



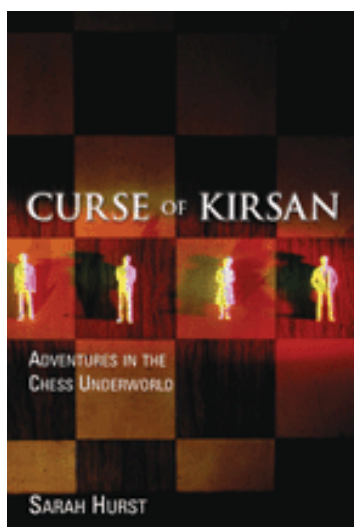
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COLUMNISTS

## *Susan Polgar on Chess*

Susan Polgar



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## My Top 10 Most Memorable Moments in Chess (Part 3)

I have experienced hundreds if not thousands of exciting, wonderful and memorable moments during my chess career, a career that has spanned almost 30 years. It was not easy, but I have narrowed these moments down to the top 10. This is a short preview of the book I am working on right now titled *My Top 10 Most Memorable Moments in Chess*. This is part of the new chess book series of the same name. I hope you enjoy it. David Letterman, the top 10 countdown is in your honor.

### 10. Meeting Bobby Fischer

9. Scoring 10-0 at the 1973 Budapest Championship for girls under 11 at the age of 4!

8. Winning 1981 World Junior Championship for girls under 16

7. Winning the gold medal at the 1990 Olympiad

6. Becoming the first woman ever to break the gender barrier, qualifying for the Men's World Championship Zonal Tournament.

5. Becoming the #1 ranked woman player in the world at age 15

4. Winning the 1992 Women's World Blitz and Rapid Championship

3. Winning the 1996 Women's World Chess Championship

2. Winning the gold medal at the 1988 Olympiad

1. Becoming the first woman ever to break the gender barrier, earning the Grandmaster title

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### 3. Winning the 1996 Women's World Chess Championship

Winning the 1996 Women's World Championship is one of the special highlights of my career. This title gave me the triple crown in chess (Rapid, Blitz and Conventional Time Control). It erased the bad memory of losing the candidate's match to Ioseliani in 1993 by a coin toss even though I had never trailed at any point in the match. This victory quieted all the doubters who said the Polgar sisters could not play against women, only against men.

The final score was a lopsided  $8\frac{1}{2}$ -  $4\frac{1}{2}$ . It seemed to be an easy victory. But such was not the case. I won the match despite facing many personal problems that I have never talked about before. After two games, the score was  $1\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$  for my formidable opponent. I opened the third game, for the first time in serious competition, with 1. e4!? This was a shock for my opponent. I obtained a slight advantage but since I was in time pressure already, I decided to offer a draw to my opponent and she accepted the offer. My main strategy was to conserve energy and to recuperate.

This is when things started to go wrong. I had a team that had been with me a long time: my mother, my sister Judit and my trainer GM Lev Psakhis. These are the people I trust and who have known me best in my career. My soon-to-be ex-husband decided to invite his parents from Israel to the match. I repeatedly objected but it did not help. I did not want to have any distractions, especially from the in-laws. He did not care and they arrived on February 1.

To make matters worst, upon arriving back from dinner following the third game, I received news that Mr. Rentero, the match organizer, had fined both my opponent and me \$25,000 each for a quick draw in game 3. His decision was absolutely illegal and the tone of his letter was rude and obnoxious. It severely affected me both emotionally and psychologically. I am sure it also affected my opponent as well.

The Chinese delegation was ready to pack up and leave. Both sides were very upset and insulted. After consulting with my trainer, my sister Judit, and my parents, I decided to try to put aside the problem with Mr. Rentero and the in-law situation and played on. At the time, I felt that my decision was right. But there was no guarantee. Chess players react differently when dealing with crises. I felt I got stronger and more focused. I went on to score  $4\frac{1}{2}$  points in the next 5 games. The rest is history.

