line. I also thought about whether to enter Chisinau University at the Faculty of Journalism. I started preparing for the exams quite seriously and wrote articles, but at the last moment I decided to enter a university where the most favourable conditions for chess were created – the Institute of Physical Education. At the time there were many chess departments: in Lviv, in Kyiv, in Minsk and in Chelyabinsk, but in the end I chose Moscow.

All exams had to be taken in Russian, whereas I had studied at school in Moldovan, and this created additional difficulties. Hoping to get a sponsored place at the university<sup>8</sup>, I fussed for a long time and walked along the long corridors of the National Sports Committee, but did not receive anything but promises. As a result, I hired tutors, laden down with textbooks in Russian (since all the terminology in Russian, of course, is different) and at the training camp before the Youth Games I wrote a bunch of pieces under the dictation of Irina Brandis. At the same time, I had a serious challenge to pass the physical education part of the ‘specialization’ exam. I couldn’t do pull-ups for a very long time. But then, how I broke through! At the entrance exam for the Institute of Physical Education, I easily pulled myself up thirteen times, just flew over the bar, and felt that I could pull up the same number again. They told me: ‘Enough, enough!’

That year brought me obvious benefit and in the summer of 1989 at the All-Union Youth Games in Kramatorsk, I shone, getting a high assessment (I had never received such a rating before). The tournament was open to youngsters of quite a significant age – up to 21 years old. I played on board one for Moldova and shared 1st-3rd places with Gelfand and Shirov. We all scored 6/8, ahead of Ivanchuk (at that moment, he was rated number three in the world), Akopian and others. To this day, I regard this result as one of my biggest successes!

Game 5 French Defence

**Victor Bologan**

**Darius Ruzele**

Kramatorsk 1989

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.♘f3**

At one time the Exchange French was part of my repertoire.

**4...♙d6?!**

4...♘c6 is seen as the most precise.

**5.c4 c6**

Once, in a tournament in Romania, someone played 5...♘e7??, and after 6.c5 the game ended abruptly.

**6.♘c3 ♘e7 7.♙d3 dxc4 8.♙xc4 0-0**

**9.h3!**

<sup>8</sup> Target direction to the university – in Soviet times, there was a special quota for representatives of the Union republics in the central higher educational institutions of the USSR. Having this, it was enough to pass all the exams (on a five-point scale) to enter the university.

We have a typical position with an isolated queen's pawn. White has the better piece placement and an excellent outpost on e5, whilst Black has the eternal problem of where to place the c8-bishop (with his last move, White prevented it coming out to g4). This structure arises from many openings, including the Russian (Petroff) Defence, Queen's Gambit, Slav, etc.

**9...♟d7 10.0-0 ♟b6 11.♙b3**



**11...♟ed5 12.♙c2!**

The usual plan. In these structures, the bishop often transfers from one diagonal to another.

**12...♙f4 13.♖d3 g6 14.♙xf4 ♟xf4 15.♖e3!**

Of course, after the exchange of a pair of pieces it is easier for Black to defend, but he had to weaken the dark squares. However, the problem of the light-squared bishop is still not solved.

On 15.♖d2 there would follow 15...♖f6 with the threat of ...♟xh3+.

**15...♟bd5**

15...♖f6? 16.♟e4 ♖f5 17.♟h4.

**16.♟xd5 ♟xd5 17.♖h6 ♖f6**

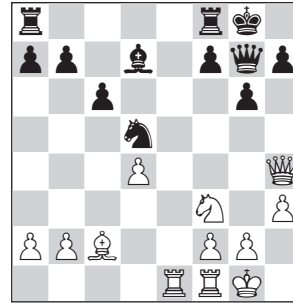
**18.♖ae1**

Completing my development.

**18...♖g7**

Nor are all the problems solved by 18...♙e6 19.♟g5 or 18...♙f5 19.♙xf5 ♖xf5 20.♟g5 ♟f6 21.♖e3.

**19.♖h4 ♙d7**



**20.♙b3!**

While the black queen is tied down to g7, White sets up the possibility of the capture on d5, followed by a rook infiltration on e7.

**20...♖fe8 21.♖e5**

Threatening simply to win a pawn and so provoking the exchange on e5.

**21...♖xe5**

21...f6 22.♙xd5+ cxd5 23.♖xd5 ♙c6 24.♖d6 ♙xf3 25.gxf3.

**22.dxe5**

White has rid himself of the isolated pawn and controls the f6-square, to where his knight will soon be heading.

**22...♙e6 23.♖e1**

With the idea of ♟g5-e4-f6.

**23...h6 24.♟d2**

The route has changed slightly but the destination remains the same.

**24...♖f8 25.♟e4 ♖b4**

An attempt at counterplay, which White confidently refutes.

**26.♖e3! ♟g7**

The rook cannot be taken: 26...♞xe3  
27.♞f6+.

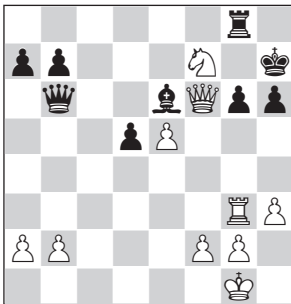
**27.♞xd5 cxd5 28.♞f6+ ♔g8 29.♞d6**

The game is practically decided.

**29...♞b6 30.♞g3**

With the threat of ♖xg6+.

