

Karsten Müller & Raymund Stolze

The Magic Tactics of Mikhail Tal

Learn from the Legend

New In Chess 2012

Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| About this book | 7 |
| Prologue – Knowledge? Intuition? Risk? – by Mikhail Tal | 9 |
| Reflections on Mikhail T., by Mikhail Botvinnik. | 11 |
| | |
| Chapter I – Warm-up..... | 32 |
| Intermezzo | |
| The golden rules of attack | 34 |
| | |
| Exercises | 36 |
| Solutions..... | 59 |
| | |
| Intermezzo | |
| Sieghart Dittmann: Comments on a game of chess | 89 |
| Wolfgang Uhlmann: An instructive experience | 92 |
| Hans-Joachim Hecht: Encounters with Tal | 97 |
| Gennady Nesis: Misha never played the star | 102 |
| Evgeny Vasiukov: Tal a magnet for the public | 104 |
| | |
| Chapter II – Correct Sacrifices | 106 |
| | |
| Exercises | 110 |
| Solutions..... | 124 |
| | |
| Intermezzo | |
| Andrzej Filipowicz: Misha was extremely crafty at the board | 147 |
| Rainer Knaak: Misha – a master of analysis | 150 |
| Boris Spassky: Tal was the chess messiah..... | 153 |
| What Karpov values in Tal – In conversation with Alexander Bakh | 155 |
| | |
| Chapter III – Speculative Sacrifices | 156 |
| | |
| Exercises | 169 |
| Solutions..... | 177 |
| | |
| Intermezzo | |
| Robert Hübner: In memory of Mikhail Tal | 193 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Chapter IV – The Correct Way to Defend against the Magician | 240 |
| Exercises | 249 |
| Solutions | 275 |
| Intermezzo | |
| Zurab Azmaiparashvili: He hypnotised me | 304 |
| Helmut Pfleger: Excessive to the last breath Personal impressions of Mikhail Tal | 306 |
| Tal played his very own brand of chess In conversation with Artur Yusupov | 312 |
| This star radiated so much energy that it finally burned out In conversation with Vladimir Kramnik | 316 |
| Misha lived his life In conversation with Engelina Tal | 318 |
| Epilogue | 320 |
| An unbroken love for chess, by Mikhail Tal. | 320 |
| Appendix | 321 |
| Bibliography | 321 |
| Acknowledgements | 324 |
| Index of Names | 325 |
| Game List | 329 |

About this book

At the start the idea was an interesting one and linked to the all-important deciding question: could a well-known German grandmaster and an equally well-known chess journalist cooperate in a productive manner? In this specific case, this common effort was made easier by the fact that each of them had been involved in the broadest sense of the term as trainers of up and coming players.

And yet, another problem reared its ugly head and would turn this project into an enormous challenge for us, like that of climbers forging a new route up a cliff face: there are as many collections of the games of Mikhail Tal and books on tactics as there are grains of sand on a beach. Just why did we want to add yet another one to that collection?

Well, it is quite certain that the magic of Tal's chess will never die and it is always worth our while to delve into its secrets. But this argument on its own, as we soon agreed, is not enough to justify another book about the chess wizard from Riga. So we knowingly went deeper into our goals in this book which is now being presented to you after a good two years of intensive cooperation.

Something which appeared quite important to us from the outset: we hope it has become a very personal book which invites its readers to an exciting journey through time. With the fireworks of the combinations of an 'immortal', as Vladimir Kramnik characterises his predecessor on the Mount Olympus of chess — Mikhail Tal—, and their 'elucidation' by modern chess computer programs and the historic sources available to us, we hope to conjure up pictures of a time long past in which the clocks ticked in quite a different way.

There was still the Iron Curtain and the powerful Soviet bureaucracy, from which chess itself — as though it were in a retort— was not spared. For that reason we have taken trouble to present not only fascinating sacrifices and the concomitant fantastic thought processes of a genius, but also, where possible and necessary, to introduce you to his opponents of the day and also to sketch in their role in the apparently ideal world of chess.

