



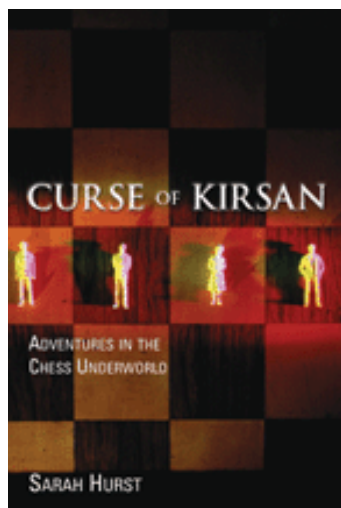
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Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



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My General Recap of the Good, the Bad and the Ugly in U.S. Chess in 2003

Looking Forward to 2004

Part 2

The Bad and the Ugly

Last month, I recounted many good things that happened in U.S. chess in 2003. Unfortunately, bad and ugly things also took place. While FIDE suffered a series of problems involving the world championship unification plans, the USCF did not fare much better.

As I have said numerous times in the past, 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!

In my opinion, the current structure of the United States Chess Federation is doomed to failure. Normal companies have presidents, vice-presidents, professionals in different fields such as marketing, PR, technology, etc., and employees. The USCF is somewhat different. It is run by an executive board of seven people. These board members are elected by members. Some of these board members are very well respected, some are highly educated, some are successful, and some are just average everyday people who love chess.

The problem is you can be a genius and still not able to run a company. One has nothing to do with the other. On the other hand, if we are fortunate enough to have competent board members who have business experience, unless they have a majority vote, their ideas will go nowhere. And even if they have the majority vote, long-term plans are often changed before they can blossom, since the

board's members are soon replaced. Everything will then be turned upside down and we are back to square one. How can the USCF ever succeed with the current structure, apparently based on instability?

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. This is a big mistake. If you have disagreements with various issues, everyone should discuss and try to resolve all problems peacefully, professionally and amicably. Below is my personal observation of what could have been done and what has been lost due to the structural problems of the USCF.

When you go to any well-known toy or department store, chances are you will find various chess sets for sale. They can be anything from a Lord of the Rings set, Harry Potter or just simple wooden or plastic chess sets. You can go to most electronics stores and chances are there will be chess software for PDAs, handhelds and PCs readily available. Products by Chessmaster, ChessBase, Excalibur, etc., can be found everywhere. I have even found Excalibur products at many airports and stores like Brookstone. ChessBase, UbiSoft, Excalibur, and Fluent Entertainment are doing a good job getting their products out. Why can't the USCF do the same?

Internet chess is booming! Millions of games are played every day worldwide. Servers such as PlayChess.com and ICC are very popular and commercially viable. There are also sites provided by major portals that consistently have thousands of people logging on and playing 24/7. Millions of dollars can be made with Internet chess. Why can't the USCF do it?

Books and equipments represents another market. Once upon a time, the USCF had a very strong presence in this market. Now, companies such as ChessCafe.com, AmChessEq, Cajun Chess, and LCC, etc. are doing very well. They have become much more profitable than the USCF can ever be. Their business continues to increase significantly. Why can't the USCF maintain and expand its dominance in the marketplace as it once did?

What does all of this mean? To me, it means that the USCF has *not* done enough to succeed and to promote the game. It means that the USCF has not installed the right people to do the job. Being the official chess federation of the United States, the USCF has a respected name. The USCF has *the* official name. There is no reason why the USCF should not capitalize on the chess boom. Millions of dollars can be made and this money can be used to finance promotional programs to popularize chess. 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*.

I personally like and respect some of the current and past executive board members. I consider many of them friends. I know that they do the best job they can under difficult circumstances. Many have given their hearts and souls and money for many years to help the USCF. But under the current seriously flawed structure of the federation, they have little or no chance to succeed.

Another serious problem with the current structure of the USCF is accountability. In every professional sport there are commissioners and players' unions. There is always someone to police and protect the image of those sports. Some players and owners have even been suspended for their words and actions. While those systems may not be perfect, there are at least systems in place to deal with conduct that, while it may not be illegal *per se*, certainly is detrimental to the sport in question.

In the U.S. Chess Federation, such is not the case. When board members or committee chairs do or say things to harm the federation or chess, who holds them accountable? The USCF does have an ethics committee. But what happens when improper conduct and action do not fall within the jurisdiction of the ethics committee? Then what? Chaos! People are not held accountable for their words and actions. This is very bad for the game.

I may be living a fantasy world, but I believe in professionalism. I have always advocated this. I do my best to dress, speak, and conduct myself in the most professional manner. I am certainly not perfect, but I try very hard and I give it my best. I care about this game and I want chess to grow the right way. I realize that my views may be uncommon but I want to see every child introduced to chess. It should be part of their lives. Chess can help children develop many valuable skills in life. However, how can we make good examples or role models for the future generations to promote this game if we cannot act properly ourselves?