**30...♔h7 31.♞xf7 ♞g8**



**32.♞xg6! 1-0**

### Lessons:

1) When the isolated d4-pawn is opposed by the c6-pawn, as a rule, White has the advantage. This is due to the fact that in the absence

of the e6-pawn, the c4-bishop directly attacks the f7-square, and if Black places the knight on d5, then the bishop can always move to the b1-h7 diagonal. It is also very convenient for White to use the open e-file and the e5-square as an outpost, while Black often has problems developing the c8-bishop.

2) The e5-square can be used as an outpost not only for the knight, but also for the rook, threatening to double heavy pieces on the e-file. In the case of a rook exchange on e5, White gets rid of the isolated pawn and gains other advantages in return – in this case, control over the weak dark squares d6 and f6.

3) Enemy pieces, most often knights, very often penetrate into weakened squares. As a result of the manoeuvre ♞f3-d2-e4 White's threats increased and he launched a direct attack.

Immediately after Kramatorsk, I headed to Moscow to enrol at the Institute of Physical Education. I felt like D'Artagnan, on his way to conquer Paris!

Having started 2002 on a positive note, I did not expect that new life tests awaited me in the next twelve months. I had just begun to get used to family life when our charming daughter Katya was born, and again I needed to rebuild.

Family life, of course, is a fun thing. However, it not only brings all kinds of goodies, but also requires a lot of self-sacrifice, and the art of compromise must be at the highest level. It is not an easy task to harness completely different people into one team! Because a man and a woman are absolutely different beings; this does not mean that one is better and one is worse, but the creatures are completely different.

Margarita and I argued all our lives. Over time, we stopped arguing in a very pronounced form, but there are still small 'foci of resistance'. And in our youth we argued about anything. For example, a classic problem of the Moscow metro: how to get from point A to point B faster – with one change or two? Here we set up an experiment in its purest form: I, as an athlete, travelled with two transfers, and the young lady, as a lazier creature, with one. Naturally, we ended up at the final point at the same time – it was very funny! And before that, both passionately argued that 'my' way was much faster!

Also, our disputes all the time concerned some words, some etymology. And then it dawned on me: I bought Ozhegov's dictionary, the most famous and authoritative Russian dictionary. Several times we opened it, and after that our disputes in one big direction ended. Now, instead of a dictionary, there is the Internet; but we already know each other well, so respect and understand who knows what better.

Disputes are inevitable, and it was because of the little things that our family had a lot of scandals. We are just completely different, and neither one nor the other wants anything bad. Mutual patience is worth a lot, so the monument should be erected both to Margarita and to me.

The marriages of many of our friends broke up a long time ago, and some have married again, some even a third time... but Rita and I understand absolutely correctly that a family is a family, children are children, and love is something that needs to be worked on and should be protected; it's not worth throwing it away. It is often easier for people to run away than to endure, take a step forward, remove their ego. But this must be done because there is no other way.

Of course, I was very lucky with my wife. It is clear – a ballerina, beautiful, smart and funny. But the main test comes in difficult situations, when nine out of ten fold. The doctors crippled our daughter at birth and did not say anything about it, we found out only a month later...



**Our wedding in Chisinau in the fall of 2002. ‘Nenashi’ (godparents) were Valeriu Myndru and his wife Evgenia.**

Rita gave birth in Sevastopol and we paid for the birth – everything had to be top-notch. An absolutely healthy mother, she grilled shish kebabs with us during the day. Everything went according to plan, no deviations, and then... some incomprehensible fuss began. I was waiting in the corridor and they told me: go home, everything will be fine. Well, I was inexperienced, this was my first child, so OK, I went home. They told me a daughter was born; everything was in order. Ten-twelve hours passed; I returned to the maternity hospital and heard the terrible cry of my child as much as 4 floors away! She had eighteen cerebral haemorrhages... these freaks mixed up the drips for my wife and instead of saline they gave a massive overdose of Enzaprost – they could have ruined Rita too...

As a result, my daughter has a serious form of cerebral palsy; she understands everything, but she cannot speak, she cannot sit, she practically does not control her arms and legs; and this is for life. We went around all the doctors, all the sorcerers... fragile Rita was with her everywhere: in all the hospitals, sometimes she spent six months there. Of course, we tried to make the conditions normal, but still. Katya lives with us, and she is happy in her own way. She smiles, we take her with us wherever we can. We try to give her our love so that she feels needed. But psychologically, of course, this is a very difficult situation. I greatly appreciate the courage and heroism of my wife.



At the same time, Rita remains an absolutely normal person. She teaches ballet, graduated from GITIS, enjoys life. She has a hobby, organizing many concerts in Qatar. And there is no feeling that we have some flawed family. Yes, of course, we have this cross in the form of Katya, but Qatar also helped us a lot in this regard. The system of nannies (most often Filipinas) is very well developed here: and we first hired one, and then the second. For our children, they are Aunt Lisa and Aunt Michelle. It helps us a lot to lead a full life: both I and my wife can work. However, in the early years, 100 percent of the worry was on Rita. In Qatar, of course, all this is much more convenient. That is, they feel much more comfortable there than they would feel in Moldova or Moscow.

The story with Katya is pain, tragedy, responsibility, and love. We are very grateful to Qatar for the two sons who were born there. After Katya, crippled by doctors, it was very important for us to have healthy children. Right before finishing the book, my Chinese friends Yangchen and Tenxiao introduced me to Shaoxing healer Dr. Gao. He has undertaken to try to work with Katya. Everything is possible. At least he helped me with my neck pain the first time. Thank God!

