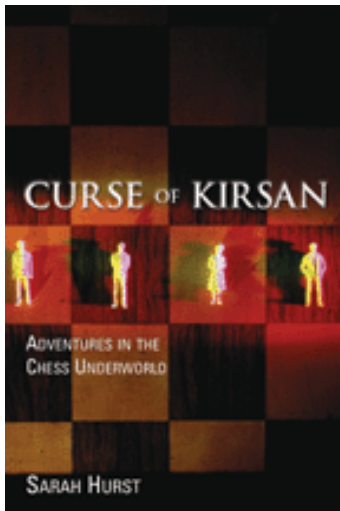




COLUMNISTS

Misha Interviews...

Misha Savinov



Interview with Konstantin Maslak

Konstantin Maslak. Born in 1984. International Master. FIDE rating 2549. Renowned blitz player and promising Internet chess teacher. Lives in Volgograd, Russia, but spends most of his time online.

MS: Where you were born and when did you start playing chess?

KM: I was born in Volgograd. My father, who was a strong candidate master, taught me to play. When I was 9, I went to the chess club and defeated all the pupils there. Then I took part in the city Under-10 championship, which I managed to win. This is how it all started.



MS: Who was your first trainer?

KM: Igor Tsyn, he is a well-known chess coach in Volgograd.

MS: What were the lessons like?

KM: We studied positions from Tsyn's textbooks, worked on examples from other books, and solved training positions.

MS: How many games per day did you play back then?

KM: There was no Internet at that time, so I did not play too much. The club was far away from home, and it was difficult to visit it frequently or stay for long periods of time. Also, after tournament games, I mostly played Bughouse, instead of regular chess.

MS: Which chess books did you read?

KM: I have seven shelves filled with chess books; there is no room for new ones. I read very fast, so I finished nearly all of them. It is very difficult to single out a book I liked the most, since I enjoyed different books and authors at different ages. There is definitely no "Number One" book for me.

MS: Who were your favorite players?

KM: I wanted to be like Kasparov, but this was when I was a child.

MS: How did your chess career develop and when did you become a candidate master?

KM: I think I became a candidate master at age 13 or so, and fulfilled the IM requirements at 18.

MS: What do you consider your main successes in OTB chess?

KM: They all came quite recently. In 2005, I took the first place on the 2nd board in the Russian Club Higher League, and shared the 1st-2nd in the 8th category tournament in Olomouc. In 2006, I finished 4th in the Moscow Open and qualified for the Russian Cup final stage.

MS: What are your aims in chess?

KM: My goal is to succeed to the best of my abilities. I do not set any limits, either upper or lower ones. (Smiles)

MS: How do you see the future of chess? What direction should we move in to win new markets and get new sponsorships?

KM: This is a difficult question. I don't think there is a definitive answer to it. However, it is obvious that we should work on perfecting the formula – the sponsors will never give money if the players themselves cannot tell who the champion is. Also, it is important to make chess more spectacular. It should be done through developing Internet relays, and shortening the time control, either permanently or for specific events.

MS: When did you play your first game via the Internet?

KM: In 2000.



MS: What are the main differences between Internet chess and OTB chess? What are the positive and negative sides of such play?

KM: There are three main differences. First, you always know your opponent in an OTB game, while on the Internet it might be kind of tricky. Second, a person who handles the mouse better in the final seconds usually wins and this actually yields many points. Third, sometimes I play on the Net while doing other things, which obviously leads to a decreased rating; then I feel enough is enough, shut down all the extra windows and regain my points with interest.

MS: What are the advantages of blitz over classical chess?

KM: It is quicker, it is more exciting, and one can play many more games in the same amount of time.

MS: Does frequent blitz with strong opponents help improve one's overall chess level? Or does it only affect certain blitz-specific skills?

KM: It definitely affects one's overall chess skill. One can improve the openings, as well as general chess understanding through blitz. If course, it happens only if the player puts effort in trying to understand the opponent's strong moves. Playing against the computer is also very helpful, one can learn a lot from the machine. Many people disagree with this opinion, but I have a full faith in it.

