GRANDMASTERS VS. COMPUTERS: LATEST

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The last few months witnessed two Grandmasters in a simultaneous exhibition against chess computers. The Rotterdam protagonist was the Russian David Bronstein, while in the village of Dieren, the well-known Dutch Grandmaster Paul van der Sterren played the leading role. Allowing for Bronstein’s advanced age of 66 years, it was decided to have him oppose 16 computers, rather less than is usual nowadays. The reasoning behind this is that even micros nowadays are quite capable and it may be held that a Grandmaster may be harder put to it to oppose simultaneous computers than to compete with the better brand of club players. The background to this is that computers are not imposed upon by their opponent’s being Grandmaster, since they are not aware of the identity of their adversary. To exacerbate matters, computers commit few errors, so many hours may elapse before a game is decided.

In spite of all this, Bronstein achieved a signal victory against his chip-based opponents. He vanguished eleven games, drew three times and lost only twice. Even by present-day standards, 78-percentage score in computer simultaneous play is a respectable achievement and many a game showed Bronstein to be equal to his achievements in his best years ever. The programs he lost to were Mephisto Portorose 68030 and the CXG Dominator, whereas his draws were against the Mephisto Portorose 68020, Mephisto Polgar 10 MHz and the American Program M Chess, formerly known as AI Chess, which latter exploited a PC with 386xx hardware. The last-mentioned program, due to US programmer Martin Hirsch, is a regular competitor in tournaments in the Netherlands, i.e., a member of computer teams or an opponent to strongly-playing human adversaries. It is an excellent chess program, the more so if it enjoys the advantage of fast hardware.

It was 4.5 hours only before all games were finished and the good score achieved by Bronstein can only be interpreted as a major achievement by this Soviet Grandmaster.

A few weeks later, one of the better Dutch Grandmasters, Paul van der Sterren, was due to test his strength against 24 chess computers. Readers please note that van der Sterren had meanwhile achieved a rating far exceeding Bronstein’s. The larger number of opponents and the sweltering heat prevailing did not exactly facilitate van der Sterren’s task. It took him all of 8.5 hours of playing to finish his simultaneous performance and even then he only achieved a 56 percentage. Paul won eight, drew eleven and lost five. Signally predominant among his opponents were ten entries by programmer Ed Schröder, participating in the tourney for the respectable total of 6.5. We are happy to publish, selected and annotated by Jeroen Noomen, a few games appropriately culled.

Switching to a subject beyond the tournaments, we have the “quicky” record of Mephisto Portorose 68030 against (very) strong chess-players, who averaged 2090 on the FIDE rating scale. In all, 118 five-minute speed-chess games were played against these humans. The computer won 103, drew 11, and lost only 4. This makes for a percentage of 92, imposing and frightening both. One should, however, allow for the known circumstance that this computer system is known to be almost indecently good at speed chess. If this needs substantiation, let us mention that this computer recently achieved first place in the FRG’s official speed-chess championship with a large lead to its strong flesh-and-blood competitors. The moral is that micros, too, nowadays should be taken seriously.

White: Bronstein
Black: Portorose 68030

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 dxc4 5. a4 Na6 6. e3 Bg4 7. Bxc4 e6 8. 0-0 Nb4 9. a5! So far Portorose’s book. White’s last move prevents Black moving a5, which would result in the b4-square falling into Black’s hands. 9. ... a6 10. Be2 Bf5 11. Bc4 Be7 12. Ne5 0-0 13. Qf3 Nd7 14. Nxd7 Qxd7 15. Rdl Be2 16. Rd2 Qc7 17. e4 Bg5 18. Re2 Bf6 19. e5 Be7 Black has lost quite some tempi by his bishop moves. As against this, d4 has lost some of its strength. 20. Be3 Rad8 21. Ne4 c5! A standard response for the position given. 22. dxc5 Rd1+ 23. Re1 Rxa1 24. Rxa1 Qxe5 25. Nxd6 Bxd6 26. cxd6 Qxb2 27. Rf1 Black is a Pawn up, though the pair of Bishops and the passed Pawn on d6 tend to compensate this. 27. ... Qc3 28. Qg4 Nc6 29. Be2 Rd8 30. h4 Since
the Pawn on d6 is doomed, Bronstein in despair attempts an attack: 30. ... Rxd6 31. h5 Nxa5? Much too greedy. The a-Pawn will keep. All of a sudden, White is granted strong attacking chances. 32. h6 g6? Better was f5. 33. Rcl Nb3 34. Qf4? The decisive error. Günther Lőwenthal had indicated 34. Rxc2! Qxc2 and only then 35. Qf4; doing this White might have won. 34. ... Nxc1 35. Qxd6 Nxe2+ 36. Kh2 Qc8 37. Bg5 Bb3 38. Qe5 f6 39. Qxf6 Qc7 40. f4 Bd5 41. g3 Nd4! 42. Kh3 Nf3 43. f5 Nxf5+ 44. Qxg5 exf5 45. Qf6 a5 White resigns.

White: Bronstein
Black: The Final Chesscard

1. d4 e6 2. Nf3 d5 3. c4 Nf6 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Qc2? An interesting variation, invented by Tony Miles. 5. ... 0-0 6. e4 dxe4 7. Nxe4 Nxe4 8. Qxe4 Nd7 9. Bd3 Nf6 10. Qe2 c5 The Final Chesscard was not led astray by White's unusual fifth move. The program will continue to move logically, here as in the sequel. 11. dxc5 Qa5+ 12. Bd2 Qxc5 13. Bc3 Rd8 14. 0-0 Bd7 15. Ne5 Rac8 16. Rad1 Ba4 17. b3 Bc6 Also possible was Be8. 18. b4 Qb6 19. a3 Ba4 20. Rcl Qc7 21. Rfe1 Bf8 In order to prevent potential sacrifices on f7. 22. Bh1 b6 23. Qf3 a6 24. Qh3 Bronstein assiduously constructs an attack. 24. ... h6 25. Qe3 Qb7 26. h4! Since the centre is stabile, White is free to start an flanking attack. 26. ... Be7? It seems correct to play Be8 to protect f7. Even so, the white attack is a threat. 27. g4! Ne5 allows the penetration as below, though nothing better springs to mind. 28. Nxf7! Kxf7 29. Qe6+ Kf8 30. Bh7 and after Nf6 follows Bxf6 and mate. Black resigns.

White: Paul van der Sterren
Black: M Chess


White: Paul van der Sterren
Black: Mephisto College Turbo


White: Paul van der Sterren
Black: Mephisto Polgar 10 MHz