This occasionally painful retrospective of the 'good old days' with adjourned games, but in return without computers (!), will certainly awaken in many readers the nostalgic desire for the return of these conditions along with Tal's immortal masterpieces. But, as we are well aware, these will remain in the past. So we also hope that our plan for the content will work, namely moving back and forth with a time machine in order to honour Tal's creative achievements, which with his cool flashes of insight cast light on the fossilised world of chess of his day.

The Magic Tactics of Mikhail Tal

There is no question but that most readers will take great pleasure solving Misha's fantastic cascade of sacrifices in the first three chapters. But one thing which the computers of 'modern days' have taught us is that one should not under-estimate the art of defence. For that reason we have also devoted a significant part of the book to that important subject, which we would particularly like to commend to you. We really hope that after it you will feel the desire to be bolder in your own games, in other words to consciously try to swim against the tide. Because one thing is certain: your opponent can only take a single one of your hanging pieces with each move, as Mikhail Tal once put it so appositely.

Quite obviously, such a project could never have come into existence without the energetic support of like-minded colleagues. To represent these may we be permitted at this point to cite only Dr. Robert Hübner and Dagobert Kohlmeyer. We are indebted to the grandmaster from Cologne for the excellent analysis of one of the most exciting games played by the chess genius and the chess journalist from Berlin has been responsible for numerous contributions especially from those eye-witnesses from the Tal era who do not speak German.

In addition to these two, special thanks are due to Prof. Dr. Sieghart Dittmann, Hans-Joachim Hecht, Rainer Knaak, Dr. Helmut Pfleger, Wolfgang Uhlmann and graphics artist and type-setter Ulrich Dirr. We hope that this book will be worthy of the trust they placed in us.

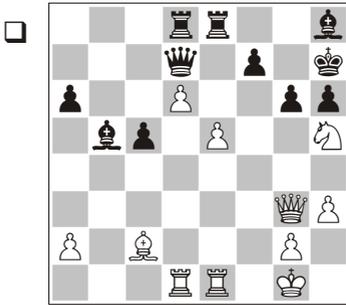
Hamburg/Hönow bei Berlin, August 2010
Dr. Karsten Müller
Raymund Stolze

4

Achilles heel

Tal - Theodor Ghitescu

6th Asztalos Memorial, Miskolc 1963



1963 did not get off to a very pleasant start for Tal, because his state of health had once again deteriorated to such a point that another kidney operation became necessary. As we know, it would not be the last one for the then still young man – he was after all at this point only 26 years old. Of course, he was then bursting with energy to become active again after this rather long enforced pause. But it was not till the summer that he had a chance, along with David Bronstein, to take part in a memorial tournament in honour of Lajos Asztalos in Miskolc, the fourth largest Hungarian city after Budapest, Debrecen and Szeged.

‘Things went smoothly and easily and practically three or four rounds before the end I was able to secure first place’, he remembered. And in actual fact: ten wins and five draws (in one of them it was the East Berliner Reinhart Fuchs who denied him victory) spoke louder than words – the chess world would once more have to reckon with Tal!

Theodor Ghitescu also was able to recognise this ungrudgingly, when in his own words he achieved a decisive ad-

vantage with white by means of an ‘an uncomplicated combination’.

Where is the Achilles heel in Black’s king position?

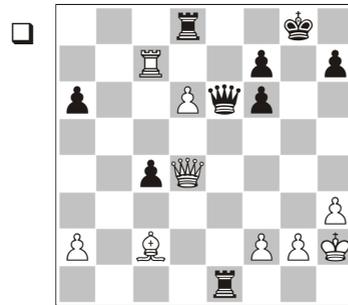
(Solution on page 60)

5

Skewered

Tal - Efim Geller

25th USSR Championship, Riga 1958



These national championships in the city of his birth were especially important for Tal. They also constituted a zonal tournament. That meant that players had to occupy one of the top four places in order to continue taking part in the struggle for the chess crown. And that was the goal which Misha had set himself with his trainer Alexander Koblents. But up until the half-way mark things were not going as he had hoped. His meagre 50 percent were not enough.

