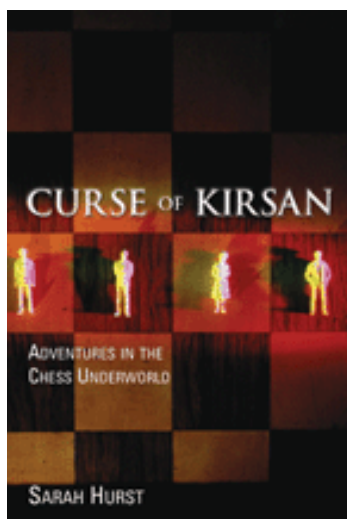




## COLUMNISTS

## *Susan Polgar on Chess*

Susan Polgar

Order*Curse of Kirsan*

by Sarah Hurst

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## Women's Chess:

## Questions, Answers & Updates

I would like to take the opportunity to thank many of the readers who took time to write and give me their wonderful feedback. Let me start this article by addressing some of the questions many of you had regarding my last article.

**Kevin Croxen** asked: "Where are the women and girl coaches? While young girls in particular do frequently derive benefit from education or training in temporary isolation from boys, a key element to this boosting of self confidence she mentions often consists of a teacher who is a woman, or a mentor who is an older girl, particularly in the US where female primary-school teachers still outnumber males by six-to-one or more."

Excellent point Kevin! There are not enough women coaches out there. Why? Let's ask the same question about hockey? Do you see many minority coaches in professional hockey? No. If you have very few players who are part of the minority group to play the game, it hard to find future coaches from this small pool of talent. This is the same problem in chess. If there are fewer women playing chess at a higher level now, there will be fewer women who will be coaches in the future. The current problem we have now is a direct result of the past.

Why are women coaches important? There are a number of reasons. In some cases, women coaches can relate, understand and motivate young girls better. Many male coaches do a great job too. Another reason is many parents are *not* comfortable leaving their young teenage daughters alone with male coaches. I can tell you from my own experience growing up, my parents would be sitting right in the next room for as many hours as and my sisters and I were training with male coaches. That was a time-consuming process for my parents and not all parents have the time to do that. Is that necessary for every case out there? No. But that is how things work. We cannot change everything at once.

Let me add that I began training one young girl at age 6 when she had no idea between the difference between a Knight and a Bishop. She was my first ever student when I opened my chess center in Rego Park, New York. Now, she is

13 and is helping me with coaching duties at my club. She is also rated on USCF best women's player list. My Olympiad teammates IM Irina Krush, WGM Anna Zatonskih, WGM Rusa Goletiani and WIM Jennifer Shahade are all working as chess trainers while training hard to win the gold at the 2004 Olympiad. There are many women players who are fine coaches but their number is still very small. But I am working hard to change that.

**John Storm** wrote: "When it comes to chess, there is not enough difference between the sexes to justify any special outlook for women--not in training, nor in tournaments. The women's world heavyweight boxing champion will never beat the men's heavyweight champion (yes, she might use steroids, but then, physiologically, her body would be closer to a man's than to a women's body); but the best woman player in the world could and did beat the best male player (and Judit Polgar may beat Garry Kasparov again). Special titles such as WGM, etc, are ridiculous. The best tournaments are open to the best players, and this includes women. If women want to do better against the men, then they are simply going to have to sacrifice even more, like the men do. I seriously doubt whether men are the best chess players because of any special or superior attributes stemming from their gender; they are better because they are more obsessive..."

You are right John. Many men are more obsessive than women in chess. And yes, Judit did beat Garry once out of more than a dozen times. But let me add a few points to your arguments. You are looking at chess today in the USA. In some countries, women were not allowed or were not encouraged to play chess. I can tell you from my own experience growing up. I was not allowed to do many things in chess because I was a girl. I was not allowed to even travel to the west to compete even though I was already a superstar in my own country. If you have a chance to check out the recent article by Frederic Friedel of ChessBase, he wrote that he was the person who had to go to Budapest to negotiate with the officials and make a lot of noise to get my own federation to allow me to play chess in the west. Without him and a few other friends/supporters, maybe my sisters and I would still be unknown to you and the rest of the world.

Yes, I made a lot of sacrifices from the age of 4. While other girls played in the yard, I studied chess. I was determined to be the overall world champion. But how would feel if you did all that and were then told that you would not be allowed to enter the big dance? Let me point out the fact. I was the first woman ever to qualify for the Men's World Championship Zonal Tournament. The key word is "Men's". No one would have ever thought a woman could qualify until I did. And after I qualified, the answer was basically "Sorry, you are a woman. You cannot play in the men's world championship cycle". Well, I was denied the opportunity to compete and eventually, FIDE changed the rule to allow women to compete and now it is called World Chess Championship and not Men's World Chess Championship.

