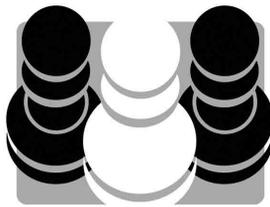


Mikhail Tal's Best Games 3

The Invincible

By

Tibor Karolyi



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Preface to Volume 3

The Invincible is the third and final part of my investigation into Mikhail Tal's unique life and chess career. It spans the period from the beginning of 1972 up to his death in 1992. At the start of this period it had been more than a decade since Tal lost the return match for the World Championship against Botvinnik, yet Tal's career was about to experience a resurgence, helped by his second marriage and a successful medical operation, which led to a big improvement in his health.

In the early seventies, Tal made history by first setting a record unbeaten streak, and then breaking his own record with an even longer streak! By that time Fischer had become World Champion and Karpov was the rising star of Soviet chess. Tal worked with Karpov to help him prepare for his 1975 match against Fischer, although in the end it didn't matter because the enigmatic American forfeited the title.

The Magician from Riga went on to become Karpov's second, his valuable input helping Karpov to defend his title against Korchnoi in 1978 and 1981. Tal's level of play varied during these years, but his genius never stopped producing beautiful ideas in his games. In 1978, Tal achieved a huge milestone by equalling Botvinnik's record of six victories in the super-strong Soviet Championship. The following year, Tal tied for first place with Karpov in the Montreal 'Tournament of Stars' – one of the strongest tournaments in chess history, which included almost all of the world's top players. Towards the end of his life in 1988, Tal even became World Blitz Champion.

Tal was unique in many ways, but I would like to underline one thing which will already be obvious to anyone who has read the previous two volumes: Tal was universally liked, not only by the chess public but even by his rivals.

Dear Reader: if you are a recreational player you will take great pleasure from Tal's imaginative masterpieces; and if you want to improve your chess, you can learn a tremendous amount from his games. Along the way, you will find out a lot more about Tal's life, personality and humour. Just as in the previous volumes, there are many illuminating testimonials from well-known players who were lucky enough to know and/or play against the Magician.

I am convinced that Tal's incredible life and career deserved such a detailed investigation, and hope you will enjoy this final instalment of the series. Tal passed away on June 28th 1992, so it seems fitting that this book should be published so close to the twenty-fifth anniversary of that day.

Tibor Karolyi
Budapest, June 2017

Taxco Interzonal

Tal had a lot of free time until the first part of June, when the Interzonal started in Taxco, Mexico. His first opponent was Qi Jingxuan. The initiative from his minority attack disappeared and Tal offered a draw, which the Chinese player accepted. Tal says that both players were affected by the big time zone difference. In Round 2 Tal drew with Cebalo in a level position.

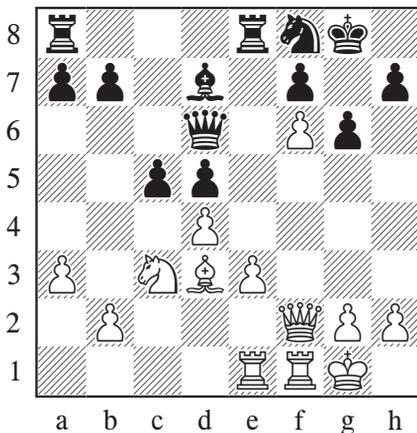
Tal's Round 3 opponent, Saeed, played only this single game against Tal. We join the action in the middlegame, with Tal having weakened the dark squares around his opponent's king.

GAME 68

Mikhail Tal – Saeed Ahmed Saeed

Taxco (Interzonal) 1985

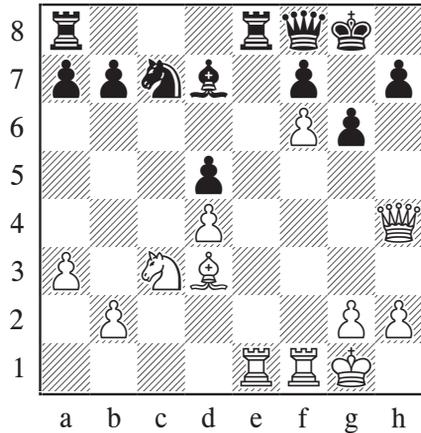
- 1.c4 e6 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.d4 d5 4.♙g5 ♘bd7 5.e3 c6 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♙d3 ♙e7 8.♚c2 0-0 9.♘f3 ♜e8 10.0-0 ♘f8 11.a3 ♘g6 12.♘e5 ♘g4 13.♙xe7 ♚xe7 14.♘xg4 ♙xg4 15.♜ae1 ♙d7 16.f4 ♘f8?! 17.f5 ♚d6 18.♚f2 c5 19.f6 g6



20.♚h4 cxd4

20...♙c6?! is strongly met by 21.♜f3!, or even 21.♜f5!?

