

Alexander Munninghoff

Hein Donner

The Biography

Including an interview with Harry Mulisch
by Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam

Game analyses and research
by Maarten de Zeeuw

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Preface

Quite soon after agreeing to write a book on Hein Donner, the misgiving crept up on me that, while in principle any human life can be couched in a biography, perhaps here we might be dealing with an *exceptio donneriana*, if not a *praeclusio donneriana*. After all, hadn't everything chess-related that could be of any importance already been written down with a master's hand by the subject itself, in pieces that had been eminently collected in *The King* by his paladins Tim Krabbé and Max Pam? And hadn't Donner already granted us a good look into his psyche in his several volumes, which had been crowned with literary laurels?

A second inspection taught me that my fear was entirely justified. During his life, contrary to all other chess players not only in the Netherlands but everywhere in the world, Donner made himself so emphatically and pointedly visible, both in speech and in writing, that there is in fact nothing to add. Donner cut the ground from under the feet of any biographer so thoroughly that we might just as well speak of a furtive 'last will' saying: 'Don't you dare write even one letter about me, you nincompoop!' Which is an understandable demand from somebody who spent a big part of his life gravely insulting countless people.

Nevertheless, a biography had to be written, of course. Not a hagiography – that would ridicule Donner posthumously and undeservedly – and neither should it be a diatribe against him. Preferably it should be a rendition, as objective as possible, of the quite chaotic life of a very controversial man.

I would like to thank in the first place my dozens of conversation partners: Hein's family members and friends, enemies and rivals, who, without any noticeable restraint, each from their own little corner and in their own way, shed their light on the Donner phenomenon.

Of the official institutions, I'd like to thank the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (= International Institute for Social History) in Amsterdam for giving me inspection of the Provo archives, and the municipal archives of The Hague, who granted me access to the archive of the chess club Discendo Discimus.

Maarten de Zeeuw, who, as it turned out, had already spent a lot of time collecting Donner material with the intention to write his own book on the man sometime, especially surprised me by his stoic compliance. The amount of data he had already collected was impressive, and I have shamelessly made use of it. I have often tried to imagine how I would feel if somebody else ran off with my subject, even using my material for his own glory. At such moments I felt a deep anger well up inside of me.

Therefore, it is only fitting that I express my warm gratitude for the selfless collaboration to which Maarten de Zeeuw has managed to force himself, in spite of everything. The entire chess-technical part of this book was done by him, and in the biographical part he has saved me more than once from errors, painful omissions and mistakes. I will gladly add that for his analytical work he was able to use the help of Harald van Dijk, grandmaster Lembit Oll and Evert-Jan Straat in several places. For the chess player who takes this book in his hand, the result will be downright surprising: it turns out that several 'evergreens' have been wrongly evaluated for years, and, thanks to De Zeeuw's detective work, the thought-provoking 'Krabbé collection' has been extended with sixteen games.

Alexander Münnhoff
The Hague, 1994

Preface to the English edition

‘The genius of Hein was that he was there.’

Anyone who is thus characterized by others must have made a big impression on his environment. Where people’s memories of the deceased are mostly limited to mentioning one or more of their distinctive qualities, this quote by one of Donner’s friends reflects precisely the slight desperation that used to seize anyone who crossed the path of this imposing giant.

A few seconds after you’d met him, you already knew you were dealing with a phenomenon, that with him as a conversation partner you would be lured into a minefield, with provocative propositions about everything under the sun – propositions which perhaps didn’t seem quite tenable at first hearing but which he managed to defend with so much debating power that eventually, exhausted, you threw in the towel. And then you would stand a good chance of being publicly branded an idiot and a nitwit by Hein. That prospect was reason for some to turn away from Donner, but this tended to have the adverse effect: he would just pretend you didn’t exist, and that was even worse.

This looks like a picture of someone who wilfully and arrogantly tried to seclude himself from his environment, but it wasn’t that bad. Certainly, Donner had enemies, and there were people who really felt he had stabbed them to the heart. But he also had many, many admirers, who found his completely unconventional lifestyle refreshing (on most days he didn’t get up until three o’clock in the afternoon, he never opened any letters, which led to problems with the tax authorities that he would ignore, and he personally torpedoed his job at IBM by sleeping on his desk – lying on his back), coupled as it was to his indisputable, but almost puzzling grandmastership. The discussion continues to this day whether a little more sense of structure couldn’t have taken him much higher up in the chess hierarchy.

But that was just the way Hein was – a grandmaster who didn't have a board and pieces in his own home most of the time, who discovered Chess Informant by coincidence at a time when it had been an indispensable tool for all his colleagues for years already, who, partly because of this, was beaten with black before move 20 in the same variation of the Sicilian twice in a short time span, and who, in spite of this, hardly ever took any account of the fact that his opponents were people who made plans too – but who also managed to win great tournaments like Hoogovens 1963 and Venice 1967, ahead of a whole range of top players.

Fortunately, Donner left us an extensive oeuvre which encompasses much more than just chess. He enjoyed a legendary friendship with one of the greatest Dutch writers ever, Harry Mulisch (whose book *The Discovery of Heaven* is largely about Donner), and, with his many columns and books, gradually grew to be a well-known Dutchman. That is what he remained until his death in 1988. In the years before that, after a brain haemorrhage, typing with one finger, he couldn't produce much more than one hundred lines a week. But this did result in a collection of fantastic 'incunabula', or 'sparkling minima' as the columnist Renate Rubinstein called them, which earned him a great Dutch literary prize right at the end of his life.

For the chess world, Hein Donner lives on in *The King*, the book that is called 'the thick Donner' in Dutch chess circles. In this marvellous anthology, Tim Krabbé and Max Pam, two laureated authors themselves, have included Donner's best chess pieces. The English translation of the book has found its way all over the world.