MS: Is there anything specific about the opening repertoire of a blitz player?

KM: No, there is nothing really. However, it is important to refresh it often to prevent one's opponents from making specific preparations. When the

opponent faces a new opening, he normally takes more time and loses the thread.

MS: Are there people who play blitz in a completely different manner than classical chess?

KM: Yes – those who use the advice of silicon or flesh-and-blood friends during the game. Otherwise, the playing manner is unlikely to change.

MS: Have you ever played with stakes? Does it affect the play much?

KM: Sometimes. It does not have much influence, except to raise the level of concentration.

MS: You frequently play in various Internet events: is it an important source of income for you?

KM: Not at all, because in those competitions one usually only wins virtual money. If I were to spend all the money I won, I could open an online store similar in size to Chessbase.



Maslak with Rauf Mamedov (l) and Yuri Drozdovsky (r)

MS: On which Internet servers do you normally play? Could you make a short list of their advantages and disadvantages?

KM: The ICC is the largest and the most popular server. Its main advantage is a great number of strong opponents, which is very useful for training purposes. The ICC is far ahead of its competitors in this respect. A convenient interface is another advantage. However, lack of tournaments with prizes is a downside.

Playchess – there are many tournaments with small prizes, which are, however, very difficult to convert. I like this server for the quickest and most convenient online broadcasting and its compatibility with Fritz.

Another good thing is that Playchess started to promote regular freestyle tournaments (ones where players can legally use computer advices – MS). What I don't like it that they don't do anything with ladders. I am also not happy with their prize system, which is very hard to cash.

Chessplanet – its main advantage is a lag compensation system and a strict attitude towards cheaters irrespective of their OTB titles. There are also many tournaments with prizes, which is pleasant. The downside is that one can hardly cash the prizes, plus the interface has bugs that appear from time to time. Hopefully, they are working on fixing these.

Bereg.ru – is another popular Russian playing zone with a very Spartan design. I like it for the opportunity to test any new openings against a decent level of competition, without revealing my identity and making the games available. Many people prepare for blitz games using the ICC database, while there is no game database on bereg.ru. Its disadvantage is that nothing is done with rude and offensive users.

MS: When did you start giving lessons via the Internet and what is your attitude toward it?

KM: I have done it for 2½ years already. First, I tried to show examples from books, but quickly realized that it was useless. Each student has to be handled in a unique manner. You have to go through his or her games together, find weaknesses and work on them. This is the shortest way to success, although sometimes students do what they are used to no matter how you try to teach them.

MS: So, you mostly work on fixing weaknesses?

KM: Of course, I work on the student's opening repertoire and improve his or her positional skills, too. It is done almost exclusively through analyzing the student's games. I save my lessons so that one can go through them again. Unfortunately, not many students really do that. And still, the majority of them improve, sometimes even quite significantly. You may find their opinions [here](#) if you like.



MS: Can you give a practical example of a student improving?

KM: A student, who plays on ICC as “davidm,” began with a rating of 1650, but with 3-4 lessons per month, he improved to 2174: +500 rating points in less than a year!

MS: Do you have any offline teaching experience?

KM: I am quite serious about teaching, as this is one of my main sources of income. I have some offline experience, but, as a rule, Russians do not want to pay according to Western standards, and I do not accept work on Russian terms.

MS: Are you venturesome? How would you describe yourself?

KM: Yes, I am venturesome. However, I don't think I can reasonably describe my character. I'd prefer to pass this on to those who know me.

MS: You traveled frequently; is there any place you'd like to stay for long, if there was an opportunity?

KM: Of all places I visited, I especially like Pardubice, Dagomys and St. Petersburg. However, I don't think I'd enjoy staying in the same place for long.

MS: What non-chess topics are you attracted to?

