

Botvinnik's contributions in the pages of this *Journal* and elsewhere have been open to more controversy than agreement. His protracted distinction between the notions of algorithms and programs, while he consistently refused to discuss anything as specific as a program, alienated him from the computer-chess community.

At least one of his publications in this *Journal* (Vol. 16, No. 2) raised ruckus among the normally sedate perusers of these pages. It pretended to be able to re-play some of Botvinnik's own magisterial moves as well as to improve on the actual play of Kasparov against Ribli (1989). It was savagely attacked; not without reason, we think.

As your Editors believe, it is not the least of Botvinnik's merits to have raised the ruction at all. He saw himself as a literal pioneer guiding humanity on its way to what he considered to be a better world, his view of this world naturally being coloured by a life-long immersion in communist thought. While we may disagree with that mode of thought, it behooves us to admit its colourfulness, which has notably decreased with the death of Mikhail Moiseivich Botvinnik.

We recall a Latin tag: *posterii mirentur nos tam aperta nescisse* (those coming after us will wonder that we have not known such obvious truths). This applies most appropriately to Botvinnik who was and will remain forever a pioneer on the path to established truths in computer chess.

## A EULOGY FOR MIKHAIL MOISEIVICH BOTVINNİK

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It was my pleasure several weeks ago to arrange for Robert Byrne to attend the 8<sup>th</sup> World Computer-Chess Championships in Hong Kong. The day after I heard of Mikhail Moiseivich's death, I had the opportunity to discuss this great man with Byrne while telling him of the travel plans. Byrne said that he had the highest admiration for Botvinnik and that he felt he was like a grandfather to him. Funny, I thought: that makes two of us. From the time I first met him at the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Computer-Chess Championship in Toronto in 1977, I too felt he was my special grandfather. I suspect there were many others who also experienced those unusually warm feelings from this unique person.

Botvinnik was born August 17, 1911 in St. Petersburg, the son of a physician. He was awarded the title of Soviet Master when he was 16 and won the Soviet Championship four years later. In 1948, he won the world championship and, except for two brief periods, reigned until Tigran Petrosian defeated him in 1963. While an electrical engineer by profession, Botvinnik ran his own chess school and had Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov as students.

In eminence, Botvinnik would stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's greatest competitors – Babe Ruth, Muhammad Ali and the great soccer player Pele. On the occasions that I was fortunate enough to be with him in the old Soviet Union, he was constantly recognized on the streets and he was always gracious with autograph seekers. His quiet dignity was particularly characteristic. He never had a need to speak but everyone around him was always ready to listen. When he did speak, he spoke of many things and his interests went far beyond the game of chess and included politics, history and education.

He was always interested in discussing his ideas for the computerization of chess. He worked for years with leading Soviet computer scientists trying to program his ideas. Work on his program PIONEER was started in the middle 1960s. He was invited to enter his program in many championships over the years, and while it looked like he would participate on several occasions, he always decided that the program was not ready, not playing at the level he wanted, and he declined our invitations. He was hampered by a lack of computing facilities on a par with those in the West, but I think he also underestimated the complexity of

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his algorithms and the difficulty of making them sufficiently efficient so that they could compete with the simple brute force search algorithms that have come to characterize the leading chess programs. In retrospect, it was an incredible transformation from world champion, a title he yielded in 1963, to the leading voice on computer chess just five years later when he published his *Computer, Chess and Long-Range Planning*.

He was an extremely disciplined person. He was disciplined at the chess table and he lived the disciplined life that made it possible for him to be successful within the communist system. He felt physical exercise was very important and when I visited him in his home in 1988, he made a point of showing off his jogging track – a straight-line path through his apartment from the front door to his bedroom. He would jog from one end to other and back to keep himself in shape. While the apartment may have been big by Soviet standards, it required many laps to wear him out!