But then the title defender stepped up the tempo, and Efim Geller, 11 years older than he was, would be a witness to that. The very experienced international competitor – he had for example taken an honourable sixth place in the famous Candidates’ tournament in Zurich in 1953 and even increased that three years later in Amsterdam to fourth place – made in their first encounter an unexpected mistake, which ‘distorted

Intermezzo

Boris Spassky: Tal was the chess messiah

I have always liked Mikhail Tal and that fondness for him still lingers in my memory today. He was a really special person. Previously I once called him the 'Christ of chess'. Why did I choose that comparison? In doing so I was inspired by a painting by the Russian artist Alexander Ivanov, who lived in St Petersburg in the 19th century. This famous picture portrays how Christ appears to his people and reveals himself to them. To some extent that was Mikhail Tal's effect on the chess public of his day when in the middle of the last century he came to the surface in a blaze of light. He was the chess messiah.

I have always thought highly of Tal, above all because his feet never left the ground. When dealing with people, the man simply made no differences between them, he showed respect to everybody. When it came to chess players, it was of no interest to him what title they had or what was their Elo rating. That was not important for him. All that counted were their human values. Mikhail Tal himself was and remains till this day something wonderful to appear in world chess. A colossal, an important and necessary personality.

He was not particularly interested in money, for him it was only there so that he could buy something to eat or drink. There was not much more which he needed. Misha was generous, he loved life and hardly denied himself any pleasures it had to offer. Sometimes, however, his actions were a bit thoughtless. I can remember the following dramatic

episode, it is something I really cannot forget: at the Chess Olympiad in 1962 in Varna we shared a room. Tal always smoked a lot, even in bed. Once, when I had gone out, he fell asleep with a burning cigarette. I did not get back till quite late, returning to the hotel about half past three in the morning. Mikhail's bed was already alight. If I had got in only a few minutes later he would not have survived the fire. That was how I saved Tal on my Olympiad premiere.

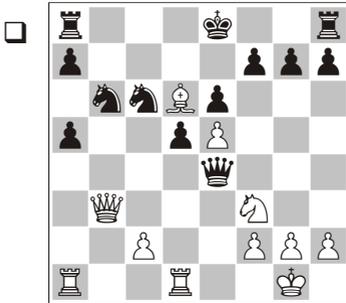
We were also rivals of course, that is true. At the USSR Championship of 1958 in Riga, which was at the same time a zonal tournament, I lost a very important game with white to Misha. Of course that rankled with me. After this victory, Tal became Soviet Champion for the second time, but I missed out on an entry to the interzonal tournament. From today's point of view, however, that was not such a great catastrophe for me as it has often been described in chess literature. The setback was all my own fault, Misha had nothing to do with it. At that time I was too preoccupied with problems of my own to be able to play better. Later I nevertheless managed to find my own way to the Mount Olympus of chess. Whether I won or lost to Tal never affected my friendship with him. There were never any negative moments between the man from Riga and me. It is obvious that at the board we were sporting rivals, but that never had any bad influence on our personal relationship. We

5

Green light for through routes

Tal - Jan Hein Donner

Hoogoven Tournament, Wijk aan Zee
1968



It is not rare for chess players to be real hypochondriacs, who continually pay attention to what they are feeling. And not just as far as their health is concerned. In this respect, Mikhail Tal was no exception, and so he felt at the deepest possible level at the traditional Hoogoven Tournament of January 1968 (it kept this name till 1999, and then in view of the new main sponsor it was re-named the Corus Tournament), that there was not really a spring in his step and 'I was simply not in a good mood for chess'. And at the same time this event in the small town of Wijk aan Zee in the Netherlands was a general rehearsal for his WCh Candidates' quarter-final match against Svetozar Gligoric, which was coming up in four months time. That Tal was really not in form can be seen from the first half of that match, which, after five games in Belgrade, saw the top Yugoslav player in the lead by one point, though the ex-World Champion was able to summon up the energy to win that match before the tenth game with a score of 5½-3½.

