GM ATTY. ROSENO C. BALINAS, JR

THE CONQUEROR OF ODESSA

FROM THE BOOK "INSIDE PHILIPPINE CHESS" BY BOBBY ANG
GM Rosendo Balinas Jr., Conqueror of Odessa

Beat Bobby Fischer!

This series is written so that we may never forget International Grandmaster Rosendo Balinas Jr. He was born on September 20, 1941 and died of liver cancer on September 24, 1998, 10:45 am, at his residence in Antipolo. "Bali", as he is called by friends, only came home sparingly during the last two decades, preferring to stay in the United States. That is why many of our younger players do not know him. This is a grave injustice to the man who dominated the Philippine chess scene in the 60s, and was its most influential chess journalist. He was the Philippines’ and Asia’s second International Grandmaster, achieving the title via his unforgettable conquest of the Odessa (Ukraine) International Tournament in 1976, despite the presence of living legend David Bronstein and the USSR Absolute Champion Vladimir Savon.

I would like to make a historical clarification: Balinas’s Odessa victory was widely trumpeted as only the second time in chess history that a non-Russian was able to win such a strong competition in the Soviet Union. Capablanca did it first in Moscow 1936. The truth is, in 1937 the American GM Reuben Fine won two successive tournaments in Moscow and Leningrad against the Soviet cream of the crop sans Botvinnik. So Balinas’s triumph is only the fourth instance; nonetheless, it is still a terrific achievement.

After he achieved his grandmaster title, Balinas established the Philippine Grandmaster school of chess. Among his more famous students were the third Philippine Grandmaster Rogelio Antonio Jr. and International Master Ricardo de Guzman. Another notable student is Oliver Barbosa, who achieved the National Master title at the age of 13 years - the youngest in our history.
GM Rosendo Balinas Jr. was the Philippines’ national treasure and unsung hero to his fans, an uncompromising lawyer who stood up for the ideals of fairness, and who promoted chess excellence and pride of the Filipinos.

Let us begin his story.

In the early 60s the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) made a great contribution to Filipino chess by giving well-paid jobs to rising chess stars like Renato Naranja, Rosendo Balinas, Romeo Rodriguez, Julian Lobigas and Susano Aguilar. These players were encouraged by top management to continue with their chess studies and even allowed special leaves of absence to play in tournaments. Balinas was the Philippine national champion in 1961 and shortly after that started working in Meralco’s public relations office. While there he pursued his law studies and at the same time won the Nationals thrice in 1964, 1966 and 1967.

Now we enter into the interesting years. Shortly after Bobby Fischer’s overpowering victory in the 1967 Monte Carlo tournament, he flew from the French Riviera to the Philippines in anticipation of competing in an international tournament in Manila, to be sponsored by Meralco. However, the failure of grandmasters Borisлав Ivkov and Arturo Pomar to arrive forced the sponsors to cancel. Now came the brainstorm: instead of the tournament, a “Beat Bobby Fischer” contest was held. Eight of our top players were pitted against Bobby Fischer under tournament conditions.

First to go was Renato Naranja who three years later was to earn his International Master title by becoming 1970 Asian zonal champion (no mean feat - he had to eliminate super-Grandmaster Walter Browne who represented Australia then):

Robert Fischer - Renato Naranja [B23]
Meralco (1), 1967


Now the reason why Bobby omits castling becomes clear - he wants to pawn storm the enemy King.

10...Bb7 11.a3 Re8

This is a common motif in such positions - Black plans to shut in White’s bishop with 12...Na5 13.Ba2 c4.


Threatening simply g2-g4-g5 and checkmate down the h-file.

13...Ne7
14.Bg5!

Naranja’s last move is not without merit. If White proceeds as planned with 14.g4, then Black counters with 14...d5! 15.g5 g6! 16.fxg6 (16.Qxh6?? Bg7 traps the queen.) 16...fxg6 17.Qg4 dxc4 18.Qe6+ Kh7 19.gxf6 Nxf5! and he is still very much in the fight.

14...d5 15.Bxf6 dxc4 16.Qg4 g6
17.dxc4

White could try for a brilliancy prize with 17.Qg5 because of 17...hxg5 18.hxg5 and checkmate cannot be done. But Black will not capture the queen.; After 17.Qg5 there is the counter-stroke 17...Nxf5! 18.Bxd8 hxg5 and once again Black has escaped.

17...Qd6 18.Bxe7 Qxe7 19.fxg6 fxg6
20.Qxg6+ Qg7 21.Qxg7+ Kxg7

Fischer has entered into an end-game two pawns up. The rest is a matter of technique.

b5 25.cxb5 Bxd5 26.exd5 c4 27.a4 Rxd5
31.Ke3 c3 32.b3 1-0

The next day it was Ruben Rodriguez’s turn. Rodriguez went on to represent the Philippines in eight Olympiads starting with 1968 Lugano. He earned his International Master title by winning the 1978 Asian Zonal in Japan (co-champion with Torre).

Robert Fischer - Ruben Rodriguez
[A08]
Meralco (2), 1967

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d3

As many of our readers know, Fischer played the Kings Indian Attack all throughout his career. “This used to be my favorite. I thought it led to a favorable variation of the King’s Indian Reversed, particularly after Black has committed himself with ...e6.”

3.Nc6 4.g3 Ng7 5.Bg2 g6 6.0-0 Bg7
7.c3 d5 8.Qe2 0-0 9.e5 f5 10.exf6 Bxf6
11.Bh6 Re8

12.g4!

A typical Fischer move - not caring about stereotypes and just playing the strongest move that he sees. The idea is to prevent ...Nf5.

12...e5 13.h3 Qc7 14.c4!

Three successive strong pawn moves.

14...e4

Rodriguez decides to give up a pawn for the initiative. If 14...d4 then 15.Nbd2 followed by 16.Ne4.

15.dxe4 dxe4 16.Ng5!
16.Qxe4? Bxb2
16...Nd4 17.Qxe4 Bd7 18.Nc3 Bc6
22.Rfe1 Kh8
Getting rid of possible knight checks on f6 and e7.

23.Rad1
[23.Qg3?? Nc2]

[28.Qc3 Rd6 is met by 29.Re7! followed by Bg7+ or Bg5.]

Every move carries a threat. Now it is ...Bc4.


Materially Black is still down, but the two bishops and the hard-to-meet ...e6-e5 gives him a big advantage.


Threatening R2xe6. Black cannot recapture because of checkmate on g7.

26...Qf8 27.Rb7 Nc4 28.h4 h5 29.g4 Ne5 30.Re3 hxg4 31.fxg4 31...h4! 32.Rc3

[32.Qxf4 Qa8! 33.Re7 Rxc2 ouch!]

32...Rc4! 33.Qd2

[33.Rxc4 Nf3+ wins the queen.]

33...Qc8 White loses on time, but his position is already in ruins. 0-1

Roumel Reyes - Robert Fischer [B95]
Meralco (3), 1967

With the idea of ...Nxe4.

8.Be3 b5 9.a3 Bb7 10.Bg2 Nbd7 11.Qe2 Rc8 12.Rd1 Rxc3! 13.bxc3 Nxe4
14.Bxe4

If I was playing White perhaps I would have found 14.Nxe6!? fxe6
15.Bd4 too tempting not to play. However, it must be admitted that the sacrifice may well be unsound.

14...Bxe4 15.0-0 Qa8 16.f3 Bd5

Roumel Reyes - Robert Fischer [B95]
Meralco (3), 1967

With the idea of ...Nxe4.

8.Be3 b5 9.a3 Bb7 10.Bg2 Nbd7 11.Qe2 Rc8 12.Rd1 Rxc3! 13.bxc3 Nxe4
14.Bxe4

If I was playing White perhaps I would have found 14.Nxe6!? fxe6
15.Bd4 too tempting not to play. However, it must be admitted that the sacrifice may well be unsound.

14...Bxe4 15.0-0 Qa8 16.f3 Bd5
Rosendo Bandal - Robert Fischer  
[A60]  
Meralco (4), 1967


Now it was Rosendo Balinas’s turn:

Rosendo Balinas - Robert Fischer  
[B70]  
Meralco (5), 1967


This is a solid option against the Sicilian Najdorf, usually adopted by players who want to avoid a lot of opening theory. The danger here is that if he is not careful the game might be transposed into a Dragon or a Scheveningen with the White g-pawn already committed. Anyway, there was a bit of psychology behind this choice, since fellow Filipino IM Rodolfo Cardoso used this variation to defeat Fischer in their Pepsi-Cola sponsored match in New York 1957.

6...g6

[6...e5 is the obvious Najdorf reaction, which was what happened in his game with Cardoso. I give this in full for history’s sake: 7.Nde2 Be7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0 Nbd7 10.h3 b5 11.a4 b4 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.Qxd5 Qc7 14.c3 (14.Qxa8?? Nb6) 14...Bb7 15.Qd1 Nc5 16.f3 a5 17.Be3 Ba6 18.Rc1 Rab8 19.f4 bxc3 20.Rxc3 Rxb2 21.Rf2 Qb6 22.Rc1 Qb3 23.Nc3 exf4 24.Rxb2 Qxb2 25.Bxc5 dxc5 26.gxf4 c4 27.Nd5 Bc5+ 28.Kh2 Bb4 29.Rc2 Qb3 30.e5 Qxa4? (30...Qd3! would have snuffed out all resistance. But even in his young years Fischer liked to grab pawns.) 31.Be4 g6 32.Qg4 The threat is Nf6+ followed by Qh4. 32...Bb7? (32...f5 33.exf6 Kh8 34.Qe6 Qe8 is the only way to continue fighting) 33.Nf6+ Kg7 34.Qh4 Rc8 (34...h5 35.Nxh5+ gxh5 36.Rg2+ Kh6 37.Qf6#; 34...h5 36.Nh5+ Kg8 36.Qf6 gxh5 37.Rg2#) 35.Qxh7+ Kf8 36.e6! Rc7 37.Qg8+ Ke7 38.Qxf7+ Kd8 39.Rd2+ Bd5 (39...Bxd2 40.Qf8+) 40.Rxd5+ 1-0 Cardoso,R-Fischer,R/ New York 1957.]

7Bg2 Bg7 8.0-0 0-0 9.h3

In the line chosen by White he usually avoids exchanges in preparation for a kingside pawn advance with Nde2, Be3, f4, etc. But after Nde2 Black’s ...Bg4 becomes irritating, so Balinas decides to eliminate this chance once and for all.

9...Bd7

Fischer didn’t like 9...Nc6 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.e5!
10.Nde2 Nc6 11.b3


11...b5 12.Be3

After the game Fischer pointed out that 12.Bb2 is a mistake. He had intended to reply 12...b4 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.Bxg7 Ne3! 15.Qd3 (15.fxe3 Kxg7 is obviously bad for White) 15...Nxf1 16.Bxf8 Nxe3 17.Bh6 Nxe2+ 18.Qxe2 leaves Black a pawn up.

12...Qc8 13.Kh2 Qc7

Take note that Fischer first forced the White King to go to h2 before he put his Queen on c7. This is so as to set up future attacks based on the ...Ng4+ theme, striking at the White while opening up the long diagonal for his g7-bishop.


Balinas has obtained a space advantage - the first time in the “Beat Bobby Fischer” series that any Filipino is ahead.

19...e5 20.dxe6 fxe6 21.Rad1 Nf7 22.f4 Qc5 23.Qxc5

In post-game analysis Fischer suggested to keep queens on with 23.Qd2 followed by Rf1-f3-d3, keeping up the pressure.

23...Rxc5 24.Rd3 Rfc8 25.Rfd1 a5 26.g4 Kf8 27.Re3

If Black maintains his passive play then Balinas intends to bring his d1rook to d3, followed by Nd4.

27...Ke7

28.Bd5! Kf6 29.g5+ Ke7

What was the point of Black’s Ke7-f6-e7 maneuver? Well to get White to play g4-g5 and so eliminating any possibility for a future f4-f5.

30.c4

Fischer thought that 30.b4 axb4 31.cxb4 Rc2 32.Bb3 was better here, keeping the bishop on the annoying a2-g8 diagonal.

30...Nd8 31.Nd4 bxc4 32.bxc4 Kf7 33.Rde1! exd5?!

Might be an inaccuracy. 33...Rxc7 is better, getting the rook out of possible bishop checks on e6, after which there is a probably draw 34.Nxe6 Bxe6 35.Bxe6+ Nxe6 36.Rxe6 Rxc4 37.Rxd6 Rc2+ 38.Kg3 Rxg7.

34.Re7+ Kf8 35.Rxd7 Rxc4 36.Ree7

Time trouble forces Balinas to take the draw. He did not have time to calculate 36Nb5! which seems to offer winning chances: 36...Re4 (36...Rxf4? 37.Nxd6 the threatened mate on e8 forces
Black to shed material.) 37.Rxe4 dxe4 38.Nxd6 Rc2+ 39.Kg3 Ne6 40.Rxh7! All the winning chances are on White’s side. For example, if 40...Rxa2? there comes 41.Rf7+ Kg8 42.Rf6 Nf8 43.Nxe4 etc.

36...Rx6 37.Rxh7 Kg8 38.Rhg7+ Kf8 39.Rh7 1/2-1/2

Fischer went on to win his last three matches and finish the series with a score of seven wins and one draw. Remember this was in a time when Fischer looked invincible, coming after his performances in the Havana Olympiad, US Championships, Monaco and Skopje tournament wins. The Filipinos celebrated Balinas’s draw just as if he had won. When Fischer revisited the Philippines in 1974 to open the Marlboro Classic Grandmaster Tournament, he asked about Balinas and, on being told that he was semi-retired because he was reviewing for the bar examinations, Fischer remarked that he had been impressed with Balinas talent, and that “I hope he gets back!” Boy, did he.

We now give the remaining three games of “Beat Bobby Fischer”. Ramon Lontoc Jr. is the Philippines’ youngest ever National Champion at 14 years old (this was in 1931)! Take note of his 9th move. At that time it was considered eccentric, but now it is all the rage.

Robert Fischer - Manuel Vister [B10]
Meralco (7), 1967


Fischer’s last opponent, Glicerio Badilles, put up a great fight but could not withstand the American juggernaut. Badilles represented the Philippines in the following Olympiads: 1956 Moscow, 1964 Tel Aviv and 1972 Skopje. Furthermore, he played top board for Hongkong in 1968 Lugano. How is that possible you say? Well, he had gone to Lugano as an analyst for the Philippine team, but when the Hongkong team arrived
with only three players he was somehow drafted into the crown colony squad.

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Robert Fischer - Glicerio Badilles
[B44]
Meralco (8), 1967

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4
0-0 12.Nc3 Kh8 13.0-0 Be6 14.Bb3 Na5
15.Nd5 Nxb3 16.axb3 Bxd5 17.Qxd5
Qc7 18.c3 g5 19.Ra4 Rad8 20.Rb4 Rd7
21.Rb6 Kg7 22.Ra1 f5 23.exf5 Rxf5
24.Ra4 Rf8 25.Rc4 Qb8 26.Rcb4 Qa8
27.c4 a5 28.R4b5 a4 29.Rxb7 axb3 30.h4
Rxb7 31.Rxb7 Rf7 32.Bxg5 Qa1+ 33.Kh2
Qxb2 34.Qe6 Qxf2 35.Rxe7
1-0

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1968 Meralco National Open

Grandmaster Rosendo Balinas Jr. won the Philippine National Championship six times. These were in 1961, 1964, 1966, 1967, 1968 and 1971. His 1968 triumph was perhaps the hardest and most celebrated of the six, since it was at the same time an international tournament including representatives of foreign countries like Yugoslavia (GM Svetozar Gligoric), Australia (IM Bela Berger), Thailand (Poul Rasmussen), Malaysia (Lee Keng Cheong) and Singapore (Dr. Lim Kok Ann, later on to become Secretary General of FIDE). This tournament also marked the debut of 16-year old Eugene Torre.

Please take note that none of the Filipinos playing in this tournament had an international title then (Naranja got his IM in 1970, Rodriguez in 1979, while Torre and Balinas got their Grandmaster titles in 1974 and 1976, respectively), and that GM Svetozar Gligoric was at the top of his form at that time - Top 10 in the world and qualifier in the Candidates Matches (leading up to the world championship) in the 1967 Sousse Interzonal.

Meralco National Open
Championship
January 15 - February 2, 1968

Final Standings

1-2 GM Svetozar Gligoric,
Rosendo Balinas Jr., 12.0/16
GM Svetozar Gligoric - Roumel Reyes [D36]
Meralco National Open (1), 15.01.1968

12.Bxe4 Bxh4 13.Bh7+ Kh8

White has s about 80% overall score in this line. After Bd3 and b4 the minority attack is well underway while Black has no real counter-attacking prospects.

14.b4 Be7

Someone tried to trap this bishop by 14...g6, but after 15.Bxg6 fxg6 16.Qxg6 Bf6 17.Qxh6+ Kg8 18.Qg6+ Kh8 19.e4 Black’s King does not stand a chance of surviving the attack. Vooremaa,A-Belinkov,A/ URS 1968 1-0 (49).


Gligoric treated this trip to the Philippines as a vacation, but it started badly when shortly before he left for Asia he broke a bone in his right hand playing football, and his hand had to be put in plaster during the whole stay. The mood of the Yugoslav Grandmaster perhaps did not improve when in the very first round he was upset by NM Roumel Reyes.

The tournament bulletin described it thus: “National Master Roumel Reyes gave more than a grim determination in holding his opponent Grandmaster Gligoric to a fierce Queen’s Gambit Declined encounter. Gligoric succeeded in pushing an early minority attack in the exchange variation and held a distinct positional advantage, saddling his opponent with weak pawns.

