## Fischer – Tal

Candidates' Tournament 1959

*A very near miss*

*This is one of the four games that Fisher lost to Tal who, in winning this tournament, earned the right to meet and trounce Botvinnik for the world championship.*

*In jest the whimsical Tal signed Fisher's name, in addition to his own, when asked for an autograph. "Why not?" he quipped; "I've beaten Bobby so often ..., that gives me the right to sign for him!"*

*A carefull reading of Fisher's notes will reveal a clear echo of the strong emotions that engulfed him during this tense encounter. He misses a win in the opening and several draws along the way, demonstrating dramatically how a continuously advantageous position can abruptly be turned into defeat by seemingly insignificant miscalculations.*

Sicilian Defense

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | e2–e4 | c7–c5 |
| 2. | ♘g1–f3 | d7–d6 |
| 3. | d2–d4 | c5×d4 |
| 4. | ♘f3×d4 | ♘g8–f6 |
| 5. | ♘b1–c3 | a7–a6 |
| 6. | ♗f1–c4 | e7–e6 |
| 7. | ♗c4–b3 | |

I had no better luck against Blackstone, in an exhibition game at Davis, California, 1964, with 7. 0–0, ♗e7; 8. ♗b3, ♕c7; 9. f4, b5; 10. f5, b4; 11. f×e6!? (11. ♘ce2, e5; 12. ♘f3, ♗b7 is bad for White), b×c3; 12. e×f7+, ♔f8; 13. ♗g5, ♘g4! and Black should win.

7. ... b7–b5!

This reaction must be prompt!

In our first lap game here Tal played the weaker 7. ..., ♗e7?; 8. f4, 0–0 (for 8. ..., b5 see the note to Black's 8th move); 9. ♕f3, ♕c7 and now 10. f5! (instead of 10. 0–0?, b5; 11. f5, b4!; 12. ♘a4, e5; 13. ♘e2, ♗b7 and Black stands better), e5 (not 10. ..., ♘c6; 11. ♗e3 with a bind); 11. ♘de2, b5; 12. a3, ♗b7; 13. g4 with a strong attack.

8. f2–f4!? b5–b4!

Indirectly undermining White's center.

9. ♘c3–a4 ♘f6×e4

10. 0–0 g7–g6?

Correct is 10. ..., ♗b7.

11. f4–f5!

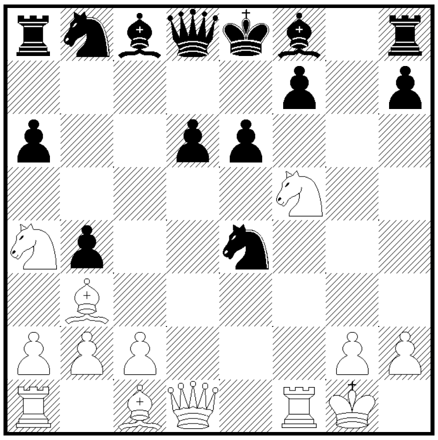
This riposte caught Tal completely unaware. Black's king trapped in the center, will soon be subject to mayhem.

11. ... g6×f5

Not 11. ..., e×f5; 12. ♗d5, ♖a7; 13. ♘×f5!, g×f5; 14. ♕d4.

12. ♘d4×f5!

Panov, with typical iron curtain "objectivity", commented in the Soviet tournament bulletins: "Almost all game Fischer played in Tal style. But all his trouble was in vain because Tal did not defend in Fischer style—instead he found the one and only saving counterchance!"



12. ... ♖h8–g8

Woozy, Tal stumbles into a dubious defense. Better is 12. ..., d5 (not 12. ..., e×f5?; 13. ♕d5, ♖a7; 14. ♕d4 spearing a rook); 13. ♘h6, ♗×h6; 14. ♗×h6.

13. ♗b3–d5!

A shot!

13. ... ♖a8–a7

" 13. ..., e×d5; 14. ♕×d5, ♗×f5; 15. ♖×f5, ♖a7; 16. ♕e4+; ♖e7; 17. ♕×b4, ♖e2; 18. ♗g5!, ♖×g5; 19. ♖×g5, ♕×g5; 20. ♕×b8+ wins" (PANOV).

14. ♗d5×e4?

Correct is 14. ♗e3!, ♘c5; 15. ♕h5!, ♖g6 (if 15. ..., ♘×a4, 16. ♗×a7, e×d5; 17. ♖ae1+); 16. ♖ae1! and White's every piece is bearing down on Black's king (KEVITZ).

