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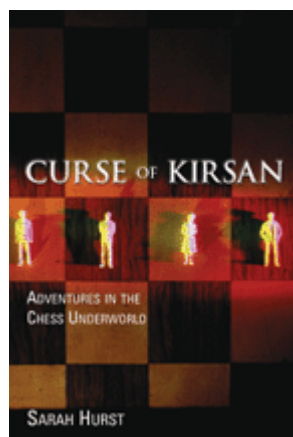
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COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

New World Knockout Champions will be Crowned

The upcoming World Knockout Championship will take place from June 18 to July 13, 2004 in Tripoli, Libya. The defending champion GM Ruslan Ponomarev will not participate to defend the title that he won in 2001, nor will former champions Vishy Anand and Alexander Khalifman. Other notable names who have decided not to compete include GMs Karpov, Svidler, Leko, Bareev, Shirov, Gelfand, Kaidanov, and my sister Judit, etc.

The 2004 Women's World Chess Championship will be held from May 21 to June 8, 2004 in Batumi, Adjara, Georgia. The defending champion GM Zhu Chen from China has announced that she will not defend her title. The following was published on www.chinaview.cn:

The Chinese chess queen is concerned with security of the Caucasian country, which has no direct flight available. Another reason for her retreat is the timetable set up by the International Chess Federation (ICF) was a rush for her. The schedule released in April 16 leaves her only a month to prepare for the tournament which kicks off on May 21.

"It's a hurry! Such an event like the World Championship is much valued. I think I should be told the timetable at least three months prior to the tournament according to the international practice. On the other hand, I'm not sure the security can be assured there," said the 28-year-old.

"I don't think my pregnancy is the decisive factor, but it may help me to make such a decision; which is not easy for a professional player."

The same thing happened to me in 1999. After failing to organize the World Women's Championship for three years, FIDE decided that a world championship must be held almost immediately, while I was in the middle of my pregnancy. After FIDE refused my request for a proper and reasonable delay, I was illegally stripped of my title. FIDE later lost a court decision for this action.

It is unthinkable that a world championship, after not being held for 3 years, will now take place with only about one month notice. Why is it being rushed when it has not been important for three years? This is much too short a time period to properly prepare for such an important title. First of all, the 2-game elimination knockout format is already a gamble. When you factor in a mere 30-day notice, even more luck will be involved in winning the event. The other thing I do not understand is why the defending champion does not get any extra benefit? That shows little respect for the champion.

The other major problem is the security issue. Many players and federations are very concerned about the current situation in Georgia. The following letters were sent to the offices of FIDE:

*FIDE World Championships
27 April 2004*

Dear Mr. President,

It is with great concern that we write to you on the topic of the FIDE World Championship for Women about to take place.

The FIDE World Championship for Women is scheduled 21 May until 8 June in Batumi. As you probably know the present political situation in Georgia is highly volatile. The conflict between the central Georgian government and the government of the autonomous republic of Adjara has risen to the extent that the Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs has issued a statement in which he expresses his concern about the safety of the participants. He has further appealed to FIDE to withdraw the event from Batumi.

The Dutch Chess Federation holds that no official World Championship should be held in such a politically unstable situation. We therefore support the appeal to the FIDE to move the event from Batumi.

We hope that you will be able to let us know soonest that in both instances appropriate steps have been taken.

*Yours respectfully,
ROYAL DUTCH CHESS FEDERATION
Mr. E.M. Enschede, chairman*

Paris 28 of April 2004

*To his excellency Kirsan Ilyumzhinov
FIDE President*

Dear President,

The French Chess Federation is concerned about the civil war situation in Batumi, Adjara.

French Consulate authorities in Georgia are not able to guarantee the security of our representatives.

Thus, the French Chess Federation kindly requests either the World Women's Championship to be postponed or its venue to be moved to Tbilisi in order to provide proper playing conditions and security to the participants.

*Damir Levacic
For the Federal Bureau
Of the French Chess Federation*

Some very good players may not participate because of the reasons stated above. Unfortunately, even with life threatening dangers, most qualified players will choose to participate anyway. Why? Because they desperately need the money and it is a good pay-day for most players (see below), even after paying back FIDE 20% of their earnings.