In purely chess terms, the year 2002 was nothing special, except for the victory at the rapid event in Mainz. Moreover, the Moldovan team took a small step forward: at the Olympiad in Bled, we took 31st, an honourable placing for us. And when I was back in Pamplona a year later, I felt better.

Game 38 Petroff Defence

**Victor Bologan**

**Rustam Kasimdzhanov**

Pamplona 2002

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I became good friends with the future World Champion in Pamplona. In addition to us, Ivan Sokolov and Paco Vallejo also played there, so the social circle was kept to a minimum. In this vacuum of communication (my wife stayed at home with little Katya), my lengthy discussions with Rustam on various topics came in very handy. The 17th World Champion, well-read to the point of erudition,

already at that time impressed with his ease and at the same time his depth of thinking.

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.c4 ♘f6**

Even more popular is 8...♗b4, as was played in those days by Karpov in his match with Kasparov in New York and tested again in the 2004 Leko-Kramnik match.

White, who gets an isolated pawn, needs to create pressure against d5 and along the e-file as soon as possible.

**9.h3 ♗b4 10.♙e2 dxc4 11.♙xc4 0-0 12.♘c3 ♗bd5 13.♖e1 c6**

**14. ♖b3**

Later White tried to prove an advantage after 14. ♖g5 ♖e6 15. ♖b3.

**14... ♖b6 15. ♖d3 ♖e6 16. ♖c2 h6****17. a3**

An important prophylactic move. Now White will not have to worry if the black knight comes back to d5. It is interesting that the well-known exchange sacrifice is also not without its dangers: 17. ♖xe6 fxe6 18. ♖e2 ♖d7 19. ♖d2 ♖d6 20. ♖e4 ♖bd5 21. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 22. ♖e1 ♖ad8 23. a3 ♖fe8 24. ♖b1 c5 25. ♖e5 (Topalov-Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2003).

**17... ♖bd5**

On 17... ♖e8 I was ready to put the bishop on the h2-b8 diagonal: 18. ♖f4 ♖bd5 19. ♖e5 with a small plus for White.

**18. ♖a4!**

This novelty was prepared by White's 17th move. While Black is provoked to fight for the f4-square, White uses the a4-square for his own purposes. It is also important to play ♖a4 before the rook comes to c8, as in this case Black will take the bishop to c8 after the preliminary ... ♖c7. This is indeed what happened in the next game: 18. ♖d2 ♖c8 19. ♖a4 ♖c7 20. ♖c5 ♖c8 21. ♖ac1 ♖d6 22. ♖e5 ♖e8 23. b4 ♖ce7 24. ♖b2?! (24. b5!? ♖xe5 25. dxe5 ♖xe5 26. ♖xe5 ♖xe5) 24... ♖c7 25. a4 ♖e6 with equality (Lutz-Fridman, Essen 2002).

**18... ♖d7!?**

Evidently, Black does not wish to give up his bishop for the knight. On the other hand, he cannot take control of c5 with the move 18... b6 because of 19. ♖e5. And after 18... ♖c7 19. ♖c5 ♖xc5 20. dxc5 ♖f4 21. ♖f1 White has the better chances.

**19. ♖d2 ♖e8 20. ♖ad1**

I also looked at doubling on the e-file: 20. ♖e2!? ♖c7 21. ♖ae1 ♖f4 22. ♖xf4 ♖xf4 23. ♖c3!? (23. ♖c4 ♖xc4 24. ♖xc4 ♖f8 25. ♖d3 g6 26. b4 ♖g5 27. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 28. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 29. ♖c5 ♖xc5 30. dxc5 ♖d8 with equality) 23... ♖c7 (on 23... ♖f8, 24. ♖xe6! fxe6 25. ♖g6 ♖ed8 26. ♖xe6 wins) 24. d5 cxd5 25. ♖d4±.

**20... ♖f6 21. ♖e5?!**

Too hasty. It was very tempting to capture new squares in the centre and prepare the advance of the f-pawn. Now it's hard to say what



I was going to do in response to ...♙g5, especially when I saw this move.

The normal continuation was 21.♙c1 with the idea of ♘a4-c3-e4, after which Black has to sit and wait for White to choose a plan.

**21...♚c7**

After the game, Rustam admitted that he had also looked at 21...♙g5!, but could not decide on the exchange, although he very well knew the rule of thumb that exchanges usually favour the defending side. There could follow 22.♘c5 (22...♙xg5 ♚xg5 23.♘f3 ♚f6 24.♙e4 is also equal) 22...♘xc5 23.dxc5 ♙xd2 24.♚xd2 ♚f6 25.♙b1 ♘f4 with equality.

