

**Tal, Mihail**  
**• Kortschnoj, Viktor**

Candidates sf1 (1)

[A.J. Goldsby I]

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This is a very famous draw ...  
 my main focus here was  
 obviously the K+P endgame.

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I saw it analyzed in several  
 books ... and also a great  
 number of magazines over  
 the years. (Several authors ...  
 Furman, Averbakh, Smyslov,  
 Botvinnik, Keres, and Gligoric,  
 just to name a few "chess stars" ...  
 claimed that Tal missed  
 a clear win, but none of  
 the chess engines really  
 substantiate this point of  
 view. 5-10 years ago, the  
 engines were quite unreliable  
 in the endgame, but, in recent  
 years, the chess programs have  
 made huge strides and can  
 quickly calculate all of the  
 important lines.)

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[The ratings come from the  
 historical ratings website,  
 "Chess Metrics," by the

**E19**  
**2757**  
**2759**  
 1968

respected statistician,  
 Jeff Sonas. According to  
 that website, Fischer was  
 the #1 player in 1968,  
 Korchnoi was #2, and Tal  
 was the #3 player.]  
**1.d4 Nf6 ; 2.c4 e6 ;**  
**3.Nf3 b6 ; 4.g3 , (fian.)**  
 This is a solid play but it  
 is also the older move.  
 (This game was played  
 well before Kasparov  
 came on the scene and  
 showed that a3!  
 <on move four or five>  
 to be a path that generally  
 gives White the best chance  
 at a solid advantage.)

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[I prefer the try: 4.a3 ,  
 see any good ref. work.  
 {This is the Petrosian  
 System ... many books  
 have been written on  
 this particular line.} ]

(Diagram)

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[ For more on this opening,  
 see MCO-15, beginning on

X A B C D E F G H Y  
 8 r ~~n~~ l ~~w~~ k ~~v~~ - t ( {  
 7 p - p p + p p p '  
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 3 + - + - + N P - #  
 2 P P - + P P - P "  
 1 R N ~~v~~ Q ~~k~~ L + R !  
 x a b c d e f g h y

X A B C D E F G H Y  
 8 r ~~n~~ - ~~w~~ - t k + ( {  
 7 p l + p ~~v~~ p p p '  
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 4 - + P P - + - + \$  
 3 + - ~~w~~ - + N P - #  
 2 P P - + P P L P "  
 1 R - ~~v~~ - + R ~~k~~ - ! [  
 x a b c d e f g h y

page # 563. ]

4...Bb7 ; 5.Bg2 Be7 ;  
 6.0-0 0-0 ; 7.Nc3 Ne4! ;

A known antidote, after this well-timed play by the second party, White has problems trying to really demonstrate a clear edge.

8.Qc2 Nxc3 ; 9.Qxc3 c5 ;  
 So far, this is all a <<standard>> book line ... ..

[ See MCO-15, page # 574; columns # 19-22, and all of the respective notes. ]

This move, (9...c7-c5!?) is probably sufficient for equality, any exchange in the center will lessen White's dominance there. (DF14 prefers 9...Be4.)

A fairly good and relatively recent example of this game would have to be:

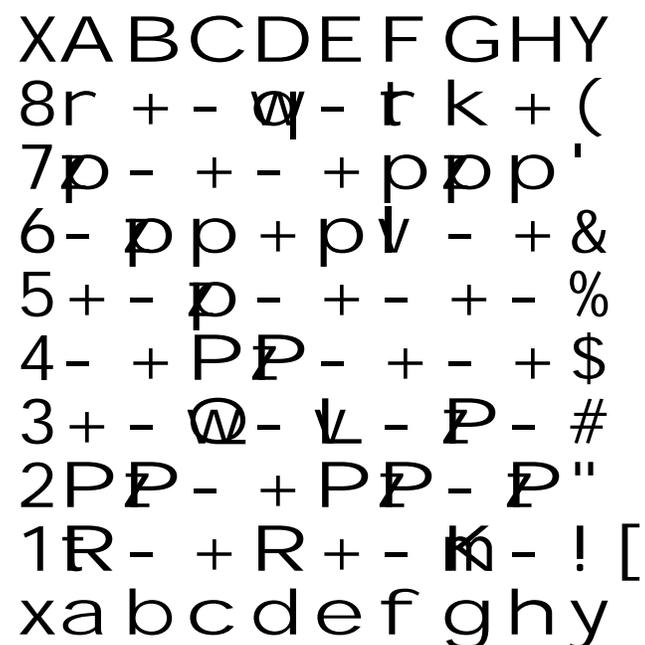
GM Evgeny Bareev (2645) - GM Judit Polgar (2727); World Champ. Candidates Semi-Finals (4) / 2007.