21.♚h6 ♘e6 22.exd4 ♚f8 23.♚h4 ♘c7



24.♚g3!

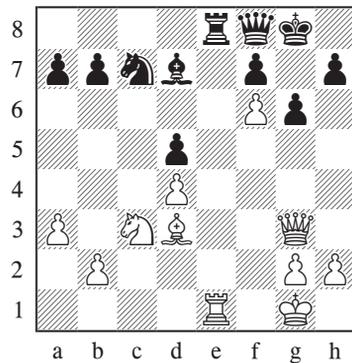
Tal likes this move: it ties the rook to the defence of the knight.

24...♜ac8

Black can also try simplifying with:

24...♜xe1 25.♜xe1 ♜e8

Tal gives a long line from here, which he probably calculated during the game.



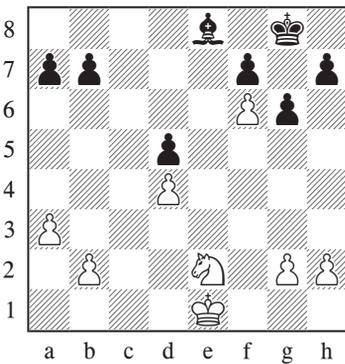
26.♜xe8

The pretty 26.♙e4! wins more quickly.

- 26...♚xe8 27.♚xc7 ♚e3† 28.♘f1 ♚xd3† 29.♘e1 ♚e3† 30.♘e2 ♙b5

30...♖e8!? may be a better try: 31.♖xb7 ♜b5 32.♖e7 ♖xe7 33.fxe7 f6 (if 33...f5 34.♟c3 ♜c6 35.e8=♖† ♜xe8 36.♟xd5 White should win with the extra pawn, but it requires some technique) 34.♟c3 ♜c6 35.♟xd5 ♜f7 36.e8=♖† ♜xe8 White has an extra pawn but he faces serious technical problems in converting it. White can press with other moves in this line, but there are no clear wins.

31.♖c8† ♖e8 32.♖xe8† ♜xe8



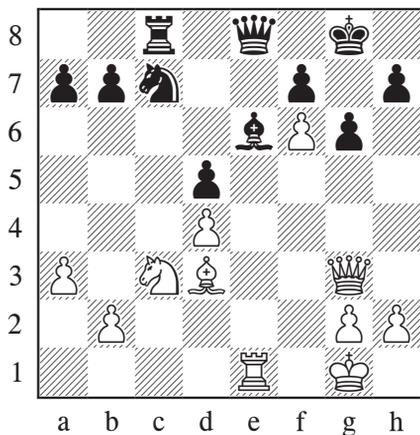
33.♟c3!

Tal gives 33.♟f4 ♜c6 34.♟d3 and evaluates the position as winning, but it is not clear if White can invade after 34...♜f8 35.♟e5 ♜e8. The text move is much easier.

33...♜c6 34.♜f2 ♜f8 35.♜g3 ♜e8 36.♜f4

White invades to e5, takes the d5-pawn and wins.

25.♞xe8 ♖xe8 26.♞e1 ♜e6



27.h4!

Tal intends to soften up Black's kingside.

27...♖f8

After 27...♖c6 28.h5 ♖b6 29.♖h4 ♟e8 30.♟a4 ♖d8 31.♞f1 White will break in.

28.♖f4 h6 29.♜b1 ♜h8 30.♞e3!

The rook gets closer to Black's king.

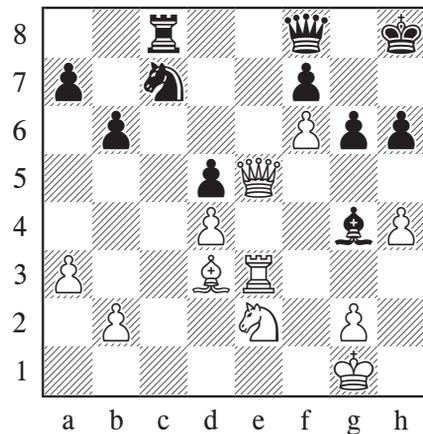
30...b6 31.♜d3

Before transferring his knight to the attack, Tal wants to take out the sting of a possible rook check on c1.