However, Misha had a fine attacking victory in round 12 against Johannes Hendrikus Donner, who five years previously had won the same tournament ahead of David Bronstein and Yury Averbakh. In individual games the local grandmaster could be very dangerous even to world class players, as is proved by his surprising victory over Bobby Fischer in the 15th Chess Olympiad in Varna in 1962.

Tal's leitmotif in his game against the Dutch player was the struggle for activity for his dark-squared bishop, which after emerging via a3, then planted itself firmly on d6. White had without worrying invested two pawns to achieve this and was now ready to invest even more.

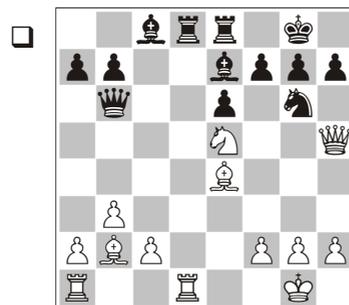
How did Tal logically continue his attack and where did Donner miss a good chance for equality?
(solution on page 183)

6

A forced pin sets the points

Tal - Miroslav Filip

Moscow 1967



This game is highly recommended as an example to consider how it can be possible to successfully thwart the strategy of an opponent who chooses a quiet varia-

Chapter IV

The Correct Way to Defend against the Magician

Of course, in your thorough work with the speculative sacrifices you will have long since drawn the conclusion that an important aspect has to be correct defence. For example, if in the game we chose as an illustration from the Candidates' tournament of 1959 (see pages 162-164), Vasily Smyslov against Mikhail Tal had not made the fateful error 18...♘f6?, but had instead adopted one of the two acceptable defensive plans 18...♙f6!? or 18...♙c7!? – the history of chess World Championships would perhaps have followed a very different path. So it is surprising that even in the standard works *The Art of Sacrifice in Chess* by Rudolf Spielmann and *Art of Attack in Chess* by Vladimir Vukovic nothing has been said about this subject.

The Austrian master, who has unfortunately been so unfairly forgotten by posterity, gave a very plausible reason for this in his manual which appeared in 1935: 'We just cannot resist the inflammatory power of the sacrifice, because the enthusiasm for sacrifice lies in the nature of things.'

At the same time, however, Rudolf Spielmann draws our attention to a circumstance with which we have certainly made painful acquaintance, and that more than once: 'Praxis demonstrates that mistakes are more frequently made in defence than in attack. Very particularly so whenever the defence has extraordinary tasks to accomplish.' This means nothing other than: if you want to play chess successfully, then it is im-

perative that you deliberately develop your defensive skills. You all know the motto 'Attack is the best form of defence!' In fact we often strongly underestimate the available defensive resources or we simply do not recognise them. Would you, for example, have gone in for such a bold way to fight off the white attack by Friðrik Olafsson à la Tal?

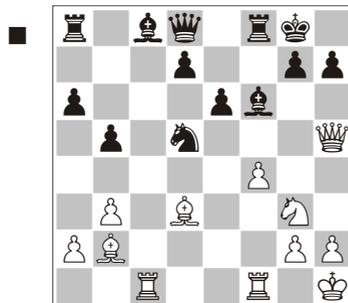
Sicilian Defence [B41]

Friðrik Olafsson - Tal

Candidates' tournament, Yugoslavia
1959

In round 11 of the 1959 Candidates' tournament the following highly explosive position was reached in a sharp Sicilian [B41] after

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♗c3 ♙b4
7.♙d3 ♘c6 8.♗e2 ♚c7 9.0-0 ♗e5
10.f4 ♘xc4 11.♙h1 ♙e7 12.b3
♗b6 13.e5 ♗fd5 14.♗e4 f5
15.exf6 ♗xf6 16.♗2g3 ♗bd5
17.♙b2 0-0 18.♖c1 ♚d8 19.♚e2
b5 20.♗xf6+ ♙xf6 21.♚h5



Tal's judgement of the position here was: 'Black is in a bad way. The threat is

mate in three moves, and after 21...h6 22.♙e5! the threat of 23.♖g6 is very strong: of course it can be parried with 22...♖e8, but then White would have at least a draw: 23.♙g6 ♖e7 24.♙b1 ♖e8(f7) 25.♙g6. But because of the tournament situation, I absolutely needed a win. So – to put things simply – I thought about sacrificing something:

21...g6!

