



Chess for Peace

Chess is a game of war, but no human lives are at stake. By nature I am a mild mannered person and I always like peaceful resolutions when conflicts arise. Therefore, when I was asked by Mikhail Korenman to take part in the Chess for Peace initiative with Anatoly Karpov and former President Mikhail Gorbachev, I jumped at the opportunity.

COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Breaking Through

by Susan Polgar

I arrived in Lindsborg, Kansas on Thursday night at around 7PM and Anatoly Karpov arrived slightly after midnight. On Friday, Anatoly was busy with a special engagement regarding his environmental platform, during which time I was busy with the media. President Gorbachev arrived late Friday night for the festivities on Saturday after conducting another event nearby. This was his fourth visit to Kansas and the trip to Lindsborg was the highlight for him.

The spectacular Chess for Peace parade began at 10AM on Saturday. Anatoly and I were in the first car followed by many other dignitaries. Thousands of people were watching the parade and thousands more were taking part in it. There were floats, marching bands, and other cool stuff. Everyone was so enthusiastic.



Shortly after Anatoly and I arrived at the viewing stage near the chess school, President Gorbachev arrived with his daughter Irina, and the rest of his entourage to enjoy the parade. He even suggested they take part in the parade, but unfortunately the secret service would not permit it.

Gorbachev was charming and funny, and when he was presented with a key to the city he jokingly apologized to the citizens of Lindsborg for entering their city illegally the night before, which got everyone laughing.



After this short speech at the conclusion of the parade, he visited the Chess School, and he was very impressed with the enthusiasm of the people. He quickly posed for a few pictures with Mikhail Korenman, Anatoly and me; then we all attended the press conference.

The conference hall was filled with reporters who asked a variety of questions ranging from the situation with the war in Iraq, the future of the world and global warming, to how chess helped him become a great leader and whether chess can really help promote World Peace. He answered all questions with aplomb, class and a sense of humor.



One of my most memorable moments occurred during the press conference when President Gorbachev wanted to have some special tea, which he had requested in advanced. But as he looked around, he only saw one cup. So he turned and offered me the tea. I declined, saying that the tea was for him, but he insisted on me having it and wouldn't take no for an answer. He then prepared the tea for me just the way he likes it. I was so embarrassed, but he kept on insisting. Anatoly smiled and said that it was a zugzwang position and I had no choice but to accept his generous offer.

As the press conference continued, one of the reporters asked what had been the most surprising part of the event and I responded that it was President Gorbachev's demeanor. He was so pleasant, friendly, warm, and thoughtful, etc. When he heard this, he gave me a kiss on both cheeks. I thought he was done, but he said no, the Russian tradition is to kiss the cheeks three times and all the media people busted out laughing.



After the press conference, President Gorbachev toured Lindsborg, while

Anatoly and I attended a special luncheon with members of the local community and some members of the USCF where many wonderful ideas were exchanged.

Following the luncheon we had a short break to freshen up before our match, which was originally planned to be an eight-game blitz match, but it had to be shortened to six games because of time constraints. While we waited for President Gorbachev to arrive to make the first move, Anatoly and I answered questions from the large audience.

President Gorbachev arrived at 4PM and we were ready to start. Anatoly had white in the first game, so President Gorbachev made his first move. As he arrived at the board, he told the audience that this was a wonderful match between two great champions. "I am going to cause some difficulties for the older player," he said and then proceeded to play 1.g4. Both Anatoly and I were shocked. Anatoly thought the President was joking and he commented that he would like to make another move, but the President held firm and insisted there were no take-backs in chess. So off we went.



I achieved a very good position when President Gorbachev, who stood next to us throughout the entire game, suddenly opened two bottles of water and poured it into glasses to serve us. I was astonished that one of the most important human beings on the planet during the last century was serving me water! I was in such a state of disbelief that I froze and lost badly thereafter. Yet it was surely worth it, because President Gorbachev is such an incredible person.

Anatoly won the first game, I won the second, and the third was a draw. I lost the fourth game, drew the fifth, and then managed to win the final game to tie the match 3-3. Unfortunately, the moves were not registered properly because of technical difficulties with the Shahcom sensory board.



President Gorbachev with his daughter Irina and Susan Polgar

After the match we only had about 10-15 minutes to rush back to our rooms to change and then return for a \$1,000 a plate black-tie fundraising dinner, which was sold-out far in advance. However, my business manager Paul and Mikhail Korenman's wife Tamara managed to get Anatoly and I back and forth in no time.

Countless dignitaries attended the banquet and city and state officials presented President Gorbachev with several gifts. I, of course, gave him a signed copy of my book *Breaking Through*. The evening was capped off by a Q&A session between President Gorbachev and Alan Murray (assistant managing director of the Wall Street Journal) while playing a game of chess, during which Anatoly and I went up on stage to join them.



The evening ended with the children of Lindsborg singing a song to honor President Gorbachev, who was also given an honorary Doctor of Law degree from the President of Bethany College. It was a memorable day that I will treasure for the rest of my life. It was a wonderful ending to a wonderful cause! I am privileged and proud to have been a part of it.

On a final note, about 2,500 tickets were sold for the Clash of the Titans II match and the address by President Gorbachev. That's 2,500 tickets for a one day chess event! Thank you Mikhail Korenman! Thank you Lindsborg, Kansas! Also, as a continuation of the Chess for Peace initiative, I will be leading a group of 300-500 American student chess players to Moscow next March to play a friendly match against Russian youths. This will be a very exciting event for our young players and the Russians will then visit America the following year.

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, 103-10 Queens Boulevard, Forest Hills, NY 11375 (Tel: 718-897-4600) or email: PolgarChessInc@aol.com

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