31...♜g8 32.♟e2! ♜h8 33.♖e5

This was criticized by several commentators, including Tal himself. He has faster wins, to be sure, but his chosen move does not spoil the position at all. 33.♖g3 and 33.♜h2! are strong, but 33.♞g3! is the most effective win, as it threatens ♜xg6. If 33...♟e8 (33...♜d7 34.♜xg6) 34.♖e5 ♜d7 35.♟f4 White wins.

33...♜g4

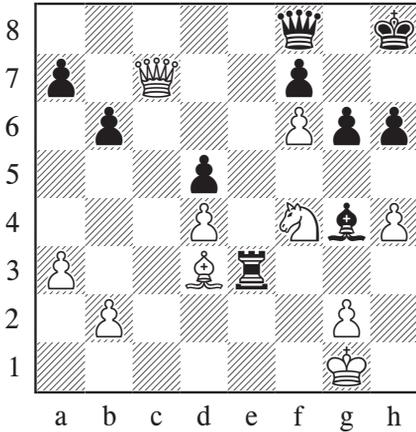


34.♟f4!!

Tal improves his position in a flashy way, by offering an exchange sacrifice.

Defending the rook with 34.♔f2 also wins: 34...♙xe2 (or 34...♜e6 35.♞f4 ♜xf4 [35...♞d8 36.♞g3] 36.♞xf4 and White wins by invading the seventh rank) 35.♙xe2 ♜e6 36.♙f3 Black drops at least a pawn with a lost position.

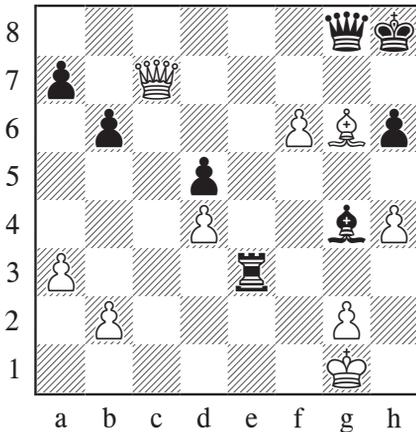
34...♞e8 35.♞xc7 ♞xe3



36.♜xg6†!

The point of Tal's combination.

36...fxg6 37.♙xg6 ♞g8



38.♞f4?

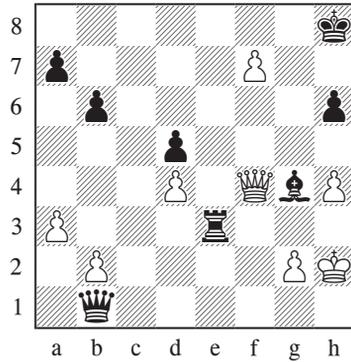
Tal chooses the wrong move order for the combination. Interestingly, it seems that no other commentator so far has spotted the error.

38.f7! ♞f8 39.♞f4 ♞e1† 40.♔h2 would transpose to the game without allowing the improvement for Black noted below.

38...♞e1†?

The young player from the Emirates doesn't spot the hole in Tal's idea.

38...♞xg6!! 39.f7 ♞b1† 40.♔h2



40...♞h3†!!

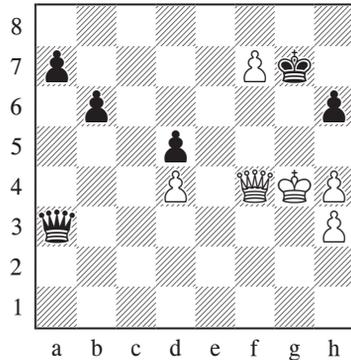
This fantastic move opens up the king.

41.gxh3 ♞xb2†!