I am still hopeful that maybe one day in the future, the great Women's World Champion Xie Jun of China and I will have a chance to play another

match. Now that I live in and play for the United States, a match like this can only create more excitement and help popularize chess a lot more in both countries.

## **2. Winning the gold medal at the 1988 Olympiad**

This was simply an incredible moment in my life as well as in the lives of my sisters. As a matter of fact, it was a big moment for Hungary. There were many meaningful storylines for the Polgar sisters at the 1988 Olympiad.

- This was the first time ever that a non-Soviet team had won the gold medal, ending its dominance of women's chess.
- This was the first time that 3 sisters had played on the same gold medal winning team.
- We had a very young team with members of the team ranging from 12-19 years of age.
- We went from being the main controversy of the game because of our approach to chess to being loved, admired and adored by millions in Hungary and worldwide.
- This was the first time that the Polgar sisters had competed in the world stage against other women players.
- It also put to rest the ridiculous accusation that the Polgar sisters could not compete against other women players and somehow it is easier to play against men.

My sister Judit won an individual gold medal with the amazing score of 12½/13. She had missed a win against Levitina which would have given her a perfect 13/13 score. I got an individual bronze on board 1 with the score of 10½/14. We also had strong contributions from my other sister Sophia Polgar and from Ildiko Madl.

We narrowly edged out the Soviet team by the score of 33 to 32½, outdistancing the Yugoslavian team that had finished with 28. Prior to coming to this Olympiad, very few people believed that we could win. After all, Soviet teams have dominated the Women's Olympiad since its inception. Most people/experts, and even some of our coaches would have been happy with the silver medal.

The three sisters and our parents were the only one who believed we could win. We worked as a team. We cheered each other on. Even though the Soviet team was much stronger than we on paper, this clearly showed what teamwork and confidence could do for the underdog.

I truly hope that our 2004 US Women's Olympiad Team can follow along the same path. Camaraderie and teamwork can sometimes make up for ELO points. Winning the team gold in 1988 is something I will treasure for

the rest of my life. Now that my sisters and I are living on separate continents, we will probably never play on the same Olympiad team together again. But the great memories will live on forever.

### **1. Becoming the first woman ever to break the gender barrier, earning the Grandmaster title**

When I was growing up, Vera Menchik, Lyudmila Rudenko, Yelizavyeta Bykova, Olga Rubtsova, Nona Gaprindashvili, and Maia Chiburdanidze were the names of Women's World Champions. They were at the top of Women's Chess in their respective eras. But none of them was able to earn the grandmaster title the traditional way with norm qualifications as their male counterparts had done. Both Gaprindashvili (2 GM norms) and Chiburdanidze (1 GM norm) had some wonderful results against men in their careers; they simply were not able to surpass that threshold.

Gaprindashvili and Chiburdanidze were awarded the grandmaster title for winning the Women's World Championship although they had never actually fulfilled the qualifications to become grandmasters. I find it interesting that FIDE never went back and awarded the title to the previous four women's world champions, Vera Menchik, Lyudmila Rudenko, Yelizavyeta Bykova, and Olga Rubtsova.

Most people did not believe that women could compete against men on the same level. Most people could not imagine that a woman could actually be good enough to "earn" the grandmaster title the same way as men do.

Since I was brought up differently, it was very important for me to prove otherwise. I believe men and women can compete at the same level in any given tournament even though women's professional chess careers are usually shorter due to many factors, as I have mentioned in earlier ChessCafe.com articles.

I earned my first grandmaster norm at Royan, France in June/July 1988, finishing second in the tournament behind Victor Korchnoi. My second grandmaster norm came in June 1989 when I tied for first with GM J. Pinter at a tournament in Leon, Spain. My third and final grandmaster norm was at Pamplona, Spain between December 1990 to early January 1991 when I took third place behind GM Yudasin and Korchnoi.