14. ... e6×f5

15. ♗e4×f5

Probably it's better to avoid exchanges with 15. ♗d5 or ♗f3.

15. ... ♖a7–e7!

A unique way of shielding the K-file.

16. ♗f5×c8 ♕d8×c8

17. ♗c1–f4?

The right move is simply 17. c3! (not 17. ♕×d6?, ♖×g2+; 18. ♔×g2, ♖e2+; 19. ♔f3,

♗×d6; 20. ♔×e2, ♕×c2+ wins), and if ...,
♕c6; 18. ♖f2.

17. ... ♕c8–c6!
18. ♕d1–f3 ♕c6×a4

Such a surprise that I didn't dare believe my eyes! I had expected 18. ..., ♕×f3; 19. ♖×f3, ♖e2; 20. ♖f2, ♖×f2; 21. ♔×f2 and White has a slight edge after a3 because of Black's disconnected pawns.

19. ♗f4×d6 ♕a4–c6!

Tal finds a inspired defense.

20. ♗d6×b8 ♕c6–b6+

White remains a clear pawn ahead after 20. ..., ♕×f3; 21. ♖×f3, ♗g7; 22. c3.

21. ♔g1–h1 ♕b6×b8

The crowd was shouting and whistling with each move. Later I was informed that many sport fans were in the audience. Maybe some soccer match had been canceled. As a consequence chess was the main attraction that day in Belgrade.

22. ♕f3–c6+

Many annotators believed that 22. ♖ae1 was the winning move. Tal himself confessed he thougt Black was lost after that. But 22. ..., ♔d8! holds in all lines (not 22. ..., ♖g6?; 23. ♕×f7+, ♔d7; 24. ♖d1+!, ♖d6; 25. ♖×d6+, ♔×d6; 26. ♖f6+! wins). I've studied this position for ages, it seems, and the best I can find is 23. ♖d1+, ♔c7! (23. ..., ♔c8?; 24. ♕c6+ wins); 24. ♕f4+ (if 24. ♖d4, ♕b7!), ♔b7; 25. ♖d6, ♕c7; 26. ♕×b4+, ♔c8; 27. ♖×a6, ♕b7!; 28. ♕×b7+, ♔×b7; 29. ♖af6, ♖g7=.

22. ... ♖e7–d7
23. ♖a1–e1+

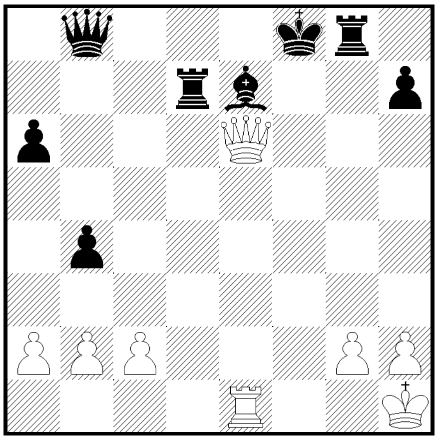
Black holds after 23. ♖ad1, ♗d6; 24. ♖×f7 (if 24. ♖f6, ♖g6; 25. ♖d×d6?, ♕×d6!), ♕c7, etc. And on 23. ♖×f7, ♕d6.

23. ... ♗f8–e7

Finally Tal "develops" his bishop. Not 23. ..., ♔d8; 24. ♖×f7!, ♗e7; 25. ♖f×e7, ♖×e7; 26. ♖d1+ wins.

24. ♖f1×f7 ♔e8×f7
25. ♕c6–e6+ ♔f7–f8!

I thought he had to go to g7, whereupon 26. ♕×d7 wins easily.



26. ♕e6×d7

Not 26. ♖f1+, ♔g7; 27. ♖f7+, ♔h8; and if 28. ♕×d7, ♖d8; 29. ♕g4, ♕e5 wins.

26. ... ♕b8–d6
27. ♕d7–b7 ♖g8–g6

Within a handful of moves the game has changed its complexion. Now it is White who must fight for a draw!

28. c2–c3!

Black's extra piece means less with each pawn that's exchanged.

28. ... a6–a5

On 28. ..., b×c3; 29. ♕c8+, ♗d8; 30. ♕×c3=.