{Bareev won a long game, 1-0 in 54 moves, however the machine shows many improvements for Black.}

10.Be3 Bf6 ; 11.Rfd1!? Bxf3! ;

**12.Bxf3 Nc6 ; 13.Bxc6 dxc6 ;**

Temporarily, Black has doubled Pawns, but they are about to be liquidated ...



The current position makes for an interesting diagram.

White now penetrates to the 7th rank, the result of which is just more exchanges.

**14.Qd3 cxd4 ; 15.Bxd4 c5 ; 16.Bc3 Qe7 ; 17.Qd7 Rfd8 ; 18.Qxe7 Bxe7 ; 19.e4 h5!?** ;

This is not a bad move but Houdini's plan of >/= 19...f6; and then 20...Kf7; has to be a little better.

**20.Kf1 Bf6!?** ;

Korchnoi gives himself doubled Pawns on the King-side. While not losing, I think it was unnecessary ... the plan outlined after the previous ply-set has to be less risky.

**21.Bxf6 gxf6 ; 22.Ke2 Kg7 ;**

**23.Rxd8** , (paring-down)

M. Tal, a great master of the endgame, knows that the doubled Pawns in Black's camp means that White will have some real winning chances.

[ RR23.a3 Kg6÷ ]

**23...Rxd8 ; 24.Rd1 Rxd1 ;**

**25.Kxd1** , ("=")

A king-and-pawn-endgame has been reached, most engines show that the current position is very close to dead level. (This would be a good place to have another diagram.)

[ < 25.Ke3?? , [DIH]  
(Note for the PDF file ...

the above move is in here only so that I could add a break. "DIH" = delete in the HTML version ... so you won't even see this note on the web page!) ]

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XABCDEFGHIY
8- + - + - + - + ( {
7p - + - + p k - '
6- p - + p p - + &
5+ - p - + - + p %
4- + P + P + - + $
3+ - + - + - P - #
2P P - + - P - P "
1+ - + K + - + - !
x a b c d e f g h y
    
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If White has any advantage at all, then engines like Houdini 3.0, DF14 and also Deep Shredder ... show that it is literally only 10-20 one-hundredths of a point. (Which is clearly NOT enough to win the game!)

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I spent almost a full day

analyzing this K+P endgame ... with the help of several strong chess engines. Black can probably draw with 25...e5; but I much prefer Korchnoi's move.

**25...Kg6! ; 26.Ke2 Kg5!?** ;

There is probably nothing seriously wrong with this move, but here it just doesn't feel right. (White can kick the BK with h4+ or even f4+ at some point.)

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To be fair, however, I should point out that 26...Kg5; IS the top choice of several good chess engines - like Stockfish. (And a few others.)