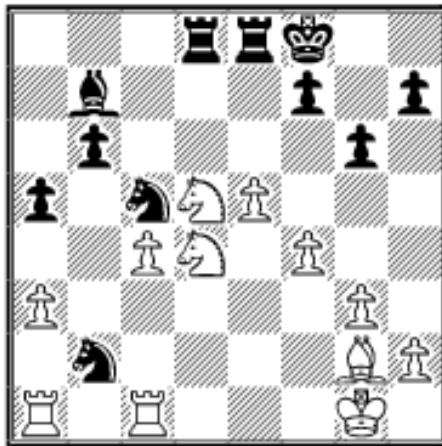
Even though I had become the youngest women's grandmaster in history at that time at the age of 12, my sight was set on the overall grandmaster title. I believe this accomplishment made a very big impact on women's chess. Someone had finally broken through this gigantic gender barrier. About a year later, my sister Judit became the second woman to "earn" the Grandmaster title and became the world's youngest grandmaster in history, breaking Bobby Fischer's record. In 1992, my good friend Pia Cramling of

Sweden became the third woman in history to do the same.

Now, it is no longer uncommon for a woman to become a grandmaster. The future generations of women's players now know that it is possible to do so. I believe that this is one of the biggest accomplishments in women's chess and therefore this is my number one most memorable moment in my professional chess career, to have become the first woman ever to "earn" the overall grandmaster title.

***Zsuzsa Polgar – Jonathan Speelman Brussels, 1985***

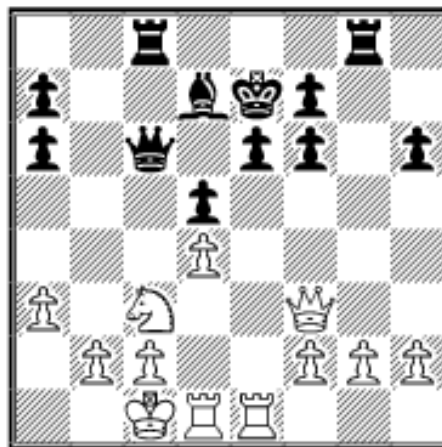
1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 Bb4+ 4. Bd2 c5 5. Bxb4 cxb4 6. g3 b6 7. Bg2 Bb7 8. 0–0 0–0 9. Nbd2 d6 10. Re1 Nbd7 11. Qb3 a5 12. e4 e5 13. Qd3 Re8 14. Nh4 Nf8 15. Nf5 g6 16. Ne3 Ne6 17. dxe5 Nc5 18. Qxd6 Nfd7 19. f4 Re6 20. Qd4 Nxe5 21. Qxd8+ Rxd8 22. Nd5 Ned3 23. Reb1 Na4 24. a3 b3 25. Nxb3 Ndx2 26. Nd4 Ree8 27. e5 Kf8 28. Rc1 Nc5



29. Nb5 Nb3 30. Nd6 Rxd6 31. exd6 Bxd5 32. Bxd5 Nxa1 33. Rxa1 Rd8 34. Rb1 Na4 35. Bc6 Nc3 36. Rxb6 Rxd6 37. Rb8+ Kg7 38. Bf3 Rd3 39. Kg2 Rd2+ 40. Kf1 Na4 41. Rb5 Rc2 42. Rxa5 Rxc4 43. Ra7 Nc3 44. Kf2 Rd4 45. Ke3 Rd8 46. a4 Nd1+ 47. Ke2 Nc3+ 48. Kf1 Rd3 49. Bc6 Rd1+ 50. Kf2 Rd2+ 51. Ke3 Rd6 52. Rc7 Kh6 53. a5 f5 54. a6 Nd1+ 55. Ke2 Nc3+ 56. Kf2 1–0

***Zsuzsa Polgar, Zsuzsa – Murray Chandler Biel, 1987***

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. Bf4 c5 4. e3 Qb6 5. Nc3 Na6 6. a3 Be7 7. Ne5 cxd4 8. exd4 Qd8 9. Bxa6 bxa6 10. Qf3 d5 11. Nc6 Qb6 12. Nxe7 Kxe7 13. 0–0–0 Qc6 14. Qg3 Rg8 15. Bg5 Bd7 16. Rhe1 h6 17. Bxf6+ gxf6 18. Qf3 Rac8