By the way, not all the best tournaments are open to all women players. Aside from Judit and me, when I was competing actively, how many other women were invited to super tournaments? Recently, GM Sergey Karjakin (age 13) has been invited to play in super tournaments when his rating was in the low-to mid-2500 Elo range. No woman has been invited, not even GM Antoaneta Stefanova who was rated higher at 2560. Thank you for your input John.

**Tony Hann** wrote: "In point 4 she argues that society (social and peer pressure) and boys create unbearable pressure on girls who play chess which results in a decrease in the number of girls that want to play chess after grade 4. I seriously question this as a cause for the lack of women in chess. Boys are not at fault for girls leaving chess. There are a variety of reasons but to put it on men or boys is misleading and not going to solve the problem. Unless there are some recent studies I am unaware of, there is no reason that girls can not compete equally with boys. If this is the case why separate boys and girls at all? Separating "girl" chess from "boy" chess only seems to reaffirm a subconscious belief that girls can't compete with boys. I fail to see how avoiding playing a particular group can increase a person's confidence. Would not playing and defeating boys after attending the same training increase a girls confidence even more? Saying that girls need special training or special anything just adds to the current batch of misconceptions."

Excellent point Tony and thank you for your input. There is no need for separate training for all girls, just some girls. Different people handle things differently. My point is a not a scientific argument. There is no single reason for girls dropping off after grade 4. There are many reasons for that. But rather than trying to be a politician and promising to fix everything at once, I would just offer the idea of the initial choice for parents and young girls to attend some separate training. Even if this would help increase girls' retention in chess by 20-30% or more, it is worth it. Confidence is contagious for everyone, especially for a young player. This program may help some young girls to have a good start.

By the way Tony, I was one of the first women to compete against all men and I was severely criticized and attacked by other players, organizers and even some people in my own federation at that time. How times have changed! My sisters and I handled it fine. But not all girls are this way, especially those who do not have the luxury of having parents fully supporting them emotionally and psychologically. If some young girls feel that they can handle the pressure and want to learn and compete against boys only, thumbs up to them and they will have my full support. I just don't want to leave any girl in the middle of the road. I am not fighting the issues for me but for the next generation.

**Tom Fraser** wrote: "I do not, however, think that it follows that pressure "caused by society and other boys" is the reason girls lose interest in chess. At least in my little neck of the woods here in the mid-western USA, I believe it is more complicated than that. In 2001 in one of my classes 3 of the top 4

players were 10-year old girls; in 2002, upon advancing to the middle school, none of them continued to play chess. This despite the fact that at the end of the 2001 school year all three said they planned to continue. And I know for sure that none of them lacked chess confidence, at least relative to others their own age. I also question the notion that the girls need "an option and opportunity to improve their chess in a more friendly and normal environment." I don't notice unfriendliness generally in my classes or at tournaments, and I specifically don't notice unfriendliness by boys directed at girls. And I have been looking for it. I have, however, noticed the following which I find interesting. At ages of approximately 4-6 girls seem not to care whether they play recreational chess with a boy or girl opponent. Beginning at about age 6 or 7, many girls seem to prefer playing with other girls for their opponent."

As I mentioned above, each girl handles things differently. One example from one of the questions above: "Boys are more obsessive". That is correct. Many boys play chess to win, to conquer, to dominate. I love chess for a different reason. I love the beauty of the game. I love the grace and creativity in chess. My sister Judit on the other hand is different. She is much more into winning. Even as sisters and I was her first coach, she took on a different direction. That is why my point is why not have both? Let the young people decide for themselves. As coaches or parents, I urge everyone to allow the youngster to make her own choices to study and compete with the boys or start off with the girls and merge with the boys later. It is always helpful to have an option and that is all I am suggesting. Even Garry Kasparov and his Kasparov Chess Foundation are supporting the idea of having a branch of their training program dedicated to girls only.

Now, I would like to update you with some progress in Women's Chess. The US Women's Olympiad Program took a turn for the better. Through the cooperation between team training consultant Michael Khodarkovsky and the team Captain and Business Manager Paul Truong, our team members were very happy and honored to spend 3-4 days training with Garry Kasparov recently. Everyone agrees that it was a most incredible experience to see how Garry trains and analyzes. It helped all the team members to better understand how to study and improve their chess. The team also worked with GM Boris Gulko and GM Gennady Zaichik. I also worked with the team members. Each of us helped the players in a different area.



The USCF Executive Board has recently approved the Annual Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls starting in 2004. This is a tournament similar to the Denker Tournament of Champions. The reason for this tournament is my desire to recognize the top young women players and give them an opportunity to shine in the national spotlight as well as having the opportunity to obtain college scholarships. More announcements and details will be made in the near future on my website [www.SusanPolgar.com](http://www.SusanPolgar.com) or [www.PolgarChess.com](http://www.PolgarChess.com).

