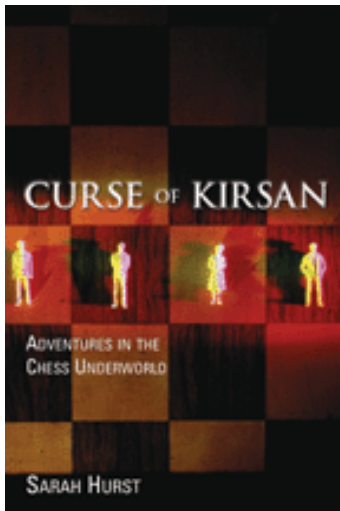




COLUMNISTS

Misha Interviews...

Misha Savinov



Interview with Gadir Guseinov

Gadir Guseinov. Born in 1986. International grandmaster and member of the Azerbaijan national team. Current FIDE rating 2591. The youngest ever European junior chess champion, at the age of 8 in 1994.

Misha Savinov: Could you say a few words about your family and how you learned chess?

Gadir Guseinov: I was born in Moscow on May 21, 1986. My father is a doctor, who graduated from the Azerbaijan Medical Institute and earned a Ph.D. in St. Petersburg. He worked at the St. Petersburg Institute of Traumatology and Orthopedy from 1983 to 1991. My mother got a degree in Law in Moscow. I have two sisters; the elder is also a doctor, and the younger one studies foreign languages in college.



My father was a chess devotee since childhood; so he wanted to teach his children, and he began with my older sister. At first she attended the chess school at the Chigorin Club in St. Petersburg, but she eventually decided to focus on medicine. Then my father turned his attention to me. My mother recalls that he used to give me chess pieces to play with when I was an infant!

MS: Did you also go to the Chigorin Club?

GG: No, we left St. Petersburg in 1991 and moved to Azerbaijan, to the town Gyandzha. I learned the moves at 5, and started to take lessons at the age of 6.

MS: Who was your first trainer?



GG: Candidate master Shakhin Gadzhiev ... It was tough in the beginning, because I was the weakest player in the class and I lost to all the other kids. However, I did not give up, and things gradually started to improve. The effort I put into the lessons was rewarded. In May 1994, somewhere around my 8th birthday, I won the gold medal of the European U-10 championship, which took place in Herculane, Romania, which also brought me an FM title. Thus, I became the youngest ever European champion, and this record is still unbeaten as far as I know.

MS: What memories do you have of that period?

GG: I remember I could work all day long. My favorite activity was solving puzzles and studying the game collections of Paul Morphy and Robert Fischer. I was fascinated by their creative and combinational play.

MS: Who were your main rivals in junior tournaments?

GG: In Azerbaijan, I competed with Teimour Radjabov, Vugar Gashimov, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov and Rauf Mamedov, who are now my teammates on the national team. In Moscow, I studied in the same club as Alexandra Kosteniuk, Mikhail Kobalia, Alexander Riazantsev, Boris Grachev, Leonid Kritz, and Stanislav Novikov, who are all grandmasters now.



MS: How did you arrive in Moscow?

GG: At the end of 1994, my father got an interesting job offer from Moscow, and, as my family thought it would assist my chess development, we returned to Russia for four years. From 1995-1998, I studied chess in

Moscow and represented Russia in international competitions around the world.

MS: How did you do against the Muscovites?

GG: This was the period of my chess ascendance, so to speak. In 1995, I was runner-up in the Moscow championship, and took 5th place in the championship of Russia for my age group. The next year, I conquered both city and national under-10 championships, and won the right to represent the country in the world and European championships, where I took 6th and 3rd places respectively!

In 1997, I improved my European result, finishing second. The following year brought my second Russian national title and another European bronze (under 12). So, everything went very well, as far as my chess development is concerned. However, because of the unstable political situation in Russia, our family returned to Azerbaijan and settled in Baku.

MS: Did it affect your training?

GG: It had quite a negative impact initially. After we arrived in Baku, I worked with IM Mikhail Shur for a short time, and then began working completely on my own.

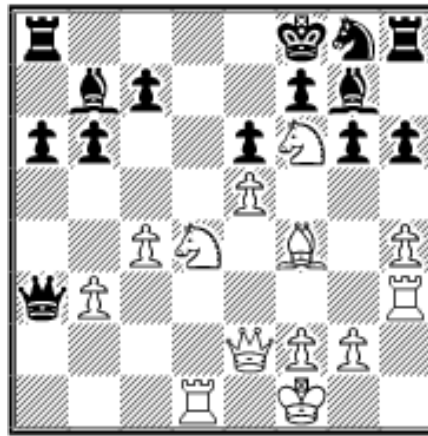
Nevertheless, I cannot say that things were that rosy in Moscow. Russia's advantages lie in the abundance of strong trainers and the fierce competition between the players. I utilized the latter; however, my parents did not have sufficient funds to hire a good trainer on a regular basis, so I could only take occasional lessons from different people.

