

Rob van Son

Reviewing the 10th AEGON Computer Chess Tournament (1995!)

Some time ago I was cleaning out my wall unit and consequently found some old computer chess material. Besides all kind of stuff from the eighties and nineties, there was a little blue programme of the 10th Aegon human-computer chess tournament, organized in 1995. With the good results of the Berlin Professional 68020 at the CSVN 'gebruikers' (users) tournaments in my mind, I stopped cleaning and began to read the programme. It caught my attention because I was the operator of the Berlin Pro at that 10th Aegon tournament. While reading the small book, memories started coming back to me and the whole tournament became alive again.

The first time I went to the 9th Aegon tournament was in 1994. In those days I was in possession of the chess computer Mephisto Milano. When I visited the Aegon in The Hague, I saw a similar looking chess computer that played much stronger than my Milano. How was that possible? I thought the Milano was already a very powerful computer. The operator, Jan de Jong, at the time secretary of Jan Louwman's computer chess magazine MegaByte, told me some more about this computer and he was very happy with its performance at the tournament. Jan told me that he was only the operator. The owner was the captain of the operators; computer chess-expert Jan Louwman.



**Mephisto
berlin
professional**
Bedienungsanleitung
Instruction manual
Mode d'emploi
Handleiding

**Mephisto
berlin
professional**

London, Fyodorov
68020 241ms 11b

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NEW GAME CLEAR ENTER

**Berlin Professional: the strongest laptop style
chess computer Mephisto ever produced!**

The similar looking chess computer, the Mephisto Berlin Professional with a program of the Englishman Richard Lang, performed extremely well among the powerful chess programs like Hiarc, The King, Quest, M-Chess Pro and many others. All of which were running on the, for that time, very fast calculating microprocessors. I remember that there was one participant who had put a sign on his table saying that his computer was running on a Pentium processor!

I was so impressed that I visited the tournament more often and kept my eye on the Berlin Pro. It played perfectly well, because the machine beat the Dutch IM Gert Ligterink and played a draw against the strong Armenian grandmaster Rafael Vaganian. The result was an end score of 3½ points out of 6 games, with a tournament performance rating of 2400. After the tournament I called Jan Louwman at home and I spoke with him about the Berlin's great result and he told me that I could buy the computer. Well, I felt I was in seventh heaven, so I drove to Jan's place in Rotterdam and bought the machine for 1199 guilders (544 euros).



Jan Louwman (25-10-1924 – 04-12-2002)

A year went by, and some time before the 10th Aegon tournament (26, 27, 28 April & 1, 2, 3 May 1995) I called Jan again to ask him if I could participate in the tournament with the Berlin. He agreed, so I only hoped that my machine would perform as good as last year. Besides this, it was a great opportunity to have a chance to sit opposite a real grandmaster and play a nice game of chess. Fortunately, the computer was playing against the grandmaster and I was only the extension of the machine, like a robot that needs a grasping arm to move the pieces on the board. But it felt like playing the game myself! The greatest crowd-puller among the human participants was certainly the legendary grandmaster David Bronstein, who died on the 5th of December 2006 in the city of Minsk in Belarus (a former Soviet Union Republic).

The organizer of all the Aegon tournaments was CSVN chairman Cock de Gorter. At the 10th tournament, we played with the Bronstein clock: a thinking time of 1½ hours for the whole game plus 15 seconds extra for each move. It was not possible to save these extra seconds for other moves. All the games began at 7.30 pm. Well, that suited me fine, because I had to work all day and after that had to drive from Amsterdam to the Aegon head office building in The Hague.

In the first round, The Berlin and I had to play against Piet Geertsema, a very enthusiastic Dutch amateur with an Elo of 1926. After a tough fight, the Berlin checkmated Piet in 57 moves. We won the first point! Hopefully we could continue this, so there might be a chance to play against a real professional. The Berlin is also a professional, so let's just see how lucky we are in the next round.

In the second round, we had to play against the Dutch chess veteran Willem Jan Wolthuis. After the Second World War, Wim (as he was called) was a very strong player for many years, and in the sixties and seventies of the last century also organizer of big chess tournaments like the famous IBM tournaments in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, the Berlin beat Wim in only 28 moves... The Berlin got two points out of two games! (Willem Jan Wolthuis passed away on the 20th of June 2006 at the age of 86).



Wim Wolthuis against the Mephisto Berlin Professional 68020

In the third round, my dream came true. The moment of truth was upon us! At the tournament there was a stage where the strongest participants played their games. That means human players like the IGM's and IM's, but also strong amateurs against the most powerful PC engines. My Berlin, compare it with a sports car in a field of formula 1 racing cars, did it again! We had to climb up the podium to meet the IGM Roberto Cifuentes Parada. Roberto was born in Santiago, the capital city of Chile, but lived in the Netherlands for many years and nowadays lives in Spain. In 1994, a year before the tournament, he was the captain of the Dutch women's team during the Olympiad in Moscow. Now, he had to play with black against the Berlin Pro.



