



## The Difference Between Boys and Girls in Chess

*Can female players be as good in chess as male players?*

The answer to the above question is, “yes.”

But then how come very few female players can compete on the same level as their male counterpart? That is the \$64,000 question, yet it seems that very few people are concerned about finding the answer. I will discuss the reasons for this and then I will offer my solutions for change.

### COLUMNISTS

## *Susan Polgar on Chess*

Susan Polgar



## *Breaking Through* by Susan Polgar

### **Social Acceptance**

In general, society does not encourage or really accept the concept of girls playing chess. That makes it difficult to get girls involved in chess and even more difficult to maintain their interest.

### **Family Acceptance**

There is also little family acceptance for girls playing chess. Many parents do not really understand or play chess well themselves. Some do not understand the benefits of their daughters playing chess. Therefore, if the girls are not encouraged to play chess, it is more natural for them not to play at all or to abandon it quickly.



This is similar to the stereotype of boys playing with cars and trucks, while girls play with Barbie dolls. Boys don't play with Barbie dolls because it is generally considered a girl thing. Many parents consider chess as a boy thing.

### **Opportunities**

This point directly links to the social and family acceptance issues. Because of the lack of family and social acceptance, fewer parents actually invest the time and money to encourage their daughters to play chess. And the lack of encouragement or assistance directly leads to fewer girls taking chess seriously.

### **Intimidation**

Because the ratio between girls and boys at tournaments are so skewed (9 to 1 boys vs. girls), girls often get very intimidated. And because girls have fewer opportunities to learn and play it leads to poor results, which leads to discouragement and eventually they quit. In addition, boys are usually much more rough and competitive; many girls are teased and rather than fighting back, they just don't come back.

### **Different approach to the game**

Boys and girls approach the game of chess very differently. Most boys are results-oriented and focus on winning and losing. Girls are very different; they have a greater appreciation for the artistic and social aspect of chess. The problem we face is that most people expect girls to learn the game and enjoy it the same way as boys do. They don't, and we as educators, parents or coaches need to understand this. If we do not recognize this differences in how boys and girls approach the game, how can we find a solution to fix it?



### **Different interest**

If we want to keep girls in chess, we must keep the girls interested in the game. We must find out what makes chess fun for the girls and what motivates them to maintain their interest.

### **Physiological and Physical differences**

As they get older, girls tend to develop faster in many ways. They develop different interests and are often treated differently; they also have different social problems. It is not easy being the “only” female player at a tournament. Many older girls have to fend off unwanted advances and are often subjected to inappropriate remarks.

Being chess pioneers, my sisters and I faced many of these issues while competing in a male dominated chess environment. No female player is immune to this. But I was able to focus on my chess because I was encouraged and supported by my parents, and I was given the opportunities to learn and compete in chess.

## **Chess Development and Improvement**

We do not have specialized chess development and improvement courses geared towards girls, something that addresses the differences between boys and girls approach to the game. The same goes with chess camps or chess classes. The activities and methods of teaching chess are more orientated for boys than girls.



## **Different standard and expectation**

A chess rating is just number that measures the competitive success of a player. Yet, as I mentioned above, girls are much less competitive than boys. So if everything revolves around ratings, can we expect the same success in girls?

## **Career Longevity**

Female players often must interrupt their careers in order to raise a family.

## **Solutions**

Now I will offer some of my solutions to the above problems.

Through my numerous experiences with thousands of young female players and their parents across the country, I discovered that girls do need and want a separate chess environment in which they are comfortable. Only in such an environment can you encourage more girls to stay, play and learn chess at a much higher ratio and level. This would give them a chance to advance and catch up with the boys.

According to the statistics from the USCF, our federation is losing girls at an alarming rate after 3rd and 4th grade. For years the USCF has been unable to correct this problem on its own. I was asked to try and reverse this trend and my solutions have been to:

- Create more fun and exciting events for girls to motivate them to stay in chess longer
- Create a better atmosphere so young girls will be less intimidated
- Create activities that girls would enjoy and appreciate more
- Create more college scholarships as an incentive for girls to achieve better results
- Create a free training program to help the more serious and more talented girls excel to be top-level players
- And much more...



All of the above initiatives have been funded by the Susan Polgar Foundation. My idea has always been that the more girls who successfully play chess, the more motivated they will be to remain in chess, which will increase the amount of good players. It's all about the numbers.

The Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls, in only its second year, had more participants than the Denker Tournament of High School Champions, which has been around for over two decades. We awarded \$155,000 in scholarships (from UTD), prizes and stipends without any funding from the USCF. The recently concluded Susan Polgar National Open Championship for Girls in Corpus Christi, Texas had 212 participants and we awarded laptops computers, chess scholarships to Texas Tech University and countless other prizes. This shows that girls *do* want to compete if they are given the opportunity.