“The Grandmaster, however, weakened at the later middle-game stage and lost a piece by adjournment time.”
27...g5!
Reyes is not going to go down without a fight.
28.fxg5 Qxg5 29.Qf2 Rg8 30.Ne5 Qh5!
Keeping his eye on h2 and setting up a few traps.
31.g3 f6 32.Nf7+?
Likewise 32.Nxc6? Bxg3! 33.hxg3 Qh3 wins for Black. 32.Rf1 was perhaps the only move.
Gligoric is taking his opponent very lightly.
32...Kh7
After long thought. 32...Kg7! wins the knight faster, but White gets a bit of counterplay on either the f- or c-files. 33.Rc5 (33.Rf1 Bxg3! 34.hxg3 Kxf7 35.Qf4 Rg4! 36.Qxf5 Rxc3+ 37.Kf2 Qxf5+ etc) 33...Qd1+ 34.Kg2 Bg4 35.Nd2 Kxf7 36.Rxc6 and it becomes a bit double-edged.
33.Nd2 Qh3
Threat: ...Bxg3.
It is only a matter of time now.
48.h3 Bb4 49.g4 Qd2 50.gxf5 Qxf2+ 51.Kxf2 Bc4 52.a4 Kf6 53.Nh5+ Kg5 54.Ng7 Bf7 55.Ne6+ Kxf5 56.Nc5 0-1

Gligoric made up for this loss with straight victories over Torre, de Castro, Naranja and Lobigas, but then he lost another one:

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**Susano Aguilar - Svetozar Gligoric**

**[B85]**

**Meralco National Open (6), 23.01.1968**


There is now the terrible threat of Ne6! coupled with Bxh6!.

24...Rg8 25.Rf1 Nf8 26.Nge4 N8h7 27.Nd2 Rxc3

Gligoric gives up the exchange to bring his pieces back into action. Aguilar continues his exemplary play and brings home the point.

28.bxc3 Nxd5 29.c4 Ndf6 30.Bg1 Qc6 31.Rb3 b5 32.Qd3 d5 33.cxb5 axb5 34.Rxb5 Rc8 35.a4 Ng5

[35...Qxc2 36.Qxc2 Rxc2 37.a5! Rxd2 38.Rb8+ Nf8 39.a6 this pawn will cost Black his rook.]

36.a5 e4 37.Qb3 Nd7 38.Qxd5 Qxd5 39.Rxd5 Nb6 40.c4 Bb4 41.Bc3 Bxd2 42.Bxd2 Nh7 43.Bc3 Na6 44.Rfd1 1-0

From the very beginning Rosendo Balinas surged into the lead. He showed uncanny skill with bishops of opposite colors. For example, in this one against Roumel Reyes Balinas demonstrated that far from being drawish they are an advantage when one is attacking:
Roumel Reyes - Rosendo Balinas  
[C84]  
Meralco National Open (9), 25.01.1968  

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4  
Nnf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.c3 Nxe4 7.Re1 Nc5  
Nnf6 12.c4 Be6 13.Nc3 Nd7 14.Qe2 Bb4  
15.Rad1 Re8  

Although Black’s position is cramped he does not go for exchanges to  
free it up. Balinas always plays to win.  
19.a3 Bxc3 20.Qxc3 Qf7 21.b3 b5 22.Qg3  
bxc4 23.bxc4 Bxc4 24.Bxc7 Qd5 25.Qc3  
Bb3 26.Rc1 Rac8 27.Bf4 Ba4 28.Qc5 Qb3  
29.Be3 Bb5 30.h3 h6 31.Rb1 Qf7 32.Red1  
Qg6 33.Qc3?  

Reyes has no inkling of the danger.  
Best is 33.Rb2 preventing penetration of the bishop via either e2 or d3.  
33...Be2 34.Re1 Bf3 35.g3 Be4  
36.Rbc1 Qf5 37.Kh2 Qf3 38.Rg1 Rcd8  
The rook is going to d5 and h5.  
39.Bd2?? A time pressure blunder. Qxf2+ 0-1  

Against Edgar de Castro we see a display of how to win an opposite color bishop ending.  

Edgar De Castro - Rosendo Balinas  
[A30]  
Meralco National Open (11), 29.01.1968  

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.g3 c5 3.c4 b6 4.Bg2 Bb7  
5.Nc3 g6 6.0-0 Bg7 7.d4 cxd4 8.Qxd4  
0-0 9.Qh4 Qc8 10.Bg5 d6 11.Rac1 Nbd7  
12.Rfd1 Re8 13.Nd5 Bxd5 14.cxd5 Qa6  
15.Qc4 b5 16.Qb3 Nc5 17.Qa3 Qxa3  
21.Rb1 Nc4 22.Bc1  

[22.Rxb5?? Nxa3 wins the exchange.]  
22...a6 23.Nd4 Nxf2 24.Nxb5 axb5  
Bd4+ 28.Kf1 Re8  

Black is going to win a pawn, but the bishops of opposite color render the  
ending drawish. Balinas is the type to ask his opponent “drawing? prove it.”  
29.Rb4 Be5 30.Bf3 Kg7 31.Rb7  
Bf6 32.Kg2 Rxal 33.Rxa2 Rxal 34.Rc7  
Ra3 35.Rb7 Re3 36.Rb5 Be5 37.Rb7  
Kf6 38.Rc7 Bd4 39.Rc4 Bc5 40.Rf4+  
Kg7 41.Re4 Ra3 42.Rxe7 Ra1 43.h4  
Rg1+ 44.Kh2 h5 45.Rd7 Ra1 46.Kg2  
Kf6 47.Kh2 Ra3 48.Kg2 Re3 49.Kf1 Ra3  
50.Kg2 Ra1 51.Kh2 Ra7 52.Rxa7 Bxa7  
Black has no more advantage. He wants to play some more, though.  
53.Kh3 Ke5 54.g4 hgxg4+ 55.Kxg4  
Be3 56.Kg3 f5 57.Bg2 Bd2
58.h5? g5! 59.h6 Be1+ 60.Kh2
[60.Kf3 leaves his d5 pawn unprise.]
60...Kf4 61.h7 Bc3 62.Kg1 Ke3
63.Kf1 g4 64.Bh1 Be5 65.Ke1 Bd4 66.Bg2
Bc3+ 67.Kd1 Kf2 68.Bh1 Kg1 69.Kc2
Bf6
0-1

Losses to Ruben Rodriguez and Renato Naranja held Balinas back allowing GM Gligoric to wrest back the lead with a five-game winning streak. Gligoric was likewise slowed down with a draw in the penultimate round and Balinas caught him via this 27-move thrashing of Susano Aguilar:

11.Nxc6
Here is an example of how the line should work: 11.f3 Na5 12.g4 Nb3+ 13.axb3 Qa5 14.g5 Ne8 15.Rhg1 Nc7
Rfd8 23.Nxd7 Rxd7 24.c3 Qxe5 Black is much better. Schneider,D-Ashley,M/
New York 1997 0-1 (39)

11...Bxc6?!
Can this natural move be wrong? What follows in this game seem to prove that taking with the rook 11...
Rxc6 is better.

12.e5 Ne8 13.f4 d5 14.f5!? Bg5
The pawn is taboo: 14...exf5? 15.Nxd5 Bd7 (this is the only move to save the queen) 16.Bxa7 snatches a pawn in broad daylight.

15.Kb1 Bxe3 16.Qxe3 a6 17.Rhf1
Bd7?
It is hard to suggest a good move for Black, who is horribly passive and cramped. However, this move, trying to force fxe6, fails for a tactical reason.

18.Nxd5?!
More accurate was 18.fxe6! fxe6 (18...Bxe6 19.Nxd5 Black is embarrassed - he does not know where to put his queen. If 19...Qa5 then 20.Ne7+ snares the c8-rook.) 19.Rxf8+ Kxf8 20.Qf3+
Kg8 (20...Ke7 21.Nxd5+ exd5 22.Qxd5 is curtains.) 21.Nxd5! Bc6 22.Rf1! with a mating attack.

18...exd5 19.e6 Bc6?
Aguilar collapses. The best defense is 19...fxe6 20.fxe6 Rxf1 21.Rxf1 Nf6! obviously overlooked (21...Bc6 22.e7 is too obvious.) 22.exd7 Qxd7 23.h4 and
Black holds.

20.e7 Qa5 21.exf8Q+ Kxf8 22.g4 Nf6 23.g5 Ne4 24.g6
One thing you can say about Bali, once he smells blood his aim is straight and true.
24...h6 25.f6 Rc7

26.Qxe4! dxe4 27.Rd8+
1-0

Susano Aguilar didn’t have the stomach for 27.Rd8+ Be8 28.Rxe8+ Kxe8 29.fxg7 queening the pawn. Both title contenders made a determined effort to out-distance each other in the last round, even though they both had the Black pieces. GM Gligoric overcame tough opposition by the name of Glicerio Badilles in a King’s Indian Defense:


“As for Balinas, he had noticed Samuel Estimo had lately taken a fancy to a certain line of the Two Knight’s Defense. In fact, he had used it against Carlos Benitez in the fourth round of this tournament. So Balinas burned the midnight oil to prepare a fitting reception to Estimo’s favorite variation in the Two Knight’s Defense. How well he succeeded can be judged by the horrible state of Estimo’s development after he accepted the sharp exchange sacrifice.”
(Tournament Bulletin)

Samuel Estimo - Rosendo Balinas
[C58]
Meralco National Open (15), 1968

This line is known as Bogolyubov’s Variation. It was first played in the 19th century but was later discarded in view
of the exchange sacrifice which Balinas plays. Then, analysis by Bogolyubov restored the line, which was widely played during the 1950s.

8...cxb5


9.Qxa8 h6!

Balinas's new idea. The acknowledged continuation is 9...Qd7 which forces White to waste a move and retreat the queen. However, after 10.Qf3 Bb7 11.Qe2 the queen is back in action. By playing 9...h6 he forces the knight to retreat, blocking the way of his queen to f3. Of such simple reasoning are monstrous novelties made!

10.Ne4 Nd5

Threatening ...Nb6.

11.Qb8 Nc6!

Balinas is already down an exchange and a pawn. Not content with that he gives up another pawn.

12.Qxb5 Ndb4 13.Na3?

White gets greedy. He should return the exchange with 13.0-0! Bb6 (13...Nxc2?? 14.Qxc6+ wins.) 14.Qa4 Bxf1 15.Kxf1 Qb6 16.d3 but that would leave him two clear pawns up and his pieces are already emerging from their shells.

13...Ba6 14.Qa4 Qd4

A full triumph of Balinas's opening preparation.

15.Nc3 Bc5 16.d3 Qxf2+ 17.Kd1 0-0


It is hopeless. 20.Re2 falls to the beautiful 20...Bc8!

20...Bxe1 21.Bxe1

21...Bc8! 22.Bxb4 Bg4 23.Kd2 Qxe2+


0-1

Tournament Bulletin: "The final standings were the most diplomatic possible. For Grandmaster Gligoric, who came here primarily to have a chess holiday in Asia, sharing a tie for first place could well be a satisfactory result. It is also a fitting present for his birthday. For Balinas, who played with great determination, sharing first with Gligoric is a grand performance." Well said. There will be more grand performances to come.
1974 Nationals and Nice Olympiad

The world seemed to be at the feet of Rosendo Balinas Jr. In 1967 he was the only person to hold Bobby Fischer to a draw in the “Beat Bobby Fischer” exhibition matches. In 1968 he tied another chess legend, GM Svetozar Gligoric for first place in the Meralco Open Chess Championship. By this time he also had a very widely-read chess column in the weekly Graphic magazine.

The problem now arose that he could not see eye-to-eye with one of the most influential people in Philippine chess: Florencio Campomanes. We are not competent to comment on who-was-wrong and who-was-right behind their disagreements, but the fact remains that they just could not get along with each other.

This in effect froze Balinas out of the tournament picture in the early 70s. In 1973 and 1974 there were several strong international tournaments in Manila and Bauang, La Union, but he was not tapped to play even though he had all the qualifications.

Anyway, when there is darkness you should not curse it. Far better is to light a candle. After a couple of years of chess inactivity during which time he got his lawyer’s degree and bar accreditation, Balinas tried to come back by concentrating on the 1974 National Championships. This was also the selection tournament to decide the team that would represent the country in the Nice Olympiad scheduled for the second half of that year.

The 1974 National Chess Championship was the longest and the most grueling tournament in the country in a long time. It was won by 22-year old IM Eugene Torre, his third consecutive title. The tournament, which started in the middle of January 1974 and wound up on April 10 counted three international masters and 17 national masters among the 600 or so participants. Of the leading masters, only Ruben Rodriguez and Ruben Reyes didn’t see action, as they were campaigning then in the United States.

The finals was a 20-manned round robin contest:

1974 Philippine Championship

Final Standings

1  IM Eugene Torre, 15.5/19
2  IM Rodolfo Cardoso, 13.5/19
3-4 IM Renato Naranja,
   Rosendo Balinas Jr., 12.0/19
5-6 Ramon Lontoc Jr.,
   Glenn Bordonada, 11.5/19
7  Robert Kaimo, 11.0/19
8-11 Roger Abella,
   Roger dela Vega,
Glicerio Badilles,
Rico Mascariñas, 10.0/19
12-13 Edgar de Castro,
Julian Lobigas, 9.0/19
14-15 Vic Torre,
Lito Maninang, 8.5/19
16 Susano Aguilar, 8.0/19
17 Cesar Caturla, 7.5/19
18 Mariano Acosta, 6.5/19
19 Edwin Edillon, 5.0/19
20 Ramon Lopez, 1.0/19

Eugene Torre dominated the event from round one to finish two points ahead of Rudy Tan Cardoso, who nevertheless gained the distinction of being the only player to defeat Torre.

The top six were named to the "Philippine Dream Team." This was a real mix of veterans and youth players. Aside from Eugene Torre, Glenn Bordonada represented the up-and-coming players. In the 1973 National Students Championship he tied for runner-up honors with Cesar Caturla and Lito Maninang behind winner Rico Mascariñas. These four were seeded to play in the final round, and it was here where Bordonada made the team.

Representing the veterans was Cardoso, who already represented the country in the 1956 and 1958 Olympiads, and Naranja, Balinas and Lontoc Jr. The last three actually came out of retirement to play. Remember, Lontoc Jr. first won the Philippine Championship in 1931 at the age of 14.

Here are my choices for Balinas’s best games in this Championship:

---

Rosendo Balinas - Rico Mascariñas
[C82]
National Chess Championship Manila, 03.1974

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3 Qa5
4.Bc4 c6 5.Nf3

In 95% of the time White would play 5.d4 here. Balinas's idea is to bring out his pieces fast and establish a beachhead on e5.

5...Nf6 6.Qe2 Bf5 7.Ne5 Bg6

Mascariñas smells something fishy. It looks like he has fallen into Balinas' preparation so he avoids playing 7...e6 which would be normal in this situation but then White has the option to go into 8.g4 Bg6 9.h4 which is unpleasant if you are not sufficiently prepared.

8.d4 Nbd7 9.Nxd7 Nxd7 10.0-0 0-0-0
11.d5 exd5 12.b4! Qc7

[12...Qxb4 13.Nxd5 Qd6 14.Bf4 e5 15.Be3 (so that Black does not have the option of ...e6 anymore) 15...Kb8 16.Rab1 Qc6 17.Rfd1 Bd6 18.a4 White has a very strong attack for the measly investment of a solitary pawn.]

13.Nxd5 Qe5

Forcing the exchange of queens, or so he thought.

14.Qf3! e6

Turns out that the rook is taboo:
14...Qxa1 15.Bf4 Ne5 (15...Qd4? is answered by the same combination as in the actual game.) 16.Qe3! Nxc4 17.Qc5+ Kd7 18.Qb5+ Kc8 (18...Ke6 19.Nc7+ Kf6 20.Qg5#) 19.Qxc4+ Kd7 20.Rxa1
the end.

15.Bf4 Qd4?
The only move to stave off immediate loss is 15...Qe4, with the likely continuation 16.Qc3! (16.Qa3 right away does not work because of 16...exd5) 16...Qxc2 17.Qa3! exd5 18.Qxa7 with a winning attack. The text, though, allows an immediate mating combination.

OK, cover up the rest of the game and try to spot the checkmate here.

16.Ne7+! 1-0


Rosendo Balinas - Cesar Caturla [A42]
National Chess Championship Manila, 03.1974

1.d4 g6 2.c4 Bg7 3.Nc3 d6 4.e4 e5 5.dxe5 dxe5 6.Qxd8+ Kxd8
This is the Modern Defense (note the position of Black's kingside knight). Black has deliberate aimed for a defensive position, hoping to neutralize White’s initiative and generate his own play on the dark squares.

7.Bg5+
The critical line is 7.f4! trying to take advantage of Black’s underdevelopment.

7...f6 8.0-0-0+ Nd7 9.Be3 Bh6
One of the common White maneuvers here is g2-g3 followed by f2-f4, so Black immediately challenges the bishop before White is ready for f2-f4.

10.Nd5
Nowadays it is well-known that the simplest way for White is to play 10.Bxh6 Nxh6 11.g3 c6 12.Bh3 Ke7 13.f4 exf4 14.gxf4 Nc5 15.b4 with a slight advantage. Uhlmann, W-Werner, D/Frankfurt 1990 1-0 (48)

10...Bxe3+ 11.Nxe3 c6 12.h4 h5

13.g4!
Only from the fertile mind of Balinas. I am sure that many of our readers would also play 13.g4. But I am also positive that most of them simply intended to exchange pawns. Balinas's
idea is to sacrifice it so that Caturla is tempted to try and hold it at all cost. That is exactly what happens.

13...hxg4 14.Ne2 Ke7 15.Ng3 Nc5
16.Be2 Nh6 17.h5 g5?
Black’s most prudent way is to abandon the pawn on g4 to its fate, to wit 17...gxh5 18.Rxh5 Nf7 is completely equal.