KM: Sports and girls. (Smiles)

Konstantin Maslak Annotates

Stefanova-Maslak

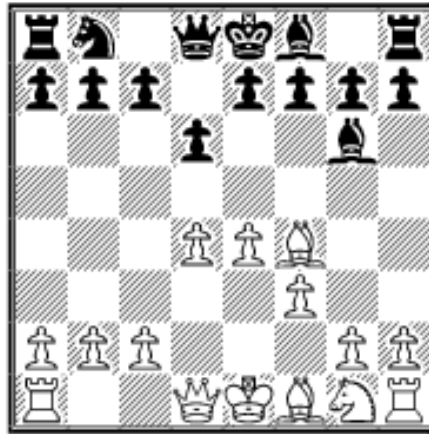
Aeroflot Open (A2), Moscow 2006

I had +2 before the last round, so I had to win this game, as Black, to have a chance at any serious prizes. The round started in the morning; so there was no time for decent preparation. I quickly went through Eti's games, and found one against McShane that he won almost effortlessly. So I decided to follow him.

1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5 Ne4 3.Bf4 d6

Here Antoaneta took about 20 minutes. The game against McShane went 4.f3 Nf6 5.e4 e5 6.de Nh5 7.Be3 de 8.Qd8 Kd8, and Black eventually won! I knew that she likes attacking, more than playing dull endgames, so I was confident about my choice. However, she deviated.

4.Nd2 Bf5 5.Nxe4 Bxe4 6.f3 Bg6 7.e4



I was pleased with the outcome of the opening – I was ahead on time, the position was non-symmetrical and non-theoretical, and, moreover, without any serious problems for Black.

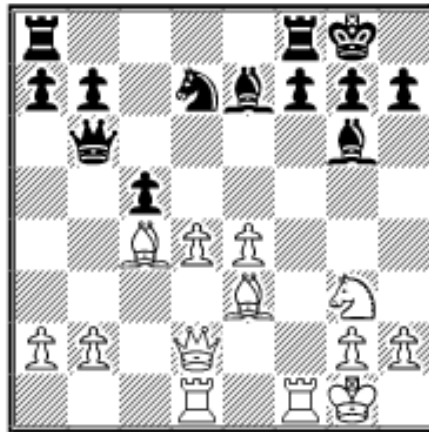
7...e6 8.Bd3 Be7 9.Qd2 Nd7 10.c3 c6

Black has many possible plans ... so I decided against spending too much time on the 10th move and selected one of many possibilities that looked slightly better at first glance.

11.Ne2 d5 12.0-0 e5 13.Be3 dxe 14.fxe 0-0 15.Ng3 exd 16.cxd c5

I've destroyed her center; however, I am in a must-win situation, so all marginally better endgames against the e4-isolani should be disregarded. Yet, suddenly my opponent started to find the strongest moves.

17.Rad1 Qb6 18.Bc4!



A very strong move, which I saw, but I did not expect her to find it so easily. The bishop transfers to d5, where it will be very well placed. Still, White has no direct threats, so there is nothing to fear.

18...cxd 19.Bxd4 Bc5 20.Nf5 Ne5 21.Bd5 Rfd8 22.Bxc5 Qxc5+ 23.Kh1 Rd7

White's position isn't bad; however, to Antoaneta's dismay, there are no tactics.

Her next moves came as a surprise, and I cannot really tell whether they are good or poor.

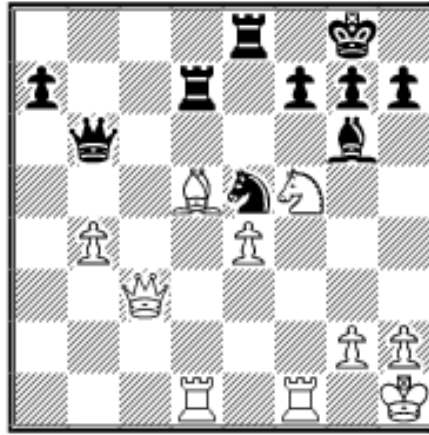
24.b4

White gains space, but it is not clear what she wants to achieve with this attack on the empty flank.

24...Qb6 25.a4 Re8 26.a5 Qd8 27.Qe3

Here I started thinking. I did not want to succumb to •6, and after 27...b6 28.ab Qb6 29.ab Ra1 White has a dynamic advantage in the endgame. Still, having recalled the opponent's attitude to simple endgames, I decided to give the second variation a try.

