

## 8 Grandmaster!

*January-May 2004*

### **'This is real talent!'**

– Alexander Nikitin, Kasparov's former trainer, on Magnus.

During the autumn Magnus had gone up about 100 rating points, from 2346 to 2461 on the Norwegian list and from 2385 to 2484 on the international, FIDE list, which is a great deal. Suddenly he was ranked number six in Norway, behind five grandmasters and ahead of one. There was plenty of praise, but neither Magnus nor his family felt as if he had done anything special recently. His results had only been so-so and he had struggled a lot with illness and fatigue. Three relaxing weeks in Norway would turn out to work wonders.

After our analysis session just before Christmas there were a few quiet days of watching TV and the usual post-Christmas rituals at his maternal grandparents' home in Solør, near the Swedish border. Magnus gradually recharged his batteries. The first week of school of the new year he stopped in at NTG's chess course and was very impressive. One thing learnt by experience from the rigours of the autumn tour was that Magnus needed more rest between the tougher events. The rest of the family also felt that constant travel was a bit of a strain, so the next semester in the year-long sabbatical was going to be structured differently.

Their house was still rented out until the first of July, so the Carlsens did not have a

home, but kind grandparents could put them up and it was also possible to live in a cabin, either in the mountains or by the sea. So now they had their base in Norway and flew to tournaments instead of driving around in their aging van. The first stop would be the famous Corus tournament in Wijk aan Zee in the Netherlands, from 9-25 January, perhaps the best organised event in the world and one that attracted most of the world elite.

Besides an array of smaller tournaments for the general public, there tend to be two closed GM groups of 14 players each, the strongest of these featuring the best players in the world. New this year was a C-group with a mix of talented players, Dutch title candidates and some grandmasters. This section was also strong, with an average rating of over 2450.

Getting into such a tournament is no easy matter. Magnus had been discovered by the editor of *New In Chess*, Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam, during the European Club Cup in Crete some months before. There Magnus, sick and miserable, had managed a 2500+ performance against strong opposition. Dirk Jan was impressed and called Jeroen van den Berg, head of the Wijk aan Zee tournament, urging him to invite Magnus to the C-group.

But Henrik was not completely sure that the rest of the family would be content in this wind-swept coastal city, a half hour's drive from Amsterdam, in the middle of the winter. The organiser also smiled a bit at the concern that the tournament might be a bit weak – the group had not then finalised its quartet of grandmasters.

The family decided that only Magnus and his father should go to the Netherlands. The girls were not tempted by charming Dutch atmosphere or top chess players and stayed with their grandparents in Solør. It was a bit strange staying behind in Norway and not going to school, but they quickly adapted to a life of tending horses, skiing, evening cinema visits and other pursuits. Schoolwork they took care of on their own.

They had also been promised a trip to an island somewhere in the Indian Ocean. The plan was that Henrik would buy tickets to Mauritius or a similar destination from Holland, since it was much cheaper there. One of the arbiters convinced Henrik that they should instead head for Curaçao in the Caribbean. Henrik ordered tickets but the holiday had to be scrapped when it turned out to be too big a burden for his credit card. But Magnus would make sure the Carlsens would get to see exciting destinations. The snowball started to roll in Wijk aan Zee.

The conditions were optimal. The consideration and hospitality of the Dutch organisers was evident as soon as they landed. There was no need to worry about transport or any other practical details, everything was taken care of. True, the accommodation was graded, with a grand, luxury hotel for the stars of the A-group, a

slightly smaller hotel for the B-group and an even smaller one for the C-players. The rooms were without bath and toilet, but it was a cosy and intimate hotel and Magnus and his father enjoyed themselves. The weather was cold, so they had a refrigerator by hanging a plastic bag out the window.

The playing schedule was ideal for Magnus, with three rest days and start of play at 1.30 p.m. They had learned how important it was to be rested and Magnus got to sleep as long as he wished. Normally he awoke around 11-12, sometimes he slept even longer. After some Weetabix and orange juice in the room they usually played football for 30-60 minutes in a nearby field, just the two of them. Magnus got a chance to run and romp.

Next it was time to prepare. Magnus began the evening before by checking what his opponent played and then worked out the specifics of an opening or variation just before the game. Magnus is fully equipped with a laptop and all the software he needs but time often ran short and for a few games Magnus turned up a bit late.

Time to prepare was especially lacking in the one game Magnus lost. Magnus had let a software program analyse the critical position but had to go before the computer had finished its calculations. Just afterwards the same position arose on the board in his game. Magnus sank into thought for half an hour but made the wrong decision and got into trouble.

After the games they usually ate at an Italian restaurant nearby. Sometimes the stars from the top group were there as well, which was a big treat, especially

since it was not so easy to watch them in action during the rounds.

The playing area was a large sports hall with room for all the participants in the festival. The A and B groups were given plenty of room, roped off in a corner, while the C-group got its own territory a few metres away. By stretching up on the tips of his toes Magnus could just make out one of the boards from the top group. He was a bit saddened that he was not allowed to go behind the enclosure and watch the biggest guns play. That was something he had been looking forward to. The organisers were worried that if they gave him permission others would come and ask for the same. But after a quick poll of the top players, Magnus was allowed to wander where he wanted in the final round.

By then it was too late. Magnus was completely absorbed with other things. Besides, the top group was not what the public wanted to see any more, it was Magnus and his games that people were flocking around. Peter Leko, ranked number four in the world, responded with a smile when asked if it was OK if Magnus could go behind the barrier to watch him play: 'Yes, but we aren't able to see his games!'

