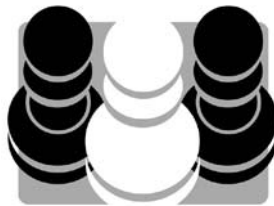


Karpov's Strategic Wins 1

The Making of a Champion

By

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Preface

Anatoly Karpov, the twelfth World Chess Champion, is one of the greatest players of all time and the holder of a number of records. No other player in history has won so many high-level individual tournaments. Karpov also achieved the best ever tournament performance in winning the 1994 Linares tournament with an incredible 11/13, two and a half points ahead of the second and third placed Kasparov and Shirov.

These records are the most impressive but they are not the only ones. Of all the World Champions, Karpov is the one who participated in the largest number of World Championship finals. He is also the only player to have won the title of World Champion in three different ways. The most significant is of course when he reigned between 1975 and 1985. He also won the 1997-98 FIDE World Championship. What is less well known is that he was the winner of the only World Rapid Chess Championship in Mazatlan 1988. Karpov may well be the player who earned the most money through chess, although it is impossible to establish this with any certainty.

Together with Nick Aplin I wrote a book entitled *Endgame Virtuoso: Anatoly Karpov*, published by *New in Chess* in 2007. During the selection of games for that book came the realization that Karpov's games are so rich as to be worthy of deep investigation from just one particular angle. The primary aim of the present two-volume work is to show the reader, in chronological order, how Karpov outplayed his opponents by strategic means. Karpov's strategic genius has been well documented by many chess writers, but according to my best knowledge not a single book has been written on the subject in such depth as can be found in these pages.

The twelfth World Champion is best known as a "python" who could slowly squeeze the life out of his opponent, but over the course of the two volumes we will see plenty of examples of his tactical sharpness as well. Games involving a quick attack on the opponent's king have been omitted, as they do not fit in with the overall theme of the book, but let me quash any misconceptions about Karpov being a one-dimensional player. When the situation on the board demanded it, he could attack with as much ferocity as almost anyone else.

A number of Karpov's games which culminated in interesting endgames have been omitted from this project, as they have already been discussed in the *Endgame Virtuoso* book. My conclusion from the work on both the present project and the aforementioned endgame book is that Karpov's little-known games often contain at least as much instructive and artistic value as his more famous wins. In this book I have tried to give priority to the beauty and educational value of his strategic masterpieces. Over the coming pages I will identify the tools he uses and highlight the features that characterize his play.

Many have called Karpov the greatest strategic player of all time. I invite the readers to become acquainted with his masterpieces and decide for themselves whether this view is justified.

1961

Anatoly Evgenovich Karpov, the twelfth world chess champion, was born on 23 May 1951 in the city of Zlatoust, located in the Urals region of Russia. He learned to play chess at the age of four with his father Evgeny Stepanovich, a chief engineer. It may or may not be a coincidence that many of the world champions came from single parent families. Karpov was an exception; he grew up in a normal family environment with his parents and one sister.

Karpov's exceptional chess talent shone almost from the start. He became a second and then a first category player at the age of just nine. His first recorded games for the public are from 1961.

We will take the year 1961 as the starting point for our study of Karpov's career, as his first games in the database are from that year. The biggest event in the broader chess world was the Tal – Botvinnik rematch, in which the fifty year old Botvinnik regained the highest title for the last time. Most of Karpov's games from 1961 were played in his home city, although he also competed in several other Russian cities including Borovichi, Magnitogorsk and Chelyabinsk. This exposure shows that he and his supporters were already taking chess seriously at that time.

It is not possible to work out from the database whether the Zlatoust games were played in one tournament or whether these are selected games from that particular year. He did not handle openings in a well educated way, although with Black he played one main Ruy Lopez Chigorin variation with ...♖d8 and a ...d5 pawn sacrifice. His generally slow handling of the opening caused his games to last longer on average than they did in the later part of his career. He already followed reasonable plans, although of course opponents' blunders played a more significant role than in later years.

Here is our first game. A database search reveals no further games on the part of his opponent.

