



Prensa Mundial

TOPALOV'S

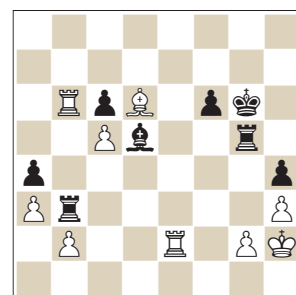
Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam

In the first row of seats immediately behind the arbiters' table, Governor Alberto Rodriguez Saa intently watches the only game that is still going on. Flanking to him are Florencio Campomanes, who displays the solemn mien that befits the occasion, and Argentinian grandmaster Miguel Quinteros, who at times whispers to the Governor what he thinks about the position. The Caja de los Trebejos saw empty days in the early rounds, but now the giant 'Chess Box', which was constructed in a mind-boggling eleven weeks, is almost packed to capacity for the last round but one of the San Luis world championship. And with good reason. If Veselin Topalov

doesn't lose his game as Black against Rustam Kasimdzhanov, the Bulgarian will be World Champion with one round to spare. Vishy Anand and Peter Svidler, both trailing by one and a half points, could still have tested Topalov's patience and nerves if they had won today, but the Indian had to settle for a draw despite a ferocious onslaught on Alexander Morozevich's king, while the Russian reached the same result with a Marshall Attack that only brought him a slightly worse ending against Judit Polgar.

Topalov's game is a tense affair. With the title in sight he has opted for the Berlin Defence. During the first few hours Kasimdzhanov had been exerting some annoying pressure and now he's won a pawn, but it's not a big pawn with oppo-

site-coloured bishops on the board. Moreover, Topalov has created counterplay with a deft rook manoeuvre. And this rook takes on an even more prominent part after White's 34th move.



Kasimdzhanov-Topalov
position after 34. ♖h2

34... ♖c3! A first indication for the audience that Topalov is going for the initiative. **35. ♗d2 ♖eg3!** And

He arrived in Argentina as one of several hot favourites and the race promised to be tight – but not for long. Seven rounds and an explosion of historic proportions later there was only talk of one new champion. In the first half of the FIDE world championship in San Luis, Veselin Topalov smashed the opposition with an unbelievable 6½ out of 7 to take a lead that

here's another one, a move that no computer indicates, as Topalov's manager Silvio Danailov proudly observed later. The tension and the silence in the hall are almost palpable now, particularly when it is rent by a mobile phone that starts ringing. As if stung by a bee, arbiters and organizers sit up and start looking around for the culprit, while Topalov stoically puts his fingers in his ears. **36. ♖xg3 hxg3+ 37. ♖h1 ♖f5 38. ♖d1 ♖f2 39. ♖b8** The rook is badly needed in the defence against the f-pawn that is threatening to roll down the board with devastating effect. **39...f5 40. ♖d8 ♖xg2+ 41. ♖g1 ♖d5** Here Black could play for a win with **41...♖g5**, but Topalov is understandably satisfied with a draw, which Kasimdzhanov offered him after **42. ♖1xd5** Draw.

recovering from the deep economic crisis of 2001, but the governor is optimistic that the investments will pay off. The 'Chess Box' can be used as a conference centre and the province's information highway will attract the music and film industry. The chess players remain welcome as well, as he announced that San Luis will bid for the 2010 Olympiad. To accommodate all the players they intend to build an Olympic village. Ambitious plans, for sure, but at 800 kilometres west of Buenos Aires, San Luis is not exactly round the corner.

Three days later, at the closing ceremony, Veselin Topalov speaks in the name of all the players when he thanks the organizers for their warm hospitality. And it's true that they had gone out of their way to

Magnificent Seven

allowed him to coast home in the second half. The Bulgarian pocketed 30 per cent of the one million dollar prize-fund and gained enough Elo points to boost the status of his title. In the next world ranking Topalov will be in first place, as the third player in history to break the magic 2800 barrier.

