

Karpov's Strategic Wins 2

The Prime Years

By

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Preface

In this, the second volume, we will continue our investigation into Karpov's strategic victories, from the time when he lost his World Championship title at the end of 1985 until the end of the year 2010. In the first volume we saw that during the ten-year period from 1975-1985, Karpov not only held the highest title in chess, but also dominated the tournament circuit more convincingly than any other player in chess history. And yet, despite being one of the greatest world champions of all time, it was only after losing his title that Karpov played his very best chess. During his decade-long reign as World Champion, Karpov worked hard but he already stood head and shoulders above the other leading grandmasters. But when the young Garry Kasparov took over as the dominant force in the chess world, everything changed.

Kasparov was able to do what no other player could. By defeating Karpov in their second championship match (after their first match was aborted, as explained on page 417 of the first volume), he forced Karpov to work harder than he ever had before in an effort to reclaim his title. Steel sharpens steel, and in the present book we will see how both of these titans were able to raise their respective levels in an effort to outdo the other.

Despite his colossal efforts, Karpov was unable to reclaim the coveted crown from his nemesis. Nevertheless, in terms of his overall skill as a chess player, Karpov's prime years occurred only after his reign as World Champion had ended.

By the end of the 1980s Karpov's level had begun to drop slightly, although he remained the number two player in the world until well into the 1990s. Indeed, his greatest tournament success, which is widely considered the most impressive tournament performance of all time, occurred in 1994. As the years went by, Karpov was gradually superseded by the next generation of super-grandmasters, but he continued to achieve excellent results and produced a host of beautiful games along the way.

Without further ado, I invite the reader to continue his voyage of discovery into the prime years of Karpov's career.

1986

Rating 2700 (2 in the world)

For the first time in more than a decade, Anatoly Karpov began the year without holding the title of World Champion. Having lost his crown, he must have spent some time contemplating his future. Faced with the same situation, many players would probably have accepted that there had been a changing of the guard, and settled down to enjoy life as a millionaire and a national hero. Not so Anatoly Karpov. Luckily for the game of chess, he decided to focus all his efforts on reclaiming his title. He must have known that it would take a phenomenal amount of work, since Kasparov was not only a marvellous player, he was also only twenty two years of age and was only going to get better. Karpov was already thirty four, so if he was being realistic he would have known he had roughly five or six years in which to achieve his goal.

One of the conditions of his last match with Kasparov was that, in the event of Karpov's defeat, he would be guaranteed a rematch. It was scheduled for later in 1986, but before that time Karpov participated in a few other tournaments.

Karpov's first event of the year was the SWIFT tournament in Brussels. He started with a draw against Torre, then defeated Timman after the Dutchman failed to find the best defence in a long endgame. A fairly quick draw with Romanishin followed. In Round 4 Van der Wiel tried the Dely Gambit, but Karpov had done some work since his match with Kasparov and he unveiled a strong novelty which yielded a clear advantage. But Van der Wiel defended stubbornly and eventually salvaged half a point after Karpov missed some chances. How Karpov must have wished he could have found the right antidote to the gambit in time to use it against Kasparov!

In Round 5 Karpov drew quickly with Korchnoi, but then he switched into top gear and amazingly won each and every one of his last six games! His win against Ljubojevic was mentioned in the notes to Game 72 in the first volume. Then after beating the Belgian IM Jadoul on the black side of a Hedgehog, he met another local player, Luc Winants, who scored one point out of six games against world champions.

Game 1

Luc Winants – Anatoly Karpov

Brussels 1986

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.e3 c5

Fifteen years earlier Karpov carried out a similar plan via a different move order: 3...b6 4.♗d3 ♗b7 5.♗bd2 c5 6.0-0 cxd4 7.exd4 ♗e7 8.b3 0-0 9.♗b2 ♗c6 10.a3 ♖c7 11.♞e1 ♞ac8 12.c4 d5

13.♖c1 ♜fd8 14.♞e2 dxc4 15.bxc4 ♞f4 16.g3 ♞h6 17.♖c2 ♞h5 18.♞f1 ♖c7 19.♙e2 ♞f5 20.♙d3 ♞h5 21.♙e2 ½–½ Platonov – Karpov, Leningrad 1971.

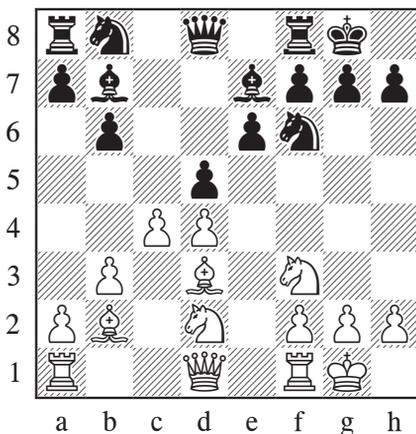
4.♙d3 cxd4

With this early exchange Karpov avoids a symmetrical pawn structure.