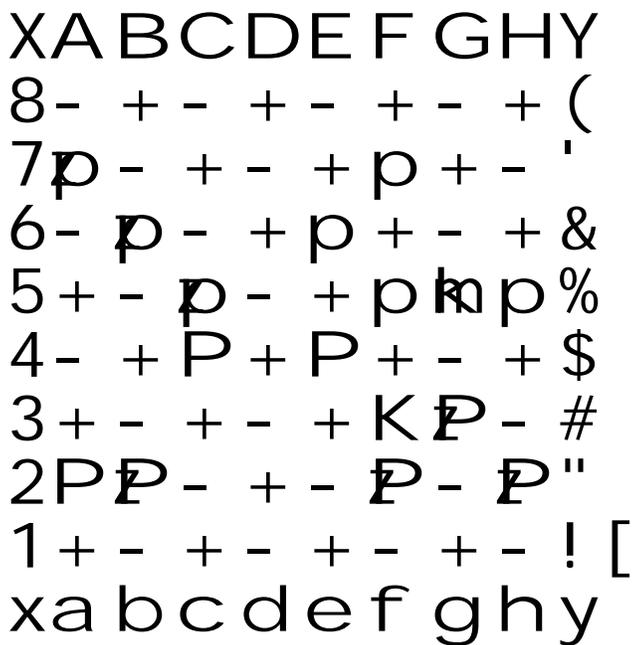
.  
[Deep Fritz 14 gives the following line here: (>/=) RR26...f5 ; 27.Ke3 Kg5 ; 28.exf5 Kxf5 ; 29.f3 , +/- White has a tiny edge ... but it will never add up to anything that the first player can deposit into the chess bank. (IMO, its an iron-clad draw.) ]

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**27.Kf3 f5!?** ; (hmm)

Probably ... eventually ... Black has to play this, but it is all a question of timing.

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[ RR27...a6 ; 28.h4+ , "+/=" ]



We have reached the critical position, and it is definitely time for another diagram.

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In this position, Smyslov once published an analysis in one chess magazine ... which ran several pages. In that work, both Smyslov and Furman strongly asserted that 28.e5!

would have won the game for White.

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**28.h3!?** , (Ha, ha, ha!)

The play of h2-h3 ... originally given a question mark by Smyslov and Furman and then the same judgment was agreed upon by Paul Keres ... turns out to be the #1 or #2 move choice of many chess engines! (As I write this note - several days ago I did an overnight D.P.A. and 28.h3, WAS the FIRST choice of DF14! (It is a flexible, it keeps just about all of White's options open, and this is probably why Mikhail Tal played it in the first place.)

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[For a very long time, I follow the analysis of Smyslov and Furman, quoted in the book, "Power Chess," by GM Paul Keres:  
 RR28.e5! f6! ; 29.h4+! Kg6 ;  
 30.Kf4 a6! ; 31.a3! b5!! ;  
 Normally, it is a loss to

give your opponent an  
OUTSIDE PASSED PAWN ...  
but Black has all of the  
bases covered here.

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32.cxb5 axb5 ; 33.b3! fxe5+ ;

**A)** The following line - found  
mostly by the chess engines -  
is so fascinating that I have  
to show it:

RR34.Kxe5 Kf7 ; 35.f3 Ke7 ;

36.f4 Kf7 ; 37.a4? , (error)

Normally, getting an outside  
Passed Pawn will guarantee  
one side a virtual win, but  
here is a wonderful exception!

( All White had to do to  
draw this ending was to  
find the following line:

>/= 1 37.b4 c4 ;

38.Kd4 Ke7 ; 39.a4 bxa4 ;

40.Kxc4 Kd6 ; 41.b5 a3 ;

42.Kb3 Kc5 ; 43.Kxa3 Kxb5 ;

44.Kb3= , w/a draw. ).

37...bxa4! ; 38.bxa4 Ke7 ;

39.a5 Kd7 ; 40.a6 Kc6 ;

41.a7 Kb7 ; (zug)

And here ... White finds  
himself in a rare form of  
a move dilemma. If the  
first player could hop his  
King over to the c4-square,  
he would win easily. Since

he cannot, he must move  
forward ... & lose the game!

42.Kxe6 c4 ; "-/+"

Black is winning easily. ;

**B)** 34.Ke3!! , (Amazing!)

It is extremely rare for a  
tactic like this to occur in  
a pure K+P endgame.