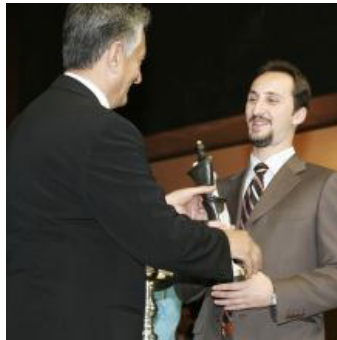
Within seconds the playing area is flooded with people, like a boxing ring after a bout, and amid endless flashlights and applause Topalov is embraced and congratulated by Alberto Rodriguez Saa, the man who brought the FIDE world championship to San Luis. For the moment, the event has been everything the governor could have hoped for, but only time will tell whether all the effort and money have been worth it. Apart from the prize-money (one million dollars), it is said that at least a further ten million dollars have been invested in the construction of the 'Chess Box', the refurbishing of the Potrero de los Funes hotel and in general improvements to the province's infrastructure. These are huge amounts in a country that is still

make the eight contestants and their partners and seconds feel at home. For instance, each player was offered a mobile phone (first three hours worldwide for free), a laptop with a fast connection and a car with a driver. Journalists, too, had nothing to complain about once they reached Potrero de los Funes: dozens of computers in the pressroom, wireless LAN everywhere and lots of friendly and helpful staff. But you first had to get there! Contacting the organizers beforehand was virtually impossible and the championship's official travel agency, based in Buenos Aires, seemed to have the same problem. As a result, many guests found it impossible to book a room in the players' hotel and had to stay in San Luis, a 20-minute taxi ride from the venue. For

many weeks I also found it impossible to make any headway in my attempts to book a room, until I struck lucky. In an attempt to reach the chief organizer directly at his workplace, I happened to get a young man on the phone who had absolutely nothing to do with the organization, but who was kind enough to go to the hotel and arrange the booking.

Topalov's improvised speech was the high point of the closing ceremony. Slightly nervous, but in fluent Spanish he struck all the right notes by thanking really everyone (even including the journalists), accepted the chair he was offered at the university of San Luis and joked that he might take part in the next elections for governor of the province. The laughter and applause he drew with this last remark were further evidence of how happy everyone was with the new champion. It was, after all, his incredible fighting spirit that had made the championship such a success. Or rather the unbridgeable lead he had taken so early on. It's hard to imagine that this eight-player format would have been received so well if the title had been decided in a five-minute tie-breaker. Also, to avoid any misunderstanding, I need to add that the other participants didn't pull their punches either and showed great combativity. There were hardly any Petroffs (and three out of five of these were decided!) and in three rounds all games ended in a decision. Perhaps the immense popularity of 1.e4 (which resulted in 25 Sicilians) played a crucial role. Out of 56 games no fewer than 50(!) started with 1.e4, if we include Morozevich's 1.♘c3 against Polgar, which quickly transposed to a Najdorf.

Still, the immense impact of Topalov's 6½ out of 7 cannot be denied, if only for the fact that almost everyone felt the champion-



Three trophies awaited the winner. The first one was handed to Veselin Topalov by Adolfo Rodriguez Saa, the second by Governor Alberto Rodriguez Saa, and the third by Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.

ship was already decided when, halfway through, he already was two points ahead of his closest pursuer, Svidler, while two other pre-tournament favourites, Anand and Leko, were trailing by three points. Obviously, this was a bitter pill for the other players, if only because they were soon asked more questions at the daily press conferences about Topalov's play than about their own games. Leko

even expressed his annoyance at the fact that Topalov was playing all his games at the same table, a result of the number he had drawn at the opening ceremony. Perhaps he felt that Topalov was sitting at 'his' table waiting for the others to come and do their exam, and he considered lodging a protest. When he heard that this would cost him 500 dollars if the protest was rejected, Leko abandoned the idea.

