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Zurich Chess Challenge 2016



This year's **Zurich Chess Challenge** (13-15 February) was again an extraordinary event, held in glamorous surroundings and covered at length by the chess press. Michael Negele was there on Sunday and Monday, 14th to 15th of February (3rd - 5th round rapid and blitz).



Hotel Savoy Baur en Ville, the venue of the tournament. Michael couldn't imagine a more sterling place to bring together the rich and beautiful with the common chess people.

Apart from the top players in the tournament, many an elite player of the past crossed Michael Negele's path such as Anatoli Karpov, Jan Timman, Judith Polgar and others.



Marc Lang, blindfold simul world record holder, has managed the official [tournament website](#).



Michael Negele with chess legend Ljubomir Ljubojevic, the latter (just like Genna Sosonko) was always interfering in the live comments all over the place, even in the German comments by Werner Hug and Yannick Pelletier.



In general

Ljubo's remarks in the Russian area were strongly countered by Genna Sosonko, as it was actually his realm.



Anatoli Karpov

was the co-commentator of the Russian internet presentation.



Dirk Jan ten

Geuzendam shows a poster of the famous artist and chess player Marcel Duchamp.



Dutch top player

Anish Giri with Ian Rogers (on the right, English comments) and Cathy Rogers (left).



Michael Negele met - for the first time personally - the Swiss KWA member and "old" collector friend Urs Frischherz.



Vladimir Kramnik vs Anish Giri.

Meanwhile a Swiss national after having moved from Paris to Geneva with his family, Kramnik radiated an impressing sovereignty. Obviously he felt very comfortable in the noble ambience of the *Savoy Baur en Ville*.

On the other hand Anish Giri who had been considered as the "pop star of the chess scene" by Richard

Forster (in a preliminary report in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*) made an erratic impression on Michael Negele. The "cat-and-mouse game" of "tomcat Vladi" with "mousie Anish" in the 4th rapid round was symptomatic of the different mental states in an unusual setting.



Levon Aronian had Alexei Shirov totally under control, the latter's *Berlin wall* was stripped down. In the final blitz games you could virtually observe how the resistance of the poor Latvian against the adversarial superiority dwindled away from round to round. No surprise that in the end he found himself at the bottom of the tournament table.

Aronian - already with a lot Zurich experience - appeared quite relaxed and in a good temper, but nevertheless didn't manage to get into his usual form. Maybe the cruel loss to Anand at the beginning has contributed to his performance, leading only to the second to last place.



Two ex-world champions - Vishy Anand and Vladimir Kramnik.

Anand's performance was significantly improved compared to Gibraltar, and he seemed to have the sympathies of the Swiss audience. With regard to time management he was the only who could rival Nakamura, even if his play appeared less pressing. He would have won the tournament if he had played more resolute in the last two blitz rounds.

In Michael Negele's view it was not possible to follow the three simultaneously played blitz games at the same time, so compared to the rapid games that was no pleasure for the spectators, the only slight critical point of an otherwise very felicitous event.

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Anish Giri vs

Alexei Shirov. In the middle of the first row of seats the main sponsor of the tournament, the Russian gem dealer Oleg Skvortsov with his wife Natalia.



Exactly at the start of the 4th blitz round, the former FIFA "godfather" Sepp Blatter together with his current "queen of hearts" Linda Barras appeared, obviously they have found a stimulating topic of conversation with Oleg Skvortsov - see the next photo. While Anand and Nakamura are unimpressed and focus on the upcoming game, organizer (and president of the SG Zurich) Dr. Christian Issler already approaches from the left in appeasing intent.



["To see and be seen ..."](#)

Blatter, who stayed in the same hotel, had a hearing on the next day where he intended (in vain) to override his suspension. Michael Negele assumed he was intercepted by the Skvortsov followers to put him in the scene, well-covered by the media. However, the "spook" nearly lasted 15 minutes, and apart from Michael most journalists missed their chance to take snapshots ...



[Some shadow play - this and also last year's Zurich winner Hikaru Nakamura.](#)

Nakamura's strength is to remain calm also in dangerous situations, and his time management is impressive - nearly always he had some more time on the clock, thus exerting additional pressure.

Naturally his win deserves the highest appreciation. But, as he didn't tire to emphasize: "What counts, is Moscow."

At the concluding ceremony Skvortsov, Dr. Issler and Mark Gluchovski (as the representative of the Russian Chess Federation) inked a contract on arranging a *Zurich-Moscow Chess Challenge* in 2017. This top-class double event should start in the Zurich *Savoy Baur en Ville* and be completed in the new rooms of the *Central Moscow Chess Club*. We look forward to the details of this exciting tournament, certainly we can expect some novelties ...

Michael Negele is also curious if the Zurich organizers will agree to his proposal for the Lasker year 2018: A rapid tournament (20 min + 30 sec bonus/move) according to the so-called Lasker points system (10-0 points for a classic win; 8-2 for a win by stalemate; 6-4 for a win by robbery [bare king] and 5-5 for a classic draw). That would promise thrilling endgames as well as - with high probability - a clear winner.

The above text is based on the article "Schach in der fünften Dimension" by Dr. Michael Negele (text) & Raj Tischbierek (games) in *Schach* 3/2016, p.53-59.

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