Game 1

Anatoly Karpov – Gaimaletdinov

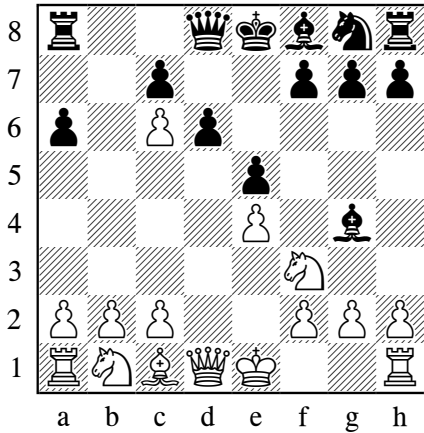
Zlatoust 1961

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.d4 ♗g4 5.d5 a6 6.♗xc6?!

White could have given up the bishop under better circumstances: 6.♗a4 b5 7.dxc6 bxa4 8.c4 f5 9.h3 ♗h5 (or 9...♗xf3 10.♖xf3 fxe4 11.♖xe4 ♘f6 12.♖c2 and White is better) 10.exf5 e4 11.g4 ♗f7 12.♖e2 d5 13.♘e5 White got a clear advantage in Dvoretzky – Biriukov, USSR 1973.

It is also promising to keep the bishop: 6. ♖e2!? ♗xf3 (6... ♖ce7 7. h3 ♗d7 8. c4 is also better for White) 7. gxf3! ♘d4 (7... ♖ce7 8. f4) 8. ♗f1 And White will carry out f3-f4 with better prospects.

6... bxc6 7. dxc6



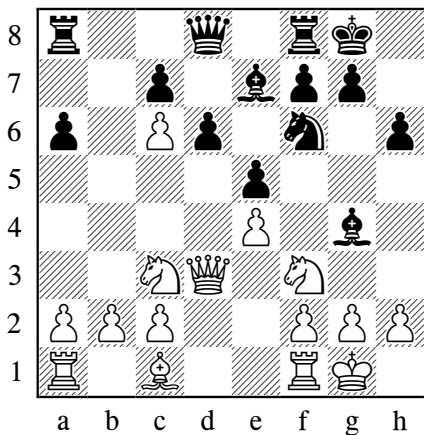
7... h6?

This move is obviously too slow, just like the whole plan with which Black intends to capture the c6-pawn. Instead he should play 7... ♖e7, regaining the pawn with a good game.

8.0-0

On 8. ♖d3 ♘e7 comes.

8... ♗f6 9. ♖d3 ♗e7 10. ♘c3 0-0



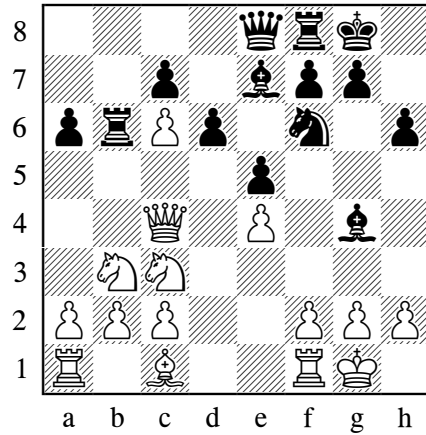
11. ♘d2!

A subtle move; the young Anatoly wants to defend the c6-pawn without allowing his opponent to double his pawns on the kingside.

11... ♖e8

So Black wants to take the c6-pawn with the queen.

12. ♖c4! ♖b8 13. ♘b3 ♖b6



14. ♘a5!

The position is closed, so White can afford to spend a fourth tempo with the knight to defend it. Besides, the black rook is misplaced on b6.

14... ♖h7?!

This is too slow. Black should have preferred 14... ♗e6 15. ♖d3 ♘h5 16. f3 ♖d8 17. b3 ♗g5 when White only has a small edge.

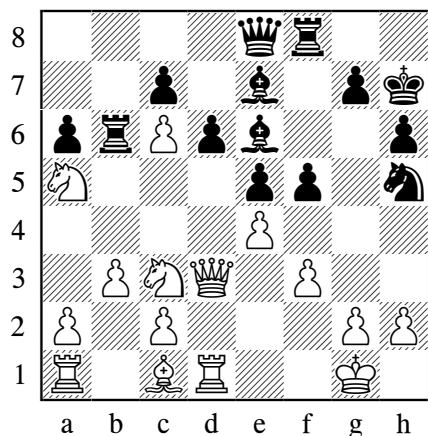
15. b3 ♗e6 16. ♖d3 ♘h5 17. ♖d1?!

