



COLUMNISTS

Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



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The Dirty Hidden Truth

Here are some excerpts from my "State of Chess in America" article back in January [2004](#).

... the popularity of chess is growing by leaps and bounds in America, especially among young people. Research has shown many times how chess can help ordinary children do better in school. More and more movie stars, athletes, celebrities and politicians are coming out to support chess. So why hasn't all this helped the growth of organized chess in this country and the United States Chess Federation?

The answer is the ugliest and dirtiest 8-letter word: POLITICS!

My column continued with the following:

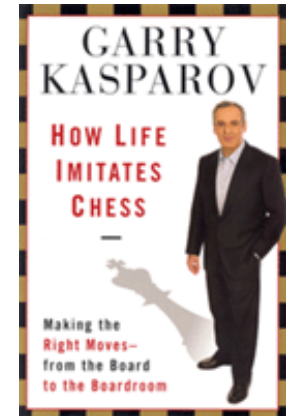
There are a lot of opportunities for licensing/merchandising deals as well as other business aspects. As I mentioned before, the problem is that too many people are more worried about their chess political agendas than doing the right thing for the federation. If our political opposition is doing a great job, we must destroy them before they make us look bad. At least that is my take on the situation. It is too bad that so many opportunities have been lost because of politics.

"In my opinion, some of the most critical jobs of the executive board are to set sound, fair policies and bring in proper, experienced business people to run the federation. The board should not be involved in running the federation. Politics should never interfere with the good of chess or the chess business."

Here are some of the stunning facts about the current state of the USCF:

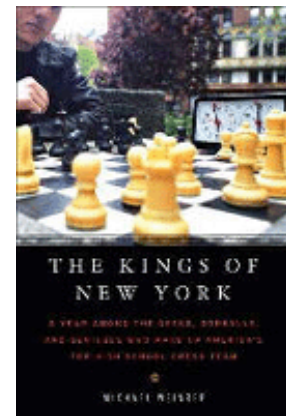
Back in March 2003, the membership level of the USCF rose to 95,388.

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As of April 2009, the number is barely over 79,000 at 79,135. That is a loss of 16,253 members!

Financially speaking, the numbers are also bad. Here are some basic USCF numbers from the April 2009 financial report which was provided to me by the USCF Chief Financial Officer Joe Nanna:

Total Revenues: \$2,952,904 (less \$397,681 bequests = \$2,555,223 of actual revenue) in 2009 versus \$2,633,658 in 2008.

Total Membership Revenues: \$1,457,224 in 2009 versus \$1,568,324 in 2008. (Down \$111,100 from last year)

Total Expenses: \$3,015,457 in 2009 versus \$2,619,019 in 2008.

(We outspent the previous fiscal year by \$396,438, which basically wiped out the bequests.

Excluding the bequests, which clearly cannot be included in normal revenues, that means that USCF has lost, so far, nearly \$500,000 in this fiscal year. (This number does not include more losses which were incurred in the month of May.)

The federation's market share is also down. According to various sources, there are as many as 4-5 times more tournament chess players, especially younger players, who are *not* USCF members, than there are members of our national federation.

Because of incompetence, the USCF no longer owns the Book and Equipment business. The entire business had to be outsourced.

For the last few years, the USCF has not been capable of holding its own annual U.S. Men and U.S. Women's Championships. It has to rely on the good will of generous individuals putting up money to save these prestigious events.

The USCF can no longer to fully fund the U.S. Men and U.S. Women's Olympiad teams. Once again, it has to rely on the generosity of outside organizations or charitable individuals. The USCF is even incapable of sending our national team to the World Team Championship. And unless sponsorship can be found soon, the USCF either will not be able to send our "A" team and will have to resort to sending an amateur team to



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by Bob Rice
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compete against the world's best.

The USCF has no money to fund serious training programs for our most young talented male and female players. The USCF has no money to properly promote chess or the even just the basic agenda of its own mission.