**22.f4 ♘f8**

22...♙h4 23.♚f1 ♘5f6 24.♙h2 ♘h5 25.♙e1 ♙xe1 26.♚dx1±

**23.♘c5 ♚ad8 24.♙c1**



**24...♙c8**

Black's last chance to sharpen the game was 24...♙h4!?. In my opinion, in all cases White should keep some pressure on the opponent's position. For example:

A) 25.♚f1 f6 26.♘g6 (26.♘xe6 ♘xe6 27.♙h7+ ♙h8 28.♘g6+ ♙xh7

29.♘h4+ ♙g8 leaves Black a little better) 26...♘xg6 27.♘xe6 ♚xe6 28.♙xg6 ♚e7 29.♚b3 ♚e3 30.♙xe3 ♚xe3+ 31.♚xe3 ♘xe3 32.♚d3 ♘xf1 33.♙xf1 f5 34.♙xf5 ♙f6 35.d5 cxd5 with equality;

B) 25.f5 ♙xe1 (25...♙c8 26.♚e4 (Black has a small advantage after 26.♚f1 ♙g3 27.♘e4 ♙xe5 28.dxe5 ♚xe5 29.g4 ♘h7 30.♚f2 b6) 26...♙e7 (26...♙g3 27.♚g4 ♙xe5 28.dxe5 ♚xe5 29.♙xh6 ♘e3 30.♙xg7 ♚d5 31.♚c3 ♘xg4 32.hxg4 b6 33.♘b3) 27.♚e2 ♙d6 28.♚de1) 26.fxe6 f6 27.♘f7 ♘xe6 28.♘xd8 ♘xd8 29.♙c4 ♘f7 30.♚f5 ♚e7 31.♙d3 with a complex and unclear position.

**25.♚f2 ♘e6**

Rather stronger was 25...♙e7!? followed by ...♙d6 and ...f6.

**26.♘e4 ♙e7 27.♙c4!?**

Establishing control over the important diagonal a2-g8. This helps White in many attacking variations, because in the majority of cases the knight on d5 will not have a move.

**27...♘f8 28.f5! ♘h7?**

Allowing a combination. More sensible was 28...♘d7, and now 29.f6!? does not work: 29...♘7xf6 30.♙xh6 ♙e6 31.♘g5 ♙d6 (31...gxh6 32.♘xe6 fxe6 33.♙xd5) 32.♘xe6 ♚xe6 33.♙g5 ♚de8. Therefore, better is 29.♙f4 ♚b6 30.♘c3 (30.♘xd7 ♙xd7 31.♙e5 f6 32.♙d6 ♙xd6 33.♘xd6 ♚xe1+ 34.♚xe1 ♙f8) 30...♘7f6 31.g4, and any 1.e4 player would choose White in this position.

**29.♙f4!**

At first I looked at 29. ♖xh6, but I stopped my calculations when I could not find a solution after 29... f6! (29...gxf6 30. ♖g3+ ♕g5 31. h4 ♕xf5 32. hxg5 ♕xe4 33. ♖xe4 hxg5 is unclear) 30. ♖g3 ♕f8 31. ♖g6 fxe5 32. ♕g5 ♕e7 33. f6 (33. ♕h6 ♕h4 34. g3 ♖h8) 33... ♕f8.

### 29... ♖b6

29... ♖xf4 30. ♕xf7+.

Now, with the queen far away, everything should work out fine.



### 30. ♕xh6!!

The merit of this combination is that it will end only after 10 moves. Of course, it was difficult to calculate everything from beginning to end, so it was enough to understand that in all variations White has a very strong attack.

### 30...gxf6

30...f6 31. ♖g3 ♕f8 32. ♖g6.

### 31. ♖g3+ ♖g5

I mainly considered 31... ♖f8. Here I had prepared a second piece sacrifice: 32. ♖xf7!, after which White has a decisive advantage in all the main variations:

A) 32... ♕g5 33. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 34. ♖xg5 ♖xe1+ (34... ♖xg5 35. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 36. ♕xd5 cxd5 37. ♖d6+ ♖g7

38. ♖xd5) 35. ♖xe1 ♖xg5 36. ♕xd5 ♖xd5 (36...cxd5 37. ♖b8 ♖f7 38. ♖c1 ♖d6 39. ♖c5) 37. ♖e5;

B) 32... ♖g5 33. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 34. f6! ♕xf6 35. ♕xd5 cxd5 36. ♖xf6;

C) 32... ♖xf7 33. ♖g6+ ♖f8 34. ♖xh7 ♕f6 35. ♖xf6 ♖xe1+ 36. ♖h2! ♖c7+ (36... ♖e3 37. ♖xh6+ ♖f7 38. ♖g4 ♖e4 39. ♖e5+ ♖e7 40. f6+ ♖xf6 41. ♖g7+ ♖d6 42. ♖f7+ winning) 37. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 38. ♖h7+ ♖g7 39. ♖xe1 ♖d7 (39... ♖xh7 40. ♖e7+ ♖h8 41. ♖xc7 ♕xf5 42. g4 ♖xd4 43. gxf5 ♖xc4 44. ♖g3) 40. f6+ ♖xh7 41. f7 ♖g7 42. ♖e8 ♖xf7 43. ♕xf7 ♖xe8 44. ♕xe8 ♖f6 45. ♖g3.

31... ♕g5 eases White's task: 32. h4 ♕xf5 (32...f6 33. ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 34. hxg5 ♖h5 35. ♖g4 ♖g7 36. gxh6) 33. hxg5 ♕xe4 34. gxh6+ ♕g6 35. ♖xg6+-.

### 32. h4 f6

The point of Black's defence.

32... ♕xf5 33. hxg5 ♕xe4 34. gxh6+ ♕g6 35. ♖xg6.

### 33. hxg5 hxg5 34. ♖g6 ♖f7

He loses at once after 34... ♖g7 35. ♖xg5 fxf5 36. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 37. ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 38. ♖xg5+ ♖f8 39. f6.

