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You Are Part of History!

The title of this column is what I told the attendees at the inaugural Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls!

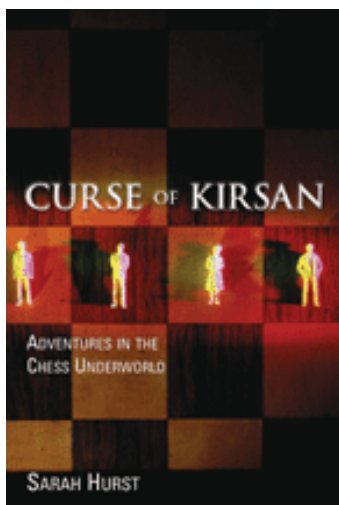
Some of the important traits to be a good chess player are:

- The ability to recognize the problems before you.
- The ability to furnish sound solutions.
- The ability to successfully implement the correct solutions.

COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

These are also good traits to be a successful person in life! I was fortunate to have very early successes in my chess career. At the age of four I won the Budapest Girls' Under-11 Championship with a 10-0 score. I was also lucky to have devoted parents who gave my sisters and me lots of help. That's where our professional chess careers started.

For a long time after that, I spent my entire playing career concentrating on being the best. My sisters and I proved that women can break the gender barrier and that we can play chess as well as men.

Today, I have a different understanding of women's chess. It all started in a discussion from 2002 between Mr. Frank Niro, the former Executive Director of the USCF, and the current USCF President Beatriz Marinello. We talked about the problem of young girls dropping out of the USCF after the third or fourth grade.

I was asked to help find the cause of the problem, supply a solution, and then help the federation fix it. This is a very worthwhile project and it goes hand in hand with helping the USCF promote women's chess in America.

During the following year I traveled to many national scholastic events across the country to promote scholastic chess. I spoke to countless young female chess players, their parents, coaches and members of the scholastic council. I also considered my own experiences as well as my sisters. The following is my conclusion of some of the main problems:

- Many girls do not approach chess the same way as boys. Many of them enjoy chess for its artistic and social benefits instead of the pure brute

force of a chess game.

- Many girls are apprehensive about the lack of social acceptance for female players. Too many people still believe that chess is not for girls. One participant told me that she almost quit chess because boys are intimidated by smart girls. She also said that a few of her teachers thought that it would be better for her to take up tennis or softball because it is more acceptable.
- Many girls do not have equal opportunities to excel or enjoy the game on an equal footing with the boys. There are not enough female trainers who can better relate to the girls on certain levels.
- Many girls do not see enough benefits or rewards for staying with the game. There are not enough tournaments where girls can feel comfortable. Nor are there enough chess scholarships for girls.
- There is a lack of positive female role models for girls. Since there are fewer female players, women are less visible in the chess world. And those that are visible work or compete and do not have time for chess promotions.

One solution that we have implemented is the Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls. It is an invitational event and each state is entitled to nominate one representative under the age of 19. The state representative could either be the winner of the state girls' championship, qualifying tournament, or the top rated girl of that state.

The inaugural annual event was held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida from August 8-13, 2004 at the Wyndham Bonaventure Resort & Spa, alongside the U.S. Open. The winner of the event has the opportunity to earn a four-year full tuition and fees scholarship to the University of Texas at Dallas worth up to \$40,000! There are four additional cash scholarships in the amounts of \$500, \$300, \$250 and \$200. Plus, all players are guaranteed at least a \$100 stipend.



The tournament hall

This invitational tournament was created jointly by Mr. Dewain Barber (American Chess Equipment), Frank Niro (former Executive Director of the

USCF), Paul Truong and me. It is sponsored by the Susan Polgar Foundation and its main goal is to give more opportunities to top young female chess players across the country. The tournament is sanctioned and hosted by the United States Chess Federation. This event also received tremendous support and assistance from Mr. Dewain Barber, Ralph Bowman, Jack Mallory, tournament TD Erv Sedlock and Chief TD Carol Jarecki.



Destiny Sawyer from Oklahoma receives her medallion

Mr. Dewain Barber sponsored the beautiful reception breakfast for 148 people. He and his company also donated the stunning gold medallions for all the participants as well as the winner's plaque.