There were a number of monitors set up around the vast hall, transmitting all the games from the A-group. In the C-group only one game was shown. Eventually Magnus completely took over the show. It was not enough just to show his games on the C-screen, when one of the games from the top group was finished Magnus' game was transferred to the vacant screen there.

Nevertheless, crowds built up where Magnus was sitting and where his games

were broadcast. There could be as many as 100 people standing on tiptoe to get a glimpse of the little boy and the miracle unfolding. The first outbreak of Magnus-fever was undoubtedly recorded in Wijk aan Zee in the Netherlands.

He started carefully, with a draw against a fourteen year old Ukrainian girl, Kateryna Lahno (2493), but, just like Magnus, this was not your average teenager. She was already top-rated in the world for her age, regardless of gender, and already the number six ranked woman in the world.

Magnus pushed Lahno in a long end-game but didn't manage to put the ball in the net. As Henrik wrote in Norsk Sjakkblad: 'When he eventually found something that resembled a winning continuation he ran short of time and had to simplify into a drawn ending with a piece and two pawns for each player. Many spectators (me included) were nervous when he nonchalantly offered a draw with 45 seconds left on his clock while his time was running. Lahno understandably refused but Magnus elegantly sacrificed a piece and assured the draw ten moves later and with 22 seconds left – whew!'

In the next round he produced a sleek win against Peng Zhaoqin (2419), originally from China, but who after marrying a Dutch chess player settled in Europe.

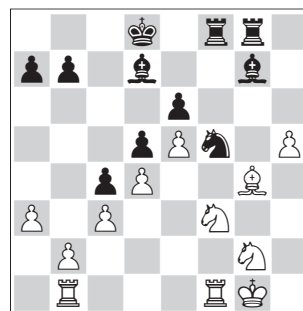
□ **Magnus Carlsen**

■ **Peng Zhaoqin**

Wijk aan Zee 2004

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5** I believe that 3.♘c3 gives the best chances of an advantage, but

it demands some experience to understand the difficult positions in the Winawer variation (3.♘c3 ♘b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♘xc3 6.bxc3). **3...c5 4.c3 ♖b6 5.♟f3 ♟d7 6.a3 c4** As Alexander Rustemov showed against Magnus in the last round of the Aeroflot Open Black has good chances for equality with 6...♘b5. The game ended in a draw after 7.b4 cxd4 8.♘xb5+ ♖xb5 9.cxd4 ♟d7 10.♟c3 ♖c6 11.♟a4 ♟e7 12.♘e3 ♟b6 13.♟xb6 ♖xb6 14.0-0 ♟f5 15.♖c1 ♖d8 16.♖a4+ ♖d7 17.♖a5 ♘e7 18.♖c7 b6 19.♖xd7 bxa5 20.♖b7 axb4 21.axb4 0-0 22.g4 ♟xe3 ½-½ **7.g3 ♟c6 8.h4** The difficult question in this variation is how to answer a black break with the f-pawn. Presumably White should take on f6 and pressure the e6-pawn, but in that case 8.♘h3 is a more logical move. However, the way Black plays it is nice to secure a bit of space on the kingside. **8...h6 9.♘h3 ♟ge7 10.♟bd2 ♟a5 11.0-0 ♖c7?** What is the point of this I wonder? **12.h5 0-0-0 13.♟h4** White prepares to charge with his f-pawn. **13...g5 14.♟g2! ♟g7 15.f4 f5 16.g4!** White's chances lie on the kingside. That his king is also on this side is not so dangerous. With such a colossus of a pawn centre it will take a lot before Black can dream of attacking on this flank. 16.exf6 would only open lines and diagonals for Black. **16...♖hg8 17.♟f3 ♟b3 18.♖b1 ♟xc1** Before White runs off with the bishop, leaving the knight pointlessly placed. **19.♖xc1 ♖df8** Both 19...gxf4 20.gxf5 ♟xf5 21.♘xf5 exf5 22.♟f2 and 19...fxg4 20.♘g4 gxf4 21.♖xf4 give White a positional advantage. **20.fxg5 hxg5 21.♖xg5!** Bold! **21...♖d8** The knight was hanging. **22.♖h4 fxg4 23.♘xg4 ♟f5 24.♖xd8+ ♟xd8**



**25.♟fh4!** By returning the pawn Magnus completely takes over the initiative. **25...♟xh4 26.♟xh4 ♖xf1+ 27.♖xf1 ♟xe5 28.♟g6 ♟g7 29.♖f7!** All of White's pieces are working at maximum power. **29...♘h6 30.♟h2 ♘c1 31.♟e5 ♘c8 32.♖f2** A temporary withdrawal in preparation for the final assault. **32...♟e7** After 32...♟e8 planning 33...♖f8 Magnus must remember to insert 33.♟g6, when Black has no active options. **33.♟h3 ♟e8 34.♟g6 ♟d7?** This makes things easier for White. The best defence was to wait passively, going back and forth with the dark squared bishop, when it is not obvious how White breaks through. **35.♖c2 ♟g5 36.♖e2!** Now the e-pawn falls as 36...♟f7 costs material after 37.♟e5+ ♟e7 38.♟xd7 and the bishop takes on e6. **36...♘c1 37.♘xe6 ♟xe6+ 38.♖xe6+ ♟d7 39.♖e2!** All counterplay is prevented. **39...♖e8 40.♟e5+ ♟c7 41.♖c2 ♟e3 42.♖g2 ♖e6 42...♘c1** is tougher, but would not have changed the result. **43.♖g7+ ♟c8 44.♖g6** Black resigned. The h-pawn decides.

The first rest day came as early as after the second round. Magnus protested as much as he could – he wanted to sit inside and watch Eurosport – but he was not going to miss a hike along the magnificent seashore