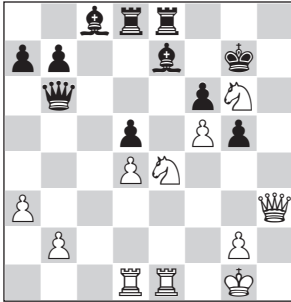
### 35. ♖h3

Allowing a sacrifice of material, which could easily have been avoided. More precise was 35. ♕xd5+ cxd5 (if 35... ♖xd5 36. ♖h2 ♖g7 37. ♖xg5 fxf5 38. ♖xe7+ winning) 36. ♖h3 ♖g7 (36... ♕f8 37. ♖h7+ ♕g7 38. ♖g3 ♖xe1+ 39. ♖xe1 wins) 37. ♖f2, going into the main variation which occurred in the game.

### 35... ♖g7 36. ♕xd5 cxd5

36... ♕xf5!? also doesn't save Black, but it was a better chance: 37. ♖xf5

♖xd5 38.♘xe7 ♜xf5 39.♘xf5+ ♔g6  
40.♘eg3 ♜e5 41.♞f1 ♜e8 42.♞de1  
♜e5 43.♔h2.



**37. ♘f2!**

The other knight retreat 37.♘g3 does not work: 37...♙d6 38.♘h5+ ♔f7 39.♞xe8 ♞xe8 40.♘hf4 ♔g7 41.♘h5+ ♔f7 42.♘hf4 with equality. From afar I also looked at 37.♘xg5, which wins as well: 37...fxg5 38.♞xe7+ ♞xe7 39.♘xe7.

**37...♙d6 38.♞xe8 ♞xe8 39.♘g4 ♙xf5 40.♞h6+ ♔f7 41.♘h8+!**

The end. Already on the next move, the white queen will begin to destroy the opponent's position, while the black king will desperately look for a safe haven. Black resigned because of 41...♞xh8 42.♞xf6+ ♔g8 (42...♔e8 43.♞xh8+) 43.♞xg5+ ♔f7 44.♞xf5+ ♔g7 45.♞f6+ ♔g8 46.♞g6+ ♔f8 47.♞f1+.

Taught by previous bitter experience, in January 2003 – for the first time in my life – I refused to participate in a tournament (Geneva) for health reasons. The younger Bologan would definitely have gone. And I got sick in a rush to become even healthier. The fact is that January 2003 turned out to be very frosty (on average minus 25 Celsius), and by that time everything was in order with my willpower. And I forced myself to go for an hour-long ski run every morning, since the ski track is near the house. The cold turned to pneumonia. After that, for the first time in my life, I lay in bed for a whole week and did not even touch chess.

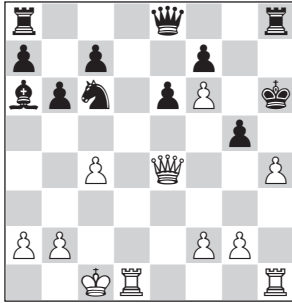
**Lessons:**

1) Already in the initial stage of the game, prophylactic moves are very useful, because the opponent does not always have a good plan. 17.a3 passes the move to Black, but it is much more important to protect yourself from the knight's attack on b4.

2) The game is a classic example of White's play in positions with an isolated pawn. He speculated by occupying the c5- and e5-squares, controlled the e-file and the b1-h7 diagonal, and avoided exchanges, i.e., almost everything was done 'according to science'.

3) Black did not take advantage of the opportunity given to him to simplify the game (21...♙g5! instead of 21...♞c7). Exchanges in a cramped position are usually beneficial to the defending side.

In fairness, it should be noted that Rustam managed to bounce back in the second round and thanks to his victory in additional blitz games (we finished with exactly the same tie-break) even took first place in the tournament.



**27. ♖d5!**

A spectacular finishing blow, although the more prosaic 27. ♖d3 ♖d8 28. ♖g3 g4 29. ♗f4+ ♔h7 30. ♗xg4 ♗f8 31. ♗e4+ ♔h6 32. ♗f4+ ♔h7 33. ♖g5 also won.

**27...exd5 28. ♗f5**

Black resigned.

Inspired by this combination (at least in part), I decided: that's it, I'm returning to big-time chess! I planned for myself several rather serious tournaments and tried to recover the 'old times'. By that point I had played very little and performed extremely unsuccessfully that year in Poikovsky. I started preparing and played a lot of practice games with Ernesto Inarkiev. If at the beginning of his career we worked at a training camp, now it all happened online. We had good practice, and the result was seen in the Aeroflot Open.

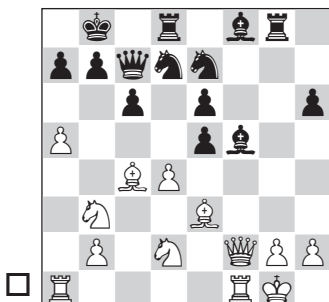
Unexpectedly for everyone (and first of all for myself) I started with 3 out of 3, including a win with Black against Anton Korobov. But then I was defeated by Vladislav Artemiev. Then I improved to +3 again, winning a spectacular game against Zhenya Najer.

Game 87

**Victor Bologan**

**Evgeniy Najer**

Moscow 2018



**18.d5! exd5 19. ♕xa7+ ♔c8 20. ♕b6**

♜xb6 21. axb6 ♗b8 22. ♕e2 e4

23. ♔h1 ♖d6 24. ♜c5

Or 24. ♜d4! ♕d7 (24... ♖f6 25.g4; 24... ♖g5 25.g4) 25. ♗xf8+.