This situation improved in 1998, when Azerbaijan president Geidar Aliev offered the four strongest young players of the country \$10,000 chess grants. This helped me make a significant leap forward. I began working with grandmasters Chekhov and Korotylev, I made an IM norm in 1999, and in 2000 I shared first place in the White Nights tournament in St. Petersburg, defeating Genrikh Chepukaitis's dangerous Scorpion defense in the final round. It was a fierce and nervous battle, when even an extra queen did not guarantee White a win.

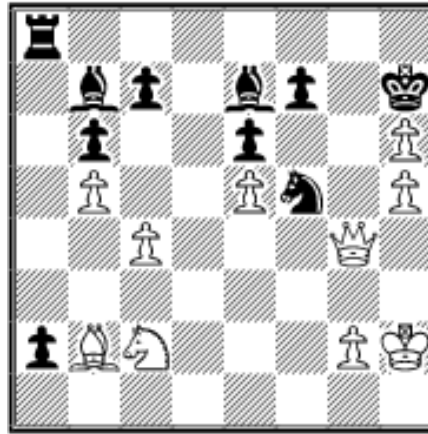
Guseinov, G (2324) - Chepukaitis, G (2393)

White Nights op St Petersburg (9), 02.07.2000 [B06]

1.e4 e6 2.Nf3 g6 3.d4 Bg7 4.Nc3 d6 5.Bf4 a6 6.a4 b6 7.Bd3 Ne7 8.Qd2 h6 9.h4 Bb7 10.Rh3 Nd7 11.Qe2 Nc6 12.e5 dxe5 13.dxe5 Nc5 14.Rd1 Nxd3+ 15.Rxd3 Qe7 16.Ne4 Qb4+ 17.Kf1 Ne7 18.c4 Qxa4 19.Nf6+ Kf8 20.b3 Qa1+ 21.Rd1 Qa3 22.Nd4 Ng8?!



23.Nc2! Qe7 (The only move, otherwise the queen is trapped.) 24.Rd7 Bxf6 25.Rxe7 Bxe7 26.h5 g5 27.Bd2 a5 28.Kg1 a4 29.b4 Bd8 30.b5 Kg7 31.Rg3 Ne7 32.Bc1 Nf5 33.Rg4 Be7 34.f4 Rhg8 35.fxg5 a3 36.gxh6+ Kh7 37.Kh2?! Rxc4 38.Qxc4 a2 39.Bb2



39...Bh4? (39...Rg8! would give Black the upper hand.) 40.Qe2 Bg3+ 41.Kh3 Rg8 42.Nd4 Rg5 43.Nxf5 Rxf5?? 44.Kxg3 Rg5+ 45.Kh3 Rxc2 46.Qxc2 Bxc2+ 47.Kxc2 Kxh6 48.Kf3 Kxh5 49.Ke3 Kg4 50.Kd3 Kf3 51.Kc2 Ke2 52.Kb3 1-0

MS: How old were you when you made your first GM norm?

GG: It happened in 2002, when I was 15. By that time, the grant had already been spent, so I advanced to a 2600+ rating without any real financial support. One needs good sponsorship to hire world-class trainers, and only very few people can boast of it...

MS: A player often passes through periods of accumulating knowledge, when the effort is not equal to the results. Did you notice such periods in your career?

GG: Strangely, it seems there were no sharp rises, and I just gradually made progress. Only recently, when I could not break out of the 2520-2570 Elo range, and it took me three years to cross the 2600 Elo mark.



MS: Which great players did you try to copy in your junior years?

GG: I wanted to play like Rubinstein and Fischer. Their games are rich in ideas, and it is very interesting to study them. Their games will never become outdated. Also, Morphy is the first grandmaster of combinational chess.

MS: What about contemporary classics?

GG: Kramnik's positional understanding has always given me great pleasure. Basically, all of the modern players are good in tactics; however, understanding positional nuances requires a greater skill.

MS: It is often said that a person's character is revealed by the way he or she plays. What do you think about this?

GG: To be honest, I don't think I can judge people's character from their play...

MS: Is there any freedom of self-expression in chess?

GG: When you are looking for the best move, it is better to forget about your likes and dislikes!

MS: When did you start playing for the Azerbaijan team at the Chess Olympiads?