But of course the matter was not purely linked to considerations outwith the game. In any case White loses some tempi by taking the pawn and retreating his pieces; in addition something wonderful opened up for an attack on the white king – the g-file.’

White was obliged whether he liked it or not to accept the challenge, since 22.♖e2 ♙xb2 23.♖xb2 ♗xf4 loses a pawn.

Finally, as far as this surprising decision is concerned, Tal must certainly have recognised that in the present situation he had, objectively speaking, no other option than an active defence. Then one must also be willing to sacrifice...

22.♙xg6

In the tournament book, the emotional comment of Grandmaster Ragozin on this capture was: ‘A small sensation! The spectators had got used to Tal sacrificing something. This time one of Tal’s opponents was sacrificing! Nowadays even chess fans are capable of playing combinations. Olafsson surely doesn’t want to force perpetual check? That would be too little. But before the spectators had finished their reflections Tal had made his move...’

22...♖e7!

That is the solution to the puzzle, or as Ragozin wrote: ‘Olafsson had a lovely reply in mind: 22...hxg6 23.♖xg6+

♗h8 24.♗f5!! ♙xb2 25.♖f3, and the black king is lost. After 24...exf5 25.♖f3! too, he cannot escape his fate. An effective combination did not work. Tal spotted it and found the correct way to weaken the white attack.’

We should add that in the variation indicated by Ragozin 24.♖f3! is the strongest move and wins directly, whilst in the second continuation after 24.♗f5 exf5 25.♖f3! ♗xf4 26.♖h6+ ♗g8 the difficult move 27.♖e1! still has to be found.

Mikhail Tal, on the other hand, evaluates the position absolutely objectively: ‘After the text move, on the other hand, White loses time retreating, while Black completely finishes his development.’

After

**23.♙xf6 ♗xf6 24.♖f3 ♖b8
25.♙d3 ♙b7 26.♖e2 ♗h8**

Black finally took the wind out of the sails of the enemy attack by returning the extra pawn and went on to win the game after 71 moves after mercilessly weaving a mating net:

**27.♖ce1 ♖be8 28.♗f5 ♖b4
29.♖b2 ♖c8 30.♗g3 ♖c3
31.♖e2 ♖g8 32.♗e4 ♖d4
33.♗g5 ♖g7 34.♖e3 ♖xe3
35.♖xe3 ♖c3 36.♖h3 b4 37.♗g1
e5 38.♖g3 e4 39.♙c4 d5 40.♙e2
d4 41.♙c4 e3 42.♖d1 ♙d5
43.♙f1 ♖e7 44.♙e2 d3 45.♙xd3
♖xd3 46.♖xd3 e2 47.♖ge3 e1♖+
48.♖xe1 ♖xe1+ 49.♗f2 ♖a1
50.♖d2 h6 51.♗e3 ♖e1+ 52.♗f2
♖e7 53.♗f1 hxg5 54.fxg5 ♗g4
55.h3 ♗e3+ 56.♗f2 ♙xg2
57.♖d4 a5 58.h4 ♗g7 59.h5 ♗f5
60.♖c4 ♖d7 61.♖c5 ♙e4 62.♖e5
♖e7 63.♖xa5 ♖c7 64.♖a6 ♖c2+
65.♗e1 ♗d4 66.♖a7+ ♗f8 67.g6
♗f3+ 68.♗d1 ♖d2+ 69.♗c1 ♖h2
70.♖f7+ ♗e8 71.♗d1 ♙d3 0-1**