

Wild goose chess

Anand may never have the opportunity to take another shot at the world chess title

In 1993, grandmaster Nigel Short of the United Kingdom was getting ready to face Garri Kasparov in the first Professional Chess Association world chess championship at London. Short's pre-match team included Lubosh Kavalek, whose duty it was to psychologically prepare the Briton to overcome his fear of Kasparov. Kavalek suggested Short should do what the Czechs did with a Soviet tank that "liberated" Prague after World War II. They painted it pink. "Nobody fears a pink tank. I thought that Short should try to paint Kasparov pink, first in his own mind and eventually with luck, in the mind of the world."

The pink tank bit did not quite work out. Kasparov's demolition of Short was quick and total. If fear was Short's undoing, it was perhaps overconfidence that was responsible for Vishwanathan Anand's poor show against Kasparov in the second PCA world chess championship held in New York recently. An over confidence born perhaps of thinking that Kasparov's best days were behind him. That, and splendid results against the cream of grandmasters in the qualifying rounds, may have contributed to a certain cockiness in the challenger. With the press rooting for him, an able team of Artur Yusupov and Jon Speelman backing him up and age on his side, Anand probably thought he had it all figured out.

A cold look at statistics would have helped Anand better. In tournament games before the showdown, Kasparov led Anand by a margin of five games to two which worked out to be 71 per cent to 29 per cent in favour of the champion. Even in speed chess played in five minutes — Anand's forte — Kasparov led by three games to two in their individual encounters.

What perhaps completely escaped the challenger's calculation was Kasparov's experience of playing more than 150 games in the world champion matches, a great bulk of them against Anatoly Karpov. This was terra incognita to Anand — an area where the mind and body both have to take an incredible amount of punishment and yet come back for more.

Sugar Ray Leonard lost 12 kilograms in his bout with Marvin Hagler for the world middle heavyweight boxing championship. Karpov lost the

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same weight in his championship matches with Kasparov. Clearly, the world chess championship is a different ball game — a far cry from games against the likes of Gata Kamsky. Anand must be ruefully realising this now.

Anand must also take the blame for not striking when he had the advantage in the match. Having won the ninth game after a string of eight draws, he should have increased his lead by taking Kasparov to unknown areas by playing the centre counter in the 10th game instead of waiting for the 14th game to spring his surprise. Had Anand won the 10th game also at a trot, the history of the championship may well have been different.

This is Anand's second defeat on the way to the top. In 1991, he had lost in the qualifying rounds to Karpov. One thing that must be worrying Anand's fans is his inability to take a punch. He crumbled against Kamsky in the Federation Internationale des Echecs match at Sanghi Nagar in 1994 and went down tamely after Kasparov decimated him in the 10th game of the current series. One quality champions require is what Emmanuel Lasker, the second world champion, called *sitzfleisch* — tenacity, staying power. Perhaps this is Anand's greatest drawback.

For chess in India, Anand's loss is an enormous setback. There is nothing



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quite like a home grown champion for popularising a game. There would also have been a spin off in terms of commercial and industrial houses sponsoring the game to a much greater extent. The fledgling chess software and book trade would have also come of age.

Anand may have well missed the chance of a lifetime. Next time around he will be two years older and if the FIDE and the PCA cycles unite, apart from Kasparov, he will have the formidable Karpov to reckon with.

If Wimbledon has its Ivan Lendl and Ken Rosewall — great players who were somehow jinxed when it came to tennis's greatest prize — chess has an even more formidable list of those not destined to wear the crown. Adolf Anderssen and Johann Zukertort, Frank Marshall and Efim Bogoljubow, Paul Keres and Bent Larsen, Victor Korchnoi and Short, they are what chess folklore describes as the "third men" — chess players with immense talent marginalised by champions of genius. Will Anand remain among them or will he cross the hurdle? Only time will tell.

Kasparov meanwhile continues to rule Mount Olympus. Since 1985, when he became the youngest ever world champion, he has defended his title five times — more than any champion, other than Lasker, has in this century. Lasker, however, had the freedom to choose his own opponents most of the time — there was no world body in chess in his time. Kasparov is also the only player in history to reach an Elo rating (Dow Jones points in the chess stock exchange) of above 2800 — Jesus Christ to Bobby Fischer's John the Baptist.

Not only is Kasparov the greatest opening theoretician the game has ever had, he has also brought to the board the concept of "total chess" together with the game's best elements. He has the pressurising tactics of Lasker, the intuition of Jose Capablanca and the combinative genius of Alexander Alekhine. He has also made chess a spectator sport. Kasparov seems to be the Kerry Packer of the 64 squares.

Before the match, Anand had said of his opponent that he could be the greatest, but he was not god and therefore not invincible. Anand was wrong. Kasparov is the greatest and god. Till 1997, that is.