Now, after precisely a quarter of a century, as an addition to *The King*, the publisher New In Chess has decided to bring out a translation into English of my Donner biography which dates from 1994. This is of course tremendously pleasing for me. But my gratitude reaches further than just my personal interest: in this decision I see a recognition of the fact that with Hein Donner we had an absolutely unique human being in our midst – someone who deserves to be rescued from oblivion

also today, not only as a chess player but also, especially, as an intractable, sometimes bizarre and sometimes also endearing person. And, above all, as a fighter: if in a discussion you were White, then he would be Black, and vice versa.

He was a chess player of a type that has disappeared from the playing halls of this century. In my opinion, the current top players, and also those a little bit lower on the list, have started to identify dangerously closely to the calculating monsters they let loose on their concoctions after every game. This doesn't make them very attractive for the greater chess audience, and I can't see any change coming in this – apparently the ivory tower of chess wisdom is so attractive for most top players that in their press conferences they limit themselves to a few statements, expressed in the first eight letters of the alphabet and the first eight numbers, and then swiftly disappear.

This biography of Donner shows that it can (and perhaps must) be different, and so I am especially grateful to the publisher, who is willing to put this reminder in print in a language that can be understood also by chess players outside the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Alexander Münninghoff
The Hague, December 2019

Note by the editor

In this English edition of the *Hein Donner* biography, a number of details have been added, collected from sources that became available after 1994, the year the Dutch edition was written. The main new sources are the now defunct Dutch chess magazine *Matten*, the documentaries *Hein Donner – Ein Heldenleben* (Jan Bosdriesz, Max Pam) and *De Liefde voor Hout* (Jop Pannekoek, Max Pam) and the books *De Geest van het Spel* (John Kuipers) and *Het Oog van de Meester* by Erik Fokke.

An interview by Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam with Harry Mulisch, published first in *Matten* 3 (2008), in which the Dutch writer talks about his friendship with Donner, has been added by courtesy of Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam (Chapter 11).

The games in Chapter 12, ‘Games and Annotations’, analysed by Maarten de Zeeuw, have been checked with the computer engine Stockfish 10 and corrected where necessary. Also, two games have been added to this collection.

This book contains several quotations from Donner’s articles collected in the book *The King*. For these, we have used the excellent translations by Richard de Weger in *The King*.

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After the liberation in May 1945, Amsterdam was like an old, rusty, defective merry-go-round, but by a miracle it got up and running again. A lot had been destroyed, or lost, but after years of suppression and curfews, the newfound freedom caused lots of sparks to catch on again to the mechanism of the city and its people. Each night, large masses of people were sauntering by the canals, making eyes at each other. The city wasn't going to be its normal self for some time. Liberation and springtime – what would you think? Most people walked around with an entire barrel organ in their heads, and it couldn't be quieted down. Water had turned into whiskey, everything boozed and fucked – you didn't have to be a poet to notice that.¹

During the day the sun was shining, and Amsterdam filled up with people. Friends and acquaintances found each other again, groups of kindred spirits coagulated, movements were started. Plans were made, a new generation announced itself that wanted to give new content to sound, colour, and life. An atmosphere of unbridled expectations for the future took possession of the cities in Western Europe. The allied forces had won, fortunately the war hadn't jumped over to the other side of the Elbe, and now it was time to reconstruct and fill up the vacuums.

The generation that had its turn now became fascinated by reports from Paris, where Juliette Gréco and Jean-Paul Sartre were giving shape to existentialism. That was the real thing. Anyone who could, threw off their drab war cocoon and flew out like a butterfly to live the full life. Amsterdam needed such people.

While Johannes Hendrikus Donner did belong to this generation that was supposed to be 'going to make it', he was anything but a

¹ 'Water was whiskey geworden./Alles zoop en naaide' is from the Dutch poet Remco Campert's poem 'Niet te geloven' (= 'Unbelievable'), written later about the days right after the liberation.

merry butterfly. Therefore, the fact that the new *élan* eventually didn't really catch on anywhere in Europe was also his fault. For the time being, the old structures of power and authority managed to hold their ground after the confetti of the freedom parades had fluttered down on the traditionally grey Dutch clay soil, and for a long time Donner went along with this. It wasn't until the 1960s that all the taboos were shattered – again, not by Johannes Hendrikus Donner, but by his then wife, among others. In his most progressive guise, Donner was at best a right-wing Labour man, with the emphasis on 'right-wing'. And above all, of course, with the emphasis on Donner.

But in 1945, the year when he arrived in Amsterdam to study medicine at the Free University, Donner was still what he had been brought up to be: a stiff, anti-revolutionary Hague boy. He did have certain anarchic aspirations: as he emphatically claimed when asked, he had broken with the church, and posed as an angry young man, like most of his contemporaries right after the war. But Donner's resistance had something unreal and feeble, because it was so clearly calmed down by a few strictly formal attainments. He left The Hague, with its 'permanent autumn, its sneaky sensuality, its majesty in decay', as he would describe it later, and went to live in Amsterdam, and was going to play chess and drink as much as he wanted – two things he had been forbidden to do before that time. And that was already sufficient for him; Donner avoided carrying through the split with his parental home, which, for existential reasons, many of his contemporaries did so rigorously. Why should he enter into that confrontation? He did feel unfairly treated, but not by his parents – after all they had suffered just as much as he had. It was the rotten world order that had made this gruesome war possible. To think that all that could have happened just like that! And what was more – to think that God had approved of it! Through the war, Donner had built up a certain amount of distrust of the Church, and of society, that he never actually lost in his entire life. But he kept his obedience and his respect towards his parents, also mindful of the Fifth Commandment – and did this much longer than the outside world believed he did.

Chess players are opportunists by nature, as Donner repeatedly found out himself. As long as he could play chess, he was prepared to keep up the appearance of being a normal student in Amsterdam – in a quite far-ranging way, in fact.