18.b4 Na6 19.a3 Be6 20.c5 Nc7 21.a4 Rad8 22.Kb2 a6 23.Kc3
Black’s knight on h6 and bishop on e6 have purely defensive functions. If all pieces get exchanged White has a dangerous passed pawn on the h-file. This position is the complete explanation for the pawn sacrifice!

23...Ne8 24.Rxd8 Kxd8 25.b5!
That’s right! While Black’s pieces are tied up in the kingside. White will concentrate on the queenside and center.

White’s immediate threat is Nd6+ followed by Rxh7.

32...Ne8 33.Kd5 Rf7?
A mistake which hastens the end.

34.Nd6+ Nxd6 35.cxd6 Rh7 36.Rc1+ Kd8 37.Rc7!
Obviously overlooked.

37...Rxh5 38.Rxb7 f5 39.Kc6 Ke8 40.Rb8+
1-0

All six players hied off to the cool air of Baguio for a few months’ physical conditioning and training. Like the Manila Olympiad squad, this team training was really funded. There they did jogging, calisthenics, basketball and, of course, an intensive group study of opening theory and current tournament praxis. After Baguio, the group went down to the beaches of La Union and to the Hundred Islands resort.

The training program bore fruit right away. On June 6, 1974 the Olympiad commenced. During the captain’s meeting the assembled 74 teams were split into eight groups (six groups with nine teams and two with ten), the top two of which will all play in the Finals Group A, the next two in Finals Group B, and so on. After three rounds, however, Nicaragua was disqualified from Group 4. In view of this development only Group 7 had ten teams for the entire preliminaries.

Unfortunately the Philippines was assigned to this group. The group had to play more games. In Group 7, five countries were strongly vying for the Finals Group A - Bulgaria, Israel, France, Philippine and Indonesia. First place was conceded to Bulgaria; the other four would have to scramble for the remaining slot.

The Pinoy scoring machine went to work right away. Even though the team were groggy from their long trip, they faced a formidable tasks. The quirks of the pairing system had assigned them against three main rivals for the second qualifying spot in the first three rounds! We didn’t do too badly there - 2.5-1.5 against France, 2.5-1.5 vs Indonesia,
and a respectable 2.0-2.0 draw with Soviet-reinforced Israel (Liberzon and Radashkovich).

Then there was a respite, three rounds against weakies, to which we conceded only 1 draw (Dominican Republic 3.5-0.5; Cyprus 4.0-0.0; Virgin Islands 4.0-0.0). After a hiccup against Bulgaria 0.1-3.0, our engines cranked up again and conceded only two draws, against Turkey (3.5-0.5) and Faroe Islands (3.5-0.5) and we forced ourselves into Finals Group A, a full two points ahead of the chasing Israel. This qualification into Group A was already the source of much rejoicing in the Philippines, since it signifies our entry once again to the world elite (Lugano 1968 was the first time).

But Torre and company were not yet done. Their “dream team” of three IMs and three unrated players were expected to get massacred by the all-Grandmaster teams of Europe and Americas (as they did in Lugano 1968). Instead of rolling over and playing dead, they fought the chess super-powers with all their might.

For the first time in Final Group A the Philippine team did not suffer a shutout, not even by the all-powerful Soviet team. The Pinoys even had the audacity to deliver killing blows to Hungary and Czechoslovakia, both by convincing 3.0-1.0 scores. Hungary is a perennial runner-up to the USSR in Olympiads, but after the Philippine victory they could not find their bearings in Nice. Czechoslovakia was fourth in 1972 Skopje but similarly, after the RP victory, it ran aground.

The Philippines finished 11th out of 73 countries. We could have finished higher, but some team members did not have the necessary stamina to last the grueling grind. We lost to several “softies” in the homestretch.

Of course, all our readers also know that here in Nice Eugene Torre won the silver medal on top board (second to future world champion Anatoly Karpov) and earned his Grandmaster title.

Rosendo Balinas was fielded 14 times and scored 50% - four wins, four losses and six draws. Here is the crucial game where he defeated former World Championship Candidate GM Miroslav Filip and cemented our final score against Czechoslovakia (3.0-1.0). Balinas tries to make the most of an initiative gained from the opening by plunging into a speculative sacrifice. He does not continue in the most accurate way, though, and allows Filip to survive. With both players in time trouble it is Filip who loses his nerve and overlooks a mating combination:

Rosendo Balinas (2200) - Miroslav Filip (2495) [B17]
Nice ol (Men) fin-A Nice (5), 1974


This is called the Smyslov System of the Caro-Kann, a great favorite of Anatoly Karpov.
5.Nf3 Ng6 6.Ng3 e6 7.Bd3 Be7
Either here or on the previous move Black could also have played ...c5 with easy equality.

8.Qe2
In most games with this treatment White would castle kingside and then fianchetto his dark-squared bishop in preparation for a kingside attack. Here is an example: 8.0-0 00-0 9.b3 c5 10.Bb2 b6 11.Qe2 Bb7 12.Rad1 Qc7 13.c4 Rfe8 14.Bb1 Rad8 15.Ne5 Bd6 16.Nxd7 Rxd7 17.dxc5 Bxc5? (better is 17...Bxg3!)

Take note that White cannot win two pieces for his rook with 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Rxd7?? because of 16...Qxb2# checkmate.

15...Bc6 16.Bxf6!
Balinas has in mind a nice combination.

16...Bxf6 17.Nh5 Red8
Black has to be careful. For example the "natural" 17...Be7 falls to 18.Nxg7! Kxg7 19.Qg4+ and wherever the King goes checkmate will soon follow: if 19...Kf8 (19...Kf6 20.Rf4+ Kxe5 21.Rf5+ exf5 22.Qd4#; 19...Kh6 20.Nxf7#) 20.Qh5 followed by Qxf7.

18.Nxf6+ gxf6

19.Nxf7?!
[19.Qh5! is a forced win: 19...Qc7 20.Rxd8+ Rxd8 21.Qg5+ followed by Rxd8.) 20.Nxc6 bxc6 (20...Qxc6?? 21.Rxd8+) 21.Qxc5 and White is a piece up with an attack on Black’s shattered kingside.]

19...Kxf7 20.Rd6?!
[20.Qh5+ Kg7 21.Rg4+ Kh8 22.Rc1 looks like a better chance, retaining as much material as possible.]

20...Rxd6 21.Rxd6 Re8 22.Qh5+ Kg7 23.Rd4 Rd8 24.Rg4+ Kh8 25.a3
Black has already gained the upperhand.

25...Ne4 26.Bb3 Qc5
[26...Qd4 looks better, threatening a back rank check should White play Qf7. From here till the 40th move, though, both players were in bad time pressure.]

27.Qf7 Qf8 28.Qxe6 Nd2+ 29.Ka2 Re8 30.Qf5 Nxb3 31.cx b3 Qe7 32.Qa5 a6 33.g3 Qe5 34.Qd2 Bd5 35.h3 Qe6 36.Qd3 Be4 37.Qc3 Bf5 38.Rf4 Qe5 39.Qf3 Be6?
With both flags ready to fall any
micro-second it is Filip who cracks under the pressure. Of course he has to play 39...Be4 as this is the only move to save the f6-pawn.

40.Rxf6 Qd5??

Another blunder - this was the point behind the previous move. What Filip overlooked was ...

41.Rf8+

1-0

A lucky win? Yes. What I cannot describe to you is the jubilation, high-fiving, hugging and chest-thumping that occurred after this game. Balinas was around 5 feet 2 inches tall against Filip’s 6 foot frame and everybody saw the significance - David has slain Goliath once again!

With a 50% score in the Olympiad Balinas did not do too badly. When the national squad returned home to the cheers of their countrymen Balinas was back hard at work — he wanted to win the National Open and qualify for the 1975 Melbourne Zonal.

1975 Melbourne Zonal

Before the end of 1974 the National Open was held, sponsored by the Far East Bank and Bancom. The cash prizes were pretty attractive: major prizes were P6,000 (1st), P4,500 (2nd) and P3,000 (3rd). The prizes were not the top priority for Balinas. He was after one of the top two places because he wanted to represent the country in the 1975 Melbourne Zonals.

GM Torre, IM Cardoso and IM Naranja were seeded directly into the finals, with seven more to come from a preliminary swiss system event. All 10 finalists were to receive cash prizes. First place was generally conceded to Torre even though Naranja was the defending champion.

Not being seeded into the finals, Olympians Balinas and Lontoc Jr. had to qualify the hard way: play in a 260-man 9-round Preliminary Swiss System.

Qualifiers:

1    Edmund Pascual, 8.0/9

2-7  Ramon Lontoc Jr., Rico Mascarinas, Susano Aguilar, Roger dela Vega, Rosendo Balinas, Jr., 7.5/9

8-9  Ricardo Bandal, Rosendo Bandal, 7.0/9

Edmund Pascual was the 1973 National Junior Champion. A very promising chesster who completely dominated the country’s junior land-
scape during these years, he was also a medical student and was soon to retire from chess competition altogether to finish his studies.

Contrary to expectations, International Masters Cardoso and Naranja did not join the Finals, so the competition was dubbed Torre Open instead of the National Open. Torre won seven and conceded two draws - with Edmund Pascual and a 10-mover with Balinas.

Here is Balinas's writing about the experience:

"Actually, I had set my eyes on three things in Melbourne: 1) the championship, 2) a berth in the Interzonals, and 3) a 66.67% performance (8 pts out of 12). These were of course in descending order of preference. (Note: by scoring 8/12 Balinas would automatically become an International Master by virtue of a special ruling from FIDE as an incentive for people to play in the Zonals).

"It was too late when I realized that it was unwise for me to have tried too hard in the early stage of the tournament because of my desire to win the championship. My first three games, which lasted a total of more than 30 hours, exhausted me (note: Balinas lost a 90-mover to Torre, drew with Bordonada in 74 moves and defeated Bachtiar in another 74-mover. The game with Torre was adjourned twice; the other two, once). I lacked sleep and rest, and as a result, I found myself in poor shape for my fourth game against Garbett of New Zealand."

Paul Garbett upset Balinas in round four to jump to the early tournament lead. In the next round Balinas lost again, this time to tough Singaporean International Master Tan Lian Ann and so after five rounds he had 1.5 points. By this time realization set in that Balinas had no more chance to qualify for the Interzonals, let alone win the Zonal, and the only thing he could aspire for was the IM title. Problem, he needed eight out

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Balinas just narrowly missed his 7th National Championship, but there was good consolation — his second place meant that he will be playing in the 1975 Melbourne Zonal.

This Asian-Pacific Chess Championship (Zonal) took place in Melbourne, Australia in the second half of January. The top two finishers were to represent the Zone in the Interzonals.
of 12 to get it, but due to his poor start that meant scoring an unheard of six wins and one draw out of the last seven rounds. It is an almost impossible mission, but he had to give it a try.

In round six he faced Elio Hoshino of Japan, who was having a bad tournament (in fact, out of 12 games he only scored two pts: one win and two draws. Now here is the surprise - that sole win was scored against GM Eugene Torre!). The Japanese could not stand up to Balinas’ sharp tactics:

Hoshino,E - Balinas,R [A21]
Melbourne zt (6), 1975

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 f5 3.a3 Nf6 4.g3 c6
5.Bg2 d6 6.d3 Be6 7.Nf3 Nbd7 8.b4 g6
9.b5 cxb5 10.Nxb5 d5 11.Ng5 Bg8 12.0-0
h6 13.Nf3 dxc4 14.dxc4 Bxc4 15.Rb1 e4
16.Nh4 Kf7 17.Re1 Nb6 18.Qxd8 Rxd8
19.Nxa7 Bc5 20Nb5 Bxb5 21.Rxb5 Rd5
22.e3 g5 23.Nf3 exf3 24.Bxf3 Ne4 25.a4
29.Rxb5 Rxd1 30.Rxd1 Nxb5 0-1

From the seventh to ninth rounds Balinas would be facing three Australians one after the other. Robert Jamieson, the hometown favorite, was Balinas’s seventh round opponent. Having had his bye and scoring 5/5 in the rounds he played, Jamieson was a half-point ahead of Torre at the end of the sixth round. It was only after Balinas defeated the Australian that Torre could take the lead which he never relinquished.

Rosendo Balinas - Robert Jamieson
[B33]
Melbourne zt (7), 1975

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4
Nf6 5.Nc3 e5

The Sicilian Pelikan is Jamieson’s favorite, and he has not lost a game with it in Australia. At the time of this game the soundness of the Pelikan had not yet been proven, and its theory was in its infancy. Balinas was familiar with the opening as well, however, having obtained good play against it in his game with Rumania’s Ciocaltea in the Nice Olympiad.

6.Ndb5 d6 7.a4

Nowadays everybody plays 7.Bg5 in this position almost automatically, but in 1975 this pawn move was the main line.

7...a6 8.Na3 Be6 9.Bg5 Be7 10.Bc4
Rc8 11.Bxf6 Bxf6 12.Nd5 Bg5 13.c3 Ne7
14.Qb3 Nxd5?!?

Ciocaltea played 14...Bxd5 15.Bxd5
Nxd5 16.Qxd5 with the text, Jamieson sacrifices a pawn. Balinas gave 14...Nxd5 the doubtful suffix “?!’’ to hint that he was not impressed at all with the move. However, I don’t see anything wrong with it. In fact, it is pretty much in the spirit of the Pelikan.

15.exd5 Bd7 16.Qxb7 Rb8 17.Qxa6
Rb6 18.Qa7 Rxb2

Jamieson had in mind 18...Bd2+
19. Kxd2 Rxb2+ but he desisted upon closer examination of the possibilities.

19...0-0 20. Rab1 Rd2 21. Rb7 Bf5 22. Nb5 Bf4 23. g3 Bh3 24. Re1 e4!
25. gxf4 Qc8

26. Qe3?

The best move was the study-like 26. Rd7!! Bxd7 27. Nxd6 Qd8 28. Nxe4 and White consolidates to victory.

26...Qg4+?

Black transposes moves. He should have played first 26... Rd1! 27. f3 Rxe1+ 28. Qxe1 Qxb7 29. fxe4 Ra8 with the better endgame.

27. Qg3 Rd1 28. f3 Rxe1+ 29. Kf2 Qxg3+ 30. hxg3 Ra1 31. fxe4 Rxa4 32. Nxd6 Ra3 33. Bb3 h5 34. e5 Rfa8 35. c4 R3a7 36. Rxa7 Rxa7 37. c5 Ra3 38. Bc4 Rc3 39. c6 Kf8 40. c7 Bd7 41. f5 This was White’s sealed move, and Black resigned without resuming play.

1-0

So, two out of two. All that is needed now is four wins and one draw out of the last five games. In round eight Balinas faced his second straight Australian - Michael Woodhams, by no means an easy prey.

It should be noted that Woodhams had played Board 4 in the Australian squad to the 1974 Nice Olympiad (behind Robert Jamieson, Max Fuller and Terry Shaw) and he had surprised everyone by scoring 14 wins, 3 draws and only 1 loss out of 18 games - 86.11%.

This included a victory against GM William Lombardy of the US. Woodhams and Balinas castled on opposite wings and went for each other’s throat, but Balinas was the first to crash through:

---

Michael Woodhams - Rosendo Balinas [E41]
Melbourne zt (8), 1975


The elaborate maneuver beginning with this move has the main objective of playing ...h5 and placing Black’s other knight at h6. This knight maneuver would attack White’s advanced f5-pawn and eventually open the h-file.

19. Rb5 Rg7 20. Reb1 Nc8 21. a4 Ng8 22. a5 f6 23. Qd1 Nce7 24. g4 h5 25. h3 Nh6 26. Kg2 hxg4 27. hxg4 Rh7 28. Qf3 Nf7 29. Be4 Rh4 30. Qg3 a6 31. Rb6 Qa4 32. Bd3
32...Nxd5!

Balinas noted after the game that the tournament bulletin gave this move an exclamation mark, but he does not agree with it as 32...Qxa5 seems to be as good as the text if not better. After some deep analysis I would note that the text move as played stands up to painstaking scrutiny and is really the best.

33.R6b3

[33.cxd5?? Rxg4]

33...Ne7

[33...Nf4+ 34.Bxf4 (34.Kg1? Rbh8) 34...Qc6+! 35.Qf3 Qxf3+ 36.Kxf3 gxf4 enters a highly favorable endgame - the pawn on g4 will fall as well. There is no need to rush into the endgame just yet, though, for the position is still full of tricks.]

34.Qf3 d5! 35.cxd5 Rxf4+?!  
[35...e4! was Balinas's original plan, and it is correct. 36.Bxe4 Ne5 37.Qe2 (by the way, if Black is not careful he will be checkmated via Qxa6+!) 37...Rxg4+ 38.Kf1 Qc4 (38...Qxe4?? 39.Qxa6+! bxa6 40.Rxb8+ Ka7 41.Rb7#) 39.Qxc4 Nxc4 one of the two bishops must go.]

36.Kf1Nd6 37.Bxa6 Qe4?!

There is a win here via the cold-blooded 37...Rh4! 38.Bxb7+ Nxb7 Woodhams does not have a follow-up to the attack.

38.Be2?


38...Rh4 39.Qxe4 Nxe4

This move is possible only because White withdrew the white-squared bishop from a6. 40.Be3? A pity - the last move before time control and it throws the game away.

40...Nxd5 41.Rb2 g4 42.Ba6 Rh7 43.Bd3 Nxc3 44.Bxe4 Nxe4 45.Rb6 Rh1+ 46.Kc2 Rd8 47.Bd2

[47.Rxb7 Nc3# mate.]

47...Ra1

[47...g3! 48.fxg3 Rh2+ wins a piece, but let us not quibble - Balinas is still winning anyway.]