(Normally, to not recapture  
is a disaster, but here White  
holds the trump card of the  
outside passed pawn.)

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Now a careless move ...

like playing the Black  
King to the h6-square ...

will lose to a4! But all  
is not lost, to maintain

the balance, all Black  
has to do is to return  
the extra material.

f4+! ; (Correct!)

Black returns the material,  
other lines are not convincing.

(See the analysis, below.)

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( Yuri Averbakh and I Maizelis,  
in the book: "Pawn Endings,"  
(Chess Digest, pub. 1974)  
<position/example # 802,  
beginning on page #267;>

give only the following line of analysis ...

(I stick to just their main variation, and pretty much ignore the many branches here.):

< 34...Kf6? ; (bad)

This is wrong, the engine throws a fit just after this move is played! (Going from equal, to "plus-slash-minus, + 2.52.)

35.a4 bxa4 ; 36.bxa4 Ke7 ;  
 37.Kd3 Kd6 ; 38.Kc4 Kc6 ;  
 39.a5 f4 ; 40.gxf4 exf4 ;  
 41.a6 f3!?! ; 42.a7 Kb7 ;  
 43.Kxc5 Kxa7 ; 44.Kd6 Kb6 ;  
 45.Kxe6 Kc7 ; 46.Kf5 Kd6 ;  
 47.Kf4 Ke6 ; 48.Kxf3+- ,

(Diagram)

White is winning ... you can check this position with any engine you like. ).

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Going back to the our original line of analysis, (White has to

X	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Y
8	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	{
7	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	'
6	-	+	-	+	K	+	-	+	&
5	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	P	%
4	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	P	\$
3	+	-	+	-	+	K	+	-	#
2	-	+	-	+	-	P	-	+	"
1	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	!
x	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	y

capture, 35.Kd2?!, fxc3; will favor Black.):

35.gxf4 exf4+ ; 36.Kxf4 Kf6 ;  
 37.Ke4 Ke7 ; 38.a4 c4! ;  
 39.a5 cxb3 ; 40.Kd3 Kd6 ;  
 41.Kc3

**B1)** Our famous crew of analysts

only give the following line:

< / = < 41...Kc5?? ;

IMO, it is rare scenario when a King move ... that immediately

grabs the opposition ... loses by force!!! (All the strong chess engines "see" this as a blunder, the evals going from near equal to +12-15!)

42.Kxb3 e5 ;

**B1a)** In case you are not yet

convinced that Black is completely lost ... I offer the following two lines as our ...

"the body of proof" ...

43.f3 b4!?! ; (human)

I showed this position to a few guys at chess club tonight, they all wanted to play this move.

( Just blindly following the engine moves yields the following variation here:

*RR43...Kd5 ; 44.a6 Kc6 ; 45.Kb4 Kb6 ; 46.a7 Kxa7 ; 47.Kxb5 Kb7 ; 48.Kc5 e4 ; 49.fxe4 Kc7 ; 50.Kd5 Kd7*

;  
*51.Ke5 Ke7 ; 52.Kf5 Kf7 ; 53.Kg5 Kg7 54.Kxh5+- ).*

44.a6 Kb6 ; 45.Kxb4 Kxa6

;  
46.Kc5 Kb7 ; 47.Kd5+- ;

**B1b)** 43.f3!+- , "+/-" when White wins easily.

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**B2)** 41...Kc6! ; (correct)

This simple move draws easily, and all of the engines will confirm this.

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(We return to the main stem of our analysis line here.)

42.Kxb3 Kc5 ; 43.Kc3 b4+ ;

44.Kb3 Kb5 ; 45.a6 Kxa6 ;

46.Kxb4 Kb6 ; (stand-off)

This is the point of 41...Kc6!

---> When the dust finally settles, the Black King can hold the opposition and still maintain the draw.

47.Kc4 Kc6 ; 48.Kd4 Kd6 ;

49.Ke4 Ke7 ; 50.Ke5

, (oppo.)

The most direct try.