It is difficult to understand why Karpov moved his rook to this square. He may have wanted to vacate the f1-square for the queen in the event of 17... ♘f4.

17... f5 18. f3!?

It is remarkable that he refrains from winning a tempo with the natural 18. ♗e3. He probably

had a different plan in mind to hurt the rook on b6.



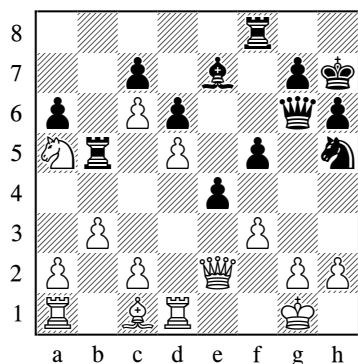
18...f4?

Black closes the kingside, hoping for a pawn storm that will never happen. Both of the following alternatives would have kept the game more interesting:

18...♖g6 19.♘d5!

19.♙e3 ♘f4 20.♗d2 (20.♙xf4 exf4 21.♘d5 fxe4 22.♘xe7 exd3 23.♘xg6 ♖xg6 24.cxd3 ♖f5 Black is very active) 20...fxe4 21.fxe4 ♖bb8 22.♖f1 It is not easy to for White to make his extra pawn count.

19...♙xd5 20.exd5 e4 21.♗e2 ♖b5



22.a4!!

It is a lovely way to showcase the theme of the misplaced rook.

22.♘b7 ♙f6 23.♖b1 ♙c3 is not so convincing.

22...♖bb8

22...♖xa5!? is possible, although after 23.b4 ♙f6 24.♖a3 ♙b2 25.♙xb2 ♘f4 26.♗f1 ♖xd5 27.♖xd5 e3! 28.♖xe3 ♘xd5 29.♖e1 ♘xb4 30.♗c4 a5 31.♖e7 White keeps a nice edge.

23.♘c4

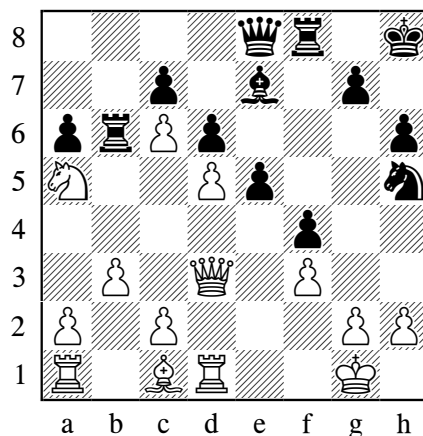
23.f4!? also looks promising.

23...♙f6 24.♖b1 exf3 25.♗xf3

Black does not have enough for the pawn.

18...fxe4 Opening the position at once was probably Black's best chance. 19.♗xe4† (19.fxe4 ♗g6) 19...♘g8 (After 19...♗g6 20.♗xg6† ♖xg6 21.♙e3 ♖bb8 22.♘d5 Black has little to show for the pawn.) 20.♘d5 (20.♙e3 is also good) 20...♘f6 21.♘xf6† ♙xf6 22.c4 White extra pawn should be worth more than Black's activity.

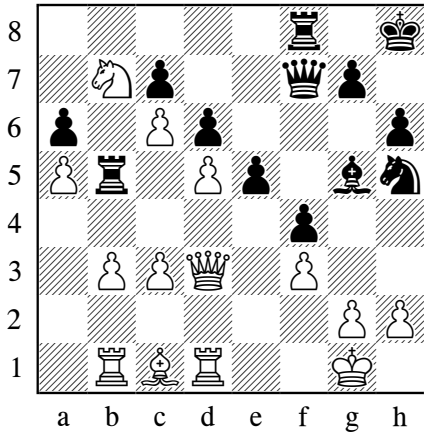
19.♘d5 ♙xd5 20.exd5† ♖h8



21.♘b7!

The knight may not attack anything here, but it serves an important function in trapping the black rook.

21...♙f6 22.♖b1 ♗f7 23.a4! ♙g5 24.a5! ♖b4 25.c3 ♖b5



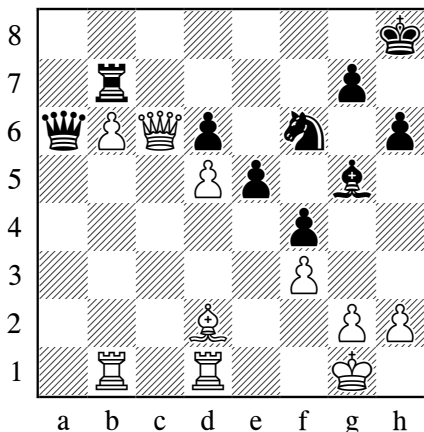
26.c4!