How could a national organization, an organization which claims that it has no money to do many things for the benefit of chess and its members, afford to spend \$500,000, \$600,000, \$700,000 or perhaps even more than \$1,000,000 in legal fees for political purposes? How could a national organization, an organization which at one time had annual revenues over \$6 million, sink this low? Finally, how can we fix the problems, to make things better, when the problems are being hidden and kept secret from the membership at large?

One of the key problems is the structure of the organization itself. It is very difficult to implement sound changes when the leadership is so far behind understanding the rapidly changing business world. If we do not understand our customers and do not offer what they want, we are doomed to fail. So many chess politicians have hung around for decades doing everything imaginable to grab and hold on to their power. Some have done this for three, four or even five decades.

Why? For some, it is very lucrative. For others, they are addicted to power. Many care more about their personal, financial and political agenda than the welfare of chess, the USCF and its members.

Many of my friends, including 3-time U.S. Champion Grandmaster Lev Alburt, have warned me about the dirty and vicious chess politics. I know that it is not easy to make positive changes. However, if no one is willing to step up to the plate and go to bat for the members, how can things get better?

What GM Alburt told me is similar to an interview he did with 5-time U.S. Champion Grandmaster Larry Evans. Here is an excerpt of that interview (from *This Crazy World of Chess by Larry Evans*, p.129):-

Lev Alburt was the first grandmaster elected to the seven member USCF board of directors and soon became the odd man out. In this exclusive interview he pierces the veil of secrecy and begins naming names.

After defecting from the USSR in 1979 he settled in Manhattan, married, and quickly became a fixture in American chess. After capturing our nation's highest title three times, he retired from tournaments to write books and give lessons.

Interview with GM Lev Alburt

Evans: Lev, it's hard to believe that people who are supposed to promote chess in America are actually holding back its growth.

Alburt: I couldn't believe it myself. But I learned that everyone in the business office and above all members of the board were interested primarily in doing almost nothing. Nothing real. Nothing to promote chess. When I get together with Allen Kaufman or Jimmy Sherwin of the American Chess Foundation we usually discuss ways to promote growth and emulate the success of England, which sprang from nowhere to one of the top nations.

Evans: Didn't the board discuss these things?

Alburt: No. I was extremely surprised that such topics were never addressed. Never, ever.

Evans: What was their goal?

Alburt: Let me continue. Even when we went to a restaurant I always expected them to bring up the subject of what can be done to make chess grow. But always the topics during our sessions was who should run for the board next year, who should be awarded national tournaments, or how to avoid being attacked by critics.

Evans: Well, what did they get out of serving on the board?

Alburt: Perks, of course. Free trips, and so forth. Some old timers look upon the federation as their toy, their plaything. They hang around people they chummed with for years. They love to give each other awards. When I left they offered me a Certificate of Service, but I said I wasn't interested in such things.

Evans: The board voted to ban tape recorders from open sessions but had to back down when Friends of the USCF blasted them in its newsletter. Isn't the board spending more and more time in closed session anyway?

Alburt: They discuss a lot of things in private which to my mind don't

belong in closed session. They often use these sessions as an excuse to say nasty things they would not dare to repeat in public. Sometimes they knock people I respect and I challenge them to produce evidence or shut up.

Evans: So didn't they become more careful around you?

Alburt: To some extent I think I spoiled the good feeling they shared together—the feeling that the less anyone outside knows, the better. When someone new was elected to the board, they immediately closed ranks and developed a bond. Even reform candidates wanted to become one of the boys as soon as they were elected.

My experience on the USCF Executive Board in the past two years is like a mirror image of what GM Alburt said, except a lot worse. I am not a chess politician and I have no desire to get involve in the filthy disgusting world of chess politics. I did not want the failed status quo to continue. My sole intention was and is to help chess and the USCF.

In the past two years, instead of working with me and helping me promote chess to benefit our entire sport, some of these chess politicians have spread the most outrageous and vicious rumors and lies, trying to destroy my reputation, my employment at Texas Tech University, and my family. They even stooped so low as to use my children (who are only 8 and 10) as one of their targets.