41...♞c2† is playable although Black must walk a narrower path: 42.♔g3 ♞d3† 43.♔xg4 ♞g6† 44.♔f3 ♞d3† 45.♞e3 (45.♔g2 ♞g6†) 45...♞f5† 46.♔g2 ♞g6† 47.♔h2 ♞c2† 48.♔h1 ♞b1† 49.♞g1 ♞xg1† (49...♞e4† 50.♞g2) 50.♔xg1 ♔g7

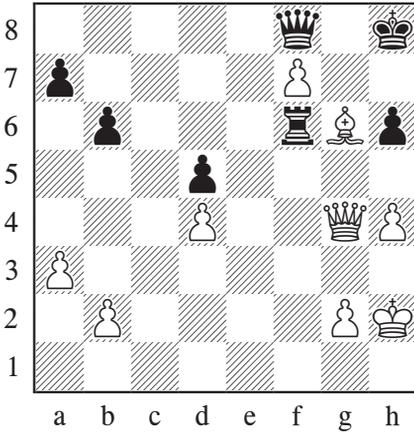
It seems to me that White can't penetrate and the position is a draw.

42.♔g3 ♞xa3† 43.♔xg4 ♔g7



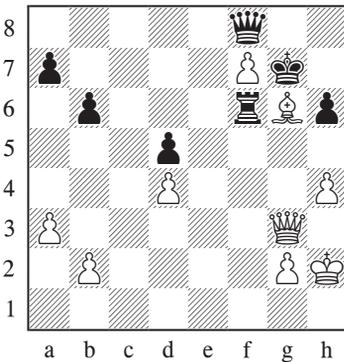
Black holds the queen ending.

39.♔h2 ♖f8 40.f7 ♜e6 41.♞xg4 ♝f6



42.♞g3

Tal sealed this move after twenty minutes' thought. The Soviet delegation had only one second, Suetin, and he had to divide his attention between three adjourned games. In the hotel room Tal had an hour and a half to analyse the position, and quickly concluded that Black has to do something to stop ♞e5. For example, 42...♔g7

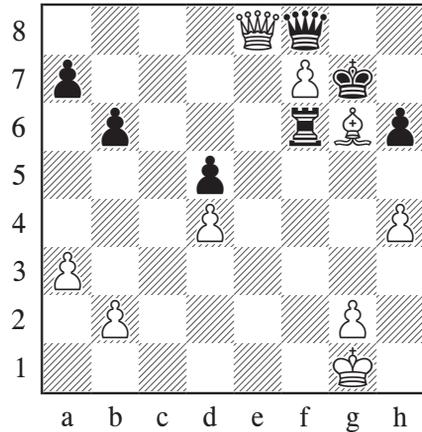


43.♔h5†! (43.♔e4† ♔xf7 44.♔xd5† ♔e8! 45.♞b8† ♔d7 46.♞xa7† ♔d8 is not simple to win as White, if it's even possible at all) 43...♔h7 44.♞e5 and White invades.

42...♞d8

Upon resumption, Saeed thought for fifteen minutes before continuing with this move.

43.♞e5 ♔g7 44.♞e8 ♞d6† 45.♔g1 ♞f8



46.h5!

Saeed resigns, as he has no defence against g2-g4-g5 and capturing on h6. After the game Tal was surprised that it was late in the evening; because of his jet lag and the difference in time zone, it felt like morning for him.

In the post mortem Tal showed Saeed and his second Marovic that he should have defended the adjourned position with 42...♞e6, preventing the queen from going to e5. During the analysis they drew the conclusion that sooner or later White must push his g-pawn. During the unhurried analysis, they looked at each other with a shocked glance as they realized that the move ...♞b6 was possible. How could this be, since a black pawn had been occupying that square since move 30?

It soon became clear that Tal and Saeed had played out the adjournment session from an incorrect position, with Black's queenside pawns on a6 and b7 instead of a7 and b6! It made no real difference to the evaluation or outcome of the game, yet it was still not the right position.

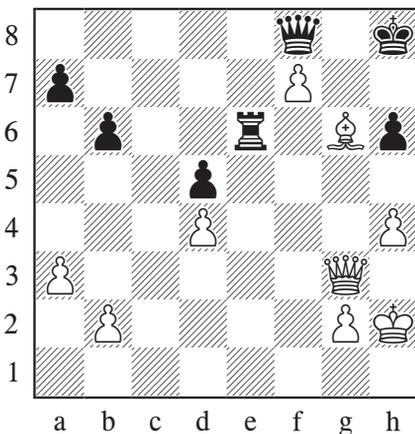
Saeed asked how the game would be published. Tal thought that according to FIDE rules the result on the scoresheet couldn't be changed, but he was not sure. The appeal committee was cautious and stated nothing, so the arbiter – who had already gone to sleep at that point – was woken up and asked to make a ruling. The arbiter decided that the players should go back to the correct adjourned position and replay it. Tal felt that it was awkward to refuse. Later the following conversation took place between Tal and Saeed.