**24... ♖dg6 25.g4 h5 26. ♖a7**

26.gxf5 ♖g2 27. ♗f4 ♖g1+ 28. ♖xg1 ♖xg1+ 29. ♔xg1 ♗xf4 30. ♖a8+ ♗b8 31. ♖xb8+ ♔xb8 32. ♜d7+ was winning as well.

**26...hxg4 27. ♗g3 ♗xg3 28.hxg3**

And, not without further adventures, White won.

Unfortunately, the next game against Sethuraman dashed my hopes for a good result; I clearly lacked physical stamina. Of course, age matters, but is not critical – more important is withstanding the pressure 'in the long

run.’ Against Sethuraman, I got an absolutely normal position, but I could not stand the tension and began to blunder crudely.

This was the end of my attempt to return to big-time chess. I also went to the European Individual Championships in Batumi and the Russian Team Championships in Sochi, but everywhere I played with varying success. And the debacle inflicted on me in Poikovsky quite naturally led me to the idea that something needed to be changed. I had to admit that a professional career in this form (when I still worked as a coach in Qatar) was impossible. And then the Lord gave me two bells, which will be discussed later.

Nevertheless, I finished the tournament in Poikovsky on a positive note. I approached the last round already as a notorious outsider; Emil Sutovsky also did not shine, but he had more points. He quite rightly believed that Bologan should be finished off, and acted very aggressively in the opening. But I also answered aggressively, and went into the tactics with open eyes, as a result of which it was not one of my royal couple that perished, but one of his. And with an extra queen, I’m still okay!

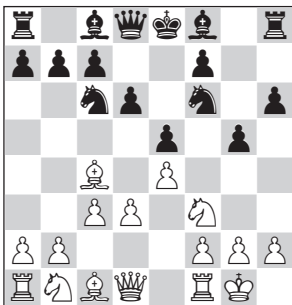
Game 88 Italian Game

**Victor Bologan**

**Emil Sutovsky**

Poikovsky 2018

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4.d3  
h6 5.0-0 d6 6.c3 g5**



In principle, even then such moves began to enter into practice and become popular. For example, a plan with ...g7-g5 appeared in the Rossolimo Variation. One can also recall the game Aronian-Kramnik,

played in the same year at the Candidates tournament in Berlin, where Vladimir played ...♙g8 at the very beginning of the game and then stormed with the g-pawn.

**7.d4!?**

Pure psychology – there was no calculation here. Black is trying to launch a flank attack and... we will strike him in the centre!

Subsequently, White adapted to this attack and proved that it was not too dangerous: 7.♘bd2 ♙g7 8.♙b3 g4 9.♘e1 h5 10.f4! (an important resource that helps to extinguish Black’s activity) 10...exf4 11.♙xf4 d5 12.♙f1 ♙e6 (Dominguez-Shirov, Berlin 2022) and now 13.exd5 ♙xd5 14.♘c4 0-0 15.d4 with a clear advantage.

But when Sutovsky and I played, this was not yet known.

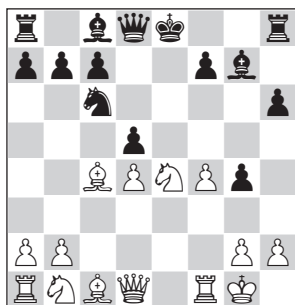
**7...g4 8.♘fd2 ♙g7**

White is better after 8...h5 9.f4 exd4 10.e5 dxe5 11.fxe5 ♖xe5 12.♖e1 ♜d6 13.♜e2 ♗fd7 14.♜f2! with a clear advantage.

It was also worth considering 8...exd4 9.cxd4 ♗xd4 10.♗c3 ♕g7 11.♗b3 ♗xb3 12.♕xb3 0-0 13.♕e3 when White has compensation for the pawn.

**9.f4 exd4 10.cxd4 ♗xe4 11.♗xe4 d5**

We must pay tribute to the opponent: Emil accepted the challenge and went for the sharpest and most principled continuation. Moreover, it was clear that we had already left his home preparation, as he was sitting at the board and intensely calculating variations. In general, Sutovsky plays all his games with great dedication.



**12.f5!**

It is important to limit the c8-bishop and open the way for our c1-bishop. A similar technique was encountered in the famous game Lasker-Capablanca, St Petersburg 1914. Of course, if you manage to carry out such moves with impunity, then this is a great success.

**12...dxe4 13.d5**

It was important to keep the tension and prevent the opponent from taking with the queen on d4.

**13...♗e5 14.♗c3**

Get all your pieces into play as soon as possible! The bishop does not hang on c4 as the piece can be won back with a check by the queen from a4.

**14...♜h4?**

Very committal, but, apparently, a bad move. It was not too late to hide the king with 14...0-0. For example: 15.♕e2 (15.♗xe4 ♗xc4 16.♜xg4 ♗e5 17.♜g3 f6 18.♕xh6 ♜e7 19.♖a1 ♜f7 20.♕xg7 ♜xg7 21.♜h4 ♖f7 22.♜h5+ ♖g8 23.♜h4 promises little) 15...♖e8 16.♗xe4 b5 17.♗g3 ♕b7 18.f6 ♕xf6 19.♕xb5 c6 20.♕e2 cxd5 21.♕xh6 with only a slight advantage on White's side. But now he can immediately tip the scales in his favour.