By composition, it was a unique group that streamed into the universities in 1945. Those who had been in the final exam year had received their certificate without having had to do anything for it. This was extra tough on Donner, since if he had only managed to pass from fifth to sixth class, he wouldn't have had to put in the extra effort of the state exam. But among the freshmen there were also many who had done their final exams in the early years of the war and had then gone underground, or ventured the journey to England. Or who – even more impressive – had been in the Resistance. Often they were 23-, 24-year-old boys and girls who had been through a lot of misery and danger, and who went to university much later than usual. Some of them were still wearing their military uniforms when they sat down on the university benches.

Everybody had been hit hard by the war, and everybody had come to grips with it in his or her own way. A large group of mainly young people were trying to find their ethical standards by investigating their own traditional backgrounds. And these were still largely determined by religion in those days. And so, they set what they had learned from the Bible side by side with the new trend – namely, that everything had to change! Thousands of boys and girls who had survived the war had to make a choice between these two, and now had to give a new élan to their country: will we continue in the old vein, or is everything indeed going to change? Since there was a lack of great helmsmen, an overwhelming majority eventually did the opposite of what each generation is inclined to do: after some hesitation during those euphoric first months of the post-bellum, they decided to stick to the old ways. The pre-war thread was picked up again – also, initially, by Hein Donner, even though he did say some remarkable things about his religious perceptions: 'I believe in God, but he

doesn't exist. I only learned to believe when I discovered that he doesn't exist.'

Just the same, Donner remained a member of *Nil Desperandum Deo Duce*, the VU 'Corps', for years. The emblem of the Lanx club house, which was situated at the Korte Leidsedwardsstraat above a now defunct cap factory, did mention the Lord as the guide of the students, but the internal interpretation of the initials, 'Never D..D..Drunk' (a typical joke for the time), is a better indication of the atmosphere that prevailed in this house. With all its Christian restrictions, it was a 'real' student society, with initiation rites, a strict hierarchy, and a lot of bingeing and bragging during endless, chaotic, very loud 'donderjolen' (= thundering revelries). Once, a piano was hurled down from the third floor; this undeniable occurrence was reformed through the years into the famous story that Donner had thrown the piano out of the window, and the instrument had landed on a couple of cars, after which his father had had to pay for the damage. In reality, Donner was not present when a group of Lanx members dumped the piano through the stairwell. However, at another occasion, at the end of what was called 'a skull-ripping scandal' in the almanac, the window of the great hall was bashed in with the ladder of a fire engine by a totally tipsy St Nicholas and his mate Black Pete, a very tall and skinny person who was later led away in a conspicuous mixture of consideration and irritation by Andreas Donner, who was then on the verge of becoming a professor.

By that time, Hein was already a member of the debating society I.U.M.B.O. – the members are never allowed to reveal the true meaning of these initials. Outsiders at Lanx guessed they stood for 'Jongelingen Uit Meer Beschaafde Omgeving' (= 'Young People From More Civilized Environments'): indeed, Iumbo consisted largely of members of the aristocracy of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands – the wealthy Amsterdam patricians, the intellectual families of the Christian nomenclature: Diepenhorst, Van Gunsteren,

Sikkel, Bavinck, Miedema, De Gaay Fortman, Woltjer, Van Westreenen, Geelkerken, Rutten.

And, since recent times, Donner as well. Before the war, André had been the first to become a member, and even though father Donner had never been a member of a student society, the illustrious Iumbo could definitely meet with his approval. Thus, by joining Iumbo, Hein started a kind of tradition that was observed with pleasure at the Statenlaan in The Hague – if only because it created a framework within which the conforming process of their difficult youngest son might take place without too many problems. Initially, things seemed indeed to be moving in that direction: still in 1946, when he had already switched over from medicine to law, Hein sat at table at the Iumbo dinner parties, making a fully convincing impression – ARP bigwigs were taking note of his flamboyant insights with interest. He was lodging with André at that time, who was already married and was just starting on a fantastic career as a lawyer. (He became a judge at the Court of Justice of the European Community, and later became a professor in Groningen. He earned fame with the Donner Commission, named after him, which dealt with the so-called Lockheed affair.) Only when Hein became so good at chess that the game started to get the upper hand and manifested itself to him as a realistic alternative life fulfilment, did he definitively began rebelling against his milieu and opting for the status of a Bohemian. This was not before the second half of 1947.

It certainly wasn't true that Hein Donner was admitted to Iumbo purely because of his name. He really had to make an effort for it during his freshman year, when senior students, hunting for *Nachwuchs*, made their selection for the various debating societies. (There were many of them, but Iumbo was the most prestigious, closely followed by *Stoa* and *Forum*.) Then the candidates were invited to the so-called 'Fleurdiner' (= 'Bloom dinner'), where they had to 'prove their worth' by 'giving as good as they got'. Those who weren't up to this could still be rejected – although it has to be said that the selection

was mostly such that an invitation to the 'Fleurdiner' could already be considered an admission.

This system, still in use today, was and is labelled by many to be relentlessly tough and unfair. An often-heard argument from opponents is that the freshmen, also called 'frosches', cannot be their true selves during the period of initiation. It is said that as a result, the selection is actually by name anyway, and 'guys' who are 'good in principle' simply don't get the chance to join an elite association like, for instance, Iumbo.

The first initiation ceremonies after the war, in 1945, were much more friendly and moderate than those in the years before (and also after). The frosches were not shaved bald, to avoid them being confused with war criminals (sic!) and after all the suffering in the war it was deemed appropriate that physical ragging be limited to a minimum in that year. Incidentally, contrary to what was customary at other societies, there was hardly any tradition of physical ragging at NDDD.