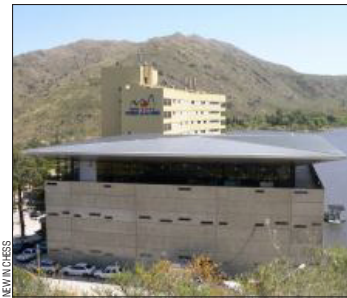
For Topalov the big lead was a luxurious cushion that allowed him to strike a more defensive attitude in the second leg. The seven draws that he added to his total were more than sufficient, but the bare figures are deceptive. Apart from two short draws against Leko and Polgar, they were certainly not bloodless draws. He missed an excellent chance to improve his score in his second game against Morozevich, when he spoiled a completely winning position, and he had to be on the alert in the other games. Essentially, the last critical moment was his game from Round 9 against Anand. Even if he had lost, Topalov would have maintained a comfortable lead, but with five more rounds to go his nerves might have started to play tricks on him.

RL 7.1 – C65

Vishy Anand

Veselin Topalov

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♙c5 5.c3 0-0 6.♙g5 h6 7.♙h4 g5!? Topalov also shows himself an excellent psychologist. He almost forces his opponent to play for a win. The risks he has to take will also offer Black chances. 8.♙g3 d6 9.♘bd2 a6 10.♙xc6 bxc6 11.0-0 ♙a7 12.d4 Anand picks up the gauntlet and decides to sacrifice a piece. 12...g4 13.♙h4 If he withdraws the knight, Black will have a good game. 13...gxf3 14.♙xf3 ♙g7 15.♙g3+ ♙h7



The Caja de los Trebejos was a perfect theatre to follow the games. The 'Chess Box' was constructed next to the Potrero de los Funes hotel in a mind-boggling eleven weeks and was still absent in the photo of the hotel on the official championship poster.



But here Anand discovered that on the move he had planned, 16. ♖d3, Black has the strong reply 16... ♜g8! in order to meet 17. f4 with 17... ♜g4. No longer sure about who was better, he decided to avoid any further risks and took the draw. 16. ♖f3 ♘g7 17. ♖g3+ Draw.

In the games section of this report you will find all of Topalov's wins annotated, plus the draw against Anand in Round 2, in which he was also winning. As already mentioned, there were many more highlights in this championship, and these, too, are presented, together with highly entertaining and instructive notes. Not everyone will agree on the format of

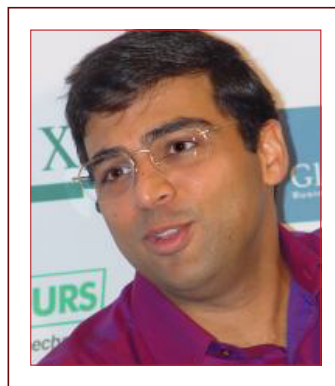
the championship, but there can be no doubt that the harvest of great games in San Luis was rich.

You can find Topalov's first thoughts about the biggest success in his career in the interview we had with the new champion in San Luis. Of course, we also spoke to the other participants, and we will present some of their statements in the order they finished in.

Two Bad Days

With 5 out of 7, **Vishy Anand** was clearly the most productive player in the second leg, but his strong fi-

nal sprint came too late after the damage he suffered in the first half. Following a relatively easy win against Polgar and a beautiful piece of preparation against Adams that put him in the shared lead, disaster struck in Round 4, when the Indian ran into Kasimdzhanov's preparation. One loss might have been bearable, but when he also lost a badly played game against Morozevich in Round 7, he no longer had any realistic winning chances. As always, Anand's 'failure' invited the standard criticism that he hadn't taken the tournament seriously enough. It's the fate of a man with such extraordinary chess talent. Whenever he wins, people feel that everything has come easily to him and when he doesn't win, they blame his mentality, even if he showed some great chess. Anand himself had this to say: 'I was well prepared, as you can see, and I was also quite motivated. I simply had weak moments. The difference with Topalov is striking because he didn't have weak moments at all. His weak moments were only rela-



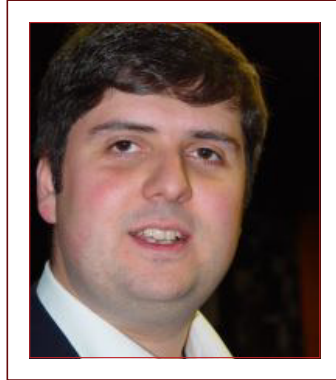
tive, when in the second half he ran out of steam a little bit. But I just had two bad days. These things can happen. You're fighting for points, you gamble once in a while and sometimes it goes badly. These black games I lost turned out to be very expensive in the end.'