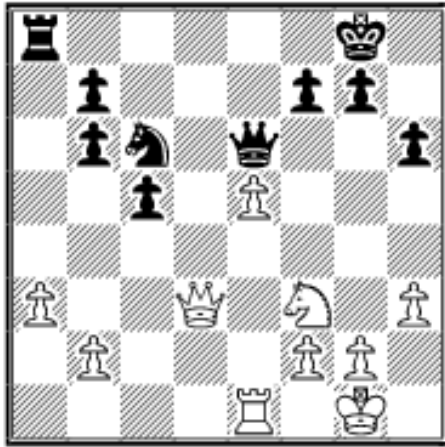


19. Nxd5+ Kf8 20. Ne3 Qxf3 21. gxf3 Rg5 22. h4 Rh5 23. Rh1 Bc6 24. Rh3 Ke7 25. f4 Be4 26. b3 Rb5 27. Kb2 a5 28. a4 Rb4 29. Rd2 Kf8 30. Rg3 h5 31. Ka3 Rc3 32. Kb2 Rc8 33. Rg1 Rc7 34. Re1 Rc8 35. Rc1 Rc7 36. Ka2 Rc3 37. Re1 Rc7 38. Ka3 Rc3 39. Rg1 Bh7 40. Kb2 Rc8 41. f5 Bxf5 42. Nxf5 exf5 43. Rg3 Rd8 44. c3 Rb7 45. Rf3 Rdb8 46. c4 Rb4 47. Kc2 Kg7 48. Rdd3 Kg6 49. Rg3+ Kh6 50. Rdf3 Rd8 51. d5 Re8 52. Rxf5 Re2+ 53. Kd3 Rb2 54. Rxf6+ Kh7 55. Rxf7+ Kh6 56. Rf6+

Kh7 57. Kd4 1–0

***Stuart Conquest – Zsuzsa Polgar London, 1989***

1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. Nf3 c5 4. d5 e6 5. Nc3 Nf6 6. e4 exd5 7. e5 Nfd7  
 8. Bg5 Be7 9. Bxe7 Qxe7 10. Nxd5 Qd8 11. Bxc4 (Today, 11. Qc2 is  
 considered more accurate) 11...Nc6 12. 0–0 0–0 13. Re1 Nb6 14. Nxb6  
 axb6 15. h3 Qe7 16. Qc2 Be6 17. a3 h6 18. Rad1 Rfd8 19. Bxe6 Qxe6  
 20. Rd3 Rxd3 21. Qxd3



21...Rd8 22. Qe4 b5 23.  
 Kh2 c4 24. Qh4 Re8 25.  
 Nd4 Qd5 26. Nf3 b4 27. Re3  
 c3 28. bxc3 bxa3 29. Qa4  
 Qa5 30. Qxa5 Nxa5 31. Re4  
 b5 32. Re2 Nb3 33. Ra2 Ra8  
 34. Kg3 Nc1 35. Ra1 Ne2+  
 36. Kh2 Nxc3 37. Nd4 b4  
 38. f4 a2 39. f5 Rd8 40. Nb3  
 Rd5 41. e6 fxe6 42. fxe6  
 Re5 43. Kg3 Rxe6 44. Kf3 Ra6 45. Ke3 Ra3 46. Nd2 b3  
 47. Nc4 Ra8 48. Nb2 Na4 0–1

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Paul Truong assisted Susan Polgar in the preparation of this column. Susan Polgar is available for chess instruction. For more information, visit the Polgar Chess Center, 97-09 64th Road, Rego Park, NY 11374 (Tel: 718-897-4600) or email: [PolgarChessInc@aol.com](mailto:PolgarChessInc@aol.com)

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