

My Chess



Hans Ree
Foreword by Jan Timman

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by

Hans Ree



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by Hans Ree

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My Chess

Foreword

Every chessplayer has his memories. These memories are part of a private world that the player has created around him. In *My Chess*, Hans Ree describes this world. He delves into the past when he was still an active player. He portrays impressive Dutchmen from a distant past that he knew: grandmaster Hein Donner, writer Willem Frederik Hermans, psychologist and international master Johan Barendregt, singer Tabe Bas. Ree brings them to life through his refined penmanship.

Ree expresses his fascination for art and literature when he writes about Vladimir Nabokov and Marcel Duchamp, both devotees of chess. But there is more: Ree remembers his old schoolfriend with whom he played endless series of games. He also reveals that he recorded games that he played against himself. I was particularly struck by this, as I had the same habit of inventing games when I was young. I did not present them as games against myself, though. In his chapter on chess cafés, Ree gives a gripping impression of the atmosphere and the regular customers..

After his career as a player, Ree became a chess journalist. He never really aspired to writing novels or biographies. When he visits Duchamp's widow, he expresses his intention to write a biography about her late husband. Later on he changes his mind and leaves this work to others.

Ree knows that his forte is the short story. In this field, his literary style blossoms to full advantage. Ree has a very economic use of words. He likes to interweave anecdotes in his stories. For a lesser writer, this might cause a problem, since the reader may get confused. Ree, however, does it in a purposeful way. As a result, *My Chess* is a treasury of stories and anecdotes.

Jan Timman
Amsterdam
June 2013

Anand

In 1987, I played a series of blitz games against Anand at the Manila airport. He won them all, which I didn't like but didn't find strange either, since he had just become junior world champion. Junior world champions often go on to become real world champions.

We played opening lines that both of us could toss off up to roughly move 15, but by that time he often was already close to 30 seconds ahead on the clock already. This was partly because of his greater dexterity, but also because hesitation was foreign to him. Not to me. Before each move I briefly considered other options, and even though this takes only a second, those seconds add up.

In later years, Anand continued to play at that speed in serious games as well. He was called a speed demon because he flashed out his moves so fast that it looked like he was playing a game of table tennis. Later he slowed down to more normal levels.

I had been Jeroen Piket's second at the junior world championship. It was supposed to be held in Manila, but when we got there, we were informed that there had been bombings in the city and that, for our own safety, we would be sent on to Baguio City. This is the city where Karpov and Kortchnoi had played their match in 1978.

We stayed in Manila for one day. There was a little park very close to our hotel, and when I took a walk there in the afternoon, I saw a political demonstration taking place. I barely paid it any attention.

They were supporters of former President Ferdinand Marcos, who had been removed on account of election fraud. That evening, I heard on TV that two people had died when the demonstration turned violent, something I could have seen from my hotel room if I had taken the trouble to look out of the window. The counter-revolution happens right before your eyes, but you don't notice it until you see it on TV.

The next day, Marcel van Herck, the second of the Belgian participant, told us that he had mingled with the demonstrators and gotten a few blows. The damage was minor and we didn't feel sorry for him, partly because he had laughed at Jeroen the day before. Swallowing half of his name, as Dutch people tend to do nowadays, he had introduced himself as Joen Pket, whereupon Van Herck had burst out laughing: Ha, ha, the Dutch can't even pronounce their own names.

My Chess



Viswanathan Anand

Anand impressed in Baguio by the lightning fast and effortless way in which he eliminated his opponents. After he had crushed the Bulgarian Kiril Ninov in 25 moves, a little group of players and seconds stood around talking about him.

“You all think he is very good, don’t you?” said Israeli participant Gad Rechlis. “Yes, I think he is very good,” I replied. “Well, I don’t think so at all,” said Rechlis.

In one of the last rounds, Rechlis had to play Anand as Black. That Rechlis is going to get his come-uppance, I thought, but I was wrong. Anand quickly found himself in a worse position and was forced to pull out all the stops to save the draw.

It was a strong tournament, with players like Ivanchuk, Agdestein and Ivan Sokolov. Jeroen did worse than expected and finished in 18th place.

Nearby was a casino with a slightly disturbing notice at the entrance to the effect that all visitors had to hand in their fire arms, and there I taught Jeroen how to play blackjack without losing too much to the bank. Later, when he gave up his chess career to manage the fortune of Dutch billionaire (admittedly only in Dutch guilders) Joop van Oosterom, I wondered about the possibility of me having sown the seeds of this regrettable decision by initiating him in the art of gambling.

In hindsight, I do not need to be ashamed of my blitz games against Anand. Only four years later he won a tournament ahead of Karpov and Kasparov, and in 2000 he became FIDE world champion for the first time.

That championship wasn’t being taken completely serious then. The real champions were Garry Kasparov and, from 2000, Vladimir Kramnik, who had beaten Kasparov in a match. Jan Timman rather cruelly called the players who became “world champions” in a FIDE knockout tournament “Soldier Emperors,” after the Roman Emperors that got hoisted on their legions’ shields in quick succession in the third century A.D. and whose names are almost completely forgotten.

In 2007, Anand became the “real” world champion, and since then he has successfully defended his title against Kramnik, Topalov and Gelfand.