Young Hein was made to hop around like a rabbit with his stiff bird's legs, but that was about it. He did do it, though! With the same conviction with which he would later turn away from anything that had to do with the 'corps', Donner tried to position himself optimally in the students' world during that first period in Amsterdam. That this meant he had to stand up for senior students in the Iumbons' bar 'Gambrinus' and had to take their coats and put them away, had to offer the gentlemen a drink, and even had to escort them home if it got late – all these things belonged to the well-known inconveniences of freshmanhood. Many a youngster would have chucked it in by this time, but not Hein. After all, belonging to Iumbo was, besides an election, also an alibi in the direction of his home front for what he was actually doing: playing chess, drinking, and talking. This was a cover-up that took an enormous amount of time initially, rather similar to Hein painstakingly stirring his toothbrush in a cup to give his parents the impression that he was brushing his teeth, as he had often done as a child.

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After the termination of his relationship with Olga Blaauw, a somewhat muddled time began for Hein. He temporarily moved in with Carel van den Berg, and started to work very hard on chess again, which, incidentally, did not bring him immediate success. The match versus Euwe, which was played around the turn of the year 1955/1956 in The Hague, in the premises of the daily newspaper *Het Binnenhof*, ended in a disaster for him. There was actually something at stake in this match, by the way: there was an old regulation of the Dutch federation KNSB stipulating that the former Dutch champion – Euwe – had a right to challenge his successor to a revenge match for the title. ‘Of course I was in the position of a pupil playing against his teacher,’ Donner later declared, ‘desperately asking myself, “what do I actually know that this man doesn’t?” I had been brought up a “Euwian”, with Uncle Jan Teaches his Nephew to Play Chess. Euwe’s style, that calm, strict understanding that “either one side or the other is standing better”, I learned that from him later. But against Euwe himself I had no chance, of course.’

This sounds very meek, and in reality the situation wasn’t like this. Donner was certainly intending to definitively dethrone the great Euwe in a man-to-man fight, but he struck unlucky: it so happened that Euwe was in excellent form, while he himself was not quite up to scratch due to all kinds of ups and downs as a consequence of his chaotic lifestyle. For example, not long before the match he had almost died of carbon monoxide poisoning. Only at the very last moment he had been able to grab a bottle of milk, and after a few swigs had managed to open the door of the room. Outside, in the corridor, a small black figure was sitting at the stairwell, trying to persuade him with gestures to return to the room of the calamity. During the match, Donner had a conversation

with a man from The Hague who had experienced something similar.

Halfway through the match, after five games, Donner was already trailing 3½-1½, but he refused to give up the fight, and set out to play the sixth game with remarkable resilience. In that famous game, he practically outplayed Euwe with white in the opening.

‘My Lord, can you tell me why I didn’t play Bishop to c6?’ Donner cried later that night at the top of his voice, his mighty arms raised in dismay at the pitch-black welkin, while walking in the rain through the dark and dreary Wagenstraat in The Hague, on his way to the even more miserable Holland Spoor station, to take the train to Amsterdam. Passers-by stopped and looked on with a shake of the head while this tall young man, who was apparently slightly unbalanced, continued on his path, dejected and wordless after his incomprehensible outburst.

Rarely will any chess player have been so genuinely sorrowful and lonely in his grief as Donner was that night, when he could have proved at least once in his life that he was also capable of beating Euwe in a direct duel. Donner never got such a chance again, mainly because he saw that this traumatic game had put a seal on his Euwe syndrome. Moreover, instead of glory, this game just brought him misjudgement for years to come. From Euwe’s brilliancies, besides the Zandvoort Pearl against Alekhine, the sacrificial orgies against Najdorf and Tartakower and the amazing little defensive move ...♖h8 against Geller, every average chess player also remembers this sixth match game against Donner, in which Black threw a devastating wrecking ball at the white king’s position with 16...♙xh3. In almost all commentaries, this move is adorned with one or more exclamation marks, and indeed it is the introduction to a crushing attack by Euwe, as can be seen in the ‘games’ chapter in the back of this book (Chapter 12, Game 6).

After this game, the match lost all of its interest. Never averse to maximization, Euwe struck once again in the seventh game in an endgame with several sharp points, and Donner,

who was totally fagged out, eventually suffered a 7-3 defeat, which was smiled off as 'honourable' in most commentaries.

Many experts have already passed their judgement on Donner's chess style. It's striking that an overwhelming majority of them describe it as quite strong, but rather dull. He was a Euwian, in the sense that most of the time he understood the positional characteristics and the main strategic lines of a game excellently. But contrary to Euwe, Donner was not sharp when he built up his game. Only rarely did he manage to drum up a kingside attack. Most of the time he would routinely start, as White, with an action on the queenside, which would yield him the extra pawn he needed in the far endgame, so as to cash in the full point with his excellent endgame technique.

Euwe once received a letter from Mario Napolitano, who was then one of the world's best correspondence chess players. Whether Euwe was willing to play a game with him by postcard? The Dutchman replied that he was certainly willing to do this, but he was awfully busy. Would Napolitano mind if he called in the help of players like Donner now and then, when he himself was absent?

Napolitano wrote back that he thought this was fine – he would then be represented by the Vienna theoretician Hans Müller on occasion. An eye-witness recalled: "The game started, and after ten moves or so, Euwe had to go on a trip. Hein entered De Kring: "Boys, I have to find a move for Euwe here." He invited a couple of chess players to take a look with him, but in the end, of course, he decreed that some action had to be taken on the queenside. Then, after some time, Donner had to travel himself, and it was Carel van den Berg's turn. Carel only had eye for the enemy king, so he immediately started to transfer all the pieces from the queenside to the kingside, sacrificing a pawn. When Hein came back after a few weeks, De Kring was shaking on its foundations: "You've ruined the whole game!" And immediately he redirected all the pieces back to the queenside. I believe Euwe won the game in the end, despite all this.'