My business manager and I are currently working very hard to gain some sponsorship from major non-chess corporations to support chess in America, especially for scholastic and women's chess. We have had incredible support so far. We would like to thank everyone for their continued support. It is great to see teamwork and unity. After all, we are working toward the same common goal and that is to enhance the game we love and bring it to a new level.

Below are some recent games, one of which is my own game from a recent event at my club. This game was played in round 5. My opponent was my own trainer and business manager and this is a game that would make Maurice Ashley "no draw" concept proud.

**FM Truong, Paul – GM Polgar, Susan, June 28, 2003, Queens, NY**

1. e4 d6 2. Nc3 g6 3. f4 Bg7 4. Nf3 Nf6 5. d4 0-0 6. Bd3 c5 7. e5 Nfd7 8. e6 fxe6 9. Ng5 cxd4 10. Nxe6 Qa5 11. Nxd4 Nc6 12. Nb3 Bxc3+ 13. bxc3 Qxc3+ 14. Bd2 Qf6 15. Bc4+ Kg7 16. 0-0 Nb6 17. Bd3 Bf5 18. Qf3 Bxd3 19. Qxd3 Qf5 20. Qc3+ Kg8 21. Rae1 Rae8 22. Bc1 Nd5 23. Qc4 e6 24. Ba3 Rd8 25. Nd2 Nxf4 26. g3 Nh3+ 27. Kg2 Nf2 28. Re2 Ne5 29. Qb3 Qh3+ 30. Kg1 Neg4 31. Qxe6+ Rf7 32. Nf3 Ne5 33. Ng5 Nf3+ 34. Nxf3 Qxe6 35. Rxe6 Rxf3 36. Rxf2 Rxa3 37. Re7 Rf8 38. Rxf8+ Kxf8 39. Rxb7 Rxa2 40. Rxh7 Rxc2 41. Rxa7 d5 42. Rd7 Rd2 43. h4 d4 44. g4 d3 45. h5 gxh5 46. gxh5 Ke8 47. Rd5 Kf7 48. h6 Kg6 49. Rd6+ Kh7 50. Kf1 Rh2 51. Rxd3 Rxh6 ½ - ½

I would like to congratulate my friend GM Pia Cramling for winning the 2003 European Women's Championship. The following are the last two games that gave her a tie for first place; she later won the play-off. Great job Pia!

***Cramling, P. (2470) - Peptan, C. (2471) European Women's Championship (10), 06-13-2003***

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6 3. c4 b6 4. g3 Ba6 5. Nbd2 Bb4 6. Qb3 c5 7. Bg2 Bb7 8. dxc5 Bxc5 9. 0-0 0-0 10. 10...Nc6 11. a3 Qc7 12. b4 Nd4 13. Nxd4 Bxd4 14. Bxb7 Qxb7 15. Ra2 Ng4 16. Qd3 Bf6 17. Ne4 Be7 18. Bf4 f5 19. Nd6 Bxd6 20. Bxd6 Rf6 21. f3 Nh6 22. Rd1 Rg6 23. Bf4 Rd8 24. Qd6 Qc8 25. Qc7 Nf7 26. Qxc8 Rxc8 27. Rxd7 e5 28. Be3 Rxc4 29. Rxa7 h5 30. Rb7 Rcc6 31. b5 Rce6 32. Rc2 h4 33. Rc8+ Kh7 34. Rxf7 hxg3 35. Rxf5 gxh2+ 36. Kxh2 1-0

***Cramling, P. (2470) - Kosintseva, T. (2457) European Women's Championship (11), 06-14-2003***

1. d4 f5 2. g3 Nf6 3. Bg2 g6 4. b3 Bg7 5. Bb2 0-0 6. Nf3 d6 7. 0-0 Qe8 8. c4 Na6 9. Qc2 h6 10. Nbd2 c6 11. a3 g5 12. e3 Nc7 13. b4 a6 14. a4 Bd7 15. Ne1 e5 16. dxe5 dxe5 17. Nd3 e4 18. Nc5 Bc8 19. a5 Ne6 20. Qf7 21. Rad1 Nxc5 22. Nxc5 Be6 23. Rd6 Rfe8 24. Rfd1 Re7 25. Bf1 Ne8 26. Rd8 Rxd8 27. Rxd8 Kh7 28. Bxg7 Nxg7 29. Qc3 Re8 30. Rxe8 Nxe8 31. Qe5 Bc8 32. g4 fxg4 33. Nxe4 Be6 34. Bd3 Kg8 35. Qb8 Kg7 36. Nc5 Kf6 37. Nxb7 Nc7 38. Nd6 1-0

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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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