27...b6 28.axb Qxb6 29.Qc3



It turned out that I was correct. Now the b4-pawn is a weakness rather than a strength and White is not going to create an attack, despite the queens being on board.

29...Bxf5 30.Rxf5 Qc7

Here White began to get short of time, which is a good explanation for White's subsequent illogical play.

31.Qh3 g6 32.Rf6 Kg7 33.Rdf1

White tries attacking, but it is incorrect. The b4-pawn begins to tell.

33...Rd6 34.R6f2 Re7 35.Qg3 Qb6 36.Qc3 f6 37.h3 Rc7

Here I realized that I had seized the initiative once and for all.

38.Qb3 Qd4 39.Qg3 Rc3 40.Qf4 Qxb4

The time-control has been passed. White's queen has traveled all over the board, but did not find any targets, while I captured a pawn and activated the pieces. It is time to convert my advantage.

41.Qd2 a5 42.Qa2 Rb6 43.Ra1 Rc5

I am making natural and perhaps the only possible moves.

44.Rff1 Qb2 45.Qa4 Rbb5 46.Ba2 Qc2

Here I thought I was winning by force.

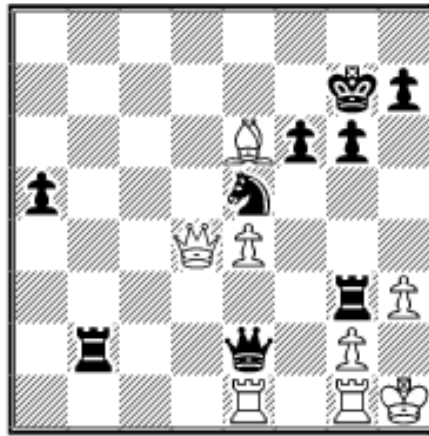
47.Qd4 Rb2 48.Rg1 Rc3 49.Be6

I completely overlooked this move. I had to readjust and start over. The position is still winning, but it was very tough to return to laborious calculations after winning easily.

49...Rg3

Here I calculated different variations associated with my king wandering around g5-f4-e3, but finally discovered that the king escapes from checks via e3 to d2.

50.Rac1 Qe2 51.Rce1



Antoaneta most likely missed my next move. This is the only explanation for making a losing move without thinking.

51...Rxb2!! 52.Rxe2 Rgxe2 53.Qa7+ Kh6

Despite having an extra queen, White is helpless.

54.Rg3 Re1+ 55.Rg1 Nf3 White resigned

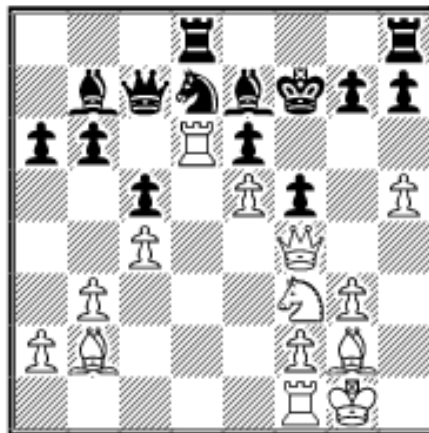
I would also like to present one of my ICC wins, because it is very spectacular.

“Maslakkostia” (2565) – “Matsanovic” (2478)

ICC, 15 minute game

Sicilian Defense

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.b3 Nf6 4.e5 Nd5 5.Bb2 Be7 6.c4 Nf4 7.g3 Ng6 8.h4 f5 9.h5 Nf8 10.Bg2 Nc6 11.Nc3 a6 12.Ne2 Qc7 13.O-O b6 14.d4 cxd4 15.Nexd4 Bb7 16.Nxc6 dxc6 17.Qd2 Rd8 18.Qf4 Nd7 19.Nd4 Nf8 20.Nf3 Nd7 21.Rad1 c5 22.Rd6! Kf7



23.Rxe6!! Kxe6 24.Qxf5+!!! Kxf5 25.Bh3+ Ke4 26.Re1+ Black resigns



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