Contrary to what one might think on the basis of the Krabbé collection, Donner was a very good defender, if only there was some strategic line he could follow.

The Dutch chess journalist Evert Straat sr. once evoked the image of Hein with his long arms, those colossal arms of his that could embrace the board from all sides and surround the position with meandering, oscillatory movements, and take it in colossal holds in dozens of ways – until, in the midst of this gigantic wrestling game, something crept in that he didn't see, something that, as it were, slipped out from under his armpit. He would miss one little tactical trick in the jumble of the titanic struggle, and the game would be over. Those strange miniature defeats were mostly caused by the fact that, while he was starting some wide-ranging plan, he forgot that his opponent could rip his kingside open with a simple bishop sacrifice. Tactically, you could surprise him, because by nature he wasn't a player who took account of the fact that opposite him someone was sitting who made plans too. He suffered very much from a fundamental lack of radar for danger in such half-suspect, half-open positions. And this was obviously caused by his completely mistaken feeling of superiority. If his opponent was not a famous player, or did not represent a challenge in any other way, then, irresistibly, a feeling of contempt rose inside Donner. Then he simply couldn't believe that such a featherbrain could be anything more than a kind of punch-ball for him, and before he knew it he had very efficiently cooked his own goose again.

On the other hand, if he wanted, he could also be very strong tactically. His game against Octavio Troianescu, in Wageningen 1957 – one of his top tournaments, if not his best one, in the creative sense – is a perfect illustration of this. The Romanian came up with four or five very good tactical tricks. All of those, however, fell short because Donner had conceived a better tactical trick every time. So sometimes he was tactically extremely clever. But then, just a little later, he could miss the most elementary things. What exactly caused this is not clear. Often it seemed to be a matter of mood.

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In the second half of the 1960s, something strange was going on with Donner. On the one hand, this was the time of his unmistakably great successes: second at IBM 1964, the next year he even won the event unshared, two reasonably good tournaments in a row in Havana (both times just above 50% in a very strong field), a decent fourth place in the Zonal tournament in The Hague in 1966 – after that – when he wasn't chopping sugar cane with Harry Mulisch – again a good result in Havana, culminating in his greatest success ever: unshared first place in Venice in 1967, ahead of the reigning World Champion Tigran Petrosian, one of the few Soviets who didn't scare Donner out of his wits. The Armenian wasn't a highwayman who put a knife to your throat, but a dull, lazy strangler – Donner could handle that. His most dangerous rival in this tournament was Larry Evans, an efficient professional player from Las Vegas, and, as Donner had to find out himself, someone who couldn't be fooled.

Sitting on a pavement café on San Marco Square with Donner, Evans was listening to a magnificent lecture of cosmic proportions by the Dutchman, who took the number of pillars around the square as a starting-point. Or maybe it was indeed the number of stones that had been used for a certain mosaic, as another version has it. Whatever the case – here, Donner was speaking, explaining the world with the help of a few seemingly trivial data. Whereupon Evans started counting the number of pillars or mosaic stones, on which Hein's entire thought construction had been based. The number was simply wrong. 'Very interesting, but always wrong' was Evans's famous characterization of Donner.

When, however, Donner had brought the same Evans on his knees in a fabulous game, the road to tournament victory was open for him in Venice – although, once again, it took a

small miracle: in their mutual game, Petrosian had to find the narrow path to a draw from a winning position.

In his notes, something rings through of the surprise and, especially, the grumbling self-reproach that must have taken hold of Petrosian during this game. It was the year of the fiftieth birthday of the October Revolution, and in those Brezhnev days it was definitely still advisable to make an extra effort at such an occasion. Now Petrosian was too elusive for the Party – in Moscow, he relied on his extensive Armenian/Georgian connections; this was a state within the state – to be faced with any real difficulties because of this. Therefore, the joke that Donner permitted himself against him (viewing the fiftieth year of the Revolution as marking the end of the Russian chess hegemony as well; in that year, the Soviets had also been outdone by people like Larsen and Fischer) was neither here nor there. It does indicate how much Donner was tangled up in stereotypical opinions regarding the Soviets. Only after the arrival of Sosonko in the Netherlands in the 1970s, who told him a thing or two about the reality in the USSR with indisputable authority, he modified this point of view – slightly, but not radically.

All in all, Venice was a convincing triumph for Donner. Also, it silenced the petty comments of his faultfinders in the Dutch marsh delta: his many opponents, who had slapped their thighs with mirth the year before, when Donner had announced that he would no longer play in the Dutch team. They had shouted that it could only have a favourable effect on national chess if that useless Provo packed it in, but now they had to swallow their words. Still, Donner wouldn't have been Donner if he hadn't immediately added a venomous tuft of antidote to the mild euphoria in his own country. The communist city council of Venice had expected Petrosian to win, and had ordered a gold gondola, set with 24 cut diamonds, to be made as an extra prize. During a Dutch television program, Donner, who was not exactly craving for such gifts, spontaneously donated the thing, which wouldn't have been out of place in the home interior of a Belgian barge skipper, as a present to the Medisch Comité Vietnam

(= Medical Committee Vietnam) with the remark: 'They'll probably buy medicines with it, but for all I care they can also buy a machine gun, because the Americans have to be kicked out of Vietnam.' At Elsevier, they summarily took his column from him because of this remark, which was interpreted as preaching for violence against a friendly nation, and the same almost happened at *De Tijd*; only an urgent appeal by several Dutch celebrities, among whom the chess-loving journalist Herman Hofhuizen, was able to dissuade the chief editors from their purpose.

As proof of the animosity towards Hein Donner and Irène, the Amsterdam Provo archives have several thick files filled with letters of abuse, anonymous or not. 'You have to be pretty shameless (or very stupid) to jabber around so loudly that you don't want to play for the Netherlands anymore, and you can't even hold your own in a field of some level' was one of the most civilized anonymous reactions in those years. The final score of Santa Monica 1966, with Donner in last place, had been added.