IGM Roberto Cifuentes Parada vs Berlin Pro with operator Rob van Son

The grandmaster played the Pirc defence and on the fifth move, they already exchanged their queens. So that's an early start for an end game! Roberto raised the pressure on the white pieces and sacrificed a rook for a bishop. The Berlin defended itself very professionally, but Roberto was playing just a bit more professional than the computer, so after 59 moves his operator resigned for the Berlin and shook hands with the grandmaster. We accepted the first zero, but it's no shame to lose from a grandmaster with an Elo of 2529.

Should we leave the stage because of the zero in the last round? No, in the fourth round we stayed on the stage and met Zsuzsa (Susan) Polgar, the eldest of the three famous chess playing sisters. Zsuzsa participated in the 10th Aegon tournament, together with her sister Sofia. In 1996, she became the Woman's World Chess Champion and kept her title until 1999. The Berlin had to challenge another grandmaster, this time a woman with an Elo of 2577.



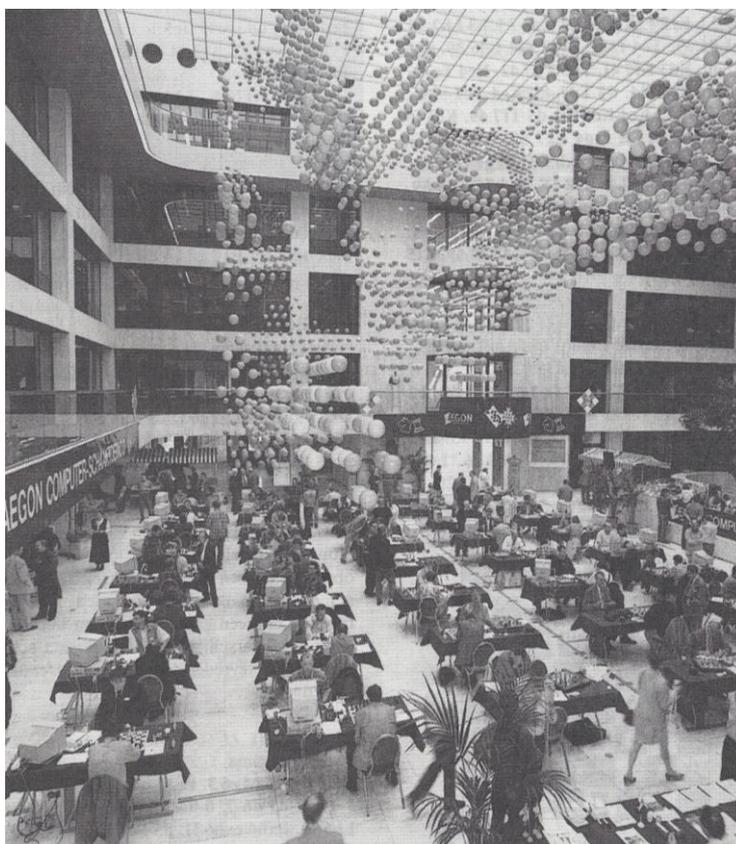
Aegon Computer Chess Tournament 1985-1995

I was honoured to sit opposite of Zsuzsa and had the opportunity to speak with her before the game started. During the game, while the Berlin was calculating, I went off the stage and walked to the other side of the hall to get a cup of coffee from the machine. I thought I deserved that after a long day of work and driving to the tournament in The Hague to operate the Berlin Pro afterwards. Suddenly, an old gentleman came running after me and made a big jump. It was an angry Jan Louwman who asked me why I was leaving my chair while the computer was in its permanent brain phase. This was reason for a small quarrel between us, but fortunately the next evening Jan and I patched it up again and I sat off-stage and closer to the coffee-machine.



The game between Zsuzsa Polgar, playing with white, and the Berlin Pro was very interesting. A Queen's Indian with chances for both sides. White's position became much better after the 19th move of black (Qc7), but Zsuzsa gave the advantage away with her 23rd move (h3) and the 24th move (Rd1-b1). Also, the Berlin made a bad 30th move (Rd4-d2), so white could play for a win again. At the 38th move of black (Ra7-c7), the Berlin thought it was a draw and I saw in the display an evaluation score of 0.00. I offered her a draw, but she said: 'No!'

Unfortunately, the Berlin made a terrible mistake to play 47...Kd5-e6?? Black resigned at the 54th move. During the last part of the game, there was a large audience watching our game. Maybe the tension was a little too high for the Berlin, so after the resignation, the machine hit the roof! All the 64 leds were on and the computer began to beep continuously. Fortunately, when I switched it off it only took a few minutes for it to cool down and function correctly again. At the end of this article, I will show you this game with analyses of Deep Fritz 14.