5.exd4 b6 6.0–0 ♙b7 7.c4 ♙e7 8.♗bd2 0–0 9.b3 d5

Karpov opts for a position with hanging pawns; he has great experience with this formation.

10.♙b2

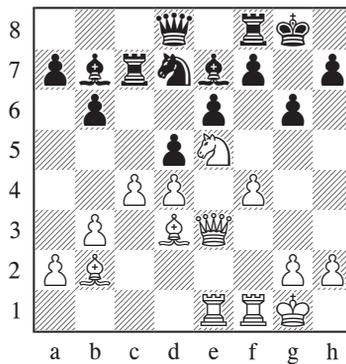


10...♗c6

Karpov chooses the main line. Interestingly, he played the position after 10...♗e4 with both colours during his career:

a) 11.♞e1 Karpov used this move to defeat Andersson twice, but then he abandoned it after Portisch came up with the following equalizing line: 11...♗xd2 12.♗xd2 ♗d7 13.♗f3 ♖c8 14.♖c1 ♙e8 15.♞e2 ♙d6 16.♞e3 dxc4 17.bxc4 ♞c7 18.g3 ♗f6 19.♙f1 ♞b8 20.♙g2 ♗d7 21.♞d3 ♖cd8 22.♗g5 ♗f6 23.d5 e5 24.♗e4 ♗xe4 25.♙xe4 g6= Karpov – Portisch, Malta (ol) 1980.

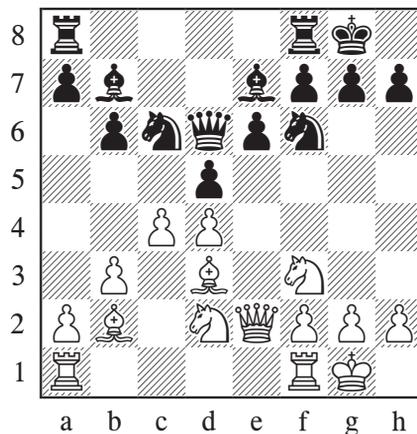
b) Seventeen years later Karpov tested the same line from the opposite side of the board: 11.♗e5 ♗xd2 12.♞xd2 ♗d7 13.f4 ♖c8 14.♞ae1 ♖c7 15.♞e2 g6 16.♞e3



16...♗f6! The knight transfer to e4 equalizes as it will be hard for White to build an attack. 17.f5? White embarks on an unsound attack. 17...exf5 18.♙xf5 gxf5 19.♞g5+ ♖h8 20.♖xf5 ♙c8 21.♖f4 ♗g4 Black defended successfully and went on to win with his extra piece, Lobron – Karpov, Frankfurt (rapid) 1997.

11.♞e2 ♞d6

This prepares an interesting plan based on the transfer of the queen to the kingside.



12.♞ad1

A more purposeful continuation was 12.♞ac1! with the idea of a3 and later c5. It

looks like Winants was expecting Karpov to exchange on c4, but the former champion postponed it for a long time.

It is worth noting that White cannot play 12.♖e5? due to 12...♗xd4! when Black wins material.

12...♖ac8 13.♖fe1

13.♗e5 was possible, although after 13...dxc4 (13...♗xd4?? does not work here, as after 14.♗xd4 dxc4 15.♗dxc4 the bishop on d4 is poisoned.) 14.♗dxc4 ♖d5 Black is not worse in this IQP middlegame.

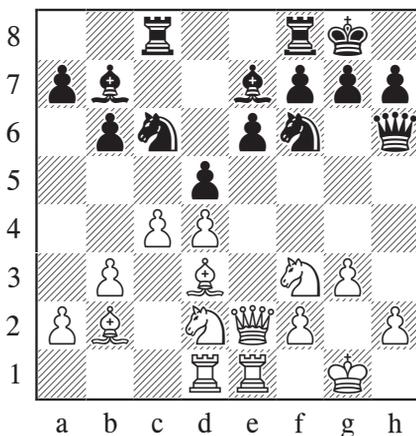
13...♕f4!?

The queen vacates the centre. She will help to fortify the black kingside, while making way for the rooks to attack White's hanging pawn centre.

14.g3

It was worth considering 14.♖e3!? ♖xe3 15.fxe3 when White's pawn centre has been strengthened, although he has no real advantage.