48.Rc2 c4 49.Ke3 Nxd2 50.Rxd2 Re1+ 51.Re2 Rd3+ mate next move. 0-1

Disaster nearly struck when Australian Max Fuller got a winning position but Balinas managed to pull out a draw:

---

Rosendo Balinas - Max Fuller [B09]
Melbourne zt (9), 1975


[34...Bd7! seems best: 35.Qf3 Rd1 36.Qf1 (36.Rf1 Rxf1+ 37.Qxf1 Bf5) 36...Rxe1 37.Qxe1 Qxb3 in both cases Black has a winning endgame.]

35.Ref1! Kh8

[35...Rxe2 36.Rf8+ Rxf8 37.Qe6+ Kg7 38.Qe7+ Kh6 39.Qh4+ Kg7 40.Qe7+ draw.]

36.Qg5 Bf5 37.Rxf5 gxf5 38.Qf6+ Kg8 39.Qg5+ 1/2-1/2

When Singaporean Giam Choo Kwee played the opening against Balinas very badly and allowed him to infiltrate, suddenly the goal was within reach.

---

Giam Choo Kwee - Rosendo Balinas
[B08]
Melbourne zt (10), 1975


[16...c6? wins the exchange. Bali did not take this because of 17.Qxd6 Bxa1 18.Qxg6+ Bg7 19.Nf6+ Kf8 20.Nh7+

which forces the draw. However, he did not notice the zwischenzug (in-between move) 17...Qg4+! which prevents the perpetual.]


The magic number for Balinas is now down to only two out of two! First, a rook sacrifice to bamboozle the New Zealander Lindsay Cornford:

---

Rosendo Balinas - Lindsay Cornford
[A00]
Melbourne zt Melbourne (11), 1975

15.Rxe6!
A totally unexpected shot.
15...Kxe6 16.Qxd5+ Ke7 17.Re1+ Kf8 18.Re6!
20.Rxf6+ Ke7 escapes with a whole rook in tow.) 19...Rd1+ 20.Bf1 g6 brings his
King into relative safety.
18...Qf7 19.Qd6+ Ne7 20.Re3 Qf6
24.Qe5 Rhf8 25.Bxf5 Nxf5 26.Qxf5+ Kg8
27.Qg4+ Kh8 28.Qd4+ Kg8 29.Qxa7 Rf7
30.a4 Rc6 31.Qb8+ Kg7 32.Qe5+ Kg8
33.h4 Rcf6 34.f4 Ra6 35.Kg2 Rc6 36.h5
h6 37.g4 Rfc7 38.c4 Rg7
[38...Rxc4? 39.Qe8+ Kg7 40.Qg6+
Kf8 41.Qxh6+ Kf7 42.Qg6+ is an easy
win]
39.g5 hxg5 40.fxg5 Rgc7 41.Qe8+
Kg7 42.Qe5+ Kg8 43.Qe8+ Kg7 44.h6+
Kh7 45.Qe4+ Rg6 46.Kh3 b6 47.Kh4 Rc5
48.Qe7+ Kh8 49.Qf8+ 1-0

And now just one game left but it was against tough Indonesian Jacobus
Sawander Sampouw. Never mind - it is all or nothing.

Jacobus Sawander Sampouw -
Rosendo Balinas [C78]
Melbourne zt (12), 1975

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4
Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bb7 7.Re1 Bc5
Balinas: “Another deviation which I used was the resurrected Archangel
Variation of the Ruy Lopez against Sampouw. Its staunch and lone sup-
porter in international competition is the innovative grandmaster, Planinc of
Yugoslavia.

Although this seems to be a dangerous set-up for Black, I did not go for the
usual lines because I was playing for a win and I had not reviewed these moves
well. On the other hand, I had fancied Planinc’s ideas a long time ago and I de-
cided to try one of his favorites thinking that if he could play it with confidence
against top-ranked players, there was no reason for me to doubt its sound-
ness. I also gambled on the thought that if I did not know the variation well
enough, neither did my opponent who probably had never met nor played this
variation.”

8.c3 0-0 9.h3
The text safeguards White’s KN4
square which is a potential launching
ground for Black’s counter-attack 9.d4
was what Sampouw played against Bali-
nas during the event’s lightning champi-
onship and lost 9...Bb6 10.Bg5 h6.

9...Bb6 10.d3 h6 11.Nbd2 Re8
15.Qc2 c5 16.Bd2 Rc8
[16...c4! is probably better 17.exd5
loses to 19...Rxe5 20.Rxe5 Qc6) 19...
Rxe5 20.Nxe5 Qh4 Black is much better
- he is threatening to take the g3-knight,
and if it moves away then he takes the
f2-pawn.]

17.Rad1 Qc7 18.Bc1 c4 19.exd5 cxd3
20.Qxd3 Bxd5 21.Qe2?
Sampouw does not notice 21.Qf5 
Bxa2 22.Bxh6!

21...Bxa2 22.Be3 Bc4 23.Qc2 Bxe3 
27.Rd2 Bd5 28.Red1 Qb7 29.Re1 Qe7 

At this point White had about two minutes left on his clock to make the 40th move while Black had also about five minutes left on his clock. The game ended in a time scramble. 

30.Rdd1 Rg6 31.Rxd5 Nxd5 32.Ng3 
Re6 33.Qe4 Nf6 34.Qh4 Rc4 35.Ne4 
Nxe4 36.Rxe4 Qxh4 37.Rxh4 Rhx4 
41.Kg3 Rb1 0-1

3-4 Rosendo Balinas Jr., Robert Jamieson, 8.0/12 
5 Max Fuller, 7.0/12 
6 Glenn Bordonada, 6.5/12 
7-8 Arovah Bachtir, Michael Woodhams, 6.0/12 
9 Paul Garbett, 5.5/12 
10 Giam Choo Kwee, 5.0/12 
11 Jacobus Sampouw, 4.5/12 
12 Elio Hoshino, 2.0/12 
13 Lindsay Cornford, 0.5/12

At the end of the zonal, both Balinas and Jamieson were awarded their outright International Master titles.

Balinas wrote about this: “In the end, I was happy that I won the IM title by virtue of the special FIDE rule, but I also felt disappointed because I missed out on my first two objectives.”

Next step - International Grandmaster.

1975 MELBOURNE ZONAL 
Final Standings:

1 GM Eugenio Torre, 10.0/12 
2 IM Tan Lian Ann, 8.5/12

1975 Marlboro Grandmaster Tournament

Balinas was on a red-hot comeback. Runner-up (half a point behind Eugene Torre) in the 1974 FEBTC-BANCOM National Open followed by third place in the Asian Zonals, he had boosted his stock tremendously. In the latter, he scored six wins and one draw out of his last seven games for his final placing and the outright International Master title.

When the 1975 Marlboro Grandmaster Tournament was organized in October of 1975 and there were two slots for Filipino players, it was Torre and Balinas who were chosen to defend the national colors.

This tournament reminds me of then Presidential Assistant Guillermo de
Vega. It was through his support that the Philippines was put on the chess map — super-tournaments were held once or twice a in these Pacific Islands.

My own father-in-law died last February 1993 and was laid to rest in Loyola Memorial Park in Marikina. Coincidentally, it was exactly across a narrow street from Gimo de Vegas’s plot. I really felt bad to see it not well kept. In fact I heard that the de Vega family was selling it to raise money for their daily expenses.

Anyway, back to our story. I had mentioned earlier that Balinas did not see eye-to-eye with Florencio Campomanes, and this kept him out of the local and international chess circuit. It was through the intercession of de Vega that Campomanes allowed Balinas to play again and to return with a vengeance during the 1975 Marlboro Chess Classic International Tournament. The tournament line-up was as follows:

1 GM Lev Polugaevsky (USSR 2645)
2 GM Bent Larsen (Denmark 2625)
3 GM Ljubomir Ljubojevic (Yugoslavia 2615)
4 GM Henricke Mecking (Brazil 2610)
5 GM Svetozar Gligoric (Yugoslavia 2575)
6 GM Lubomir Kavalek (USA 2555)
7 GM Helmut Pfleger (West Germany 2540)
8 GM Eugene Torre (Philippines 2515)
9 IM Leif Ogaard (Norway ELO 2460)
10 IM Nikola Karaklajic (Yugoslavia 2445)
11 IM Rosendo Balinas Jr. (Philippines 2355)

Average ELO was 2540, making this a Category 12 Tournament. The Grandmaster norm for a 10-game tournament like the above would be 5.5 points.

Let us put this tournament in the proper perspective. This was before the period of outrageously inflated ratings. Nowadays we have Kasparov and Kramnik who are ELO-rated at over-2800, after which 14 more who have 2700+ ratings. Being rated above 2600 is no big deal — there are around a hundred of them!

Not so in 1975. The World Champion then was Anatoly Karpov and his ELO rating was 2695 (compare this with Garry Kasparov’s current rating of 2838!). Also, there were only around 10 players rated above 2600. Ljubojevic at ELO 2615 was considered the European champion for his string of tournament victories while Bent Larsen at ELO 2625 was still perhaps the strongest western challenger for the chess throne (not considering Bobby Fischer, who had already retired by then). Henrique Mecking was at his prime then — this enfante terrible had shocked everyone by running away with the 1973 Petropolis Interzonal (ahead of even the Soviets!) and he was
to do a repeat performance in the 1976 Manila Interzonals (you guessed it, once again ahead of the Soviets!). And do not forget Lubomir Kavalek, who was champion of the USA.

Category 12 might not seem like much now but at that time the Marlboro event was one of the 10 strongest tournaments in the year. This tournament is ranked alongside the Amsterdam IBM Tournament (won by Ljubojevic), Milan 1975 (won by Karpov), Alekhine Memorial in Moscow (won by Geller), and the USSR National Championship in Erevan (won by Petrosian).

It could have been stronger too. The USSR Chess Federation had originally promised to send Viktor Kortchnoj (ELO 2670) but right after the Final Candidate Match where he lost to Anatoly Karpov (Remember? Bobby Fischer later refused to defend his title causing the winner of that candidates’ match, Karpov to be declared world champion) he had made some rather undiplomatic remarks, thus he got canned.

Anyway, the player they sent to replace him, Lev Polugaevsky is no slouch either—several-time USSR champion and candidate for the World Championship crown.

In this tournament the darling of the chess press Eugene Torre was not in good form and in fact tied for last place. But the imagination of the public was captured by Rosendo Balinas, the lowest-rated player of the tournament, who would show his highly fancied opponents no respect and would throw everything at them including the kitchen sink in pursuit of the elusive grandmaster norm. The never-say-die attitude, the tension, and pressure brought to bear upon the position would cause both players to eat up their time. The piece banging, hands grabbing and scrambling that panic time entailed would heighten the drama that unfolded every day.

Balinas needed 5.5 points for the Grandmaster norm. He got the first point from IM Leif Ogaard, the Scandinavian Champion, and created a sensation by scoring a second win against no less than Polugaevsky:

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Rosendo Balinas (2355) -
Lev Polugaevsky (2645) [A21]
Marlboro GM Classic (4th) Makati (3), 04.10.1975

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 d6 3.g3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.d3 f5

According to the best-selling book “Gambit Guide to the English Opening: 1...e5” the best set-up against Black’s formation is to play 6.e3 Nf6 7.Nge2 Nc6. Aside from getting ready for a queenside offensive the set-up will make it hard for Black to get an attack on the rolling kingside, as White will often be able to intercept it with f4.


Polugaevsky was expecting 9.b4, but after the text he realizes that Balinas
intends to castle queenside.
9...c6 10.0-0-0 Qe7 11.e3 Nc5!
Black is targeting ...e5-e4.
12.fxe5 dxe5 13.d4 e4! 14.Ne1
is already better.]
14...Ne6 15.Kb1 Bd7 16.Bf1 Rac8
17.h3 c5 18.d5 Ng5 19.Be2 Nf7 20.Ng2
Ne5 21.Bc1 Ne8 22.Nf4 Nd6
Black is obviously calling the shots
here - his knights have occupied their
ideal places.
23.b3 b5 24.Nxb5 Nxb5 25.cxb5 c4

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Looks like White is going to be
wiped out real quick, huh? Well, Balinas
has just begun to fight.
26.d6! Qf7 27.Nd5 Nd3
[27...cxb3 28.Qxb3 Be6 is met by
29.Ne7+ Kh8 30.Qa3 everything is still
unclear.]
28.bxc4 Bxb5

Lev Polugaevsky was really one
colossal player. He was always excel-
ently prepared in the opening and
well-equipped in all facets of the game.
Did he have any weaknesses? Well, in
his book “Russian Silhouettes” Genna
Sosonko quotes Polugaevsky himself:
“I get very nervous and experience
cowardice when conducting attacks in
unclear, double-edged positions.”

Bobby Fischer’s description of his
opponents from Argentina during his
simul tour could apply to Balinas: “you
had better nail those guys in the open-
ings, otherwise they get stronger as the
game goes on.”
29.Ne7+ Kh8 30.Nxc8 Rxc8!
[There is a trap here: 30...Qf6?
31.Bb2 Nxb2 32.Rd4!]
31.Bxd3 exd3 32.Rxd3 Rxc4?
[32...Bxc4 is much better: 33.Rb3
Qe8! White is hard-put to hold the posi-
tion. The retreat of the queen has many
purposes, one of which is to support the
rook when it comes to the b-file to pin
White’s queen against the King.]
33.d7!

Why not 33.Qb3 ? Well, that was
the point of White’s 33rd move, decoy-
ing away the bishop, because with the
bishop still on b5 there would follow
33...Rb4! 34.Qxb4 Bxd3 checkmate!
33...Bxd7 34.Qb3 h5 35.Bb2!
Very precise defence. He does not
fall for 35.Rxd7? Qxd7 36.Qxc4 Qb7+
37.Kc2 Qxh1.
35...Ba4 36.Bxg7+ Kh7
Worse is 36...Kxg7 37.Qb2+ Kh7
38.Rd8 Qg7 39.Rc1
37.Qb8! Bc2+
[37...Qxg7 38.Rc1 forces simplifi-
cation into an easily won endgame.]
38.Ka1 Qxg7+ 39.Rd4 Rx4 40.exd4
Qxd4+ 41.Qb2 Qxb2+ 42.Kxb2
How was that for perfect defense? Everything is now cut-and-dried.

42...Be4 43.Rd1 g5 44.Rd7+ Kg6 45.Rd6+ Kg7 46.Kc3! Bg2 47.Kd4 Bxh3 48.Ke5 f4 49.gxf4 g4 50.f5! h4 51.f6+ Kf8 52.Rd8+ Kf7± 53.Rh8 1-0

News was just fanning out of this gigantic upset when an even bigger sensation occurred: Balinas upset Larsen and Kavelek in quick succession! The victory over the great Dane was awesome:

Bent Larsen (2625) - Rosendo Balinas (2355) [A01] Marlboro GM Classic (4th) Makati (6), 07.10.1975

1.b3
This used to be called the "Larsen Opening" but in modern times this is known as the "Nimzo-Larsen Attack".
1...e5 2.Bb2 Nc6 3.e3 d5

What is opening theory coming to? Nowadays it is all the rage to play 3.Nf6 4.Bb5 Bd6!? (A beginners move? The player of the Black pieces, Speelman, used to be a candidate for the world championship! So why does he block his d-pawn? Well, the reasoning is that White will soon play Bxc6, and after ...dxc6 Black's bishop is on its ideal square after all!) 5.Na3 (so now White makes it a point not to capture on c6, but prepares Nc4) 5...Na5!? (which Black promptly prevents! Speelman's last two moves were either played by a moron or a genius) 6.Nf3-a6 7.Be2 Qe7 8.Nb1 0-0 9.c4 b6 10.Nc3 Bb7 11.0-0 Rfe8 12.d3 Ba3 13.Qc1 Bxb2 as GM Tony Kosten puts it, the players, exhausted by having to find so many original moves, agreed to split the point. This is Julian Hodgson versus Jon Speelman, Birmingham 1998.

4.Bb5 f6
In 90% of the time the Black player essays 4...Bd6 after which White can continue 5.f4 exf4?? (5...Qh4+ 6.g3 Qe7 is, of course, much better.) 6.Bxg7 and wins. Playing the creator of this opening Balinas hastens to get out of the books and protects his long diagonal.

5.d4
White is a super-Grandmaster after whom this opening is named, so we will not pretend to question his play, but in cases like this I always counsel my students to insert the moves 5.Qh5+ g6 6.Qe2 first, so as to induce a kingside weakness. This was played as early as the 19th century! Harry Bird vs A.Clerc, Paris 1978 0-1 (76).

5...e4 6.Ne2 a6 7.Bxc6+ bxc6 8.c4 f5 9.Nbc3

GM Kosten commented in the "Chess Publishing" website that Balinas's treatment of the opening is incorrect because now White can play 9.Qe2 Nf6 10.Ba3 and would have had "a superior reversed Winawer-French type of structure".

Hmmm ... wonder what is wrong with that position?

9...Nf6 10.Nf4 Be7 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.Rc1 0-0 13.Na4 g5!
Completely fearless.
14.Nh5 Ng4 15.h3 Nh6 16.Rc6?!
Maybe 16.g3 followed by 17.h4 would be a better way to try and refute Black’s overly aggressive stance.
16...Bd6
Black plans f4
17.h4 f4 18.hxg5 fxe3! 19.Nf6+
[19.gxh6? Qg5! and Black will either win the knight on h5, take the pawn on g2, or take the pawn on f2, in all three cases ruining White’s position.]
19...Rxf6! 20.gxf6 exf2+ 21.Kf1 Qxf6
22.Qh5 Bd7
Paradoxically, Black’s best seems to be 22...Nf5! 23.Qxh7+ Kf8 and there are no more checks, meanwhile the White King is feeling mighty insecure.
23.Qxd5+ Kg7 24.Rxc7

mate is coming up.]
27...Kf8 28.d5 Qg6 29.Qf3 Ke8
Running away from the pin. Black avoids 29...Bb5+ 30.Rxb5 axb5 31.g4 bxa4 32.Rh5! when the position becomes just a bit too unclear to evaluate properly.
30.g4?
White overreaches himself in trying to win. He could have played 30.Qe4+ Kf8 31.Qf3 tacitly offering a draw by repetition.
30...Ng3+!
Now it is clear who will win.
31.Rxg3 Qb1+ 32.Kg2 Qg1+ 33.Kh3 f1Q+
Black can still botch it. If 33...Bxg3? succumbs to an attractive mate then 34.Qxe3+ Kf8 35.Ba3+ Kf7 36.Qe7+ Kg6 37.Rb6+ White will mate first.
34.Qxf1 Qxf1+ 35.Rg2 Qh1+ checkmate next move
0-1

At this time Balinas already had 4.5/6 (including a draw with Eugene Torre in the fourth round) and only needed a solitary point for the GM norm. He was not to get it due to losses to Karaklajic and Mecking and a draw against GM Svetozar Gligoric.