Aegon Computer Chess Tournament 1995

As I already mentioned, in the fifth round we were off-stage again, and the Berlin had to face another professional, IM Paul Boersma. Paul is a chess journalist for a Dutch newspaper, and during the tournament his only fear was playing against a PC program running on a Pentium processor! After a closed Catalan opening, the Berlin stood no chance with the black pieces and had to resign on move 45. After the game, we analyzed it together with one of Paul's friends and fellow participant, Jannes van der Wal. Jannes was a renowned draughts player who became World Champion in 1982 in São Paulo, Brazil. Due to his eccentric personality, he was frequently invited to Dutch talk shows, which boosted their ratings. He also enjoyed chess and participated in the tournament for the second time in 1995, with an Elo rating of around 2270. I was honored to meet him during the event. Sadly, Jannes van der Wal passed away on September 24, 1996, at the age of 39, due to leukemia.

After five rounds, the Berlin scored only two points and lost three games against the professionals. With one round to go, the computer could not equal its score of the year before; $3\frac{1}{2}$ out of 6. But a 50% score was still possible if the Berlin could win the last round. In the sixth round we had to play with white against Henny Maliangkay, a very enthusiastic amateur chess player. This time, it was very easy for the Berlin to win the game. After a Sicilian opening, black made a terrible blunder at the 18th move and resigned.

I was very satisfied with the 50% score (3 points out of 6 games). The Mephisto Berlin Professional played like a professional against the human amateurs, but was an amateur itself against the real professionals like Zsuzsa Polgar, Roberto Cifuentes Parada and Paul Boersma.



As a thank you for participating in the tournament, the operators received a chessboard from the organisation. Not with regular wooden pieces, but with pieces made of chocolate! You can probably imagine that the picture of my present was taken directly after the tournament, because not much later all the pieces were gone and I never was able to find them again...!

Zsuzsa Polgar – Mephisto Berlin Professional 68020

10th AEGON The Hague NED (4), 01.05.1995

[Analyses Deep Fritz 14 x64 (180s)]

[E14: Queen's Indian: Classical Variation (4 e3)]

1.d2–d4 Ng8–f6 2.Ng1–f3 e7–e6 3.e2–e3 b7–b6 4.Bf1–d3 Bc8–b7 5.c2–c4 Bf8–e7 6.Nb1–c3 d7–d5 7.b2–b3 d5xc4 8.b3xc4 0–0 9.0–0 c7–c5 10.Bc1–b2 c5xd4 11.e3xd4 Nb8–c6 12.Ra1–c1
[last book move]

12...Be7–d6 13.Qd1–e2 Ra8–c8 14.Nc3–e4 [White has an active position]

14...Nc6–b4 15.Ne4xd6 Qd8xd6 [15...Nb4xd3? fails to 16.Qe2xd3 (16.Nd6xb7 is the weaker alternative 16...Nd3xc1 17.Bb2xc1 Qd8–e7μ) 16...Qd8xd6 17.Bb2–a3±]

16.Bb2–a3 Rf8–d8 17.Rf1–d1 a7–a5 [Black has a new backward pawn: b6]

18.Rc1–b1 h7–h6 [Controls g5]

19.Nf3–e5 Qd6–c7 [19...Qd6xd4? would be great except for 20.Bd3–g6 f7xg6 21.Rd1xd4 Rd8xd4 22.f2–f3+–]

20.Ba3xb4 a5xb4 21.Qe2–e3 Rc8–a8 [21...b6–b5!/? 22.Rb1xb4 b5xc4 23.Rb4xc4 Qc7–a5=]



22.Rb1xb4± Ra8xa2 23.h2–h3 [Consolidates g4] [23.Rd1–b1 Nf6–d7 24.Ne5xd7 Qc7xd7± (24...Rd8xd7? 25.Rb4xb6 Bb7–c8 26.d4–d5+–)]

23...Qc7-d6 [23...Bb7-c8 24.Rb4-b3²]
 24.Rd1-b1 [124.c4-c5!? Qd6-d5 25.f2-f3±]



24...Qd6xd4= 25.Qe3xd4 [White has a mate threat]
 25...Rd8xd4 26.Rb4xb6 Bb7-e4 27.Rb6-b8+ Kg8-h7 28.Bd3xe4+ Nf6xe4 29.Ne5xf7 Ne4xf2
 [Instead of 29...Ra2xf2 30.Rb8-h8+ Kh7-g6 31.Nf7-e5+ Kg6-h5 32.Ne5-f3 Rf2xf3 33.g2xf3±]