America is a great country. We have freedom. So many lives have been lost to preserve this right. But there are limitations to our freedom. Let me offer a few examples. Do you have the freedom to go to an airport and yell "I have a bomb"? Yes! But you will also go to jail for that freedom of expression. Do you have the freedom not to wear a seatbelt when you drive? Yes! But if you are caught, you will get a ticket. Do you have the freedom to verbally or physically abuse and harass TDs? Yes! But the TDs may also throw you out of the tournament, call the police and ban you from future tournaments. So why are we not holding our executive board members and committee chairs to the same standard if they cross this line? There is a major difference between freedom of speech versus malicious libeling and defamation. And if no one from the USCF has the power to impose sanctions for inappropriate actions, then it is up to people to use the legal system to resolve these problems. This can be costly and embarrassing for a national federation.

Personalities in other sports have the freedom to make their opinions known. But they have to be prepared to pay for the abuse of that freedom, and penalties range from substantial fines to suspension. Chess is nowhere as big as those sports yet.

Does that mean that anyone, especially officials of the federation, can do or say anything they want even if it hurts the USCF? I understand that while we are not in the position to police everyone, I strongly believe that people who have official positions with the federation should be held accountable for what they do and say. Otherwise, the abuse of freedom can be irresponsible and can seriously harm the USCF. While I love the freedom that Americans possess, we need to exercise that right with caution if we want to bring chess to the next level.

I can only hope that my views will open some eyes and maybe it will spark some constructive debates that may result in dramatic improvements for the USCF. Chess is too important to destroy because of our own flaws and doing. Let's think of our children. Let's make things right for the future generations.

For the new year of 2004, I hope that everyone will work with each other and cooperate with one another a lot more for the sake of the game. In addition, let's put the good of chess ahead of political or personal interests. Lost opportunities may never return.

I wish everyone a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous 2004! I would like to personally thank all the supporters of the US Women's Olympiad Program and the Susan Polgar Foundation. I promise we will continue to work hard to better US Chess and make you proud.

Thank you and Happy New Year!

Here is a recent game of WIM Jennifer Shahade, 2002 US Women's Champion and a member of the 2004 US Women's Olympiad Program. The game was played at the Marshall Chess Club during the New York Masters weekly tournament. In this game, Jennifer demonstrated her typical aggressive play. Even a strong and experienced Grandmaster like Ehlvest succumbed to her attack. You can check out this famous weekly New York tournament at this site www.newyorkmasters.com.

WIM Jennifer Shahade - GM Jaan Ehlvest
NY Masters 2003

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Be2 Be7 7. 0-0 a6 8. Kh1 Qc7 9. a4 b6 10. f4 Bb7



A typical set-up for the Sicilian. White's plan is to attack on the kingside. Black's plan is to counter-attack on the queenside while trying to break through in the center.

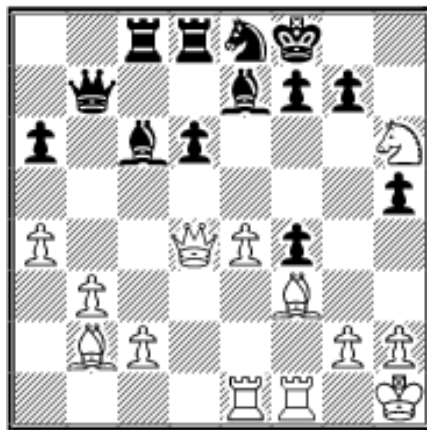
11. Bf3 Nc6 12. Nxc6 Bxc6 13. Qe1 0-0 14. b3 b5 15. Bb2 b4 16. Nd1 e5 17. Qxb4 exf4 18. Qc3 Qb7 19. Nf2 Rac8 20. Qd4 Rfd8 21. Rae1 Ne8 22. Ng4

White is trying to create some sort of activity on the kingside.

22...h5? This move violates one of the basic rules in chess - do not expose your own King without good reason. An alternative would be 22...Bh4 23. Rb1 Bg5 with equal chances for both sides.

23. Nh6+ Typical of Jennifer Shahade's style - aggressive tactical chess.

23...Kf8



24.Nxf7! White continues to play aggressively. This is a good move psychologically in a G/30 time control. It is hard for Black to calculate out all the defensive possibilities in such a short time control

24...Bf6?? Black gets scared and does not capture the Knight. The correct defense would have been 24...Kxf7 25. Bxh5+ Kg8 26. Rxf4 Nf6 with equal chances for both sides.

25. e5!+- The best continuation!

25...dxe5? Giving Black no chance to save the game. 25...Bxf3 26.Rxf3 Qxf7 27.exf6 Nxf6 28.Qxf4 White is up a pawn with good position +-.

26. Nxd8 Once again, the best continuation!

26...Bxd8 26...exd4 27. Nxb7 Bxf3 28 Rxf3+-.

27. Qxe5 Bf6? Giving up more material. 27...Nf6 28.Bxc6 Qxc6 29.Rxf4 and White has a Rook and two pawns for a Knight.

28. Ba3+ Nicely done! White forces the black King to a white square. Then the white Queen can get out of the attack with a check, saving a tempo.

28...Kf7 28...Kg8 29. Qe6+ Kh7 30. Bxc6 Qxc6 31. Qxc6 Rxc6 32. Rxe8+.

29. Qe6+ Now the Queen gets out of harm's way with a devastating check.

29...Kg6 30. Bxc6! The rule of thumb is if you are ahead in material, trade down and simplify the position. In this case, Jennifer simplifies the position as well as winning a piece. (30...Qxc6 31. Qxc6 Rxc6 32. Rxe8 and White is up a rook) **1-0**

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



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