Here are the final standings:

MARLBORO GM CLASSIC 1975

Final Standings

1  GM Ljubomir Ljubojevic, 7.0/10
2-5 GM Lev Polugaevsky,
GM Henrique Mecking,
GM Bent Larsen,
GM Helmut Pfleger, 6.0/10
6-7 IM Rosendo Balinas Jr.,
GM Svetozar Gligoric, 5.0/10
8-11 IM Nikola Karaklajic,
GM Lubomir Kavalek,
GM Eugene Torre,
IM Leif Ogaard, 3.5/10

International Master Rosendo Balinas Jr. missed the grandmaster norm by half a point. If there was any justice at all in the world Balinas should have made it. Let us take a look at this position against Gligoric:

Balinas is White, Gligoric is Black. This had been a very tense game but now the Yugoslav has a winning attack. Take note that although Black's rook is pinned against his King the win is relatively easy: 48...Qxf3+ 49.Qg2 Rh4+ 50.Kg1 Rg4. Instead Gligoric sought to break the pin with 48...g5?? and after 49.Re2 White survives the attack with winning chances because of his extra piece.

The problem here was that the nervous tension and pressure had played havoc on Balinas's nerves, and when Gligoric played the fateful blunder he muttered "draw" as in "I am saved!" The most you have now is a draw! After thinking for a long time Gligoric suddenly accepted the draw offer. When Balinas protested that he made no such offer tempers flared and the arbiter had to be called. Here is how Balinas described it:

"The foreign grandmaster participants sided with Gligoric in what I think was an impulse to protect their standing although they were right by the rules. I relented after realizing my mistake. I could have insisted playing the game on the ground that I did not mean the utterance "remis" (a French word for draw) as an offer of a draw. I was under extreme nervous excitement after I saw the prospect of a lost position reversed by Gligoric's faulty move at resumption. But when I had time to think it over I realized that anyway you look at it, the utterance of the word "remis" must be construed as an offer of a draw. Gligoric understood it as such and acted on it."

After the game there was another incident:

"In the post-mortem analysis of the game, Polugaevsky was present and he said that I was lost before Gligoric made his mistake, to which I countered that before that I should be winning, being a pawn up in the game. Then Polugaevsky
said I should not have scored the other points I got in the tournament. It was true that in our game he missed a move that could have given him at least a draw and Lubomir Kavalek of the United States should not be losing against me when he was a pawn up and with a slightly better position. But I was then just keeping my great embarrassment to myself for what had happened and Polugaevsky's last remark seemed to push me down further.

"Peeved, I told Polugaevsky, I will play you again. I am not afraid to play anybody. Then I mentioned the Soviet players. This I regretted, because I knew it was uncalled for.

"My words sounded like a dare — and indeed it was. But deep within me, I wanted to reassure myself that the outcome of my games in the Marlboro tournament was no fluke, and the only way this was possible was for me to play them again. After all, not only Polugaevsky but several other grandmasters as well seemed to question my capabilities."

Later on these heated words were to be a cause for apprehension. When the invitation for him to play in Odessa 1976 came next year, Balinas was very worried that perhaps what he said might have reached the ears of the Soviet chess establishment, and the invitation was sent to teach him a lesson.

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Run-up to the Conquest of Odessa

Shortly after the 1975 Marlboro Grandmaster Tournament (October 1975) came a historic event: Philippine versus China Friendship Match. This was the first time a foreign sports delegation was allowed within the gates of the Great Wall. Balinas joined the Philippine delegation which met China's best in a six-round series over 10 boards.

Boasting of a very deep bench Philippine team captain Florencio Campomanes announced the Philippine board order in advance, and allowed the Chinese the privilege of arranging their board order any way they want and change it every round if they want. This was a very big concession, as it enabled the hosts to pick out the weaknesses of
their opponents and concentrate their point-makers there.

It didn't matter anyway, as in spite of the handicap the Philippines was just too strong for them (that was back in 1975!) and scored a massive 35.0-25.0 victory.

Here is the complete lineup of players including their points:

1. GM Eugene Torre (4 wins, 1 draw, 1 loss)
2. IM Rodolfo Tan Cardoso (4 wins, 2 losses)
3. IM Renato Naranja (3 wins, 2 draws, 1 loss)
4. IM Rosendo Balinas Jr. (5 wins, 1 loss)
5. NM Glenn Bordonada (1 win, 2 draws, 3 losses)
6. NM Rico Mascarinas (1 win, 3 draws, 2 losses)
7. NM Lito Maninang (3 wins, 1 draw, 2 losses)
8. NM Cesar Caturla (2 wins, 3 draws, 1 loss)
9. NM Roger Abella (2 wins, 3 draws, 1 loss)
10. Junior Champion Fredric Tumanon (1 win, 3 draws, 2 losses)

Total: 26 wins, 18 draws, 16 losses (35.0-25.0)

Top scorer for the visitors was Rosendo Balinas Jr. with five wins and one loss. It was not only the winning percentage but also the manner in which he attained it that emphasized just how great Balinas's form was. First, a word about the Chinese.

GM Torre has seen the play of three generations of Chinese players. At the beginning their undisputed best was Qi Jingxuan, ably supported by Liu Wenzhe, Liang Jinrong, Chen De and a few more.

In the 80's there emerged the two Ye's - Ye Rongguang and Ye Jiangchuan, followed by Xu Jun, Wang Zili, Wu Shaobin, Deng Kongliang, and Lin Weiguo.

In the 90's new blood emerged in the persons of Zhang Zhong, Peng Xiaomin, Bu Xiangzhi, Ni Hua, Liang Chong, and so on.

I asked Eugene who he thought was the strongest Chinese player ever. This got him thinking and after a few minutes's reflection he shrugged and told me they are all the same. Asked to clarify he explained that they have a lot of very strong players but no superstar. Even their styles are similar.

This really stuck to my mind, and I was very amused a few months later when I read the internet column of GM Alex Yermolinsky, who expressed a similar view:

"They all are booked up in the opening, solid yet passive in the middlegame, but with an alert tactical eye to seize their chances. Good players, all in the 2525 to 2575 range. I almost had the feeling that I was up against the tag team of an opening specialist, to be replaced by a middlegame tactical wizard, followed by an endgame virtuoso."

Anyway, from my experience of
writing Chess Piece I have come across and studied a lot of games of the leading Chinese players and it is my observation that the above description is probably true today. But their early waves were much more aggressive and tactical in nature, and I can even offer an explanation of why this is so.

Do you remember who Xie Jun is (no relation at all to the Xu Jun above)? She is the World Women’s Chess Champion. She started out as a xiangqi (Chinese chess) player and won the Beijing Girls’ Championship. However, there was already a better woman player in Beijing who was National Senior Champion, so the authorities decided that one talent was enough for the city, and urged her to try her hand at international chess.

Xiangqi has been compared with chess because the two games have similar features such as attacking the enemy king and activating the pieces. However, there are also marked differences. In xiangqi activity and attack have a higher priority and tactics play a more prominent role. This would account for the tactical orientation of their earlier players.

Chen De is a good example. He has now retired from active play and for the past few years has been assigned as the National Coach of the World Champion Chinese Women’s Team.

His game is always geared to mix it up in a clash of piece. He meets his match in Balinas though, and is smashed up pretty bad:

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**Rosendo Balinas - Chen De [A64]**
**RP-PROC Friendship Match Peking, China (4), 24.10.1975**

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.Nc3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.Nf3 g6 7.g3 Bg7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0

I recall that Kasparov made a comment in a similar position that there are a lot of dangerous lines which White may adopt against the Modern Benoni, but the fianchetto Variation played here by Balinas is not one of them. In fact, if you think about it, White has wasted several moves to put his bishop on a diagonal blocked by his own pawn on d5. But lots of people like this fianchetto system - it covers e4, protects the King, and allows Nf3-d2-c4 followed by Re1, Bf4 and the advance e2-e4-e5 which incidentally then frees up his g2-bishop.

9...Nbd7 10.h3 a6 11.a4 Re8 12.Nd2 Nh5

Lack of access to the latest opening theory was a problem for China in the 70s, since their flow of chess books from the west was severely curtailed. Even at this time it was already known that the kingside knight thrust undertaken by Chen De is better prefaced by 12...Rb8 13.Nc4 Ne5 14.Na3 Nh5 if you compare this with the actual position from the game around move 12 you will note that Black is better placed now with the rook supporting the b-pawn and White’s knight on a3.

I will illustrate to you some of the
missing the pawn thrust \(b7-b5\) with the rook on \(b8\).

16...\textit{Nxe4} 17.\textit{Nxe4} \textit{Nf6} 18.\textit{Ng5} \textit{h6} 19.\textit{Ne6} \textit{Bxe6} 20.\textit{dxe6} \textit{Rxe6} 21.\textit{Bxb7} \textit{Rb8}?! 

Chen De intends to follow this up with \(\textit{...Qe7}\) and \(\textit{...Re2}\) putting pressure on the \(b2\)-pawn.

22.\textit{Bg2} \textit{Qe7} 23.\textit{Ra3} \textit{Re2} 24.\textit{Raf3} \textit{Kh7} 25.\textit{Rf3} \textit{f2} 26.\textit{Rxh2} \textit{Rb4} 27.\textit{Re2}

Opening the position up for his two bishops with 27.f5 \textit{gxf5} (27...\textit{g5}\? 28.\textit{Re2} \textit{Qd7} 29.\textit{Re6} \textit{Rd4} 30.\textit{Qc2} followed by \textit{Bc1f2-d2-c3} contesting the long diagonal.) 28.\textit{Rxf5} \textit{Qe6} is not yet too convincing. Balinas wants to improve his piece placements first.

27...\textit{Qd7} 28.\textit{Qe1}

Balinas is threatening 29.\textit{Re7} \textit{Qd8} (29...\textit{Qxa4}? 30.\textit{Rg7}!! \textit{Kxg7} 31.\textit{Qe7}+ winning.) 30.\textit{Qe6} \textit{Kh8} 31.\textit{Bd2}.

28...\textit{Ng8} 29.\textit{Bd5} \textit{Qxa4}?

Better is 29...\textit{Rd4} 30.\textit{Be6} \textit{Qxa4} forcing White to pay attention to his threat of causing some mischief along the back rank.

30.\textit{b3} \textit{Qa1} [30...\textit{Qd7} is a viable option looks like the only move.]

31.\textit{f5} \textit{Nf6} [31...\textit{gx5?} 32.\textit{Bxg8}!! \textit{Kxg8} 33.\textit{Re8+ Kh7} 34.\textit{Qe6} \textit{Qf6} (34...\textit{Qxc7} 35.\textit{Qxf5# checkmate}) 35.\textit{Qg8}+ \textit{Kg6} 36.\textit{Re6} wins.; 31...\textit{g5} 32.\textit{Bxg8}!! \textit{Kxg8} 33.\textit{Re8+ Kh7} 34.\textit{Qe6} likewise wins.]

32.\textit{fxg6}+ \textit{Kxg6} 33.\textit{Be6} \textit{Rb8} There does not seem to be any way now to save Black.

34.\textit{Qf2} \textit{Qb1} 35.\textit{g4}!
Black either loses the queen or is mated. 1-0

On May 1976 IM Rosendo Balinas Jr. was invited to play in a 12-man tournament in Dortmund, West Germany where he finished tied for 4th to 5th places:

**Dortmund 1976**

1 GM Oleg Romanishin (Russia, ELO 2560), 9.5/11
2 IM Janos Flesch (Hungary, ELO 2390), 8.5/11
3 GM Anthony John Miles (England, ELO 2510), 8.0/11
4-5 IM Andrzej Sydor (Poland, ELO 2425), IM Rosendo Balinas Jr. (PHI ELO 2365), 6.5/11
6 GM Dragoljub Ciric (Yugoslavia, ELO 2435), 6.0/1
7 Rob Faase (Netherlands), 5.5/11
8 Gert Iskov (Denmark, ELO 2415), 5.0/11
9 Hans Werner Ackermann (Germany), 4.0/11
10 Werner Nicolai (Germany), 2.5/11
11-12 Dragoslav Tomic (Yugoslavia ELO 2360), M. Krause (Germany), 2.0/11

It was reported in the dailies that Balinas missed out on a grandmaster norm by one point there, but he himself clarified that there was no grandmaster norm available in the first place. The tournament was not classified as international under FIDE rules where a player can get title results because four Germany players had no ratings and one from Holland (Faase) lost his through inactivity for a period of three years.

It was at this point when Balinas was summoned by FIDE Deputy President Florencio Campomanes to Amsterdam, the Netherlands. There he was informed that the USSR Chess Federation had invited him to play in an international tournament in Odessa, Ukraine to start on July 29, 1976.

This was probably the first time that the Soviets ever invited a Filipino player to participate in one of their international tournaments. Of course, this could be due to reciprocity since every time we have one in Manila they would be invited to send one or two players. Balinas speculated that another reason could be due to his undiplomatic claim that he is not afraid of the Soviet players aired during the 1976 Marlboro International.
He had another, more far-fetched speculation. When Soviet chess officials, for no reason at all, did not send Korschnoij to play in the 1975 Manila Marlboro international tournament, the tournament's original plans and schedules were altered and the category was lowered. The Soviet's other representative, Candidates qualifier Lev Polugaevsky, came but suffered his only losses against the two Filipino entries — Torre and Balinas.

With only a point dividing him from the eventual winner, Ljubomir Ljubojevic of Yugoslavia, Polugaevsky was practically deprived of first place by these losses. If a normal result based on rating would be followed, he could have easily gained at least 1.5 points from the Pinoys. Campomanes said in his television program after the tournament in a half-jesting, half-serious tone: "You’re still lucky, Lev, there were only two Filipinos in the tournament." He said this in the presence of Polugaevsky and several other grandmaster participants.

Anyway, whatever the reason the invitation was very eagerly accepted, and Balinas plunged into serious training and theoretical study in preparation for the event. He analyzed and took notes on more than 160 games played in the just-concluded 1976 Manila Interzonals and the Marlboro-Loyola Tournament of Champions (which Torre won over Karpov, Ljubojevic and Browne).

On July 24, 1976 Campomanes sent Balinas the money for the plane tickets, and Philippine Chess Federation President Federico Moreno gave US $200 for pocket money. After some quick good-byes International Master Rosendo Balinas took the flight for Moscow via Singapore on his way to his appointment with destiny. The Filipino invasion of Odessa has started!

The Conquest of Odessa Begins

On July 31, 1976, the following grandmasters, among others, assembled to do battle in the 17th Central Chess Club International Tournament in Odessa, Ukraine:

- GM Vladimir Savon (USSR 2545), former USSR Champion (Leningrad 1971). This victory was no fluke - he scored 15.0 points out of 21 games and won the 39th Championship against
the likes of Vassily Smyslov, Mikhail Tal, Anatoly Karpov, David Bronstein, Leonid Stein, Efim Geller, Lev Polugaevsky, Mark Taimanov, and Rafael Vaganian, all of whom were either former/future world champions or candidates.

GM David Bronstein (USSR 2540), a chess legend. Winner of 1948 Saltsjobaden Interzonal (+8-0=11 read: 8 wins 0 losses and 11 draws), tied for first with Isaak Boleslavsky in 1950 Budapest Candidates Tournament (+8-2=8), winner of their play-off match, and then tied a world championship match in 1951 with Mikhail Botvinnik (+5-1=14). Even in the field of chess publishing he is a legend, having written arguably one of the top five chess books ever, "The Chess Struggle in Practice" (1953 Zurich Candidates' Tournament). Was he washed up in 1976? NO! Coming into this tournament he had just won two successive international tournaments in Poland: in Sandomiercz followed by Ivonicz Zdroj.

GM Anatoly Lutikov (USSR 2500), a very respected grandmaster in the USSR, his best accomplishments were 3rd place in the 1968 Soviet Championship behind Lev Polugaevsky and Alexander Zaitsev, and winner of 1973 Leipzig against the top grandmasters from Eastern Europe. Among Soviet chessplayers he is well known for his sharp, impulsive style and extravagant gambits. Internationally, though, his name is not so well-known, as eternal problems with the bottle caused him not to see so much action outside of the Soviet Union,

GM Georgy Tringov (Bulgaria 2490). Together with Milko Bobotov and Ivan Radulov, they formed the "Big 3" of Bulgarian chess during this period.

GM Vladimir Tukmakov (USSR 2490). In 1976 Tukmakov was earmarked as one of the most promising young players of the Soviet Union. He has had a long and distinguished tournament playing career, but perhaps his most memorable performance was in Madrid 1973 - solo second place with 10.5/15 (behind Anatoly Karpov) in the strongest tournament for the year.

Six International Masters: Rosendo Balinas (PHI 2365), Jan Plachetka (CZE 2470), James Tarjan (USA 2490), Lutz Espig (East Germany 2480), Fernando Silva (POR 2340) and Enrico Paoli (ITA 2265).

Four Soviet National Masters: Lev Alburt (USSR 2520), Konstantin Lemer (USSR 2430), Mikhail Tseitlin (USSR 2450), Felix Ignatiev (USSR 2415).

