



Interview

Alexander Morozevich

Alexander Morozevich stunning winner of the Biel Grand Master

Tournament:

"I never before achieved such a high performance"

(Interview by Olivier Breisacher)

The return of Alexander Morozevich to the spotlight has been a real success. One year after his last closed tournament, the Muscovite player won the Grandmaster Tournament of the 36th Biel International Chess Festival in a stunning and convincing manner. Achieving a performance of 2879 Elo points and unbeaten with six wins and four draws (a Tournament record), he sailed over the competition and finished clearly in first place, being in front of Bacrot, Smirin, Pelletier, Lutz and Kortchnoi. He succeeds Ilya Smirin, last year's winner.

Morozevich's performance in his first visit in Switzerland is a highlight in the recent history of Biel International Chess Festival. This year about 600 players were invited to participate. They played in the newly renovated Congress Hall with its large air-conditioned playing room, where Open participants played alongside the Grandmaster Tournament. The 37th Festival will take place from 17th to 31st July 2004.

The appearances and the declarations of Alexander Morozevich have become more and more rare nowadays. One more reason to give him the opportunity to express himself about his tournament, his current vision of the chess world and his new attitude concerning the way he wants to play in chess tournaments.

Alexander Morozevich, first visit in Switzerland, first tournament, first win and also a impressive result of 8 out of 10 in the tournament: how do you consider this success?

When I win a tournament, I often win it easily. Sometimes I share first place. But this is the first time that I have had a performance on such a level, with a category 16 tournament. I remember having achieved 9 out of 10, in Maikop (Russia), but it was only category 14.

Your comeback was quite expected. It appears now that it was a triumph...

I need some time to analyse this tournament. Of course I am satisfied with the result. I was in good shape, but not in optimal shape. From a strictly chess point of view, I am more



critical of the quality of my games. I committed many mistakes. But my opponents did as well—that's why I could win so many games. Moreover, I was at some point quite lucky. In the first round against Yannick Pelletier, I could have lost in one move, but I won. What would have happened if I would have lost? Since that game, I think I elevated the level of my play.

What does this Biel tournament mean to you?

I came here without any kind of pressure. It is a solid tournament with strong grandmasters, but there is no matter here to qualify for a world championship cycle or something similar. And finally, I also need to practise some chess. It was only my second classical tournament since the beginning of the year.

You were even thought to be the big favourite of the tournament...

Not in my current situation. I decided to stop to dedicate myself fully and seriously to chess. So it was impossible to consider myself as a favourite. I simply had a chance to win the tournament, but, of course, I was not the only one.

You announced last summer that you would not be a professional any longer. Do we have to understand that it's still the case today?

Yes, of course. Why should I have changed my opinion? I decided to end my professional career before playing the candidates tournament in Dortmund 2002. I got tired of the lack of any reasonable prospects in the chess world. What are the goals for a professional player? There is no more clear system, no real cycle of world championships, no clear world champion and thus no possibility for the players to fight for a world title. I don't see any innovative ideas coming to change this dead-lock. I cannot believe in any real change. That's why I study chess less and less at home. Only some hours per week, no more than four or five.

So, your decision is definite?

Unless there is a miracle or, at least new structures allowing the players to express themselves correctly—yes, my decision is final. To be sincere, I really doubt there will be any new ideas in the near future...

And if there is a reunification of the world championship titles or some other sort of reunification, is it that still conceivable?

I don't believe in any kind of reunification. Everything is completely fake. It's just a matter of money. Some players will earn money, and then the mess will go on. We are facing a



situation where some players go out of the FIDE, make money out of it and then come back to earn even more. They are just doing business while others are sitting watching this.

You declare yourself a non professional chess player, but chess is still your main and only activity...

For the moment, that's right, I earn my living from chess. And when I'm playing at a chessboard, like now in Biel—it is a great pleasure for me—I still like this game a lot. Chess is not the question. I cannot find any objective to spur on me to work more intensively for chess in my career. You know, when you play each year the same super tournaments, with the same places, same players, same results, you get a feeling of déjà-vu.

So, why did you decide to take part to the Biel tournament?

Nothing surprising. I came because I was invited. If an organizer calls me, shows his interest and proposes reasonable conditions, why should I decline them? I will also play next January in Wijk aan Zee.

What did you know of Biel before coming?

From the city, almost nothing, except the fact that there is a lake and scenic areas. But, I know of course the Chess Festival, had a look on some games that were played here. In 1993, I almost qualified for the interzonal tournament in Biel, but I finished in 5th place in the zonal tournament. I should have been 4th

And two weeks later?

I enjoyed the atmosphere of the playing hall. It was not so noisy, nobody disturbs you and it's good to have a lot of other players in the same room that are engaged in the Open. Many of them also follow our games on the screen and it's pleasant. I hope that I will play here again.

Alexander, do you still feel comfortable in this chess world?

Yes, that's fine for me. I have also good friends in this environment. But I am not a big fan in general of these closed tournaments. Take for example the case of Wijk aan Zee, with 14 players, 13 rounds, it's too long. When a player is out of shape, he cannot retire and he suffers—but nevertheless he must go on because he has signed a contract. Timman suffered so much in Wijk aan Zee, as did Kortchnoi this time in Biel. In my opinion, the best option would be the knock-out tournaments.

You were talking about Viktor Kortchnoi. Any comment on his difficult tournament in Biel



(4 draws, 6 losses), a place where he took 1st place in 2001...

You know, it's not the first time that Kortchnoi failed so clearly. But each time he has the ability to recover and achieve very high results again. I do hope his performance in Biel was a fluke and he will find soon return to his real level. With Bacrot, he was in my eyes the most unpredictable opponent in Biel.

Etienne Bacrot achieved a great tournament with a 2749 performance and the second place. Any comments?

It's not a secret that Bacrot is a very talented player that should be ranked in the top-20. I don't know why his ranking is so low. He suffers maybe from a lack of aggressiveness and plays too many draws. From a chess point of view, he has all the abilities to achieve much better results.

With your performance in Biel, you will win about 23 Elo points and go again over 2700. Is it important for you?

It would be if I still had any ambition in my career. Currently, I don't give any kind of importance to my ranking. FIDE rankings are important for the players who want to be qualified or invited to the super-tournaments, but this is no more my priority. To be number 4 or number 23 doesn't make any difference to me.

During this tournament, you could prove that you didn't lose your risky and unpredictable style. You especially surprised Bacrot (round 2) and Smirin (round 8) with quite rare moves...

I am not scared when I am playing. I like taking risks. That's why I win and lose so many games. But to finish in Biel without any loss, that's fine.

Does the chess world need more players like you?

What the chess world needs most is a decent system of world championships and real structures to allow top players to fight for the title.

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