14...♖h6



15.♕f1!?

This is too artificial. Winants retreats the

queen in order to prepare h3 and g4, but he never gets enough time to carry out the plan.

Correct was 15.♗e5 ♖fd8 16.♗df3 ♗xe5 (16...♗e4!?) 17.♗xe5 (If 17.dxe5?! dxc4 18.♗xc4 ♗d5 Black is a bit better.) 17...♗b4 18.♖f1 reaching a balanced position, rich in chances for both sides.

15...♖fd8

Karpov calmly completes his development.

16.h3!?

White continues with his faulty plan.

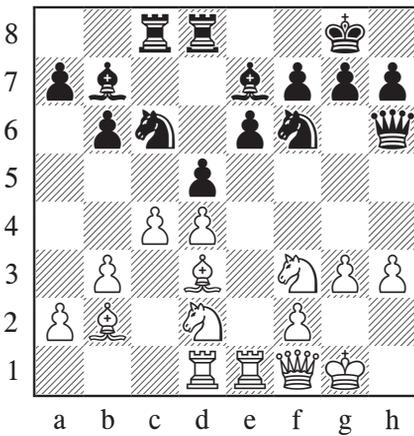
With hindsight, it was worth considering the prophylactic 16.a3. It would have been interesting to see how Karpov would have responded. There are several reasonable options:

a) 16...♗g4!? The threat of ...dxc4 followed by ...♗xd4 provokes a further pawn move on the kingside. 17.cxd5 (another possibility is 17.h3 dxc4 18.bxc4 ♗f6) 17...♖xd5 18.h3 ♖h5 19.h4 ♖d5 Black has a good game, but he has not achieved anything special.

b) 16...g5!? Black wants to drive the knight away from its defence of the d4-pawn. The idea is interesting, but not at all in Karpov's style. After 17.cxd5 ♗xd5 18.♗e5 the position is about equal.

c) 16...g6 17.h3 dxc4 (there is also 17...♖f8!? 18.c5 a5) 18.bxc4 ♖f8 19.♖a1 ♗e8 Black intends to increase the pressure on the d4-pawn with ...♗f6.

d) 16...♖c7 This type of small improving move was typical of Karpov's style. 17.h3 (If 17.♗e5? ♗xe5 18.dxe5 ♗g4 19.h3 ♗xf2! Black takes over.) 17...♖dc8 18.♗e5 The position remains balanced after 18...g6 or 18...♗xe5 19.dxe5 ♗d7 20.cxd5 ♗xd5.

**16...♙b4!**

Positions with hanging pawns are similar to those with an isolated pawn, in the sense that the opposing side should generally try to exchange minor pieces. Normally one would be hesitant to exchange a bishop for an enemy knight, but since White has weakened his kingside with g3, Karpov has devised a powerful strategy based on playing on the light squares.

17.♖c3 ♗xd2!

Removing a defensive piece makes the latent power of the b7-bishop become real.

18.♗xd2?

Winants either missed Karpov's reply, or he did not fully appreciate its power.

18.♗xd2 was essential, although following 18...dxc4 (18...♗b4 does not achieve much after 19.♙b1) 19.♗xc4 ♖h5 20.a3 (20.♙e2 ♖f5) 20...♗d5 Black has the upper hand.

18...♗b4!

Suddenly White's position is on the brink of collapse.

19.♗e5

White cannot save the bishop with 19.♙b1? as 19...dxc4 20.bxc4 ♗xf3 wins a piece.

Another idea was 19.♙c1 ♗xd3 20.♗exd3, but after 20...dxc4 21.bxc4 ♖h5 22.g4 ♖a5 Black dominates the light squares and is also well placed to attack the hanging pawns.

19...♗xd3 20.♗dxd3

After 20.♗exd3 ♗e4 21.♖c2 f6 22.♗f3 dxc4 (22...♗d7 is also strong) 23.bxc4 b5! Black secures his domination over the light squares. 24.♖b3 (24.c5 ♗c6) 24...♗d5 25.♖xb5 ♗d6 Black takes over.

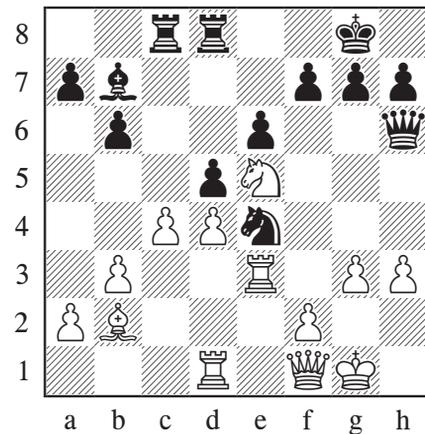
20...♗e4

Winants probably did not anticipate the main point of this move.