**15.♗xe4?**

Missing my chance. After 15.f6! ♕xf6 (15...♕f8 16.♕f4) 16.g3 ♜h3 17.♜xf6 ♗f3+ 18.♜xf3 gxf3 19.♕f1 White wins. Of course, I considered the move 15.f6, and the whole variation is not complicated. I don't even know why I didn't play it.

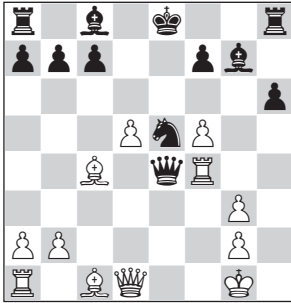
**15...g3**

It is essential to keep going forward. Black is in trouble after 15...0-0 16.♕b3 g3 17.♗xg3 ♗g4 18.h3 ♜xg3 19.♕f4 ♜h4 20.♜xg4.

**16.hxg3**

And now not 16.♗xg3 because of ♜xc4. 16.h3 ♜xe4 17.♜f4 ♜xf5 18.♜xf5 ♕xf5 19.♜e2 0-0-0 20.♕f4 is also good for White though.

16... ♖xe4 17. ♖f4!



It is always nice to trap the queen in the centre of the board!

17... ♖xf5 18. ♖xf5 ♕xf5 19. ♖a4+ ♕d7 20. ♕b5

The rest of the game is already technical in nature. It was only necessary not to blunder anything and not to allow Black's pieces to gain a foothold on the central squares. If they had succeeded, they would have neutralized White's small material advantage.

20...c6 21.dxc6 bxc6 22. ♕e2 0-0 23. ♕d2 c5 24. ♖e4

A quicker win was offered by 24. ♖a3! ♕e6 25. ♕c3 c4 26. ♖c5 ♖fc8 27. ♖e3.

This is where the story 'of a chess player' actually ends, although I sometimes play blitz, and even won the Francophone Blitz Championship in Côte d'Ivoire in 2023. But let's move on to 'more important matters' – to my social and political activities.

So, the same June 2018, and the tournament in Poikovsky, which was unsuccessful for me, had just ended. Clearly, there was little joy. But the election of the FIDE President was just around the corner, and I was already affected by some kind of 'election fever'. A few months before that, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov had been planning to nominate his candidacy, and the possibility of my inclusion in the team was discussed. And in May, during the Russian team championship in Sochi, I discussed a similar prospect with my friend, Vladimir Barsky. However, in the end, Ilyumzhinov did

24... ♖ae8 25. ♕c3 ♘c6 26. ♖d5 ♘d4 27. ♕f1

Chebanenko said that the bishops are already developed in the initial position; this theme is also reflected in my Blue Notebook. Here the bishop is very well positioned on f1: it covers the king, continues to take part in the game, and at the same time does not fall under the blows of the enemy pieces.

27... ♕e6 28. ♖xc5 ♖c8 29. ♖xa7 ♖a8 30. ♖b7 ♖fb8 31. ♖e4 ♖a4 32. ♖d1 ♕f5 33. ♖d5 ♕e6 34. ♖d6 1-0

### Lessons:

- 1) Closely follow the new trends in chess and always be ready to accept a challenge (6...g5).
- 2) The ideal opening move is one with which you open the way for your pieces and limit the enemy's (12.f5!).
- 3) Remember the testament of the classics. The bishops are often located very well in the initial position; they are quite actively involved in the game.



not stand and at that time I was completely free in my thoughts and plans. And then within 24 hours I received two very interesting calls...

The FSR (Russian Chess Federation) executive director Mark Glukhovsky was the first to call: he told me that Arkady Dvorkovich was going to run for the FIDE presidential elections, and they invited me to join the team. I took some time to think and began to consult with my friends. In general, I liked this idea, but there was still a decisive conversation with Arkady Vladimirovich. We met at the Radisson Collection Hotel in Moscow, discussed everything, agreed on the terms – and the work began.

And the second call was from my friend, at that time the President of Moldova, Igor Dodon. He invited me to take part in the Parliamentary elections. I was put on the party list and did not have to fight in any single-mandate constituency. The idea seemed sound: to resist the dictates of the almighty Vladimir Plahotniuc and to return democratic processes to the republic. I remember that I set a condition for Dodon – to ennoble justice in Moldova. Looking ahead, I will say that we managed to cope with the first task, but not so much with the second.

Elections were held at different times, but the result was positive in both cases. I became a member of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and wore a deputy's badge for almost two-and-a-half years. And I still work at FIDE. Some things work, some things don't, but I try to follow the basic principle of Zigurds Lanka – do no harm. When you occupy such a serious position as an Executive Director of FIDE, then, in my opinion, you need to be very careful not only with your power, but even with your word, since it is very easy to offend someone, or even harm someone. And most of all I like to create, resolve some crisis situations, solve problems. In addition, I came up with a huge ChessID project – I hope that it will finally be realized.

In the future, these two lines – the deputy and the chess functionary – diverged somewhere, intersected somewhere, intertwined somewhere, interfered with each other somewhere, helped somewhere... as a result, in the spring of 2021, our coalition, despite the control of the necessary votes, managed not to elect a prime minister, and the Parliament was dissolved. We outplayed ourselves, gave power into the hands of our opponents, and everyone can form their own opinion about what is happening now in Moldova...

