

Richard Shorman**Chess**

For many years Vasily Smyslov was the closest chess friend and rival of world champion Mikhail Botvinnik. Three times they played title matches and although Botvinnik retained, lost and regained his crown (in that order), Smyslov confirmed his place among the world's greatest living players. Even today, he barely missed qualifying for the current world championship cycle and he was eliminated from the last candidate's series only in the final stages.

Smyslov's style reminds one of a fierce Capablanca, full of positional niceties with an aggressive bite. He differs from the immortal Capa in his keen attention to modern opening theory, which this game from the 1950 Venice international vividly illustrates.

White: Vasily Smyslov (USSR). Black: Hein Donner (Holland). Venice, 1950.

French Defense

1 P-K4	P-K3	16 P-QR4	Q-B2
2 P-Q4	P-Q4	17 B-R3	N-K5(k)
3 N-QB3(a)	N-KB3	18 BxN/4	PxB
4 B-KN5	B-N5(b)	19 N-Q2	N-Q4
5 P-K5	P-KR3	20 Q-R4!(1)	QxKP
6 B-Q2	BxN	21 NxP	P-KN4
7 PxB	N-K5	22 Q-N4	B-Q2(m)
8 Q-N4	P-KN3(c)	23 N-Q6ch	K-Q1
9 B-B1!(d)	NxQBP	24 NxNPch	K-B1
10 B-Q3	P-QB4	25 N-Q6ch	K-B2(n)
11 PxP!(e)	N-B3(f)	26 Q-B4ch	B-B3(o)
12 N-B3	Q-R4	27 Q-B5!	Q-B5
13 O-O(g)	QxBP(h)	28 P-B4	N-N3
14 Q-R4!(i)	N-K2(j)	29 P-R5	Resigns(p)
15 Q-B6	R-R2		

(Notes by grandmaster Alexander Kotov translated from his book of the tournament, "Shakhmatny turnir: Venetsiya, 1950 god," Moscow, 1952, pp. 163-66)

(a) Grandmaster Smyslov believes the French Defense to be fundamentally wrong for Black. Therefore he always responds with this energetic mode of development rather than the calm, positional treatment with **3 N-Q2**.

(b) A sharp line, which for some unknown reason goes under the name of the MacCutcheon Variation. Research by Soviet masters has discredited the variation and it has gradually disappeared from tournament practice during the past few years.

(c) This position used to crop up fairly frequently in tournament play. White generally continued with **9 B-Q3 NxB 10 KxN**, leaving his king in the center subject to attack but, in turn, building up a powerful offensive on the king side himself. Whose attack carries more weight constitutes the cardinal problem of the whole line. Soviet theoreticians (the first was probably chess master Vsevolod Rauzer) focused attention on the key black-square weaknesses in Black's position. The natural reaction was to preserve White's black-squared bishop from exchange, which led to a new and more efficient way of opposing Black's opening formation.

(d) White sacrifices a pawn to relocate his bishop on the **QR3-KB8** diagonal with great effect. In a number of games **9 B-B1** was played with such startling success that the MacCutcheon Variation hardly ever occurred in serious play thereafter. Sufficient example is provided by the game, Boleslavsky — Lisitsyn (XIII USSR Championship, 1944): **9 . . . P-QB4 10 B-Q3 PxP 11 N-K2 Q-R4 12 O-O PxP 13 BxN PxB 14 N-N3**, and White has an irresistible attack.

(e) The simplest and most logical move; White gives scope to his black-squared bishop. Weaker is **11 B-Q2 N-R5**.

(f) Black has better defensive prospects after **11 . . . Q-B2 12 N-B3 N-Q2 13 B-K3 NxBP**.

(g) White has carried out his plan. For his sacrificed pawn he has complete development and attacking chances. An interesting battle in a sharp position lies ahead.

(h) Smyslov considers this move the decisive error, following which Black's game is indefensible. Only **13 . . . Q-R4!**, in his opinion, can hold off White's mounting pressure by forcing the White queen away from her strong post at **KN4** and, after **14 . . . B-Q2**, preparing for Q-side castling. I would say that while **13 . . . Q-R4** is certainly stronger, the textmove is not so bad that Black must lose.

(i) A fine and extremely forceful move. White's queen re-deploys on **KB6**, where she drives the enemy rook to its **KR2** and prevents Black from castling long as well. Nor does . . . **Q-K2** help matters in view of **15 B-KN5 Q-N5 16 Q-R3**.

Q-R3.

(j) Donner does not find the most obstinate defense. After 14 . . . **B-Q2 15 Q-B6 R-R2** (Black meets **16 P-QR4** with **16 . . . P-QR4**, getting ready to plant a knight at **QN5** in order to restrict White's black-squared bishop.) Black can still offer considerable resistance.

(k) Loses irrevocably, since now White's knight travels through **Q2** and **K4** to reach **Q6** and **KB6**. In fact, Black's backward development and awkwardly placed pieces make the fatal outcome only a question of time.

(l) Simple and fine. Black cannot stop White's knight from playing to **Q6** and **KB6**, as **20 . . . N-B6** fails against **21 B-Q6 Q-Q1 22 Q-R3**, with the unanswerable threat of **23 N-B4**, while **21 B-Q6 P-KN4 22 Q-N4 Q-B3 23 P-B4** opens winning lines for White on the king side. Nonetheless, **20 . . . N-B6** was Black's best practical chance in this critical position.

(m) Loses by force, but Black's game is already hopeless because of the threats of **23 P-QB4** and **24 N-Q6ch**, with all of the White pieces cooperating in the king hunt. If **23 . . . N-B3**, then **23 NxNch QxN 24 Q-N4 R-R1 25 B-N2 P-K4 26 BxP QxB 27 KR-K1** wins (Smyslov).

(n) White has more than one winning continuation after **25 . . . K-Q1**, e.g., **26 Q-QB4**, threatening **27 Q-B5**, and **26 P-QB4** plus **27 Q-B3**, attacking **KB7** and the Black **QR**.

(o) After **26 . . . K-Q1 27 Q-B5** nothing can prevent both **28 P-QB4** and **28 N-N7ch** followed by checkmate at **KB8**.

(p) Quick mate awaits Black on **29 . . . N-Q2 30 N-N5ch K-N2 31 P-R6ch**.