- But I am very tired. How old are you?
- Sixteen.
- I am fifty. [Tal writes that he made a tiny lie; he was actually forty-nine.]
- I am not able to play.
- You are not able to play, but you are able to resign.

Some time after midnight, the arbiter started the clock. The adjournments were played in one of the hotel halls. Tal found it moving that a lot of spectators were still present.

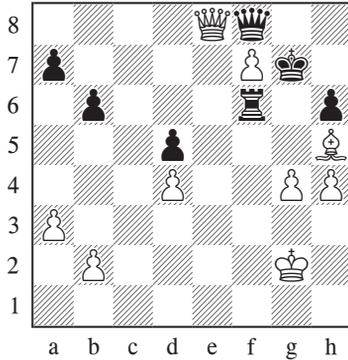
42...♞e6

This time Saeed plays the better move which Tal had recommended in the post mortem.



43.h5

White has another win: 43.♙h5 ♔h7 (43...♞f6 44.♞e5+-) 44.♞f3 ♜d6† 45.g3 ♞f6 46.♞e3 ♔g7 47.♞e8 ♞f2† (47...♞f8 48.♔g2 ♞f5 49.♙g6! ♞f6 50.h5 wins, as in the original adjournment) 48.♔h3 ♞f8 49.g4 ♞f3† 50.♔g2 ♞f6



51.g5! hxg5 52.♞e5! and White wins.

43...♞e7 44.♞g4 ♜d8

Tal mentions that he was not sure whether Black should move his rook instead, but it doesn't seem to affect the result. For example, if 44...♞e1 45.♞f4, or 44...♞b7 45.♞e6 and Black loses.

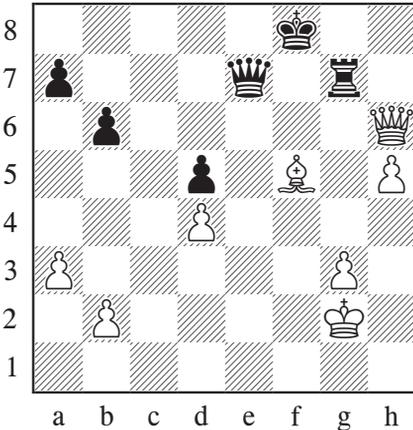
45.♔g1 ♞f8 46.♔f2 ♜d8 47.g3 ♞f8 48.♔g2 ♜d8 49.♞f5 ♔g7



50.♙h7!?

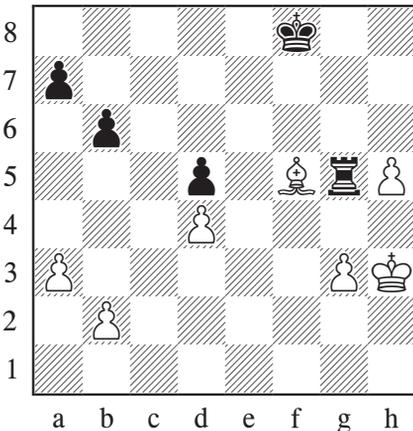
Tal attaches an exclamation mark to this move. It wins, but 50.g4! would have been much faster: 50...♔f8 51.♖f4 ♔g7 52.g5 and it is all over.

50...♖xf7 51.♖g6† ♔f8 52.♖xh6† ♖g7
 53.♙f5 ♖e7
 53...♖g5 54.♖xg5 ♖xg5 55.g4 wins.



54.♔h3 ♖g5
 54...♖e2 55.♖d6† ♖e7 56.♔h4 ♖e3 57.h6
 (or 57.♖xd5) 57...♖xd4† 58.♔g5 and White wins.

55.♖xg5 ♖xg5



56.♙g6!
 Tal traps the rook in an original way.

56...♔g7 57.♔h4 ♔h6 58.a4
 1-0

Tal writes that he made this move with special satisfaction. Saeed laughed and resigned, this time forever.

Tal faced Alburt in Round 4, offering a repetition early on. Alburt deviated, but he was not able to create pressure and the game ended in a draw at move twenty-five. In Round 5 Romanishin offered a draw at move fourteen, which Tal accepted. Against Agdestein in the next round Tal got an attack, but used a lot of his time. Tal's position was objectively promising, but he went for safety and forced a perpetual when he had ten minutes remaining for fifteen moves. In Round 7 Tal drew quickly with Browne. Then he beat Sisniega, after the latter failed to find the correct defence to Tal's pawn sacrifice – an opening idea found by Vitolinsh and played by Tal and Vitolinsh in some training games. Part of the game is shown on page 368, in the notes to Game 72.