Knowing that I am a one of the biggest advocates for scholastic chess in this country, especially for girls, some of these people spewed out the disgustingly offensive rumor that my husband and I were child abusers. They claimed that we abused my children and we even forced them to consume hot sauce. This sort of despicable thing made its way to the internet and even made its way to my employer Texas Tech University as well as to sponsors and potential sponsors. This outrageous lie was even tossed around within the USCF leadership as a way to pressure my husband and me to resign from the board even though they knew that it was false.

There were countless remarks and postings telling my husband and me to go “back to where we came from.” Some said this is the United States Chess Federation and not the United Nations Chess Federation; and a foreigner had no business running the USCF, while others were openly discussed ways to deport me back to my native Hungary although I have been an American citizen for a number of years and both my children

were born in the U.S.

Ironically, the USCF and some board members have continued to deny that they have had anything to do with this despicable conduct, but their own attorney made sure to demand that I show proof that I am in the U.S. legally and if I “hot-sauced” my children in the past!? Outrageous, but true! Coincidence? You decide.

Some called me a “whore,” “bitch” and worse, with words that are not appropriate to print. They even created a public website about this. I informed the USCF and its board members, but they chose to ignore this and do nothing. Instead of investigating such vile and despicable conduct, the USCF and the board majority spent hundreds of thousands of dollars investigating us!

To support their agenda, misleading and one-sided information was published in *Chess Life*, the USCF website, in mailings and to the email list so I would have no opportunity to respond or correct the record.

Here are just some of things which took place in the past year:

- After wasting an exuberant amount of members’ money in the previous fiscal year, **the USCF filed the first unauthorized lawsuit in San Francisco in June 2008.**

I only found out about it during the Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls which took place at Texas Tech University when a local reporter called me during the tournament asking my husband and me to comment on the lawsuit filed by the USCF.

We were absolutely shocked. The USCF, the board members and the ED did not even have the courtesy to inform me or wait until the tournament was over. This was purposely done right in the middle of a National event (which is sponsored by Texas Tech University and the Susan Polgar Foundation) to maximize the damage. The sponsorship for this tournament alone is valued over \$1.5 million over 10 years.

- The parties continued and some even escalated their efforts to harm me and my family in various ways. **The USCF amended their original petition in June 2008 and I was served at a public event at the Fresno Chess Club in October 2008.** Once again, the board and ED had no proper authorization to file this lawsuit. The

new bogus charge is that I am a computer hacker even though there was absolutely no evidence to support this.

- **Then another unauthorized lawsuit was filed by the USCF against my husband and me in February 2009, this time in the state of Illinois.** I was once again served publicly at Susan Polgar National Open for Girls and Boys in Phoenix, Arizona. The pattern is consistent. These lawsuits and services were coordinated to take place at my major events to maximize the damage to me and my events.

There is a lot more; you can read about the filings [here](#). This will give you a much deeper understanding of what took place.

Instead of focusing on doing positive things for chess, the USCF and its members, these parties have abused their authority and power for political purpose. They have wasted over \$500,000 of members' money so far for their own political games. My \$1 offer to settle the lawsuit with the USCF still stands but the USCF has ignored it for more than 9 months.

Now another election draws near, and the same political, destructive games are being played again. Tens and thousands of emails and post cards were sent out with false information with the intention of smearing my reputation and misleading the members to maintain power by controlling another election. The system has been abused by the use of *Chess Life* and the USCF website as if it were a private, partisan domain in the sole custody of petty, vindictive board members and Executive Director. I was never given the opportunity to explain or state my case.

The current financial state of the USCF is dire. This pattern of frivolous spending for political power must stop. That is why I decided to break my silence and inform you of the facts. I will continue to share with you the facts and status of these legal cases on my website www.ChessDailyNews.com.

Many people have asked who I will be voting for in the upcoming USCF Executive Board election. At this time, I will vote for the following individuals and I will explain why.

1. International Master Blas Lugo. Why? He is a successful chess player, organizer, coach, chess club owner, and his sole intention in this election is to help make the USCF better using his experience, ability, business acumen, and passion for chess. He has no political or personal

interest. He is also multilingual and understands the needs and demands of a diverse membership group. He is NOT a part of the “good ol’ boys” network that would do anything to grab and maintain power for personal and political interest. He is an independent thinker and a tremendous asset to help set the USCF on the right course of recovery.