He was bigger than the Communist System, although he was forced to live within its rules – especially its travel rules. In the Crazy Old Days, he had to get permission from the Soviet Chess Federation to travel abroad, and he could never be sure how easy it would be. They always granted him his requests, but they were somewhat inconsiderate in forcing him to wait until the last moment for their approval. The System did give him a dacha in the countryside east of Moscow in an area where many of the leading Soviets resided in the warm season. Tupolev, a leading airplane designer, had his summer home only a few doors away. Botvinnik's dacha was located in an old forest with spectacularly tall pine trees. Black Mercedes cars could be seen silently chauffeuring leading Soviets through the woods past his front door.

He made two trips to North America. The first was to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Computer-Chess Championship in Toronto in 1977 which he attended as an honoured guest. I served as his host and we communicated in a mix of my weak Russian and his better-than-expected English. It was there that DUCHESS upset KAISSA while Botvinnik and the entire audience were sure that DUCHESS had blundered. Even the Great One made some mistakes. From Toronto, he came to Montreal where he spent several days, including his 66<sup>th</sup> birthday, in my home. He was particularly interested in my furnace, something that seemed very strange to me. I was to find out some years later that he subsequently went to Germany where he purchased a German furnace for his dacha!

His second trip to North America came in 1983 for the 4<sup>th</sup> World Computer-Chess Championship in New York. He was impressed with the progress that the programs had made and went from board to board discussing the games with the programmers. He particularly enjoyed his days in New York where he had the chance to meet with some of his old cronies including Samuel Reshevsky, Reuben Fine, and Eduard Lasker.

The last time I saw him was in 1991 in Moscow with Misha Donskoy. He was in excellent health and his spirits were high. Botvinnik hosted us to a day at his dacha, lunch and a delightful walk in the woods. I will always remember and admire him for his graciousness as well as his great internal strength as a competitor. I, along with many others, will miss him.

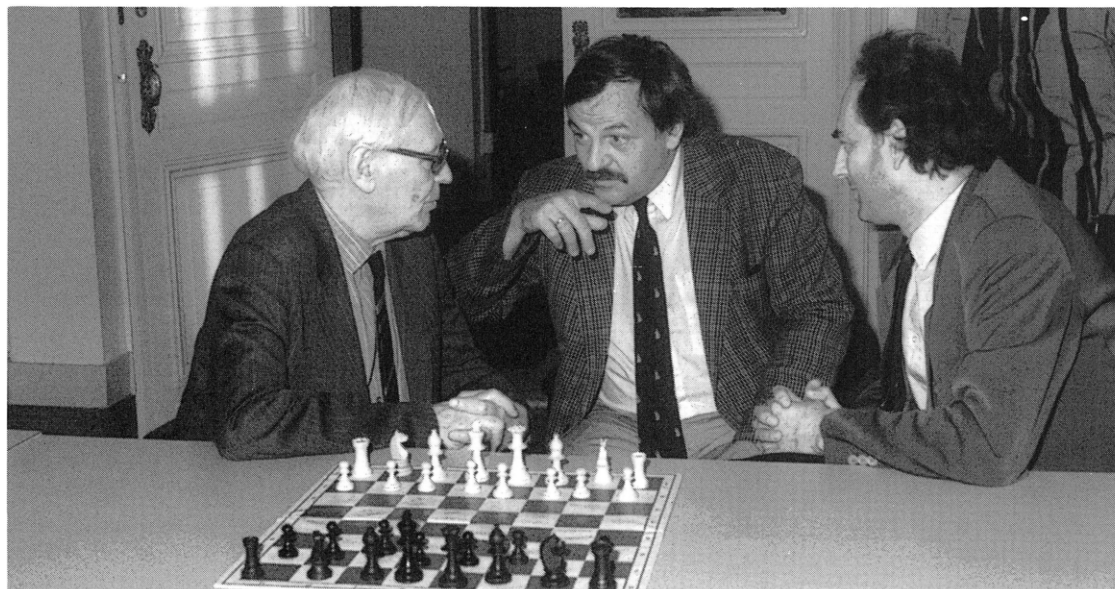


Photo by Jos Uiterwijk

#### MEMORABLY IN MAASTRICHT

From left to right: Mikhail Botvinnik, the grand old man, Alexander Münninghof, the grand interpreter and Job Cohen, the grand host, Maastricht, June 30, 1993.