GG: I became a member of the national team in 2002. I have participated in all the Olympiads and the European team championships since then. My best result was in Calvià, Spain, where I won the bronze medal on the 4th board.

MS: Could you create an “ideal chess player,” using the various skills of your teammates?

GG: My teammates are skilled in many different areas of the game; however, it is impossible to design an ideal player from them, because not one of them has perfect opening preparation! Still, this is only a temporary issue.



MS: How much attention is paid to chess development in your country? Is there a pyramid of children’s events or large-scale competitions?

GG: There are many chess-playing children, and there are many tournaments where they can test their skill. Until recently, we had a problem with a lack of stronger tournaments; however, the Presidential Cup is a step in the right direction, and we hope this festival becomes a tradition.

MS: The start was quite good...

GG: Yes, the competition took place in the Central Chess Club of Baku, with a prize fund of \$25,000. It attracted 13 grandmasters (7 at 2600+). This was the strongest open tournament in the country's history.

Hosting such events is critically important for chess development, as local talents obtain a unique chance to compete against strong foreign players. During the tournament, 7 players made various international norms, and 4 of them were from Azerbaijan. Tournament director Emmin Gashimov worked very hard for the festival to run smoothly, and all the participants were pleased.

MS: Is it difficult to spot a talented kid? How can you discern big talent?

GG: As the saying goes, talent is given by the nature, and normally it becomes apparent all by itself, so there is no real need for spotting it. (smiles)

However, talent alone does not make a grandmaster. Utilizing one's talent is a serious issue. It is very important to realize that there are many less talented but more successful chess players. They compensate a certain lack of ability with hard work, physical and psychological preparation, etc. Chess is very complex.

MS: Can good results in blitz serve as an early indicator of one's gift? Most future grandmasters become dangerous in blitz much earlier than in classical chess.

GG: Blitz requires the aptitude of an adolescent; for instance, you have to calculate flawlessly at lightning speed. Tactical vision and the ability to quickly make the correct strategic decisions also helps. Speed chess is more of a game of chance. Blitz offers you a decent chance of flagging your opponent, and childish 1-2-move traps often work, too. Generally, I think blitz is most indicative about one's tactical skill, as practice shows that the best blitz players are brilliant tacticians.

MS: What are you non-chess interests – books, movies, music?

GG: I like football very much, and I have supported Arsenal London for many years. In cinema, I have very mixed interests, but of course we have to exclude Latin American soap operas. (smiles) I also enjoy watching new movies at the theater.

MS: What have you seen recently?

GG: Pirates of the Caribbean 2 is a very interesting film, I enjoyed it very much! I am not so fond of reading, if I take a book to our summer house, I

tend to get bored ... I mostly prefer adventurous tales, recently I came across Dan Brown's novels. My musical tastes are not very original – I like pop.



MS: Do you play poker at all? It seems to be capturing the fancy of many chess grandmasters these days.

GG: No, I don't play poker. I have a rather negative attitude to gaming and gambling. My limited experience in this area suggests that such games are fun at the beginning, but always end sadly. The ability to stop at the right moment is so rare among humans! I don't have any friends that play poker, but some of them are devoted to betting on sporting events, and this can become really addictive.

MS: What do you hope to achieve in chess?

GG: I am aiming at the 2700 mark, and of course I need to work hard to fulfill my dream in less than 20 years (when it will happen by itself because of inflation). I think I will always play chess, even if not professionally. I really like it! Even when I retire, I will play blitz on the Internet, like Kamsky did.

MS: What is the future of chess? In which direction should we move to survive as a sport?

GG: It is absolutely necessary to join the Olympic family. Chess must be recognized as an Olympic sport. If everything continues as it is, then I don't think the situation gets any better.

Finding sponsorship for chess is always difficult. We are not even on TV, and, moreover, it is hard to imagine any form of chess that can succeed

there. One can explain a football match to a 5-year-old in just a few seconds, but with chess it is much more complicated. There is nothing spectacular in waiting for a single move for 20-30 minutes, and shortening the time control simply ruins the quality of play. Therefore, chess must become an Olympic sport!

Gadir Guseinov Annotates

I would like to present a game played in the style of Morphy and Fischer, who were my favorite players when I was a kid.

Guseinov G. – Khagani M.

Abadan, Iran 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 b5

This is a topical line of the Paulsen Variation. The main line 6.Bd3.

6.g3!?

I regularly employ this move against the Paulsen and the Scheveningen. GM Valery Chekhov taught me the subtleties of this variation some years ago, and until recently my winning percentage was quite high.