I was very happy that the inaugural event drew an outstanding 34 players from all over the United States including Hawaii. But in order for many of these young ladies to be invited, they had to qualify through their state scholastic championships or qualifying events. Some even competed in several state scholastic championships, which means that more young girls are participating in local chess. That is exactly our goal.



Presenting the champion's plaque to WFM Roza Eynullayeva,

with Mr. Barber looking on.

The tournament top seed WFM Roza Eynullayeva, from the state of Massachusetts (formerly New York), scored $5\frac{1}{2}$ out of 6 to win the tournament. She yielded only one draw to the second seed of the tournament Alisa Melekhina from Pennsylvania. Alisa (who won the 2004 All Girls' Championship in Chicago), Anjali Datta from Kansas, and Elisha Garg from Northern California all tied for second place with $4\frac{1}{2}$.



Elisha Garg from Northern California

I spent the entire six days of the tournament with the girls, their parents and coaches. I talked, motivated, and gave advice. I also wanted to send a very clear message to the girls; that I care and I want to help them. They need to know that there are people working hard to give them more opportunities. I wanted to show them that they have someone they can admire and try to emulate. Chess can help them in their lives if they stay in the game and fully enjoy it. Don't quit! They are not alone and there are many girls who share their passion for chess.

No matter what they achieve in chess, I would be most proud if they conduct themselves like ladies, be great role models for younger generations, plus take what they learned and apply it to life. Together, they can make a difference, they can make history. In fact, they are part of history.



Susan Polgar with the participants

World Champion Anatoly Karpov was in southern Florida for his induction ceremony to the World Chess Hall of Fame and graciously visited the players on the last day of the event. All the young ladies, their coaches and families were treated to a fun pizza party before the official prize giving ceremony. They had fought hard for six days and it was time to celebrate together. It was a joy to see how well the girls get along with each other; they are like sisters after the game. They enjoyed their new found friendships just as much as their wonderful battles on the chessboard.



World Champion's Anatoly Karpov and Susan Polgar

I decided during the tournament to create two special awards: "Miss Congeniality" for the most friendly, hospitable, and sociable player and "Fighting Spirit" for the player who scored the biggest upset in the tournament. Stephanie Pitcher from the state of Utah received the Miss Congeniality Award and Emily Nicholas from the state of Idaho won the Fighting Spirit Award. Stephanie and Emily received the special awards donated by Excalibur Electronics. I wanted to encourage the girls to be congenial off the board and fight hard on the board and all of them made me very proud.



The Princesses and me!

The next tournament will be held in Phoenix, Arizona during the 2005 U.S. Open. I have added three extra events: the Susan Polgar National Invitational Blitz Championship for Girls, the Susan Polgar National Invitational Chess Training Program for Girls, and the Susan Polgar National Invitational Puzzle Solving Contest for Girls. These additional events are open to the participants of the invitational tournament and all its alumni, giving all the girls a chance to reunite annually. They will forever be part of the Polgar Girls' Club.

Because of the tremendous success of this inaugural event there will be additional scholarships and opportunities for young female chess players all over the United States. I had the opportunity to make history and revolutionize chess for my native Hungary by winning the World Championship and, along with my sisters, the Women's Olympic Gold medals. My sister Judit and I are the only two women in Hungary to earn the grandmaster title.



The girls having fun after the tournament

Unfortunately, the United States has never produced a Women's World Champion, Olympic Champion or grandmaster. I hope that with tournaments and

opportunities like this and the All-Girls National Open Championship sponsored by the Kasparov Chess Foundation, this will change. Soon there will be many more young girls getting involved in chess and staying in chess. Perhaps these wonderful ladies can help show millions of other young girls and their parents the benefits of chess in all aspects of life.

I would like to thank everyone who helped overcome the obstacles of organizing this tournament, as well as the countless parents, coaches and players who gave so much support. There were many chess politicians who objected to this event and I felt as if I had to fight for women's rights all over again. But it did occur because of the tireless efforts and tremendous support from so many individuals. And to the 34 players who took part of this inaugural event, "You are part of history!"



GM Denker (founder of the Denker Tournament of HS Champions), Anatoly Karpov, Susan Polgar and some Denker Tournament participants

Many of the participants in the Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls wrote essays about their experiences in this historic event. To view them, please visit: www.SusanPolgar.com or www.SusanPolgarFoundation.org.

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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