Karpov completes his plan and the rook perishes. The rest should be simple.

26...Rxb7 27.cxb7 Bb8 28.b4 Rxb7 29.b5 axb5 30.cxb5 Qe8 31.Qc4 Qa8 32.Qc6 Qa7† 33.b6 cxb6 34.axb6 Qa6 35.Qd2?

Missing an opportunity to end the game with 35.Qe8†, winning the knight on h5.

35...Ng6



36.Qxd6

36.Qe1!? e4 (36...Ng8 37.Qf2) 37.h4 wins without giving any counterchances. Karpov has such an overwhelming advantage that he can win in any way he chooses. In the game he

certainly did not finish off his opponent in the most efficient way, but he always maintained a winning advantage.

36...e4 37.Qxf4?!

37.fxe4 was simpler, as 37...Ngxe4? loses to 38.Qf8† Qh7 39.Qf5†.

37...Qxf4 38.Qxf4 exf3 39.Qxf3

39.d6!? was also possible.

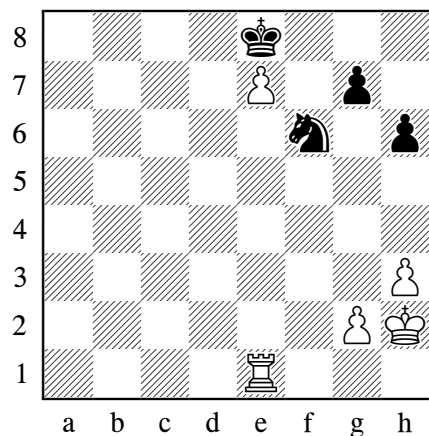
39...Rxb6 40.Rxb6 Qxb6† 41.Qh1 Qd6 42.h3

42.Qg3 was also fine.

42...Qh7 43.Qe2 Ng8 44.Qe6 Qxe6 45.dxe6 Ng6 46.e7?

46.Rd8! Qg6 47.Rf8 wins very simply.

46...Qg8 47.Qe1 Qf7 48.Qh2 Qe8



49.Re5

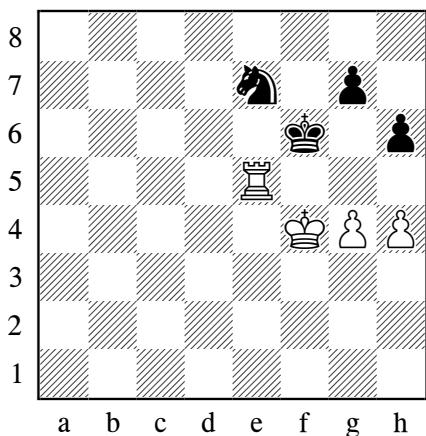
It is worth mentioning the line 49.Re6 Qf7 (49...Ng8 50.Rg6 wins easily) 50.Rxf6†? gxf6 51.Qg3 Qxe7 52.Qg4 Qf7 53.h4! White wins here but there was no practical value in playing like this.

49...Ng8 50.Qg3 Ngxe7

Winning the e7-pawn enables Black to resist for a while, but he is lost anyway. If Black had

a light-squared bishop instead of the knight, the win would require skilful technique.

51.♔g4 ♕f7 52.h4 ♖g8 53.♕f4 ♕f6 54.g4 ♖e7



55.h5 g5†

55...♖g8 56.♖a5 ♖e7 57.♖a7 ♕f7 58.♕e5 ♕f8 59.♕e6 wins.

56.♕e4 ♕f7 57.♖a5 ♖g8 58.♕e5 ♕g7 59.♖a7† ♕h8 60.♕e6

1-0

This was a remarkable performance for a ten year old. He made the win a bit harder than it should have been, but overall he played the whole game impressively.

1961 Summary

The database contains eighteen games from this year, of which Karpov won twelve, drew five and lost only one. It is likely that his overall results were lower and Karpov publicized only his best games from the early period of his life. Even so, his play was undoubtedly at a high level for a ten year old.