Included originally as participant was the Soviet Union's No. 2 player, grandmaster Victor Korchnoi, who tied for first place in the IBM international tournament in Amsterdam with the English grandmaster Anthony Miles a few days before the start of the Odessa tournament.

Korchnoi however, sought political asylum in Holland and did not play. His reason for defecting was personal - he said that Soviet chess officials had
concentrated all their resources on the world champion (Anatoly Karpov), to the extent of discriminating against other Soviet players.

This defection was to have a bad repercussion on at least one of the participants of 1976 Odessa, a joint letter by all Soviet Grandmasters condemning Korchnoi’s actions was passed around for signature, and David Bronstein refused to sign. The Soviet Chess Federation retaliated by forbidding him from leaving the Soviet Union starting 1976.

The average rating of the tournament is 2450, making it category 9. The organizers wired FIDE for confirmation of the points needed for title result, and the reply was that 9.0/14 is good enough for a grandmaster norm. Take note that Alburt, Lerner and Tseitlin, although not internationally titled, have very high ratings and in fact all of them became grandmasters soon after. Lev Alburt was later to emigrate to the United States where he became USA Champion. IM James Tarjan was the lone American representative. He is known as a very sharp tactician (specialty: Sicilian Dragon) and extremely dangerous to anybody.

The Italian Enrico Paoli is an international master, but he was to gain fame later on not in playing but in chess organization - it was under his direction that the Reggio Emilia tournaments graduated into the league of super-tournaments.

Balinas: “Going back to my chances, I discussed with the American GM Tarjan that the category 10 and 9 tournaments like that one in Odessa are where it is most difficult to get a GM result.

“There are no players you can easily beat here,” Tarjan said.

“I concluded that anyone who gets a GM result would probably end up the winner of the series. That sounded incredible. An IM must surpass all the eight GMs to get his GM result.

“On this assumption I concluded correctly.

“Thus, from the start the thought of winning the tournament entered my mind only as a means of getting the GM result. My primary aim was to win a GM result. I learned something from bad experience. In the 1975 Asian Zonals, I wanted to win first place. I was not yet an IM then. And Eugene Torre, Asia’s only grandmaster, was the defending champion.

“If I achieved what I desired, it would have been over Torre’s reputation. I did not aim to win against Torre but I thought I can make the contest against our other opponents. Torre sensed my aim, and he played hard and beat me in the first round. I kept trying unnecessarily harder and this caused me harm than good.

“The IM result in that tournament should have been my first concern. When the championship was virtually lost as early as the fifth round, what remained was the bleak prospect of getting the IM title by scoring 6.5 points from my last seven games. That I did it eventually was not a justification for not aiming to do first things first.”
Balinas’ goal in Odessa was not to win the tournament, but to get the grandmaster norm of 9.0/14. He calculated that he had to win at least one and draw two out of every three games to make it. That was exactly what he did in the first three rounds so when he sat down to play Konstantin Lerner in round 4 he had 2.0/3 against his opponent’s tournament-leading 2.5/3.

Balinas meant business. He played for a win and got it on the 84th move after 10 hours of play, wrestling the tournament lead in the process. Going ahead of our story, during the closing ceremonies of Odessa 1976 a Russian journalist asked him which was his favorite game and the reply was immediate. He particularly liked his game with Lerner, not only because of its over-all quality but also because of the series of precision moves. These were executed for a simplified win in a rook and pawn ending.

15.exf5 Bxf5 16.Rd1 Qc7 17.0–0 Nf6
21.Bd3 Bxd3

At this point Lerner offered a draw. Balinas: “I had refused Lerner’s draw offer in the 21st move. He was leading with two wins and one draw. I had one win and two draws. He needed points to get an IM result but I saw he could well take care of himself. Besides, I had a slightly better position.”

22.Rxd3 Rf5 23.Qg4 Rdf8 24.Qe4 h6
25.R1d2 Rf5f6 26.b4

The problem with Black’s position is that he does not have any targets to attack, while White has a mobile queenside pawn formation which he can use to break through.

26...a6 27.a4 Rd8 28.a5 Rdf8 29.g3
Rf5 30.Kg2 Qc8 31.Bb6 Qe8

Black is moving his pieces back and forth waiting for White to hit upon a plan. At the time this game was played there was an adjournment after 40 moves with the resumption usually scheduled on a free day. Balinas was also not averse to shuffling his pieces around and going home to look for the winning idea.

32.f3 Qc8 33.Bf2 Re8 34.Bb6 Rf6
35.Bf2 Bf8 36.Rd1 Rfe6 37.Be3 Qd7
38.R1d2 Rc8 39.Bc5 Qc7 40.Qg4 Rce8
41.Bb6

After the first 40 moves both players are consumed almost all of their allotted time of 2 1/2 hours each, making a total of five hours. When the adjournments were played off after the sixth round it took Balinas another five hours to nail
the full point. A total of 10 hours of this game!

41...Qf7 42.Qe4

OK, after burning some midnight oil it is decided to break through at b5. Black, on the other hand, based his counterchances on a timely ...e5-e5 push.

42.Rc8 43.Rb3 Ree8 44.Qd3 Kg8 45.Rb1 Qb7 46.b5 cxb5 47.cxb5 axb5 48.Rxb5 e4 49.Qd5+ Qxd5 50.Rbx5 exf3+ 51.Kxf3 Rc6 52.Rd3

Since in most rook endings the h-pawn belongs on h5 I would have played 52.h5 without thinking. For some reason Balinas seems to avoid this possibility.

52.Rb8 53.Re3 g6

See? This move is precisely to avoid h5.

54.Rb5 Kf7 55.Ra3 Ra8 56.a6 d5 57.Ra2 Bd6 58.Rb3 Ke6 59.a7 Rc4 60.Ra6 Rc6 61.Ra5 Bc7 62.Rab5 Bxb6 63.Rxb6 Kd7 64.Rc6 Kxc6 65.Ra3

66...Ra6 Kd4 67.Rxg6 Rxg6 68.Rxh6 Rf7+ 69.Kg4 Kg7+ 70.Kf4 Rf7+ is a draw. The best that White can do is 71.Kg5 Rg7+ 72.Rg6 Rxg6+ 73.Kxg6 Ke3 74.h5 d4 75.h6 d3 76.h7 d2 77.h8Q d1Q with a queen-and-pawn endgame that is still drawn.

66...Ke3!

The ending is now won for White.

66...Re8+ 67.Kd4 Ka8 68.Kxd5 g5 69.hxg5 hxg5 70.Ra4!

Precisely played, winning the g-pawn.

70...Re3 71.Rg4 Kxa7 72.Rxg5

Balinas: “The once abundant pieces on the board was reduced to a bare King and a pawn. My pawn. The players who had finished their adjourned games — Tringov and Plachetka — watched us with keen interest. It seemed they were fascinated the way I continued on pressing a position with equal material on the board.”

Anyway, at this point, with the Black King far off in the flank, the position has become a book win.

72...Kb7 73.Kd6

Of course 73.g4 immediately also wins, but Balinas wanted to make 100% sure of the win. He just HAD to make sure that the Black King cannot sneak in to the front of White’s pawn.

73...Rd3+ 74.Ke6 Re3+ 75.Kf6 Rf3+ 76.Kg7 Ke7 77.g4 Rf4 78.Rg6 Kd7 79.g5 Rf5 80.Kh6 Ke7

[80...Rf4 81.Rf6 doesn’t change anything, and after 81...Rg4 82.g6 Ke7 83.Rf7+ Ke6 84.Kh7 Rh4+ 85.Kg8 Rc4 86.g7 Rc8+ 87.Rf8 Rc3 88.Re8+ Kd6]
89.Re4 we have the Lucena position, where White will emerge on f7. The only defense Black has is to continuously check the King, and so White will bring his King to g5 and interpose with the rook on g4 to terminate Black’s checks.]

81.Ra6 Rf1 82.g6 Rh1+ 83.Kg7 1-0

This is already too easy: 83.Kg7 Rh4 84.Rb6 Rh5 85.Rb7+ Ke6 86.Kg8 Rh6 87.g7 Rh3 88.Rb4! Remember the Lucena position we mentioned in the previous note? It is perhaps the most fundamental of all winning methods in R+P vs R endings. It is important that White’s rook station itself on the 4th rank. Now, if Black’s rook remains on the h-file with, for example, 88...Rh2 then 89.Re4+ Kd7 90.Kf7 is once again Lucena. If the Black rook leaves the h-file then 88...Rg3 89.Rh4 Rg5 90.Rh7 Rg6 91.Kh8 queens the pawn.

The following game comes from the sixth round.

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**Rosendo Balinas (2365) - Lutz Espig**

(2480) [B40]

Odessa, 1976

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.c3 d5 4.e5 Bd7 5.Na3

Espig had probably intended to transpose into Wade’s line of the French with 5.d4 Qb6 6.Bd3 Bb5 The text is an original opening idea from Balinas, the reasoning behind it is that he will be playing his knight to c2 to support the d2-d4 advance.

5...Nc6 6.Nc2 f6 7.d4 fxe5 8.dxe5 Qc7 9.Bf4 Nge7 10.h4 h6

There is a trap here. If Black tries to win the e5-pawn with 10...Ng6 11.Bg3 Ngxe5 12.Nxe5 Nxe5 then White unleashes 13.Qh5+.

11.Qe2 0-0-0 12.h5 g5 13.hxg6 Nxg6

14.Bg3 Bg7 15.0-0-0 Rdf8

[15...Ngxe5 is still not possible because of 16.Rh5, but now Black has the threat of 16...Nf4 17.Qe3 Nxe5 18.Nxe5 (18.Bxf4?? Rxf4! 19.Qxf4 Nd3+ wins the queen) 18...Bxe5.]

16.Qe3 Nce7 17.Bd3 Be8 18.b4!? d4


Excellent! Balinas willingly enters the endgame a pawn down. The weakness of Black’s over-extended pawns is more than enough compensation.


No better is 28...a6? 29.Nd6+ Kb8 30.Nf7 winning for White. Actually,
28...Kb8 walking into the pin, is the best defense. 29.f4 Rc8+ 30.Kb1 Rc5 31.a4 Nc4 Black is OK.

29.Nd6+! Kb8
[29...Kd8? loses a piece to 30.Bxe5 Bxe5 31.Nf7+]

30.Nf5 Rc8+ 31.Kb1 Rxd1+ 32.Rxd1 Bh8 33.Ne7! Rc5

It is only now that Espig notices that 33...Re8 34.Ng6 Bf6 35.Nxe5 Bxe5 36.Re1 loses a piece.

34.Rd8+ Kc7 35.Rxh8 Kd7 36.Rh7 Nd3 37.a3 Rc1+ 38.Ka2 Nxf2 39.Nf5+ 1-0

Balinas: “I was quite happy because I won against East Germany’s Espig in a like a problematic win in the finale of the game? It was probably both.”

After Balinas had scored 2.0/3 at the beginning of the tournament people just raised their eyebrows and muttered something like “he’s got to be kidding.” But now, after a further three rounds and 2.5/3 they all sat up and took notice.

Balinas: “At the dining table, Silva (the Portuguese International Master) proclaimed me the winner of the tournament. Tringov echoed Silva’s observation. As early as the sixth round he predicted, in a crude manner, that I would be the champion by saying loudly, ‘Balinas, tournament winner.’ I felt elated though I felt it was too early.”

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No Holds Barred in Odessa

Balinas had a target of one win and two draws every three rounds. This he attained in the first three, but in the second series he outdid himself - two wins and one draw! With 4.5/6 Bali had wrested solo leadership from Konstantin Lerner, to the surprise of everybody including himself.

Balinas: “Although I was now leading, I was afraid of two other players then, Savon and Tukmakov. Savon has been playing sharply, carving wins against strong grandmasters such as Bronstein and Lutikov. He lost one game and drew two but he lost against Tseitlin after refusing the latter’s draw offer. Tukmakov was also playing well. He won against Tarjan and Tseitlin and drew four other games.”

It was as if a bounty had been put on the Filipino’s head. His next few opponents tried their very hardest to knock him off his perch. In the seventh round it was the Russian Felix Ignatiev.
“There were games which I eventually won wherein if I thought my opponent would be willing to draw, I would probably go to the extent of begging for it. It happened in my game against Ignatiev in the 7th round.”

Felix Ignatiev (2415) -
Rosendo Balinas (2365) [A22]
Odessa, 1976

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.g3 Bb4
This early development of the dark-squared bishop to b4 was first suggested by Smyslov. Black’s idea is to disturb the white development and perhaps disrupt White’s pawn structure, thereby enhancing Black’s control of the center.
4.Bg2 0-0 5.e4 d6?! 
For Black, 5...Bxc3 is more or less a necessity; with his 5th move White showed his intentions of keeping the center under firm control in order to start his own undertaking on the kingside. With the exchange on c3 Black reduces White’s control of the center and thereby enables himself to prepare a central thrust to counter any white attack on the kingside.

Balinas had this to say: “I did not know what was the right move in the opening and my preference for the bishop was unwisely placed then. I should have earlier exchanged my bishop for my opponent’s knight and doubled up his pawns but I did not do so. It was too late when Ignatiev defended his knight with the other knight. It meant I could no longer double his pawns up and the exchange now would be pointless.”

6.Nge2 a6
I saw this position come up on the board in the Philippine Grand Finals earlier this year in the game Darwin Laylo vs Alan Sayson. Alan seemed to handle the Black position better, establishing a strong point on d4 and then pushing his f-pawn forward. Take a look: 6...Nc6 7.0-0 Bc5 8.h3 Ne8 9.d3 f5 10.Nd5 fxe4 11.dxe4 Be6 12.Be3 Bxe3 13.Nxe3 Qg5 14.Qd3 Qh5 15.g4 Qg5 16.Nf5 Qd8 17.b3 g6 18.Ne3 Qg5 there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with Black’s position here. Laylo,D-Sayson,A/ Quezon City 2001 0-1 (61)

Balinas: “I realized that mistake right from the start and I tried to remedy it but Ignatiev just found the correct continuation each time. He was squeezing me positionally. I wanted very much to offer him a draw then but Ignatiev looked very determined to beat me. I also did not like the rebuff of my draw offer after I had also similarly declined the draw offer of another Soviet player.”

14.b3 b5 15.Bb2 Bb7 16.Qd2 Rb8 17.Rab1
Balinas: “So, I just played on while I saw my position being squeezed from all sides. I thought Ignatiev did not take advantage of breaking in the cen-
ter which I assessed very much in his favor. But when he failed to do it, I just concluded he felt old enough to go into the complications. He is 43”.

17...b4 18.g4 Bc8

Balinas: “To counter his kingside action I tried to make a bluff with the idea of taking his two kingside pawns in exchange with my bishop, hoping he would get rattled for the time being. But he continued on massing forces in the kingside.”

19.Ng3?!

Allows Black the chance to complicate the game. More accurate seems to be 19.g5 hxg5 20.fxg5 Nh7 21.h4.

19...Bxg4!

Balinas: “I had no move choice because I saw I could not break in the center, the queenside was closed, and he was taking the kingside. I continued my bluff and took his two pawns with my bishop. I did it acting as if I have seen everything and hoped he will look at me so that I could say “remis” without loss of face. But he even became bolder. He seemed to construe my sacrifice for the inadequate exchange of two pawns as belittling of him. And so again I hoped for the best to come.”

Reading Bali’s original notes to the game you would get the impression that the bishop sac is a risky attempt to force complications. In fact, after some deep analysis I am convinced that it really is the best move in the position.


[21.Kh1?? Qh4+ forces mate.]

21...Ne3 22.Rf3 exf4 23.Rxf4 Qg5!

24.Rh4?!

Balinas: “And then he made one little error that made my sacrifice look sound. I capitalized on the error and made pretty move that netted me more compensation.” 24.Rf3 is better, not allowing Black’s next tactic.

24...Ng4! 25.Bc1

[25.Rxg4?? Qxd2; 25.Qxg5 Nf2+ 26.Kh2 hxg5 27.Rh5 f6 locks the rook out of play.]

25...Nf2+ 26.Qxf2 Qxh4+ 27.Kxh4 Bxf2

Balinas: “Soon I had two pawns and the exchange of my opponent’s rook for my knight. I had now sufficient compensation but he still had to play because my pawns were located on the far side of the board and not in the center where I could have had the better deal of the barter.”

28.Kg4 Bd4 29.Nf5 Be5

Please do not be overly critical of the next few moves, as they are done in mutual time pressure.

30.d4 Bf6 31.Kf3 h5 32.Be3 g6 33.Ng3 Kg7 34.Rc1 Rbd8 35.c5?
Ignatiev wanted to open up the position for the two bishops but what happens is that it is Black’s two centralized rooks which benefit from the opening.

35...dxc5 36.d5 c6! 37.dxc6 Rd3!

Balinas: “One reason I wanted a draw was that I could not think very fast although my nerves were steady. Soon I was under time pressure but my hands found the right pieces to move each time. I was scrambling the pieces on the board under extreme time pressure but my nerves were okay and therefore my eyes were alert to the placements of the pieces.”


The final mistake. 40.c7! is the only move, and now 40...Rc8 41.Ke2 repulses all threats.

40...Rxe3+! 41.Nxe3 Rxe4 42.Bg2 0-1

Balinas: “At adjournment, my opponent just found himself three pawns down and a knight up. But the knight could be captured with a check in the succeeding move. He sealed his move, but later at the dining table he said he was resigning. I admitted that he had the better game and I was just content to draw. He said in translated English “And I gave you the chance to win.” Of course, it was true.”