- Round 1 – \$3,000
- Round 2 – \$4,400
- Round 3 – \$6,400
- Round 4 – \$9,600
- Round 5 – \$16,000
- Runner-up – \$24,000
- Winner – \$48,000

Now, if they can return home safely, the trip will have been worthwhile and they can wait another three years for the next knockout event, perhaps in Fallujah?

News flash!

Just three weeks prior to the WWC, the President of the Republic of Adjara, H.E. Aslan Abashidze has agreed to transfer the 2004 World Women's Chess Championship to Elista, Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, in response to the request of the FIDE President, President of Kalmykia H.E. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.

Are most male chess players nerds?

The following controversial statement was made by *Chess Life* Editor Kalev Pehme in the April 2004 issue (page 17, line 4, third column):

Let's face reality: Most of the males who play chess are nerds. But the females aren't. There is something remarkable about their presence. They are cool, often slinky, hip and they play chess.

I am not sure if this reflects worse on men or women? Yet, it is a very irresponsible remark.

Growing up as a female chess prodigy, I faced extreme difficulties trying to survive and excel in a male dominated game. In the last thirty years, my sisters and I, along with many other top women players proved that we can play chess, too. Yet we want to be respected for our chess playing abilities and not our dress or under-garment sizes.

I have been outspoken about this problem for a long time. When you have young boys such as Radjabov, Karjakin, or Carlsen excel in chess, the public responds with something like: "Have you seen his games? He is an awesome player." However, when you talk about young girls, and I will not mention names, the public says something like: "Have you seen what she looks like? Man, she's hot!" When you are a female chess player, your personal life is magnified tenfold.

I have been insulted, verbally abused, and even physically threatened when I turned down advances from men. I am sure other women players also faced this problem. Yet we are afraid to speak up. I remember after a tournament game in my pre-teen years, I was returning from the tournament hall to my hotel room with my father and coach walking about 30 seconds behind me.

A young man followed me into the building and made some advances that I politely

refused. Then suddenly he wanted to throw me out of the building through a window, I luckily broke free and ran out to the street. And, this was just one of a number of incidents.

Decades later, fortunate to have survived all these experiences, I now have to deal with this same editor and his demeaning, insulting, and humiliating language in various e-mail correspondences. The following letter was sent to the USCF by Mr. Stephan Gerzadowicz, a long-time, well respected chess coach and TD.

*EDITOR, CHESS LIFE
USCF
3054 RT 9W
NEW WINDSOR, NY 12553*

Sir,

With all due respect, I suggest that the USCF find a new editor for CHESS LIFE. The present editor's statement in the April issue that "Most of the males who play chess are nerds" is astounding in its ignorance and lack of professional judgment.

He is wrong. I have been involved in all aspects of chess for 40 years. I have taught hundreds of students in 6 states. I have directed USCF tournaments in 10 states. I have met thousands of chess players. On average they are smarter than the general population, AND also more athletic, more well-rounded and self-confident, with superior social skills. They fit no definition of nerd.

When you are employed by a membership organization you do not use a pejorative to describe the majority of the members. This is Journalism 101. Many of us have spent decades promoting U. S. Chess and the USCF. You need not help us. But don't get in the way.

*Sincerely,
Stephan Gerzadowicz*

Do you agree with the editor or do you agree with Mr. Gerzadowicz? While some male players may be “nerds” according to his definition, most male players are not nerds. I have been involved in chess for over 30 years. I have traveled extensively around the globe to play chess. In the last 15 months alone, during my chess promotional tour from February 2003 until today, I have met more than 20,000 chess players in National Chess Events. I have spoken to many more and signed thousands of autographs. I find that most chess players are NOT nerds and it is wrong and offensive to say so.

I agree with Mr. Gerzadowicz. Many people have worked very hard for decades promoting chess. I understand that nerds are the old common perception of chess players in the past, but that was just a perception. The truth is far from this. Even Hollywood is casting chess in a new light. Chess is now cool, hip and “in.” Chess scenes are now commonplace in many movies. Therefore, it is irresponsible to make such an outrageous statement. Let’s not hurt our own industry with poor judgment.

There are hundreds of celebrities who play chess. Are these people nerds? I wonder how boxers Lennox Lewis and Vitaly Klitschko would respond if they knew that they were considered nerds because they play chess.