Looking back, he was relieved that he had fought back to claim second place, but of course he was a bit bitter that he hadn't displayed the same high level all through the event. 'Yeah, but in the end you have to say that a player who doesn't have any weak moments deserves to win. I think 6½ out of 7 flatters him slightly, but it happens this way. You cannot say it is undeserved. You put your opponents under pressure and they crack, and he was doing this very well.'

As expected, Anand felt no inclination to speak about the status of Topalov's title, as he believes it's a futile discussion. 'I am just happy if tournaments happen, if the next cycle happens. I don't think that this tournament was stronger than New Delhi, but we all know that the knockout gets a very bad press. There's no fighting it, so I won't bother. But Kasparov's retirement will ironically help Toppy, because as long as he was around there was always this why not him, why not him. It's funny, Kasparov and Kramnik have not played here, but because one of them retired the event may have gained, but I have no idea. Anyway, it was clear that this thing would heal with time. By the year 2015 I hope the chess world will stop going on about the great legacy going back to Steinitz or whatever.'

Peter Svidler finished equal with Anand but had to settle for third place because the Indian won more games. 'I felt that with a cer-

tain amount of luck almost any of the players here could have won, myself included. Somehow my

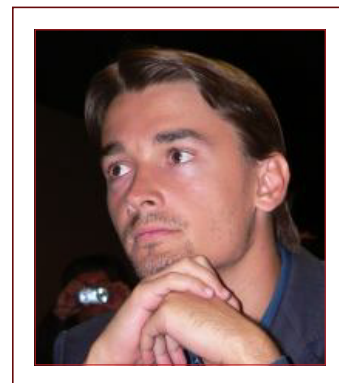


openings worked out well, I didn't have any seriously bad positions, and when the openings go OK, I always feel I am in with a chance.' Svidler played well, and for a long time he was Topalov's closest follower, although he realized he was on a well-nigh impossible mission. 'Here, obviously, there was no fight for the first place. After the first half it resembled one of the good old Soviet Olympiads where you get these Russian team meetings in the evening seriously discussing that, say, Hungary is only three points behind us and that we have to stay focused, whilst everyone else has long switched to fighting for the silver.' Svidler only lost one game, but it was a rather crucial one against Topalov in Round 5. 'It was painful to lose that game. I got hit with this novelty. Well it was not exactly a novelty, I had expected it and I reacted in a very reasonable manner. At some point he refused a repetition, which objectively was what he should have done. All credit to him, at least in the first half he played every single game to win. This is unusual and it's great for the public. This was one of the causes, because I don't think he thought he was better. But he still continued to play for a win and in doing so he actually

gave me a chance of getting a serious advantage. But I missed it, and in four moves I ruined a completely reasonable position. I am not saying that I would have won but for that, but the race could have become a bit tighter.'

As he was Kramnik's second in his match against Leko, an obvious question was if Svidler felt that Topalov had won the world championship. He said that he felt this was the case, but also expressed his hopes regarding a reunification, even if they are faint. 'This is obviously an interesting subject for me, because I was in Brissago and I am not prepared to say that Brissago was a complete waste of time. I don't think so. It wouldn't harm anyone at all if they played a match. But it's unlikely, I suppose.'