In the eighth round it was the turn of Lev Albur at try and pin a zero beside Balinas’s name on the scoresheet. There was a fierce battle when the Russian gave up a pawn for a terrific initiative on the center and the queenside. Balinas put up very accurate defense and managed to hold:-

Lev Albur (2520) - Rosendo Balinas (2365) [E17]
Odessa, 1976

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.g3 Bb7
9.d5 Nxc3 10.Bxc3 Bxc3 11.bxc3 Qf6
15.f4 Qc7 16.d6 Qc8 17.Qd3 c4 18.Qd4
0-0 19.Rfc1 b5 20.a4 Nc6 21.Qc5 a6
22.Rab1 Na5 23.Qb6 Re8 24.Nc3 Bxg2
25.Qxa5 Bc6 26.Qb6 Rb8 27.Qc5 Qb7
28.axb5 axb5 29.Rb4 Qb6 30.Qxb6 Rxb6
31.Rcb1 f6 32.Rxc4 Re3 33.Kf2 Re6
34.Rd4 b4 35.Rb3 f5 36.h3 Rh6 37.Nd5
Rb6 41.Rxb4 Rxb5 42.Rxb5 Kf7 43.g4
fxg4+ 44.hxg4 Rd6 45.Rf5+ Ke7 46.Ke4
h6 47.Ra5 Re6+ 48.Kf3 Rc6 49.e3 Rc4
50.Rd5 Ra4 51.Rd3 Rb4 52.Kg3 Rb1
53.Ra3 Rd1 1/2-1/2

And then somehow Bali managed to rout the American Champion Jim Tarjan in just 26 moves.

Rosendo Balinas (2365) - James Tarjan (2490) [B96]
Odessa, 1976

Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 b5
This early push of the b-pawn is known as the Polugaevsky line. It was very popular during the 1976 Manila Interzonals held just a few months before Odessa. Balinas was present then and had studied carefully all the games, so he was armed to the teeth with theoretical preparation.

Sadly, ever since Polugaevsky passed away in 1995 no top player has played this line with any regularity. However, recently Van Wely and Leko both have adopted it in high-profile games. Maybe we will see a revival soon of this mind-boggling variation?

12...Qxe5


13.Nc7

This was Balashov’s new move (at that time) which he unleashed against Argentina’s GM Miguel Quinteros during Manila 1976 (as I had mentioned earlier, the time difference between the interzonal and Odessa was so short that most of the ideas showcased in Manila were not yet known in Odessa.) The white-squared bishop is in search of a good diagonal, so White will relocate it with good effect on h5-e8.

13...Nf6?


Partly because of the Quinteros game, this one and a later one won by
Eugene Torre over Icelandic GM Sigurjonsson, people have abandoned the text move and nowadays it is recognized that the best in this position is 13...Bc5 14.Bf3 Bxd4 15.Bxb7 Bxc3 16.bxc3 (16.Bxa8 Bxb2+ 17.Kb1 Ba3 18.Bc1 Bxc1 19.Kxc1 Nb6 White’s King is mighty uncomfortable. Lạc, A-Verduga, D / Camaguey 1987 0-1 (31)) 16...Ra7 17.Rhe1 h5 Black is at least equal. Stean, M-Sigurjonsson/ Telechess olym 1977 0-1 (29).

14.Bxf6

Up until here Balinas had been enjoying the fruits of his analytical labors. This is his first independent move.

14...gx6 15.Rhe1!

White, a pawn down, is not afraid of a queen exchange.

15...Qg5+


16.Qxg5 fxg5 17.Bh5!

Threatening Nxe6. Surprisingly, Black is already lost.

17...Ke7 18.Rf1

Do you see the mate threat 19.Nc6+! Nxc6 20.Rxf7?

18...f5


19.Rfe1 Bxg2


1-0

Balinas reports: “At this stage, everybody had been noticing me. Even the battle-scarred participants were beginning to consider my chances of winning the tournament. I beat Tarjan in 26 moves. It was practically a rout the way the game went. But somehow I felt I was only very lucky to have the benefit of knowing the improvements on the variation played by Tarjan from the interzonal games.

“Still, my analysis of the interzonal games was not instrumental for my win. I took note of Russian grandmaster Yuri Balashov’s improvement but Tarjan played a move different from Balashov’s opponent.

“I found out the right continuation only over the board. But after the game, Tukmakov, who was a second of one of the Soviet participants in the Manila Interzonals asked me if I got the idea from the game of Balashov against Quinteros.
I said yes. He looked satisfied.”

Disaster

Balinas only needed two points from his last six rounds to get the International Grandmaster norm! Even if he drew all of his remaining games the norm would be his. But he was on an intellectual high from all those good games. Besides, there also came a feeling of invincibility because he got several bad games in Odessa but his opponents just could not finish him off. In fact, he won several of them too. So Balinas tried to beat Plachetka, an International Master from Czechoslovakia .... and lost. Not to be defensive about it, but the loss also coincided with the stomach ailment which cropped up on the eve of his game with the Czech.

Balinas: “I drank a small bottle of Russian wine labeled “Madera.” It contained 19 per cent alcohol. I just wanted to get a good night’s rest so I drank it while reviewing some of Plachetka’s games from the “Sahovski Informator” and the tournament bulletin.

“I always reviewed my opponents’ games, seeking their weak and strong points. It is also important to know their favorite openings. That way, I always feel prepared the next day.

“After downing my last glass, I suddenly felt spent. I felt numbed all over. My stomach was in pain again. I slept like a log but I had a hangover the next morning.”

Jan Plachetka (2470) - Rosendo Balinas (2365) [B50]
Odessa, 1976

\[\begin{array}{cccc}
1.e4 & c5 & 2.Nf3 & d6 \\
3.Nc3 & a6 & 4.g3 & g6 \\
5.Bg2 & Bg7 & 6.0-0 & Nc6 \\
7.d3 & e6 & 8.Be3 & Nd4 \\
9.Qd2 & Ne7 & 10.Nh4 & 0-0 \\
11.Nd1 & e5 & 12.c3 & Ndc6 \\
13.f4 & exf4 & 14.gxf4 & f5 \\
15.Nf3 & b6 & 16.Bf2 & Bh6 \\
17.Bg3 & d5 & 18.e5 & d4 \\
19.c4 & Rb8 & 20.Nf2 & Qc7 \\
21.Rae1 & Nd8 & 22.h4 & Ne6 \\
23.Nh3 & Re8 & 24.h5 & Kf7 \\
25.Bh4 & Rg8 & 26.Bf6 & gxh5 \\
27.Nf5+ & Ke8 & 28.Kh2 & Bxg5 \\
29.fxg5 & Ng6 & 30.Qe2 & f4 \\
31.Qxh5 & Qf7 & 32.Bd5 & Bd7 \\
33.Nxf4 & Ngxf4 & 34.Qxf7+ & Kxf7 \\
35.Rxf4 & b5 & 36.Rh4 & Rg7 \\
37.b3 & bxc4 & 38.bxc4 & Kg8 \\
39.Kg3 & Rg6 & 40.Rf1 & h6 \\
41.Rxh6 & 1-0
\end{array}\]

Balinas: “For several minutes after signing the scoresheet recording my loss, I was speechless. I just sat there. Dejected. When Plachetka tried to lessen my feeling of frustration by saying ‘excuse me,’ I managed to blurt out ‘it’s all right.’

“And yet, I was still glued to my seat. For 20 minutes, we analyzed our game. I found several correct lines but then it was too late. I knew why I lost. I tried to win a full point instead of seeking for a draw in my effort to get nine. I managed to eat that night but I did a lot of tossing in bed. Soon, I felt stomach pain.”

With the recurrence of his stomach pain Balinas this time took the time to see a medical doctor for treatment. His position is not too bad, needing two
pointss out of five games for the grandmaster norm. Balinas resolved to pull himself together and not collapse as he did in 1975 Manila when the norm was already in sight. This time he must pull through!

The Final Stretch

After Balinas’s very upsetting loss to Jan Plachetka of Czechoslovakia his path to the International Grandmaster norm still did not seem all that difficult since there were five games remaining and he only needed two points.

But still he was very worried because his last five opponents were the Soviets GM Anatoly Lutikov (ELO 2500), Mikhail Tseitlin (untitled, but rated at ELO 2450), GM Vladimir Savon (ELO 2545), GM David Bronstein (ELO 2540) and Bulgarian GM Georgy Tringov (ELO 2490). Compare their ratings against Balinas’s ELO 2365.

As he had experienced with Ignatiev and Alburt, the Soviets were not about to let an outsider run away with their tournament and they were determined to crush him.

In Balinas’s previous attempt at the GM norm he only needed one point out of the last three rounds but he collapsed and half a point was all that he could manage. His physical condition was not so good now - his stomach was acting up.

Here is Balinas’ narration taken from his ‘Times Journal’ column:

“Only when I felt the stomach pain anew did I try to look for the kind old man from the Soviet Sports Committee. I wanted to have my game with Lutikov postponed, but did not ask for it. I wanted them to take the initiative. I thought I needed a doctor but the old man brought me to a drug store and bought some medicines.

“The old man was concerned about my condition but he thought it was just a spoiled stomach. He instructed me to take just bland food, no grease. He brought me to Tseitlin who is some kind of a physical doctor. He just said he is a physical doctor.

“Probably he specialized in external medicine and physical fitness education. Tseitlin told me not to take anything,
only tea for the next two days. That was probably the best cure. But there was already an order of two boiled eggs and rice for me. And I had to play Lutikov in the afternoon."

GM Anatoly Lutikov was already 43 years old in 1976 but still possessed the sharp and confrontational style which distinguished him during his youth. He was the Russian Federation champion (RSFSR) in 1955 and 1959 and at Alma-Ata (now called Almaty, the former capital of the Kazakhsthan Republic) 1968, in his sixth and penultimate attempt to win the USSR championship, he took third place behind Lev Polugaevesky and Alexander Zaitsev.

**Side Comment:** Please do not confuse Alexander Zaitsev with Igor Zaitsev, the second and long-time assistant of former world chess champion Anatoly Karpov. As far as I know, they are not related. Igor is a well-known opening theoretician but Alexander was a much stronger player who was USSR co-champion in 1968. He came to a tragic end. The story as told by Ken Whyld: "Wishing to marry, he decided first to remedy a limp by having one leg lengthened; although he was otherwise a robust and healthy man, he died of thrombosis as a consequence of the operation."

Lutikov was to gain a measure of negative immortality by losing to teenage sensation Garry Kasparov two years after Odessa in Minsk. In 1986, at 23 years of age Kasparov wrote a very good book entitled “The Test of Time” which sought to chronicle his chess exploits up to the 1984 Candidates’ Match with Vassily Smyslov. The book became a runaway best-seller and is perhaps destined to become a classic.

Lutikov must have fallen off his chair when he opened his copy of the book and found that the first chapter was titled “My First Encounter with a Grandmaster.”

I give the bare score of the game below:

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Kasparov,G - Lutikov,A (2540) [A41]
Sokolsky mem Minsk (17), 1978
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Nbd7 5.e5 Ng8 6.h3 Bxf3 7.Qxf3 c6
g6 12.Qxe6 Bg7 13.0-0 Nh5 14.Bg5 Nh8
15.Qg4 Nf6 16.Qe2 Qd6 17.Rae1 e6
Qc7 22.b5 Qa3 23.Nc3 c5 24.Nb1 Qa4
25.dxc5 bxc5 26.c4 Nbd7 27.Nc3 a5
28.Qc2 Qd8 29.Bg5 Nb6 30.a4 dxc4
31.Be4 Re7 32.a5 Nbd7 33.Bc6 Nb6
34.Rd1 Qxa5 35.Ne4 Rf8 36.Bf4 Nxc6
37.bxc6 Ne8 38.Rd7 Rxd7 39.cxd7 Nf6
40.Nd6+ Ke7 41.Nxc4 Qa6 42.Bd6+
Kxd7 43.Bxf8 Bxf8 44.Qd3+ Ke7 45.Rd1
Nd5 46.Qe4 Kf7 47.Ne5+ Kg8 48.Nd7
c4 49.Rb1 Qd6 50.Rb7 c3 51.Nxf8 Kxf8
52.Rxh7 Qf4 53.Qxf4+ Nxf4 54.Kf1 a5
55.Ra7 Nd5 56.Rxa5 Kf7 57.g3
1-0
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On the positive side Lutikov has
a variation named after him in the Spanish Opening. Here is the “Lutikov Variation”:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4
Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3
0-0 9.Be2 Line

Balinas: “Against Lutikov, I had the same predicament (as against Ignatiev). I wanted a draw but I saw my opponent seemed bent on crushing me. He already brilliantly crushed Silva earlier, sacrificing pawns and pieces like they were nothing at all.” Look at this beautiful game:

GM Anatoly Lutikov (2500) - IM Fernando Silva (2340) [B31]
Odessa, 1976

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 g6 4.Nf6
Bb7 5.c3 Nf6 6.d4 Nxe4 7.d5 Nb8 8.Re1
Nd6

Silva did not want to allow the pawn push d5-d6, and that is why he retreats the knight to d6 rather than f6.

9.Bf4!

Nobody had ever seen this move before, seemingly leaving his b5-bishop free for the taking. Up to this time the choice was either Bd3 or Bf1 for White.

9...Nxb5 10.a4

If anyone plays this line and would like to surprise his opponent with it then I would point out that 10.d6!? is also possible in this position.

10...0-0

[Of course 10...Nc7 is answered by 11.Bxc7 Qxc7 12.d6 Qc6 (12...Qd8
16.Ne5 ouch.]

11.axb5 d6 12.Qe2 e5 13.dxe6 Bxe6
20.Nac4 Nc7 21.Ne5 Bxe5?

Silva underestimates the black-square weaknesses that are created around his King. He should have retained his fianchettoed bishop and played 21...Bd5

22.Bxe5 Ne6 23.b4!

Lutikov wants to swing his knight over to f6 via e4 and Black has a bishop watching the e4 square, so White tries to get rid of it.

23...cxb4 24.cxb4 a6 25.Qa2 Qd7?!
26.b5! Bxb5 27.Ne4

The knight gets to f6 and Black’s position becomes very difficult.

27...Qd3 28.Nf6+ Kf8 29.Nxf7+ Kg8 30.Nf6+ Kf8 31.h3?

[31.Qa5 (threatening Qb4+) 31...Qb3 32.Qd2! Rde8 33.Qh6+ Ke7 34.Qh4 maintains the threats. The text wastes a move and allows Black to get back into the game.]

31...Rc8 32.Qa1 Rc2 33.Rd1 Qe2
34.Bg3 Bc6 35.Kh2 g5?

Now it is Black’s turn to be over-optimistic. He should have blocked out the d-file with ...Rd2. 35...Rd2 36.Re1 Qd3 37.Qe5.

36.Rd8+ Ke7

[36...Kg7 leads to checkmate: 37.Rg8+ Kh6 38.Ng4+ and so on and so forth.]
37.Rd7+! Bxd7 38.Nd5+ Kd8
[38...Kf8 39.Qh8#]
9.Qf6+ Kc8 40.Nb6# checkmate.
1-0

And the tremendous player handling the White pieces above is now the one facing Balinas from across the board.

IM Rosendo Balinas (2365) - GM Anatoly Lutikov (2500) [C60] Odessa (11), 1976

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6
The Steinitz Defense.
4.c3 Bd7 5.d4 g6 6.0-0 Bg7
GM Glenn Flear recently wrote a book entitled “The Offbeat Spanish”. Why he considers all lines in the Spanish without 3...a6 “offbeat” is beyond me, but he did cover the Steinitz Defense. According to him, this line has the reputation for being dull, passive and unambitious. Also as per Flear the modern way of playing this defense as Black is for Black to capture on d4 and get his bishop to the a1-h8 diagonal.
7.dxe5 dxe5 8.Qb3
[8.Bg5 Nge7 9.Qb3 0-0 10.Rd1 Qe8 11.Nbd2 was immediately called a draw in Hulak vs Lombardy from 1976 Banja Luka.]
8...Qe7 9.Qa3
Balinas: “From the position I judged that the two tempi lost when I exchanged queens did not matter very much. What was important was simplification and with this the chances of a draw are closer.”
9...h6 10.Qxe7+ Ngxe7 11.Re1 0-0-0
12.h3?!
Obviously the only way for Black to play for a win here is to pawn storm the g1-King, so White should have refrained from any pawn moves in front of his King.
12...f5 13.Nbd2 f4 14.Nb3 b6
Of course Lutikov does not allow Nc5, exchanging off his white-squared bishop. As in the case of a King’s Indian pawn storm, this bishop is indispensable due to its ability to support a pawn thrust on g4.
15.a4 a5 16.Bc4 g5 17.Nbd2
Balinas’ original intention was to play 17.Bf7 preventing the pawn roller, because 17...h5 would then be met by 18.Nxg5; but at the last moment realized that 17.Bf7 is properly met by 17...Bf6 18.Bh5 g4! 19.Bxg4 Bxg4 20.hxg4 Rhg8 and Black’s offensive is hard to contain.
17.Bf7 is a patzer’s move, according
to Balinas. “Yet, I could easily have made a “patzer’s” move during the game because at one time I was tempted to move my bishop twice successively.

“My opponent was able to establish a very strong position in the kingside and was preparing a plan to crush my kingside by pawn roller. This was when I almost moved that bishop twice to prevent the pawn roller. But if I did so, I was aware it would be a position wherein my opponent could still sacrifice a pawn and get a break through sooner or later. It would be similar to a kingside attack by black in the King’s Indian Defense, the more you try to prevent it the sooner it comes.

“But pushing pawns forward does not always prove to be a good strategy and I saw that flaw in time.”

17...Bf6 18.b3 h5 19.Nh2 g4 20.hxg4 hxg4 21.g3! Rh3 22.Ndf1

Balinas: “There were no complications. It was just a matter of looking at the respective positions and seeing where the pieces can move and what they can do.

“When he carelessly kept on pushing his pawn I used the strategy of blockade in my third and second ranks. The blockade in the third rank was against the further advance of the pawns and in the second was the closure of the file for his rooks with the use of the two knights.”