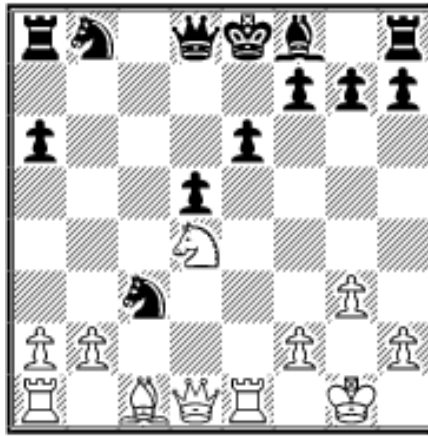
6...Bb7 7.Bg2 Nf6 8.0-0 b4

Black makes the most principled move, winning my central pawn. After 8...d6, White can play 9.Re1!, creating dangerous ideas like e5 or Nd5, a sample line runs as follows: 9...Nbd7 10.e5! Bxg2 11.exf6 Bb7 (11...Bh3 12.Qh5 Qf6 13.Be3! Bf5 14.Nd5 Qd8 15.Bg5 wins) 12.fxg7 Bxg7 13.Nxe6! fxe6 14.Rxe6+ Kf8 15.Rxd6, winning. Also after 9...Qc7 10.a4 b4 11.Nd5! exd5 12.exd5+ Kd8 13.Bg5! Nbd7 14.Nc6+ Bxc6 15.dxc6 Nc5 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.Qd4 Be7 18.Qxb4 Ke8 19.Qh4! Ne6 20.Bd5 White gets a big advantage.

9.Na4 Bxe4

If 9...Nxe4, then White gets an edge by 10.Re1! d5 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Qh5+ g6 (12...Kd7 13.Bxe4 dxe4 14.Bg5! Be7 15.Rad1+ Bd5 16.Bxe7 Kxe7 17.Rxe4! Bxe4 18.Qg5+ wins) 13.Qe5 Qd7! (13...Qf6 is bad because of 14.Rxe4!) 14.Qxh8 Qxa4 15.f3 Nc5 16.Bh3! Qd7 17.Be3!, and White has the initiative.

10.Bxe4 Nxe4 11.Re1 d5 12.c4! bxc3 13.Nc3 Nxc3



My opponent played fairly quickly up to here, and no wonder – this is all theory! Normally, White automatically proceeded with 14.bxc3 Be7 15.Bf4 0-0 16.Bxb8 Qxb8 17.Nc6 Qc7 18.Nxe7+ Qxe7 19.Qxd5, and the game is close to a draw. However, I found a surprising move.

14.Qh5!!

A novelty! I remember I made this move while standing. People started to gather around the table to see what was happening.

14...Ne4

14...g6 loses quickly: 15.Qe5 Rg8 16.Nxe6! fxe6 17.Qxe6+ Qe7 18.Qc8+, and White wins.

15.Ne6 Qb6

What should White do now?

16.Nc7+!!

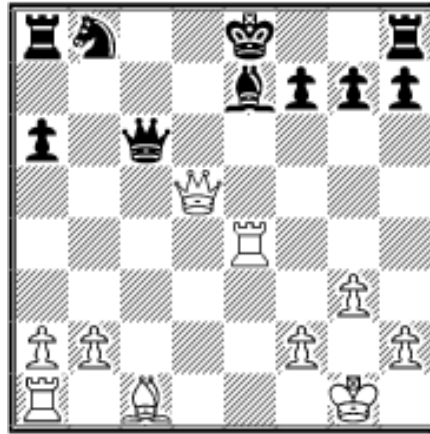
An unexpected sacrifice of a second piece!

16...Qxc7 17.Qd5 Qc6

By the way, after I showed this game to IM Eltaj Safarli and GM Rauf Mamedov, they both successfully used it in their games. Rauf employed the idea in Turin, against Norwegian GM Kjetil Lie. The preparation took exactly 10 minutes, and our team won the match 3-1.

The best play for Black, which is extremely difficult to find at the board, is 17...Nc6! 18.Bf4 Qd7! 19.Qxe4+ Be7 20.Rad1 Qb7 21.Bd6 0-0 22.Bxe7 Rfe8 23.Qf3 Rxe7 24.Rxe7 Qxe7 25.Qxc6. White has an extra pawn and good winning chances.

18.Rxe4+ Be7



Now another sacrifice decides the issue by force.

19.Rxe7!+ Kxe7 20.Bg5+ f6 21.Re1! Kf8 22.Qd8+ Kf7 23.Re7+ Kg6 24.Qxh8 Kxd5 25.Qxg7 1-0

Curiously, about two months ago, I won a twin game in a Baku blitz tournament against Georgian GM Levan Pantsulaya.



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