This Santa Monica event, which is better known as the Piatigorsky Cup (named after the musician and chess Maecenas who paid for it all), had indeed been a woeful deception. In the summer of 1966, this double-round ten-player event, one of the strongest tournaments in all chess history, had started in an atmosphere of glittering American chic. This tournament boasted such an incredibly strong field that the feeble motto of the Olympic amateurs, 'Participation is more important than winning', seemed to be quite valid here: the players who were invited to Santa Monica saw their market value increase substantially. First prize, by the way, was still peanuts compared to today: five-thousand dollars.

Being one of the strongest Western European players, Donner was invited, but not much was expected from him. Such a thing may stimulate a chess player into surprisingly strong resistance, just like it had done sixteen years earlier at Hoogovens. After eleven rounds, way past halfway in the tournament, he still had a fine 50% score with 5½ points, and Donner was in a group with World Champion Petrosian and Fischer, trailing the rampant Boris Spassky.

9

Donner's first encounter with Hans Ree dates from an international match against Germany in 1964. At that time the gap between both players was still enormous, since, besides the usual difference between board one and board nine (the adage in chess teams is that 'board one is always right'), there was also a fathomless chasm between Donner and the rest.

They became a little better acquainted when they played together during the Lugano Olympiad in the autumn of 1968. The atmosphere in a chess team is determined to a large extent by the conversations at the dinner table. Purely technical discussions about preparation, in which the team members analyse the previous match as a group, and consider the strategy for the upcoming contest, were not really part of Dutch chess tradition, and were in any case unthinkable for someone like Donner. He was not so interested in the problems of others. Sometimes, when the line-up of the next opposing team was known, his teammates would ask him whether he had any experience against this or that grandmaster, but in most cases his answer would be evasive – one-liners like 'he's no good at all, he always gets mated on g7'. Otherwise, he was solely interested in his own play. As a consequence, assignments like for instance agreeing a tactical draw were, wisely, never given to him.

It was already quite something when Donner joined his fellow Dutchmen at table, as he did that evening in Lugano, with Ree and Bert Enklaar in the players' hotel. The three of them were gazing out of the window. Lake Lugano was a black abyss full of darkness. Only far away, on the other side, they could see some lights from village houses. A strange sight, Enklaar thought, whereupon Ree remarked: 'Yes, and in the meantime nothing nothings, and it's nothing but nothingness.' This was straight from Heidegger, and it had

quite an effect on Donner. He opened his eyes wide, looked at Ree as if hit by lightning, and finally asked: 'How do you know that?!' A very typical moment: Donner, who had been studying the existential philosopher from Freiburg for years and had put his main work *Sein und Zeit* under his pillow (mainly as a sedative, as he had honestly admitted), could hardly imagine that other chess players, and certainly not any of the younger generation, knew anything about Heidegger. Here, his deep-rooted tendency to not take any account whatsoever of other people's capabilities was playing tricks on him again. However, it has to be admitted: he magnanimously forgot about the incident. Starting from that moment in Lugano, Donner acknowledged Ree as a worthy conversation partner, and in the years that followed they had a pleasurable and friendly contact.

With Donner, that didn't mean you were always free from insult, orally or in writing. On the contrary, he called Ree 'a well-trained donkey' in the press, to which Ree responded by calling Donner 'the fat one in the check jacket' – but of course that was mainly for show, although they were really annoyed too. It was all part of a superior bit of rabble-rousing, eventually, in 1971, leading to a match that resulted in the hardest blow Donner ever had to take.

But first he enjoyed a final, wonderful moment of triumph. The Leidsch Schaakgenootschap LSG celebrated its 75-year jubilee in 1970. Initially they intended to organize a match between Botvinnik and Fischer, but when they couldn't realize this due to Fischer's exorbitant demands, the organizers dexterously switched to a twelve-round four-player event with the exceptionally strong field of Botvinnik – Donner – Larsen – Spassky. At first they maintained this alphabetical order, taking some care not to name both Soviets in one breath, followed by Larsen and then, at a considerable distance, Donner. Nobody knew that the latter had been preparing this time: he had visited Hans Bouwmeester on two evenings, where, as he said afterwards, he had 'quenched his thirst for knowledge by drinking from a rich source'.

25. ♖cf1

Also 25. ♗d4 ♖xf3 26. ♖xf6 wins.

25... ♖e5 26. fxg4 ♗xg4

27. ♖xg7+!! ♖xg7 28. ♖xg4

♖xg4 29. ♖g1 ♖xg1 30. ♗xg1

The endgame is hopelessly lost for Black.

30... ♖f8 31. ♗e3 ♖f3 32. ♗xd3

♖h3 33. ♗b5 ♖h2 34. b3 ♖xa2

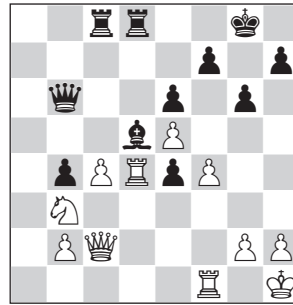
35. ♗d2 c6 36. dxc6 bxc6

37. ♗xd6 ♖a3 38. ♗d4 ♖xb3

39. ♗xa5 1-0

The cover text of the original Dutch version of *The King* mentions that ‘anyone who had never been insulted by J.H. Donner meant nothing in Dutch chess life’. Well, then the question is: when did Donner insult Euwe? The answer can be found in the article ‘Donner reads from the classics’, which originally appeared in *Schaakbulletin*. This article is a paraphrase of *Oom Jan leert zijn neefje schaken* (*Uncle Jan Teaches his Nephew to Play Chess*) by Euwe and Alb. Loon, the book from which Donner had learned to play chess, which was sent to him by mocking chess fans when he started with a 0 out of 4 score in the Hoogovens tournament of 1951, and which he had elsewhere

referred to as ‘a disgusting piece of trash, written by a schoolteacher who had added his own highly ridiculous and jaunty comments to a number of games by Euwe.’ This article is perhaps the sublime high point of Donner’s chess-literary work.