22...Rdh8 23.Rd1

White’s first threat in a long time: Ba6+ followed by Nxg4

23...Nb8 24.Ra2 Ng6 25.Rad2

Black’s offensive has been contained and now the play revolves around the weakness of Black’s advanced pawns.


30.Rxd7!

At the cost of the exchange Balinas takes out the supporter of Black’s pawn chain. It took a lot of guts to play this move in such a crucial game. Not only first prize or money is involved here, but the future of Balinas’s career!

30...Nbx7d 31.Nxg4 Reh7 32.Ngh2 Nc5 33.Re1 Ng6 34.Nxf3 Nf4

Just in case White misses the mate threat of ...Rh1. The knight cannot be captured because of 35.gxf4 Rg7+ 36.Ng3 exf4.

35.Nh2 Rg7?!

[Perhaps better chances were offered by 35...Nh3+ 36.Kg2 Ng5 37.Ng4 (37.f3?? Rxh2+! 38.Nxh2 Rxh2+ 39.Kxh2 Nxf3+) 37...Ngxe4 38.Nxe5 (38.b4 N6d) 38...Nxc3 etc.]

36.f3 Ncd3 37.Re3 Nb2?

Lutikov is trying too hard to win.
37...Nh3+ 38.Kh1 Nd4 locks up the kingside pawns and pieces after which peace will come soon.

38.Ba6+ Kb8 39.Ng4 Ng6 40.Re1 Rd7?

Lutikov had to move one of his rooks to the d-file otherwise his b2-knight would be lost to Rb1. However, he should have used the other rook, because then after 40...Rd8 41.Nf2 the position of the other rook on the g-file permits the shot 41...Nf4! and the knight escapes.

41.Nf2 b5

Black is desperately trying to save his knight.

42.Bxb5 c6 43.Bxc6

[43.Be2 Rb7 44.Rb1 Nxa4 saves the piece]

43...Rc7 44.Bd5

[44.Bb5!? makes it even easier for White 44...Rxc3 45.Rb1 Rxb3+-]

44...Rxc3

Balinas: “It was Petrosjan who said that the two knights are defensive gems and I believe there could not be more shining an example than this game against Lutikov. He had slowly realized the futility of his kingside actions. One false plan usually begets another and that is how Lutikov lost the game. We reached an adjournment with Lutikov three pawns down but the exchange up. I confirmed in subsequent analysis that he had a lost game.”

45.Re2 Nd3 46.Re3 Nc1 47.Rxc3 Ne2+ 48.Kg2 Nxg3 49.Bf7 Ne7 50.Ng4 Nc6 51.Nf3 Rh7 52.Bd5 Nxd5 53.exd5

The passed pawn on d5 will quickly become a dangerous weapon.

53...Nd4 54.Nxe5 Nxb3 55.Nc4 Kc8 56.d6 Nc5 57.Nb6+ Kb7 58.d7 Kc7

[58...Rh8 lasts a few moves longer.]

59.Nd5+

Balinas: “At the resumption, he came to the table drunk. At one point he touched his rook while his king was in check. He told me he was sorry and I took it with a smile, knowing the genial person that he is when he is drunk.”

59...Kd8 60.Nf6 1-0

Black resigns. The exchange of all the pieces is forced after which 60.Nf6 Nxd7 61.Nfxd7 Rxd7 62.Nxd7 Kxd7 63.Kh3 the only problem left for White is whether he wants to queen one pawn or two.

Balinas: “I sympathized with Lutikov because it seemed to me that he could not win his fight against the bottle. It had already affected his professional chess life. The Soviet Chess Federation would no longer allow him to go out of the country to play, I was told, because of his drinking habits. Towards the end of the tournament, he got sick in the stomach because of too much liquor. His three games after ours, had to be postponed because of this. But the next time I saw him he would not take alcohol anymore even when we were celebrating the closing of the tournament. He was probably advised that it is either the bottle or his life.

“But Lutikov is still a great player. Even when he had taken a quantity of al-
alcohol he could still play chess. Plachetka told us a story:

He was then playing Lutikov and he noted that the latter spews alcoholic breath. Lutikov offered him a draw, but he declined. He made another offer but Plachetka declined again. Then later Lutikov said: "You don't want to draw because you think I am drunk. I'm offering you a draw for the last time."

"Plachetka immediately accepted it. He was hoping Lutikov would make one bad move but it did not come. On the contrary, his position was getting worse and that was why he accepted the last offer."

Balinas' goal had been considerably lightened. From needing two points out of five it is now one point out of four. Almost there!

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**Odessa Conquered!**

Balinas only needed one point out of the remaining four rounds to get the grandmaster norm, but faced four formidable players in the persons of Tseitlin (Russia), Savon (Russia), Bronstein (Russia), and Tringov (Bulgaria), the last three being full-fledged grandmasters.

In the 12th round Mikhail Tseitlin made a serious effort to beat the upstart Filipino with a sharp Vienna Opening.

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Mikhail Tseitlin (2450)
IM Rosendo Balinas (2365) [C30]
Odessa (12), 1976

1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.f4

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Mikhail Tseitlin is known to be a great expert in this opening. In fact, in 1995 together with Igor Glazkov he wrote the bible "The Complete Vienna".

3...d6

[3...d5 4.fxe5 Nxe4 is the main line which, of course Balinas avoids.]


White's attack has been rebuffed.

17.d5 c5 18.Qh4 b5 19.Ncd2 Nd7 20.a4 b4 21.Nc4 Qe7 22.a5 Re8 23.Rd1 Ng7

[23...Qxe4!? 24.Re1 Nf4 25.Rxe4 Rxe4 26.Kf1 Rxc4 looks better for Black but Bali did not want too much complications in the game.]
24.Re1 1/2-1/2

Black is a pawn up with no problems in the game. In this position of strength Balinas offered a draw, and Tseitlin was only too glad to accept.

Balinas: “The most decisive part of the tournament was the 13th round. It was during this encounter that my victory was practically decided. It was also during this time that I fulfilled the GM result after beating Savon.

“He was my closes pursuer. The others were two points behind me while Savon was only half a point behind.”

IM Rosendo Balinas (2365) - GM Vladimir Savon (2545) [A73] Odessa (13), 1976

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.Nc3 exd5
5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6 7.Nf3 Bg7 8.Be2 0-0
9.0-0 Nbd7

The Classical Main Line of the Benoni proceeds thus: 9...Re8 10.Nd2 Nbd7 11.a4 Ne5 where Black will pursue a dark-square strategy on the kingside and in the center. Black will normally play ...g5 next, to secure the knight on e5 against f4. White’s most important idea, Nc4, may now be answered by ...Nxc4, after which Black may reoccupy e5 by ...Nf6-d7-e5 or ...Nf6-g4-e5.

10.a4 Qe7

Balinas: “He played for a win, refusing my draw offer in the 10th move. I was against draw offers if I can help it. I had that sad experience against Gligoric. But as I said before, I wanted the GM result so much I did not mind even inching my way to it.

“I already had eight points and if my draw offer had been accepted by Savon, I would be needing only one half in the next two rounds. I considered Savon the more dangerous opponent of the three remaining. He had always played for a win uncompromisingly. Even against his compatriots who needed points to get a title result.

“When I offered the draw, I did not expect him to accept. It was very early and in such stage a Russian contender would surely not accept it especially so when his opponent was ahead of him by one half point. It was not only himself that he would be thinking about but also his federation.

“What would his federation’s reaction be if Savon would settle for a truce even before the fight has began. Certainly he would be criticized for not fighting. But I did it to as a feeler that I was amenable for a draw.

“I felt I had the better position but I did not seek a win. On the other hand, I knew that would soften him, at least, if not make him careless outright if he refused. It could not be any other because I offered that draw on while I had the better position, unlike that offered by Lerner. In this last case, the one who refused would feel like a tiger determinedly going after its prey.

“I knew of many cases in which the
one offering a draw with good position eventually end up winning the game after being turned down. One example — the Florin Gheorghiu-Robert Fischer match in the Havana Olympiad. Gheorghiu crushed Fischer after the latter refused. Bent Larsen was also crushed by Lubomir Kavalek in a Manila tournament. And Anatoly Karpov also lost against Boris Ivkov in the Buenos Aires tournament in 1971 a few moves after refusing a draw offer.”

11.Nd2 a6

Savon had probably seen this Petrovian game and was trying to improve on it: 11...b6 12.Re1 Rb8 13.f4 a6 14.Bf3 b5 15.axb5 axb5 16.Ra5 b4 17.Na4 h5 18.Nc4 Ng4 19.e5 dxe5 20.Bxe4 hxg4 21.fxе5 b3 22.e6 fxе6 23.dxe6 Qh4 24.Ra7 g3 25.hxg3 Qxg3 26.exd7 Qf2+ 1/2-1/2 Petrosian,T-Kapengut,A/ Moscow 1972. Savon wanted to improve on this line by pushing his b-pawn to b5 in one push, thus saving a move.

12.f4 Rb8 13.Kh1 b6?

Balinas calls this move an “irreparable positional blunder”. Indeed, Black should have played 13...Re8 and now White cannot play 14.Nc4 because of 14...Nxe4 15.Nxe4 Qxe4 and the pawn on d6 is immune to capture because then the e2-bishop will fall.

14.Nc4


14...Nxe4

Balinas: “He had to choose between losing a pawn or retreat his forces to safer places. He chose to give up a pawn and fight back.”


White has won a pawn but his position is a bit loose. I would have preferred 19.Ra3 as a first step towards getting everything coordinated. The rook can either wind up on d3 or on f3.

19...Nf6 20.Qxb6 Rxd5 21.Qb3 Rd4

Balinas: “I held on to the pawn until both of us were under time pressure. Savon was probably just keeping his pride in not offering a draw when I was pawn up. I would still have accepted such offer if it was made in the earlier stage of the game when everything was still not so sure. But Savon kept it up until we were under the time pressure.”

22.a5 Ne4 23.Qf3 c4 24.Be3 Rd3

25.Rfe1

[25.Rab1? Nd2! wins]

25...Bxb2 26.Bxc4 Rc3 27.Rab1 Rxc4

28.Rxb2 Qa3 29.Rb5 Re8

30.Re5!

White gives up a pawn to break the pressure along the e-file.
30...Rxe5 31.fxe5 Qxa5
Balinas: "With less time on his clock, he offered a draw after getting back the pawn. I had now reversed our role because when I had the pawn I was on the defensive, but when he got back the pawn I was the one attacking.

"I refused the draw not out of belief that I had a winning position but that I had a move that threatened mate. In time pressure, that is the easiest thing to do — threaten mate of the opponent's king.

"Also, I felt I had to stake something when fighting for glory and I felt it was now or never. Savon's 'draw' was matched by my 'no'.'"

32.Rf1 Qd5 33.Bh6 Rc3 34.Qf4
Balinas has the threat of Re1 threatening the only protector of the f6 square, and also pushing his pawn to e6 with a threatened back rank attack.

34...g5?
Balinas: "He finally panicked and gave up a pawn that only hastened his loss. However, even if the game was adjourned before he made the final mistake, I could probably still find the win."

The better 34...Rc8 35.Re1 Nc5 seems to just barely hold (35...Rc4? 36.h3! (36. Rb1 Rb4 37.Rc1 Rc4 etc) 36...Rb4 what else? At least this move watches b8 just in case White would threaten to push his pawn to e6 with a back rank mating idea 37.e6! nevertheless! 37...Qxe6 38.Qc7 Qe8 (38...Rc4 39.Qd8+) 39.Qc3! Qf8 40.Bxf8 Nxc3 41.Bxb4+-) 36.Qf6 Ne6 37.Rf1 Qb7 38.h3 Rc2 39.Rf3 — The winning chances are all White's, but Black is still alive.

35.Bxg5 Rc6
Savon had given up his g-pawn so that this rook can take up the menacing post on g6. However, in time pressure he had overlooked

36.Bf6
and the game is suddenly over.

36...Nxf6 37.exf6 h6
Despair. 37...Qd6 38.Qg4+ Kf8 39.Qg7+ Ke8 40.Re1+ Kd8 41.Qxf7 Qd7 42.Qg8+ Kc7 43.f7 is cut and dried.

38.Qxh6 1-0

Balinas said in Times Journal: "During the game, a photographer kept roving around me. At times I showed my annoyance by taking my gaze out of the board and he would transfer to the side. But I could still see him taking shots of me. He must have used a roll of film just for me.

"Accompanying Savon's resignation was crowd's applause. I had accumulated quite a number of sympathizers because of the novelty of experience I presented to them. Grandmasters from other countries have gone to the Soviet Union and returned home beaten.

"A part of our prizes in rubles was given in advance just before the last round so we could do some shopping.

"First prize was 1,000; second, 800; third, 700; fourth, 600; fifth, 500; sixth, 400; seventh, 300; and eighth, 200. But 12 percent of the prize money was deducted for taxes.

The last two rounds were non-events. Having made the GM norm,
Balinas was content to draw out his remaining games against Bronstein and Tringov.

Before the new rules were revised in 1971, my result in Odessa would have given me the title outright.

"In a tournament of similar category in 1971, Ljubojevic won his grandmaster title by coming second to Vaganian. Vaganian, a Soviet player, won the GM title in that same tournament although he was not yet then an international master."

Bronstein’s suggestion is unlikely to happen however because there is even a move in the FIDE congress requiring all who secure a grandmaster norm to have an ELO rating of 2500 first before they get the title.

"Bronstein also said that even if I do not play for 10 years, I will still be remembered for my victory in Odessa. Those nice words coming from a player whose worth and greatness I had practically denied show the kind of person Bronstein is.

"He gave me a copy of his autobiographical book with a dedication saying: ‘Even if you say in this newspaper that you are a pupil of Botvinnik, I am still giving this book to you.’

"Geller volunteered to say something during the ceremony. He said that as an Odessa native, he wanted so much to play in the tournament but it coincided with the Interzonals in Biel, Switzerland, where he was a participant. He said he witnessed the last games and noted that the players from Odessa played very well but unfortunately they did not win. He said I won instead, and he proposed a toast."
“In spite of the glory that goes with winning, I will be deluding myself if I will think I am now in the class of such grandmasters as Savon, Lutikov, Bronstein, and Tukmakov. This is hard to explain but I am stating this to place my feat in the right perspective.

“To me, the win, at the most, is only a proof of my potential. I think that in a tournament, there are many accidental factors that often help largely in the players’ results. And in Odessa there were some that, I believed, went with me. There was the motivation that made me conscious all the while to exert the greatest efforts possible and the fact that my opponents do not know me very well. There was also the psychological condition of my opponents which probably was not as good as mine then. In a battle among players whose strength is just about equal these accidental factors are often decisive.

“I recognize only two factors that are somewhat the permanent character of the player and these are perceptibility and general knowledge of the game. The first involves the capability of the player for intelligent observations and the second refers to the degree of possession of knowledge culled from these observations.

“These are the factors I base my judgment of the players. The ability to make use of the accidental factors in his favor is a cheap talent that is easily possessed by everyone who just exercises care.

“As to the first, I consider myself as good as anyone else but as to the second I definitely consider myself below the class of the players I mentioned. To improve on this I think I have to have further review and observation of the greater masters’ games.

“This needs more time.

“Getting the second half of the grandmaster title looked very easy but in my case I believe the key is more study. There is no reason why I would not be able to get it within a reasonable number of attempts. The three years I am allowed to get the other half would provide plenty of opportunities for this. After all, as a businessman would say, making your first million is the hardest.”

Balinas did not have to get another norm. In the 1976 Haifa Olympiad which followed a few months after Odessa, Florencio Campomanes, then Deputy President of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) proposed to the Titles and Ratings Committee that IM Rosendo Balinas be elevated to the ranks of International Grandmaster by virtue of his historical victory in Odessa 1976, over-fulfilling the required grandmaster norm by one point.

The Titles and Ratings Committee also took note that in Marlboro 1975 Balinas just missed his first norm by half a point. All in all, they saw the merit of Campomanes’ arguments and by a special resolution conferred the International Grandmaster title on Rosendo Balinas.

Thus, Rosendo C. Balinas Jr. became the Philippines’ and Asia’s second
international grandmaster after Eugene Torre. Unlike Eugene Torre he was not born of an affluent family, and neither was he anointed by the gods of Philippine chess. He had to fight, barter, haggle for every opportunity to play. His victory was not only a great personal marker in his bio-data sheet, but also a monument to the native “abilidad” of the Filipino chessplayer. Underfunded, undertrained and underprepared as he usually is, the great fighting spirit and never-say-die attitude has always been the Filipino’s most dangerous weapon in the field of battle.

We showed it in the city of Lugano (1968), when a ragtag team of six untitled players upset the giants to just squeeze into 14th place in the Olympiad. We impressed in the beaches of Nice (1974) when Eugene Torre showed everyone just why he should be a grandmaster, smashing the top boards of the chess super-powers as if they were nothing.

We flabbergasted them all in the board rooms of Lucerne, when a small Filipino with a manicured moustache, Florencio Campomanes, won the Presidency of the International Chess Federation (FIDE), the second largest sports body in the world.

We proved it in 1982 Toluca, when Eugene Torre (again!), still lowly-rated, shocked the assembled hosts of super-grandmasters and tied for first in the interzonal, qualifying for the elimination matches leading to the world championship. We made them stand up and take notice when GM Joey Antonio had the Armenians, European Team Champions, standing and frowning heavily, worried at the prospect that their champion might be eliminated in the early rounds of the Las Vegas World Championship.

We surprised them again in 2000, when then-IM Bong Villamayor got his grandmaster title in 42 days.

The city of Lugano, the sands of Toluca and the deserts of Las Vegas, the mountains of Shenyang, the beaches of Nice, the ports of Odessa, the streets of Istanbul, anywhere else in the world: we, the Filipino people, proved it then, and will continue proving it every day. We will fight everywhere against all odds. We will never surrender.