29. ♕b7–c8+

On the wrong track. Right is 29. c×b4!, ♕×b4 (if 29. ..., a×b4; 30. a3!, b×a3; 31. b×a3, ♕×a3 draws); 30. ♕f3+, ♔g7; 31. ♕e2 draws, since Black can't possibly build up a winning K-side attack and his own king is to exposed.

29. ... ♔f8–g7
30. ♕c8–c4 ♗e7–d8
31. c3×b4 a5×b4

On 31. ..., ♕×b4; 32. ♕e2 White should draw with best play.

32. g2–g3?

Creating loosing chances. I don't see how Black can make any progress after 32. ♕e4. If 32. ..., ♗c7; 33. ♕e7+, ♔g8; 34. ♕e8+, ♕f8; 35. ♕e4, etc.

32. ... ♕d6–c6+
33. ♖e1–e4 ♕c6×c4
34. ♖e4×c4 ♖g6–b6!

I overlooked this. Now Black has winning chances. I had planned on a draw after 34. ..., ♗e7?; 35. a3! dissolving Black's b–pawn (

35. …, b3 is answerred by 36. ♖c7 followed by ♖b7).

35. ♔h1–g2 ♔g7–f6
36. ♔g2–f3 ♔f6–e5
37. ♔f3–e3

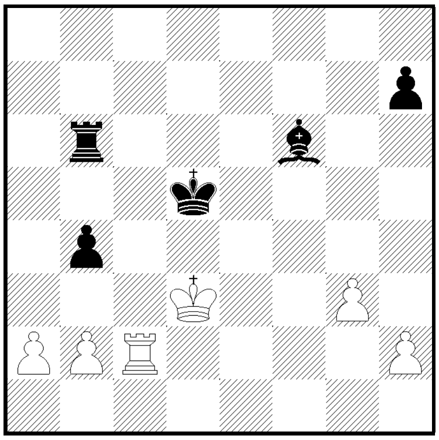
37. a3 is met as always, by b3. Once White can eliminate Black's b–pawn it's a theoretical draw.

37. … ♗d8–g5+
38. ♔e3–e2 ♔e5–d5
39. ♔e2–d3 ♗g5–f6

White might be able to draw this ending, but it's an ugly defensive chore.

40. ♖c4–c2?

Too passive. I wanted to avoid immobilizing my Q–pawns with 40. b3 but it's the best hope now. On 40. …, ♗e7; 41. ♖d4+ preserves drawing chances.



40. … ♗f6–e5
41. ♖c2–e2 ♖b6–f6
42. ♖e2–c2 ♖f6–f3+
43. ♔d3–e2 ♖f3–f7
44. ♔e2–d3 ♗e5–d4!

Little by little Tal inches his way in.

45. a2–a3

On 45. b3, ♖f3+; 46. ♔e2, ♖f2+; 47. ♕d3, ♖×c2; 48. ♔e4 wins.

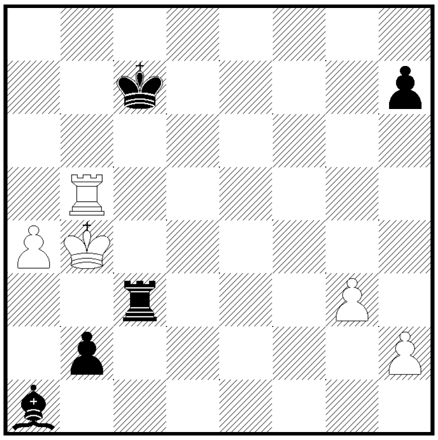
45. … b4–b3
46. ♖c2–c8

Equally hopeless is 46. ♖e2 (or 46. ♖d2, ♖f3+; 47. ♔e2, ♖f2+), ♖f3+; 47. ♔d2, ♗×b2 etc.

46. … ♗d4×b2
47. ♖c8–d8+ ♔d5–c6
48. ♖d8–b8 ♖f7–f3+
49. ♔d3–c4 ♖f3–c3+
50. ♔c4–b4 ♔c6–c7

(Here the author omits 50 …, ♔c7; 51. ♖b5 but overlooked that he could win the game (*pt*)!)

51. ♖b8–b5 ♗b2–a1
52. a3–a4 b3–b2!



White resigns.

If 53. ♔×c3, b1♕+!

From: *My 60 Memorable Games*, by Bobby Fischer; Faber and Faber, London. 1969. ISBN 0 571 09312 4