In Round 9 Tal drew with Nogueiras in just eleven moves, which was followed by another short draw with Timman. Tal now had to try to win if he wanted to qualify for the Candidates, and he did so against Prandstetter. Tal managed to win a pawn before the time control, but he claims that he made a few second-rate moves, including his sealed forty-seventh move. Tal writes in his analysis that Prandstetter missed a forced way to hold at move forty-eight, after which Tal carefully converted his advantage. In Round 12 Tal scored a point without playing, as Balashov withdrew from the tournament. He then played short draws with Spraggett and Speelman.

Timman had already qualified with a round to spare. Nogueiras had 9½/14, with Tal and Spraggett just half a point behind. Tal's closest rivals had to play each other, while Tal faced

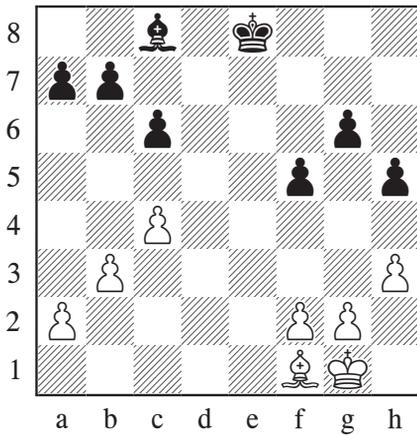
Pinter. This was his only game against Tal. We will skip ahead to the bishop ending, which was the pivotal stage of the game.

GAME 69

Jozsef Pinter – Mikhail Tal

Interzonal, Taxco 1985

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 d6 3.♘c3 ♘bd7 4.e4 e5
 5.♘f3 g6 6.♙e2 ♙g7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♙e3 c6
 9.♞c2 ♞e7 10.♞f1 exd4 11.♙xd4 ♘c5
 12.♘d2 ♞e8 13.♙ad1 h5 14.h3 ♙h6 15.♙f1
 ♙f4 16.♘f3 ♘fd7 17.♙e3 ♙xe3 18.♞xe3
 ♘e5 19.♞d2 ♙e6 20.b3 ♘xf3† 21.♞xf3
 ♞ad8 22.♞h6 ♙c8 23.♞d5 ♞f8 24.♞xf8†
 ♘xf8 25.♞d4 ♘e6 26.♞d2 ♘g5 27.♞e3
 f5 28.♞ed3 ♘xe4 29.♘xe4 ♞xe4 30.♞xd6
 ♞xd6 31.♞xd6 ♞e6 32.♞d8† ♞e8 33.♞xe8†
 ♘xe8



34.c5?!

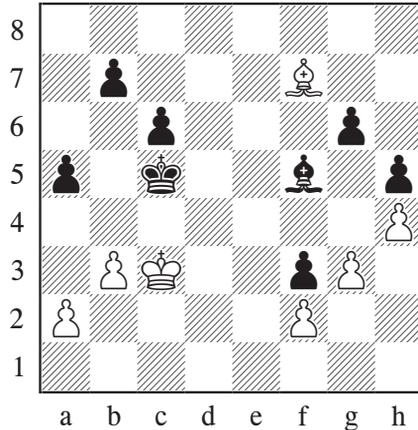
The Hungarian is an excellent endgame player. His last move makes it clear that he is playing for more than a draw, but he has overestimated his chances. 34.f4! is better, with an almost certain draw.

34...f4! 35.g3 f3!

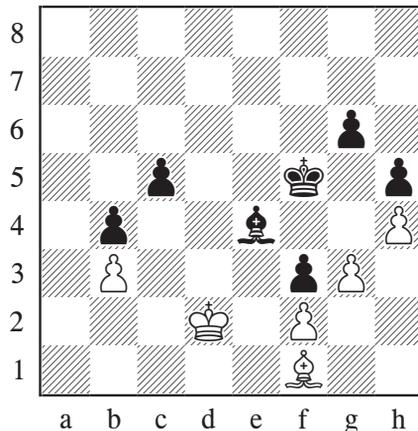
Tal takes charge.