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( Or White could try:

*RR50.Kf4 Kf6 ; 51.f3 e5+ ;*

*52.Ke4 Ke6= ;*

which is also a draw. ).

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50...Kf7 ; 51.f3 Ke7 ;

52.f4 Kf7= ; (100% equal!)

It is a DEAD DRAW ...

all of the engines evaluate

this position as "0.00,"

which is as drawn as it gets!!!

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X	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Y
8	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	(
7	+	-	+	-	+	K	+	-	'
6	-	+	-	+	p	+	-	+	&
5	+	-	+	-	K	-	+	p	%
4	-	+	-	+	-	P	-	P	\$
3	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	#
2	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	"
1	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	!
x	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	y

This analysis diagram should convince even the most hardened skeptic.

(Even if White exchanges off the f-Pawns and wins Black's h-Pawn, it is still a draw as long as the BK can reach the important f8-square.) ]

After a deep analysis of some of the potential K+P endings, we return to the actual game.

**28...Kf6 ; 29.Kf4 e5+ ; 30.Ke3 a6 ; 31.b3 ,**

This is actually the first choice of DF14, but Smyslov, Furman and Keres seem to think it was clearly inferior!

[In the book, "Power Chess," Keres claims that the following line was a big improvement over the actual game:

31.a3! Ke6!? ;

This is OK but Houdini shows that 31...b5! (right away) might be even better.

32.exf5+ Kxf5 ; 33.f3 f6 ;

34.g4+!? , (premature?)

The line given by Furman, and later improved upon by Smyslov, but the engines don't seem to like it.

( Probably a little more tricky was the following line here: *RR34.h4 Ke6 ; 35.g4 f5 ; 36.g5 Kf7 ; 37.b4 a5 ; 38.bxa5 bxa5 ; 39.Kd3 Ke6 ; 40.Kd2<sup>2</sup> ,*

The engines give White almost a third of a Pawn ... but its is all nonsense, as it is an easy draw ... by "mutual terror," as as GM Arty Bisguier once described a similar situation of a K+P endgame at a U.S. Open. (Neither King can leave the square of the pawn,

the BK has to keep an eye on the g-Pawn, while the WK has to stick around to watch the Black Pawn duo on e5 and f5.) ).

34...hxg4 ; 35.hxg4+ Ke6! ; This is a HUGE improvement over the line, (with 35...Kg6?!); as given by Keres, Smyslov, etc. 36.Ke4 b5! ; 37.cxb5 axb5 ; 38.b3 Kd6 ; 39.Kd3 Kc6!= ; with a VERY drawn position. (Check it with any engine.) ]

[\*\*\* \*\*

The continuation of:

31.exf5 Kxf5 ; 32.f3 Ke6 ; 33.g4 f5 ; 34.g5<sup>2</sup> Kf7 ; transposes to a variation already examined here. ]

The rest of the game is pretty much a draw, I saw no "blips" in the engine evals ... which would indicate that one side (or the other) missed an easy win or made a significant mistake in this endgame.

**31...Ke6 ; 32.exf5+ Kxf5 ; 33.f3 Ke6 ; 34.g4 f5 ; 35.gxf5+ Kxf5 ; 36.h4 Kf6 ; 37.Ke4 Ke6 ; 38.a3 b5 ;**

**39.cxb5 axb5 ; 40.Kd3 Kd6 ;** Its now a draw ... (Engines at "0.00" again.)

X A B C D E F G H Y

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7 + - + - + - + - '

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2 - + - + - + - + "

1 + - + - + - + - ! [

x a b c d e f g h y

A wonderful endgame ... but it seems only one that a chess engine could really fathom.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

#1.) "Power Chess," by GM Paul Keres.

(Chapter/game #19, page # 212.)

# 2.) The book: "Pawn Endings," by Yuri Averbakh and I Maizelis, (Published by Chess Digest, 1974. Copyright in 1974.)

<position/example # 802,  
beginning on page #267.>

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