2. Dr. Mikhail Korenman. Why? He is a premier chess promoter, organizer, coach, and he is well respected and admired by many chess players from amateur to grandmasters, world champions and even Presidents. He has successfully organized many mega events in the United States, events which have brought in unprecedented positive media coverage. His experience in grant writing brought in big money for chess in Kansas. Like IM Lugo, Dr. Korenman is an independent thinker, multilingual and understands what it takes to improve the USCF. Many American Grandmasters have [publicly endorsed](#) him in this election because he has a most impressive chess résumé.

3. Dr. Eric Hecht. Why? The USCF has lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in the last few years and it is or will be nearly bankrupt if a proper course of action is not soon taken. Dr. Hecht is absolutely the most successful businessman among all the candidates, perhaps even the most prolific candidate ever. He has successfully managed billions of dollars on Wall Street and he is a brilliant financial person. He has used his fortune to help chess by sponsoring many wonderful chess events from New York to Florida. Dr. Hecht has no personal or political ambition in chess. Like Blas Lugo and Mikhail Korenman, Dr. Hecht has the expertise and desire to help the USCF get out of the vicious cycle of failure and destruction.

I strongly believe that these three highly qualified people will be able to greatly help fix the many problems of the USCF and end the long-time pattern of corruption and abuse of power which is bankrupting this federation. They are “no nonsense” individuals and they will set this federation on the right course for years to come. They are all independent candidates and they do not affiliate with any corrupt political parties. They will examine every issue and vote their conscience.

I have not yet made up my mind about the fourth candidate. However, I will not vote for anyone who will irresponsibly advocate more legal battles which will without doubt destroy and bankrupt this federation. I will also not vote for anyone who will advocate alienating and dividing various membership groups instead of uniting everyone, as well as putting their personal and political interest before chess and the USCF.

This federation under the leadership of current USCF President Bill Goichberg and USCF VP Jim Berry has been a disaster. On their watch, the USCF has lost hundreds of thousands of dollars while engaging in numerous lawsuits and legal battles in seven different states. Most were either provoked or started by them. They are responsible for wasting a massive amount of members' money for frivolous actions. And yet they want another four years along with "their candidates" Mike Atkins and Ruth Haring.

They are desperately trying to hide many important facts about their actions (which have resulted in devastating consequences for this federation) from USCF members, while using *Chess Life* and the USCF website for their political propaganda.

Bill Goichberg has been involved with the USCF in various capacities for over four decades. Memberships are down, revenues are down, and expenditures are up. But he does not want to let go of his personal and political power even at the expense of the USCF and its members. He has his hands on nearly every election as far as I can remember. He keeps on recruiting people who will vote with him and for his agenda which has caused so much damage to the USCF. Do you want a different direction for the USCF or do you want the USCF to continue down the same path with the same cast of characters?

The USCF CANNOT afford to lose a few more hundred thousand dollars while doing very little for its members. We cannot afford to have our leaders spend our money like it is their own. Let your voice be heard and vote for the most qualified candidates and NOT individuals who have personal, financial and political interests.

Make sure you have an official ballot to vote. Your ballot should be outside of your June 2009 *Chess Life* and it should have your name and USCF ID number imprinted on it.

Check the names of the candidates you are voting for, fold the ballot into three and mail it back to Taylor, Bilyeu & Company at PO Box 1156 Crossville, TN 38557-1156. The ballot should only require a first-class stamp. If you do not have one, email the following people pknight@uschess.org, jdubois@uschess.org, bhall@uschess.org and request one.

The United States Chess Federation belongs to its members. We can take

back control of the USCF by voting in the candidates who will serve the membership and not their own interests. I am counting on you to make a difference. Every vote counts.

Paul Truong assisted Susan Polgar in the preparation of this column. Susan Polgar is the director of the Susan Polgar Institute for Chess Excellence (SPICE) at Texas Tech University. For more information, visit www.spice.ttu.edu or email: SusanPolgar@aol.com.

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