36.h4 ♘e7 37.♙d3 ♙f5 38.♙c4 ♘f6 39.♘f1
 ♘e5 40.♘e1 ♘d4 41.♘d2 a5! 42.♙f7 ♘xc5
 43.♘c3

43.♘e3 can be met by 43...♘b4 44.♘xf3 b5 followed by ...♙b1 winning, so Pinter attempts to set up a defensive wall.



43...b5 44.a3 b4† 45.axb4† axb4† 46.♘d2
 ♘d4 47.♙e8 c5 48.♙b5 ♙e4 49.♙a6 ♙d5
 50.♘c2 ♘e5 51.♙b5 ♘f5 52.♙d7† ♙e6
 53.♙b5 ♘g4 54.♙f1 ♙d5 55.♘b2 ♘f5
 56.♘c2 ♙e4† 57.♘d2

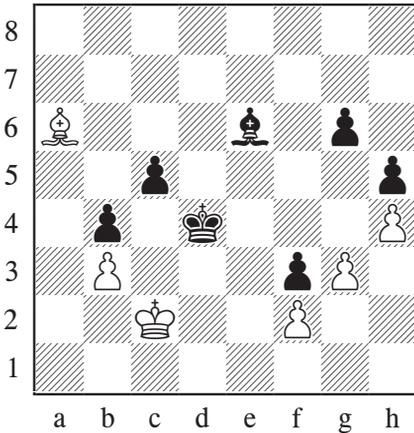


57...♘e5

Tal recalls that he wanted to seal a move much earlier, but Pinter played so fast that he did not get a chance to. Finally Tal was able to seal the text move with, as he puts it, “a relaxed heart.”

They had two hours to analyse before resuming play.

58.♙a6 ♖d5 59.♙c4† ♖d4 60.♙b5 ♙f5
61.♙a6 ♙e6 62.♖c2



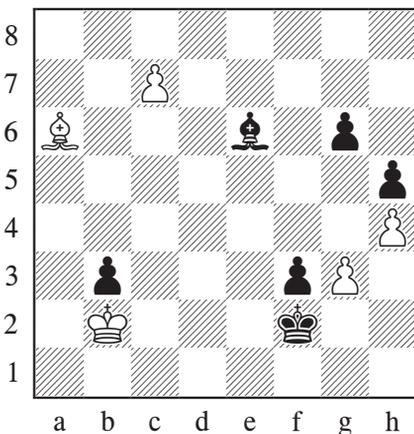
62...c4! 63.bxc4 b3†!!

Diverting the king opens the way to the f2-pawn. Tal had reached this point in the adjourned analysis, but after 63...♙xc4? 64.♙b7 he was unable to find the win. But over the board, “with fresh head” as Tal puts it, he found the solution.

64.♖b2

White can't block the way to the f-pawn, as if 64.♖d2 ♙f5 wins.

64...♖d3 65.c5† ♖d2 66.c6 ♖e1 67.c7 ♖xf2



Black is obviously winning, but Pinter of course keeps on playing as long there is a tiny chance to go wrong.

68.♙c4

68.c8=♙ ♙xc8 69.♙xc8 ♖xg3 70.♖xb3 f2
71.♙a6 ♖g2 also wins easily.

68...♙g4 69.♙d3 ♖g1 70.♙xg6 f2 71.♙xh5
f1=♙

0-1

Pinter resigns as he loses the c-pawn.

Spraggett risked a lot against Nogueiras and lost, so Tal finished the event in sole third place. This was a nice result, but it was clear that if Tal wanted to finish in the top four in the Montpellier Candidates tournament, the standard of play he displayed in Mexico would not be enough.

Jon Speelman was kind enough to share his memories of Tal from the Interzonal:

“The title of World Champion requires huge ability but this doesn't necessarily imply a love affair with chess. Misha Tal was one champion, though, who did utterly adore the game.

I always remember the evening after the Taxco Interzonal of 1985 from which Tal qualified for the Candidates. (Jan Timman won ahead of Jesus Nogueiras and Tal). In the evening my second Will Watson asked whether he could play some blitz with Tal, who agreed, but it wasn't until the small hours that this actually happened, by which time a celebrating Tal was fairly stocious.

Will didn't want to take advantage of his hero and they exchanged wins in a few games, but then Guillermo Garcia Gonzales (the Cuban who once came second in the New York Open but died tragically young in a traffic accident in 1990) came along. He was determined to beat Tal, drunk or not, but got crushed!”



Tal with his young apprentices