In general, political life is a separate part of my biography. I have always felt a certain attraction to political activity. Leadership qualities were somehow instilled from childhood: I was head of the class, Komsomol organizer, deputy student trade union committee of the institute, captain



of the national team, involved in the creation of the Association of Chess Professionals in 2003. All the time, fate, or rather even an active life position, put me on the front line. Perhaps this is a family thing for us: my father worked in the Parliament – though not as a deputy, but as the head of the department of information, while my mother was a member of the Association of Women of Moldova and was nominated for deputy as an independent candidate (she could not be anything else – only an independent!).

In December 2008, before the completion of my first contract in Qatar, I started negotiations with the Communist Party of Moldova to include me in the party lists for the Parliamentary elections. Then a reformist wing was formed within the party and one of its members was Vasily Shova, a very cultured and intelligent person, who invited me to join them, in fact. For many years he had worked in various government positions, including ministerial ones. I had met Vasily Vladimirovich in 2000, at a tournament in Beijing. At that time, he was the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Moldova to China and supported me very well throughout the tournament. By the way, I managed to take first place.

So, I was included in the party list and we had to go to the polls under the motto: fresh blood, fresh ideas, fresh reforms. But in the end, for some reason, I was thrown out of the lists, and the reformist wing itself gradually spun off from the Communist Party and everyone left in all directions. Now the party, which once had a constitutional majority, does not even pass the 5% barrier to enter Parliament.

Later, reading books about power (this is a whole science), I realized that I had always been a ‘nobody’. To be elected, you have to be in a team, and I was just a well-known grandmaster, a popular person in the republic. At the same time, I am a chess player, and I can play my own combinations – probably, other politicians did not really need me.

Later, my older brother Nicu and I continued talking with politicians of the first magnitude on the subject of our participation in the political life of the country, but we did not succeed. Nicu gave up on this and began to write books, but I still received a call from Moldovan President Igor Dodon in June 2018. This was the first concrete proposal for me to enter politics. I agreed. By that time, I had already known Igor Nikolaevich for almost seven years, and he’d never let me down. In a difficult economic time for Moldova, he supported the Chess Federation in full. I received the desired mandate, already being the Executive Director of FIDE. The question arose what was more precious to me: chess, or politics? I could very well refuse to be a deputy. In this case, the seat in Parliament would have automatically passed to the next name on the list. No one would

have said a word to me because I had such a responsible position as FIDE Executive Director. But Arkady Vladimirovich and I discussed this issue and came to the conclusion that the status of a deputy of the Parliament could also help in my chess work.

In the Parliament of Moldova, I first got into the commission for culture, sports and education and immediately took over the development of the law on sports. It is curious that at that time there were as many as four chess players in the Parliament – me and three candidate masters, one of whom is very strong and even became the champion of the country. But looking ahead, I will say that the maximum that has been achieved is the adoption on the first reading of the law on sports.

Only those laws are adopted that are powerfully lobbied for by some economic interests. But no one stood behind our law, no one has yet pushed it through, and therefore for two-and-a-half years it did not get beyond the first reading. The essence of the law was that part of the funds received from the tax on *vicii* (in Moldovan this capacious word means bad habits such as alcohol, cigarettes, gambling) went to the development of sports. Which is logical. After all, sport is a natural antagonist of these phenomena. I met with the sports ministers of several countries and saw how similar schemes worked for them. All in all, this is a great way to



**In the office of the Moldovan Parliament.**

support sport! But this law hit someone's pocket, so it was competently 'overwritten'. As a result, sports in Moldova now have no support at all. I would like to note that our party was in power at that moment, but it still failed to pass the law.

Power is a science; one must give oneself to political work. I had to decide whether to play chess or politics as it is very difficult to conduct two such serious activities at the same time. If you focus on politics, then you need to delve into all the details and assemble your team. The only law that I managed to pass was that we put a ceiling on earnings for micro-credit organizations. They ripped off our citizens terribly. We set limits: you can earn on a loan no more than the amount of the loan itself.

My assistant Andrey Bash, with whom I was very lucky, did a very good job on this law. I had a choice of whom to take as assistants, but not *carte blanche*: my wife would hardly have approved of beautiful young girls! I was advised by a young smart worker who had just graduated from high school. It suddenly turned out that Andrey and I knew the same five languages: French, Spanish, English, Romanian and Russian. He also has a law degree. To this day, Andrey and I maintain good relations and help each other. He has already become a lawyer and has his own office.

I remember when I was 16-17 years old, I refused to understand phrases like: 'I'm much older than you and therefore much smarter.' Instead of turning on critical thinking and analysing the situation, a person would hide behind his age and, besides, sometimes behave quite aggressively. I try not to. As I said before, I love to consult with my 15-year-old son, and he often gives me great advice. Yes, I can sometimes 'chase' him like a father does a son, but at the same time I perceive him as an absolutely adult intelligent interlocutor. The same thing happened in communication with Andrey. Express your opinion: maybe you will teach me something, or maybe I will teach you. There was an exchange of experience and youthful energy, a fresh look.

After some time, I was transferred to an international commission. It approved ambassadors and dealt with various international issues. From the very beginning, I was appointed chairman of the delegation of the Parliament of Moldova to the Inter-Parliamentary Council, where representatives of all Parliaments of the world gather. This is a pretty serious position. And they chose me because I knew foreign languages and had extensive experience in international communication. I was a representative of the Eurasian group, which includes both Russia and the CIS countries. We were then preparing the fifth world conference of speakers. I went to Geneva to work. In addition, from Geneva to Lausanne, where the FIDE office is located, is within easy reach.