21.♗d1?!

It turns out that the rook is vulnerable on this square.

The best chance for White to keep his position together was 21.♙c1! ♖h5 22.g4 ♖h4 23.♗d1 ♗g5 24.♗ed3 f6 25.♙xg5 ♖xg5 26.♗f3 ♖f4 although White is under pressure here too.

**21...f6!**

The knight was well placed on e5, where it defended several vulnerable light squares. Once it is driven away, White will not be able to defend all his weaknesses.

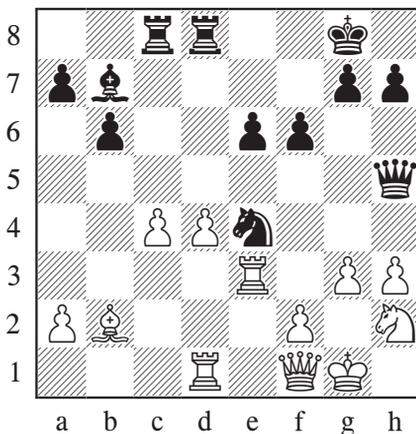
22.♗g4 ♖h5 23.♗h2?

This loses quickly, but the game was already beyond saving.

If 23.♔h2 dxc4 24.bxc4 f5 25.♕e5 ♖xf2 26.♗c1 ♗e4 Black wins.

Also after 23.f3 ♗xg3 24.♖g2 ♗h4 25.♗xe6 ♗e8! 26.♗de1 ♗xe6 27.♗xe6 ♕f7! 28.♗e1 ♗h5! Black wins material.

23...dxc4 24.bxc4



24...♗xc4!

Exploiting the loose rook on d1. White is completely busted.

25.d5 ♗xd5 26.♗g4 ♗g5

0-1

Winants' level has never been world class, but he is a good player and the way Karpov dismantled him was highly impressive.

In the final three rounds Karpov defeated Seirawan, Zapata and Miles. He finished with an unbeaten 9/11, winning first prize by a two point margin ahead of Korchnoi. In many of his earlier tournaments Karpov had settled for draws in some games, provided they suited his tournament strategy. But by this stage in his career, it looks as though his rivalry with Kasparov may have motivated him to strive for an even higher level.

Karpov's next tournament was in Bugojno, the scene of his 1978 match versus Korchnoi. He started by drawing with Spassky, then won a fine game against Yusupov. He drew comfortably with black against Timman, but then suffered an unpleasant defeat on the black side of a Zaitsev Ruy Lopez against Andrei Sokolov. This turned out to be one of the most beneficial losses of Karpov's career, as it motivated him to learn the Caro-Kann, which became a mainstay of his repertoire and served him well for many years.

Karpov immediately bounced back with a long endgame win over Ljubojevic, draws with Portisch and Miles, then a fine win over Spassky, which is referenced in the notes to Game 14 (Karpov – Mikliaev) of the first volume. Then he drew with Yusupov, won a hard fought game against Timman, and drew his final three games to win the tournament with 8½/14, a point clear of Sokolov.

Third World Championship match versus Kasparov

As was customary in those days, the defeated champion was granted the right to a rematch. Once again it was contested over twenty four games. The first twelve games took place in London and the remaining twelve in Leningrad. It was the first time that a world championship match between two Soviet contenders did not take place solely within the Soviet Union. It was probably symptomatic of the fact that the superpower was in decline. The overall weakening of the Soviet Union had an impact on chess, as the state was unable to offer the same level of economic support to its most talented players.

On Kasparov's initiative, both players generously agreed to donate the prize fund from the London half of the match to help the victims of the Chernobyl disaster, which occurred in April of 1986.

1986 Summary

Brussels (1st place): 9/11 (+7 =4 -0)

Bugojno (1st place): 8½/14 (+4 =9 -1)

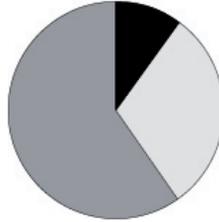
World Championship match versus Kasparov, London/Leningrad: Lost 11½-12½ (+4 =15 -5)

Tilburg (3rd place): 7½/14 (+2 =11 -1)

Dubai Olympiad (Board two): 6/9 (+4 =4 -1)

Vienna (2nd-3rd place): 6/9 (+3 =6 -0)

Total 59.9% (+24 =49 -8)



□ Wins ■ Draws ■ Losses