

A Very One-Sided Chess Match

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Pasadena

The shortest chess match in history is over. It lasted one move.

At precisely 1 p.m. on Saturday, with 200 people looking on, grandmaster Viktor Korchnoi plopped down in a black leather chair, grabbed his queen pawn and shoved it forward two squares.

It wasn't much of a move, but it was good enough to bolt him into the final round of the world chess championship.

The game was one-sided because Korchnoi's opponent, Soviet grandmaster Garri Kasparov, never showed up. Soviet officials, upset with the choice of Pasadena as the match site, refused to allow their young star to play.

The Russians complained that Pasadena is off limits to Soviet diplomats and they wanted the match played in Rotterdam instead.

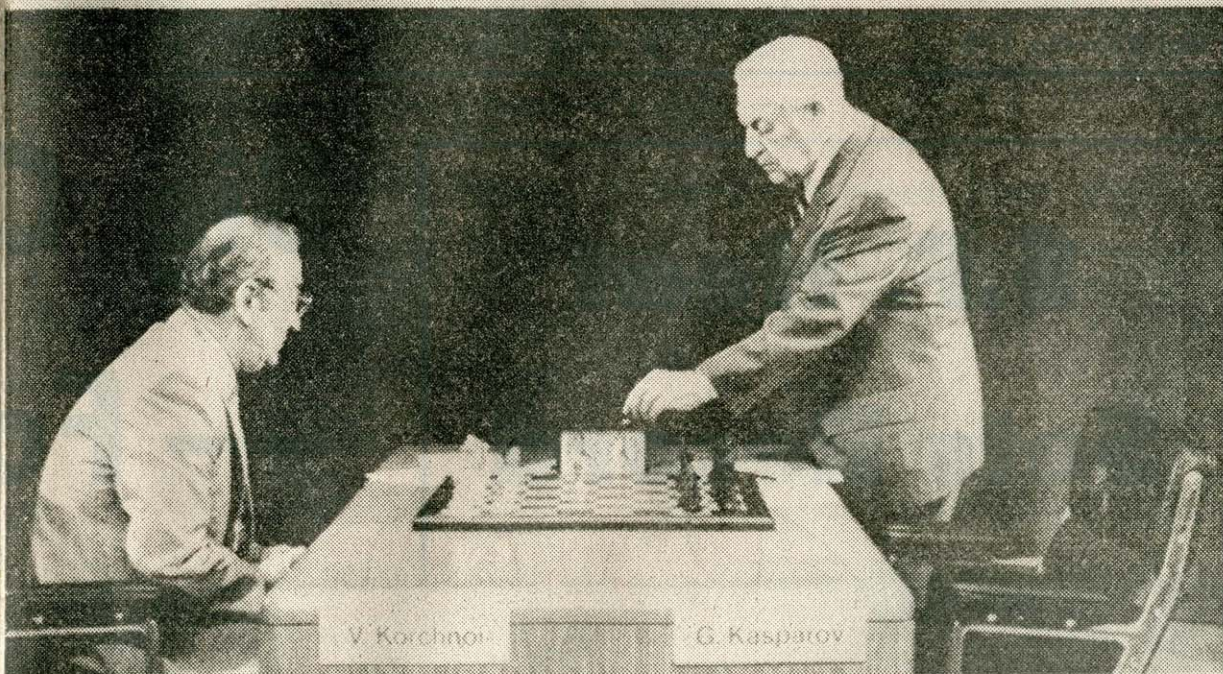
Nonetheless, the World Chess Federation stuck with its decision and the result was the weirdest spectacle ever in a game that has become increasingly known for its weirdness.

Match organizers and the public knew beforehand that Kasparov would not appear. But the organizers charged the full \$8 ticket price anyway to view the non-game. A leaflet distributed at the door called it a "historic event," and chess fans ponied up.

Inside the small lecture hall at Pasadena City College, the fans stared at the two empty chairs, the wooden table and the 32 chess pieces on it as game time approached. Match officials called for silence and the few whisperers stopped whispering.

What happened next resembled a stately court dance. At 12:55 p.m., with all eyes upon him and the room as quiet as a mortuary, Korchnoi rose from his seat at the rear of the hall and strolled toward the stage.

Five minutes later, The Chronicle's chess editor, George Koltanowski, the official arbiter, pushed a button to start Kasparov's chess clock. Korchnoi moved his pawn and the move was flashed to the audience on closed-circuit video screens overhead.



AP Wirephoto

Viktor Korchnoi made the first move (top photo) as referee George Koltanowski watched; an hour later, when opponent Garri Kasparov failed to appear, the match was ended

for the title. Korchnoi, a Soviet defector, has played title matches against Karpov twice, in 1978 and 1981, losing both.

"I would like to congratulate Mr. Korchnoi for this afternoon's

..." Three seconds passed before Campomanes could find the proper word. "Event," he said at last.

A reporter asked Korchnoi what his next move would have been if Kasparov had shown up and

had moved his knight to the f6 square. Korchnoi said he would have moved his queen bishop pawn two squares forward.

The fans, filing out of the hall, had to be satisfied with that.