Now, I would like to announce a new initiative that was suggested by a member of the USCF Scholastic Council:

The program is the **Susan Polgar All-Stars Girl's Chess Team**. Its goal is to recognize girls who already excel in chess and it to serve as a motivational tool for others. All girls who qualify for the team will be



nationally recognized, they will receive a special Susan Polgar All-Stars jacket, a special All-Stars Certificate, and an invitation to the exclusive and intensive Susan Polgar All-Stars Girl's Training Program conducted by me personally, similar to the historic 2004 US Women's Olympiad Training Program that I created. This program will greatly assist them in improving their chess skills.



Below are the tentative criteria for the Susan Polgar All-Stars Girl's Team:

Age	Minimum Peak Rating
8 & Under	1500
9	1600
10	1700
11	1800
12	1900
13	2000
14	2100
15	2150
16	2200
17	2250
18	2300

In addition, any girl who is within 50 points from the above criteria can apply for special exemptions to attend this exclusive training program. It will not be an easy task for girls to qualify for the Susan Polgar All-Stars Girl's Chess Team.

There is no stopping any young female player from qualifying for another award such as the Trophies Plus All-America's Chess Team. They can qualify and accept either award or both, it is entirely up to the players who earned it. Therefore, we are not offending any individual young female players.

This is a non-profit initiative to help the USCF and young female players in the United States. As I mentioned above, girls are dropping out at an alarming rate. We need to reverse this trend before we can expect to produce large numbers of good female players. To insist on keeping the same system in dealing with girls is simply irresponsible. Standing still and not doing anything is simply unacceptable to me.



Here are some quotes from USCF members on this issue:

*I support Susan Polgar on this issue. Girls and women drop out of over-the-board chess at such an alarming level. Susan's idea is a start in the right direction. The problem is the great importance placed on the girls' over-the-board rating. Just like any scholastic player, most are not going to become an expert or greater during their life time. True, you need to have the best players to get the coverage or sponsors needed to build stronger and better players ... It could be best if there are girl's only tournaments. The more active girls around, will, in time, make more active women players.* **Douglas M. Forsythe, President - Grand Rapids Area Chess Club**

*As a professional sociologist, I believe that Susan Polgar is correct to say that women are socialized to be more passive, less competitive and more likely to not protest against authority than are their males counterparts ... I can reference a million research articles by social scientist if I need to prove this point, but it is my opinion that Susan's work with young female chess players is of vital importance to insure not only equality of opportunity for women, but also to the future generation of women who can grow up in a society that supports their playing of leisure and tournament chess in a democratic and free society.* **Dennis Doyle of Joliet, Illinois**



*... on the merits of the general issue of ‘women’s chess,’ I think Polgar is right. When our world society is completely gender-neutral then I don’t think there will be a demand for girls’ teams, women’s titles, women’s championships (club, local, state, national, or FIDE), women’s prizes, and so forth. But we’re not at that point yet.” “Petrel,” a USCF member*

*“The Polgar plan offers an additional opportunity to girls and is intended as an encouragement for further participation in all that chess offers ... Additional opportunities, as long as they do not result in prohibiting women from participation elsewhere or imply some innate inequality, are just that – opportunities. “Alaskan Bishop,” a USCF member*

*I can’t cite studies, all I know is what I see as a chess group leader and parent of a chess girl. Somewhere around third to fifth grade, when the genders start to separate socially, girls fall out of chess. The girls I know who have stuck with the game have had all of the following kinds of support...*

- *a parent who’s a strong player*
- *private teaching*
- *another girl who’s a friend in their club*
- *strong parental support – (example: parents of girls tend to go to every single tournament, and they stay all day. It’s awkward for a fifth grade girl to go off to a tournament with a carload of her male peers.)*

*If you are serious about getting larger numbers of girls’ active in chess, you must figure out how to target girls and keep them in the game. Separate programming for girls – at whatever level – is one way to accomplish this. There may well be other ways, but if there are other plans on the table, they’re not widely known. “Akzidenz,” another USCF member*

In conclusion, girls *can* compete equally against boys and they *can* excel in

chess if they are given the same opportunities. Only then we can expect a growth in both numbers and strength. My goal is to eventually close the gap between boys and girls in chess. My next major [girl's event](#) is the **Susan Polgar World Open Championship for Girls under 21** in Las Vegas, Nevada in June 16-18, 2006. More laptop computers and scholarships will be awarded and, of course, much more fun!

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

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