Loon presented this position, which was derived from the game Znosko-Borovsky-Euwe, Weston-super-mare 1924, and which continued 31... ♗xc4!? 32. ♖xc4 ♖a6! 33. ♗d2 e3! 34. b3 exd2 35. ♖d1 ♖xc4 36. bxc4 ♖a3, as a game Uncle Jan had played at the club. He was demonstrating it to his nephew Jan. Uncle Jan had just explained the 31... ♗xc4 piece sacrifice to his nephew when Uncle Hein entered: ‘And here you sacrificed your bishop?!’, bellowed Uncle Hein. ‘The rabid petty bourgeois with spite eating away at his inner life is always

hankering for violence. He doesn't recognize beauty as the simple image of the ideal itself, which it is, but only as the strange and the bizarre. You're not Tim Krabbé, are you? What idiot would want to sacrifice the best piece on the board here, the d5-bishop? That will only lead to an exchange of pieces against a good defence and simply cannot be right. There must be another way.'

Then Uncle Hein recommends 31...e3, which indeed after 32.♖fd1 (threatening 33.♖d3, winning a piece) 32...♙xc4! wins for Black, without having to sacrifice anything, because of White's weak back rank. 'So White has just played 33.♗d2? Yes, well, that'll lose, won't it! Why didn't the duffer play 33.♗a5?'

'Because I would have taken', said Uncle Jan softly.

'Ah, and there's nothing hanging on c8?' roared Uncle Hein, who began to laugh riotously. 'I don't think Black has got anything left after 33.♗a5.'

In a stylish later addition in Wim Andriessen's Schaakbulletin, Uncle William, one of Jan's quieter uncles,

indicated that Black's best option here is 33...♗c5!, as had already been indicated by Euwe and Kmoeh in *Euwe slaagt* (= *Euwe Succeeds*). And yet, in a higher sense Uncle Hein was right to suggest 33.♗a5!, as after 33...♗c5! 34.♖xe4 ♖xa5 35.h3 (35.♗e1? ♖a1 36.♗cc1 ♗xc1 37.♗xc1 ♖b6 38.h3 ♗d2 and Black is clearly better) 35...♗d2 36.♗g1 ♖a1 37.♗xb4 ♗xg1+ 38.♙xg1 ♗d1+ 39.♙h2 ♖f1 40.♙g3 ♗d3+ 41.♙h2 White seems to be able to defend.

Hein Donner **16**
Raymond Keene

Elvetham (England-Netherlands) 1975

Another beautiful positional victory.

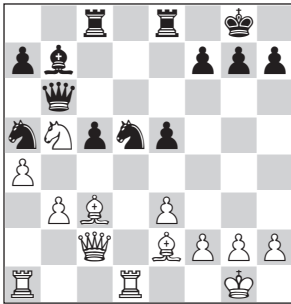
1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♙b4 4.e3 b6 5.♗ge2 ♙a6 6.a3 ♙xc3+ 7.♗xc3 d5 8.b3 0-0 9.♙e2 ♗c6 10.a4 ♗a5 11.♙a3 ♗e8 12.0-0

Not a pawn sacrifice: 12... dxc4? 13.b4 ♗b3 14.♖b1 ♖c8 15.b5 and White wins back the pawn, with advantage. **12...c5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♗b5 ♖b6 15.♖c2 ♗ac8 16.♙b2 e5?!**

To prevent 17.♙xf6, but now Black gets a weak c-pawn. **17.cxd5 ♗xd5 18.♖fd1 ♙b7**

After 18...♖b4 19.♔c3 White will invade on d6.

19.♙c3



19...♗xc3

White threatened 20.♙xa5 ♔xa5 21.♗d6. 19...♖c6 failed to the weakness of the ♗d5, 19...♖cd8 to that of the c5-pawn, and 19...♖e6 to 20.♙xa5 ♔xa5 21.♙g4. The text is virtually forced, but it does provide White with an entrance to the d-file.

20.♔xc3 ♖c6 21.f3 h5 22.♖d7 a6 23.♗d6 ♖xd6 24.♖xd6 ♗xd6 25.♔xa5 ♖c8 26.♖d1 ♗h6 27.♔c3 ♔e6 28.♙c4 ♔e7 29.♔d2

Re-establishing White's command of the only open file, this time for good.

29...♖b8 30.♔d6 ♖e8 31.♔xe7 ♖xe7 32.♖d8+ ♔h7 33.♔f2 h4 34.a5 g6 35.♔e2 ♔g7 36.♖d6

Conquering Black's a-pawn, after which White's passed a-pawn decides.