2004 Samford Chess Fellowship

The winner of the eighteenth annual Frank P. Samford, Jr. Chess Fellowship is

Rusudan Goletiani, a twenty-three year old chess teacher and Women's Grandmaster (WGM) of Hartsdale, New York. The Samford Fellowship identifies and assists brilliant young American chessmasters by providing the resources and funding needed to enhance their skills and reach their full potential. The total value of the Fellowship is approximately \$32,000 per year. The prize is awarded for one year and renewable for a second year.

The winner was chosen by the Samford Fellowship Committee, consisting of Frank P. Samford III, the son of Samford Fellowship founder Frank P. Samford, Jr., former U.S. chess champion grandmaster Arthur Bisguier and international master John Donaldson. The winner's potential was determined based on her chess talent, work ethic, dedication and accomplishments.

Ms. Goletiani, the first woman to win the Samford, was born in Sukhumi, Soviet Georgia, in 1980. At age ten she won the USSR championship for Girls under age 12. While still in Georgia Ms. Goletiani won a number of other important chess contests, including the World under-14, under-16 and under-18 championships for Girls. In 1999 she finished third in the world championship zonal tournament which qualified her for the Women's World Championship.

In 2000, Ms. Goletiani emigrated to the United States. She won the Pan American Women's Championship in Venezuela in 2003, which also qualified her to compete for the Women's World Championship. Her other chess activities in America include teaching chess to schoolchildren from age five through middle school. Here is a typical Goletiani game:

WGM Rusudan Goletiani - WIM Elena Lopatskaya
Moscow, 1998

1. Nf3 c5 2. e4 Nf6 3. d3 Nc6 4. g3 d5 5. Nbd2 e5 6. Bg2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8. exd5 Nxd5 9. Re1 f6 10. c3 Kh8 11. Nh4 Be6 12. f4 Qd7 13. f5 Bf7 14. Be4 b5 15. Qf3 Rfd8 16. a4 a6 17. axb5 axb5 18. Rxa8 Rxa8 19. c4 bxc4 20. dxc4 Ndb4 21. Ng6+ hxg6 22. fxg6 Be6 23. Bf5! Kg8 24. Qh5 Qd6 25. Ne4 Qd4+ 26. Be3 Qxc4 27. Bxe6+ Qxe6 28. Ng5 Black Resigns

Speaking of the opportunities offered by the Samford Fellowship, Ms. Goletiani said, "I have been dreaming about this since I was six years old."

The Samford Chess Fellowship was created by the late Frank P. Samford, Jr. of Birmingham, Alabama. Mr. Samford was a distinguished attorney and CEO of Liberty National Life Insurance Company (now Torchmark). He was active in civic, business, political, educational and cultural affairs and was an enthusiastic competitor in chess tournaments. The Samford Fellowship provides top-level coaching, strong competition and access to study materials. The Fellowship also provides a monthly stipend for living expenses so that the winners may devote themselves entirely to chess.

Over the last sixteen years the Samford Fellowship has proven very successful. Several of the Fellows have become grandmasters and a few have won the U.S. Chess Championship. Ms. Goletiani's term as Samford Fellow will begin on July 1, 2004. The Fellowship is administered by the U.S. Chess Trust (Ms. Barbara Vandermark).

Generous contributions from Mrs. Virginia Samford and Torchmark Corporation support the Fellowship. The Samford Fellowship is a fitting memorial to an extraordinary man. The dedication, creativity and achievement that marked Mr. Frank P. Samford, Jr.'s life are examples for all chessplayers to admire and emulate.

I have known Rusa since the beginning of the Women's Olympiad Program last year. She is a young girl who has beaten all the odds to make it in America. Growing up in the republic of Georgia, Rusa was ranked as one of the top young women players in the world and is now ranked among the best women players in the United States. Plus she has an impressive list of achievements.

2003 was a break through year for Rusa, she received an invitation to join the US Women's Olympiad Program and she had good results at the World Open. She followed that up by winning a spot for the 2004 US Championship at the US Open in Los Angeles and crowned her successes by winning the prestigious Ladies Continental Championship in Venezuela by a full point to earn a spot in the upcoming World Women's Championship. I am very proud to have the pleasure of helping Rusa with some of her chess training. She is always eager to learn and improve and she is a true fighter. I am confident she will show great promise in the future.

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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