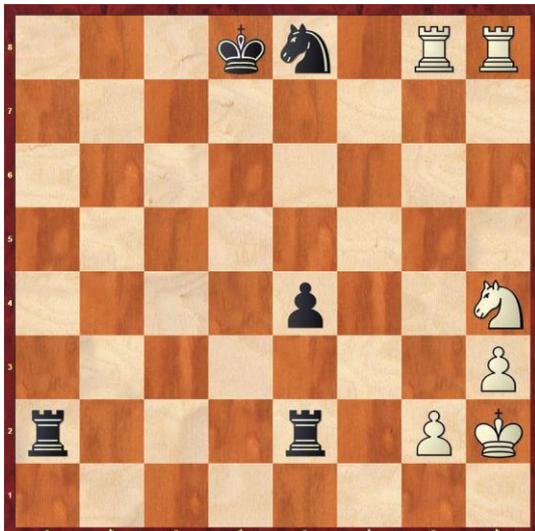


30.c4-c5 Rd4-d2 31.Rb8-h8+ Kh7-g6 32.Nf7-e5+ Kg6-f6 [Black threatens to win material: Kf6xe5]
 33.Ne5-f3 [White threatens to win material: Nf3xd2]
 33...Rd2-e2 [133...Rd2-d1+!? might be a viable alternative 34.Rb1xd1 Nf2xd1=]
 34.Nf3-e1± Nf2-e4 35.c5-c6 Ra2-a7 36.Ne1-d3 [136.Rh8-f8+!? Kf6-e7 37.Rf8-g8±]
 36...Ra7-a2= [Black has a mate threat]
 37.Nd3-e1 [Twofold repetition]
 37...Ra2-a7 38.Kg1-h2 [138.Rh8-f8+!? Kf6-e7 39.Rf8-g8±]
 38...Ra7-c7= [Black threatens to win material: Rc7xc6]
 39.Rb1-b7 [the rook is the rook!]
 39...Rc7xc6 40.Rh8-f8+ Kf6-e5 41.Ne1-f3+ Ke5-d5 42.Rb7xg7 Ne4-d6 [42...e6-e5!?!=]
 43.Rg7-g6² Rc6-c2 44.Nf3-h4 [44.Rf8-d8 Rc2-b2]
 44...h6-h5 [44...Rc2-a2 45.Rf8-f1=]
 45.Rg6-h6 [White threatens to win material: Rh6xh5] [45.Rg6-g5+ Kd5-e4²]

45...Nd6-c4 [45...Nd6-f5 46.Rh6xh5 Kd5-e4 47.Rf8-a8=]
 46.Rh6xh5+ e6-e5 [46...Kd5-e4 47.Rf8-e8 Ke4-d3 48.Rh5-h7?]
 47.Rf8-d8+± Kd5-e6?? The position is going down the drain] [47...Kd5-c5±]

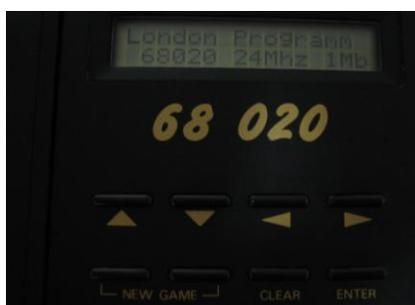


48.Rh5-h6+-- Ke6-e7 49.Rd8-a8 Rc2-a2 50.Ra8-c8
 [150.Ra8-g8!? keeps an even firmer grip 50...Re2-f2 51.Rg8-g7+ Ke7-f8+--]
 50...Nc4-d6 51.Rc8-c7+ Ke7-d8 52.Rc7-g7 Nd6-e8 53.Rh6-h8 [53.Rg7-g8!? makes it even
 easier for White 53...Ra2-a7 54.Rg8xe8+ Kd8xe8 55.Rh6-h8+ Ke8-f7 56.Rh8-h7+ Kf7-f6
 57.Rh7xa7 Re2-b2+--]
 53...e5-e4 [53...Ra2-a6 hardly improves anything 54.Nh4-f5 Ra6-e6 55.Rg7-a7+--]



54.Rg7-g8
 1-0

Author: Rob van Son, May 2014



<https://susanpolgar.com/home/>

NOTE: With this English-language article, our author Rob van Son once again confirms that he is the best historian in the Netherlands! I always thoroughly enjoy his detailed contributions. In 1995, I did not know Rob personally, as that did not happen until 1999 when he first visited me in Tilburg. However, I must have seen Rob in action in person during the 1995 Aegon tournament, as I had been attending every year and every day as a spectator since 1990. The Aegon program booklets in my binder are silent witnesses to this. It is quite funny to realize now that I saw Rob at work as an operator, not knowing that a few years later I would come into personal contact with him! How strange life can be sometimes. It should also be mentioned that Rob previously wrote about his experiences with this tournament in Computerschaak in February 1998 under the title: World Champion Zsuzsa Polgar crosses swords with the Mephisto Berlin Pro. I wish Rob many more wonderful articles on our small but excellent site!