36...♖c7 37.♔d3 h3 38.gxh3 ♙xf3 39.♖xa6 g5 40.e4 ♙g2 41.♖d6 ♙xh3 42.♔e3 f6 43.a6 ♔g6 44.♖d8 ♙g2 45.♖g8+ ♔h5 46.♖b8 1-0

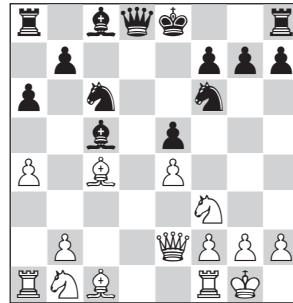
Hein Donner

17

Max Euwe

Amsterdam exh 1977

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.♗f3 a6 4.e3 ♗f6 5.♙xc4 e6 6.0-0 c5 7.a4 ♗c6 8.♔e2 ♙e7 9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.e4 e5



11.h3

'Obviously, 11.♙xf7+ would have won on the spot,' Donner wrote. It's not that obvious according to Tim Krabbé in an article in AD (2001), after 11...♔xf7 12.♔c4+ ♔e8 13.♔xc5 ♗xe4 14.♔e3 ♙f5. But Black's central defence will soon collapse after 15.♗bd2 and 16.♖e1. 11...0-0 12.♗c3 ♗d4 13.♗xd4 exd4 14.♗d5 ♗xd5 15.♙xd5 ♙e6 16.♙xe6

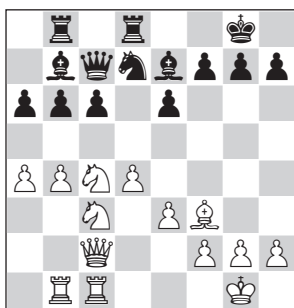
Again, too much respect for Euwe? He could have just taken the pawn with 16. ♖xb7. Now the game quickly peters out.

16...fxe6 17. ♔d3 ♖a7 18. ♖d2 ♖c8 19. ♖fc1 ♔d7 20. b3 h6 21. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 22. ♖c1 ♖xc1+ 23. ♖xc1 b5 24. axb5 axb5 25. ♖d2 e5 ½-½

Hein Donner 18
Comp Belle

Delft/Murray Hill exh 1982

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. ♘f3 ♘f6 4. ♘c3 e6 5. ♖g5 ♘bd7 6. e3 ♔a5 7. ♘d2 ♖b4 8. ♔c2 0-0 9. ♖e2 dxc4 10. ♖xf6 ♘xf6 11. ♘xc4 ♔c7 12. 0-0 ♖d8 13. a3 ♖e7 14. b4 b6 15. ♖fc1 ♖b7 16. ♖f3 a6 17. ♖ab1 ♘d7 18. a4 ♖ab8

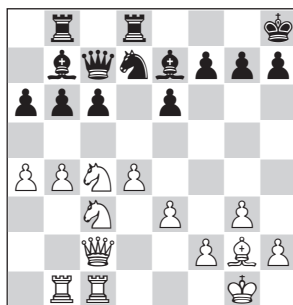


19.g3?

19. a5 bxa5 20. ♘xa5 is met by 20... ♖xb4. But also after the text move Black can play 19... ♖xb4, e.g. 20. ♖xb4 c5

21. dxc5 ♖xf3 22. cxb6 ♘xb6 23. ♘xb6 ♖xb6 24. ♖xb6 ♔xb6 with some advantage for Black. Belle's programmer, Ken Thompson, said that Belle had seen this variation, but for some inexplicable reason had given it a lower evaluation than the chosen continuation. Afterwards, Donner said that he was curious if the computer had seen it, and that he would have played 20. ♖e4. In that case Black keeps an extra pawn with 20... ♖xc3.

19... ♖h8 20. ♖g2



20...f5??

A move no human would ever play.

21. ♘e2 ♖e8 22. ♘f4 ♖g5 23. ♘d3 ♖f6 24. f4 ♖ec8 25. a5 b5 26. ♘d2 ♖a8 27. ♘b3 ♔a7 28. ♔e2 ♖c7 29. ♘bc5 ♘f8 30. ♖c2 ♖e8 31. ♖bc1 ♖g8 32. ♖f3 ♖d8 33. g4 ♖dc8 34. ♖c3 fxg4 35. ♖xg4 ♖e7 36. ♔a2 ♖ce8 37. f5 ♖d8 38. ♘f4 ♖xd4 39. exd4 ♖xd4

40.f6 ♖xf4 41.fxe7 ♖xg4+
 42.♗g3 ♖xg3+ 43.hxg3
 ♚xe7 44.♚d2 h6 45.♗d1
 ♚e8 46.♚d6 e5 47.♚c7
 ♚h5 48.♗f1 ♚e8 49.♚d6
 e4 50.♗f4 e3 51.♗e4 ♚c8
 52.♖xe3 h5 53.♗e7 ♚f5
 54.♚f4 ♚g6 55.♗a7 ♚e8
 56.♚d4 ♚g6

Here the game was adjourned, and the decision was made to stop using the transatlantic line. Fridrik Olafsson, the chairman of FIDE, acted as an ad hoc arbiter, and almost immediately proclaimed Donner the winner.

To conclude, we present the promised addition to Krabbé's collection of Donner's miniature losses. Anyone who thinks they can laugh at Donner because of these games, doesn't understand the essence. This collection is an invaluable mental support for all chess players who lose ingloriously every now and then; may it be rated at its true value for a long time to come.

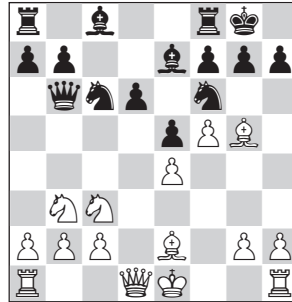
Hein Donner 19

Hans Bouwmeester

Amsterdam 1948

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4
 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 d6 6.♗e2

e5 7.♗b3 ♗e7 8.f4 0-0 9.f5?
 ♚b6 10.♗g5?



10...♗xe4! 11.♗xe7?

11.♗xe4 ♚b4+ 12.♗d2
 (12.♗bd2? ♗xg5 13.♗xg5
 ♚h4+) 12...♚xe4 clearly
 favours Black.

11... ♚f2 mate

Erich Kübart

20

Hein Donner

Bad Pyrmont zt 1951 (13)

1.d4 ♗f6 2.♗g5 d5 3.♗d2
 ♗bd7 4.♗gf3 c5 5.e3 ♚b6
 6.♖b1 e6 7.c3 ♗d6 8.♗d3
 ♚c7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♗c2 b6
 11.e4