As FIDE decided that the first four players from San Luis qualify for the next world championship

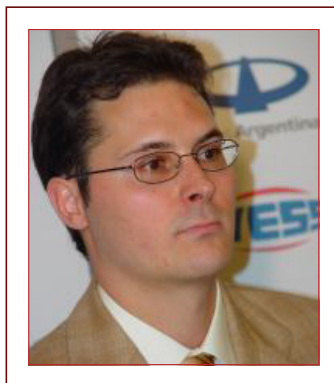


tournament, finishing fourth clearly had its charms. **Alexander Morozevich** was happy that he claimed this spot and also felt relieved that for the first time in many months he had gained some Elo points again. Yet he also looked at his play with his typical self-criticism. 'I think I was quite lucky here, because I saved so many lost positions. I think I made eight draws, in six of which I was losing at some point. This is too

much.’ Morozevich’s main concern in San Luis was the level of his play and nothing else. Even on the free days he was studying for six hours. The Muscovite no longer speaks about being an amateur and the possibility that he may quit chess altogether, but has clearly found back his love for the game. He has improved his opening preparation and felt that he got ‘more or less good positions after the opening with both colours’ and that the mistakes came only later. He found back his appetite for chess this summer, when he both discovered a new approach that might put an end to a series of weak results and decided no longer to be bothered by the chaos in the chess world. ‘There are still many things with which I am seriously dissatisfied, but objectively I cannot change them. So I have to accept things as they are, even if they are not very logical or pleasant. Maybe after three years of being not too professional this is a new breath. It fully depends on my mental state – whether I take chess seriously or not. I was too upset with many things in the chess world and switched my attention to non-chess things. Now I just want to play as well as I can, whatever happens in the chess world. My shared second place in the rapid in Mainz and my result here were OK, but I think that I can still improve. My results in 2006 will be better and I will be back in the top 10 quite soon.’

The participant to leave San Luis as the most disappointed player was probably **Peter Leko**. Seen as one of the odds-on favourites at the outset, the Hungarian grandmaster played a dramatic tournament. The first blow came as early as Round 1, when he lost a winning position against Topalov. But there was more in store. In the sec-

ond round he spoiled his winning chances against Morozevich in time-trouble and the next day he



ran into a second defeat against Svidler. With admirable fighting spirit Leko managed to fight back to 50 per cent, but by then Topalov had long since vanished over the horizon. Leko kept trying till the last day, when he scored a nice win against Kasimdzhanov, but he also suffered another major upset in the second half when he misplayed a winning position against Morozevich and kept on trying till he finally lost.

Leko blamed his bad fortune in the first game for a lot of what happened next, but he also saw a broader explanation: ‘I should have relaxed more. I had one month of very heavy preparation. I was working an incredible lot and the pressure was too high.’

‘This tournament came too soon after Brissago. Only one year. Also in Hungary the tension was incredible, that within one year I could again fight for the title. Things could have been completely different if I had won the first game in 20 moves against one of the main rivals. Then you get a boost and the tension goes, but actually almost everything went wrong.’

Leko called Topalov a deserved winner, but unsurprisingly did not share the enthusiasm of many people who raved about this champi-

onship. ‘This is just a tournament and we have decided who is in the best form at this moment. It does not mean at all that this guy is better than the others. This was the format and now Topalov is the FIDE World Champion, but just the FIDE World Champion, not the absolute World Champion. We still have Kramnik, and in order to feel completely legitimate as a World Champion you have to beat him. It was clear from the beginning that this format favours Topalov. If Kramnik had played here I would have put my money on Topalov, but in a match I would put all my money on Kramnik, of course.’

Rustam Kasimdzhanov finished in sixth place and lost his title without too many regrets. ‘In the past



year lots of things happened that prevented me from taking this title all too seriously. After all, if the title is not taken very seriously by the world around you, it would be ridiculous for you to take it seriously.’ For him San Luis was just another Linares, a very strong double round robin where he wanted to perform better than in Linares. ‘And above all, to play different chess, to step aside from this defensive chess that I was trying to play in Linares for some completely unknown reason. I was just trying to make 12 draws and later, when I was analysing