



## COLUMNISTS

## *Susan Polgar on Chess*

Susan Polgar



## *Breaking Through* by Susan Polgar

## An Exciting Month in Chess

### The 2006 US Championship

The 2006 US Championship recently took place from March 1-12 in San Diego, California, and was sponsored by America's Foundation for Chess (AF4C). The 64 participants were split into two groups of 32, with the winners from each group meeting in the final. In the end two former Ukrainians were crowned new national champions: GM Alexander Onischuk of Baltimore, Maryland and IM Anna Zatonskih of Long Island, New York. Onischuk pocketed \$25,000 and Zatonskih \$12,500. Congratulations to the 2006 United States Champions!

The winners of Group A were Onischuk and defending champion WGM Rusa Goletiani, while the Group B winners were Zatonskih and GM Yury Shulman. The latter advanced because of better tie-breaks after a three way tie for first with GM Gata Kamsky and GM Larry Christiansen. It is a shame that Gata and Larry did not have the chance to decide their destinies over the board, but instead had to rely on some luck-of-the-draw tie-break system.

In the first half of the tournament, two players made the biggest news for different reasons. WIM Batchimeg Tuvshintugs scored 3½ points in the first 5 games, defeating GM's Fishbein, Kreiman, and Becerra, while drawing GM Gulko. In the meantime, defending champion Hikaru Nakamura lost to IM Friedel in round 1, escaped with a draw against NM Kleiman in round 2, and lost to WGM Baginskaite in round 3.

In the second half, GM Shulman, who was very steady throughout the first 8 rounds, scoring 6½ points out of 8, was leading Group B until his shocking loss to GM Fishbein in the last round, which allowed GM Kamsky and GM Christiansen to catch up to him. In the meantime, after a horrid start, GM Nakamura reeled off 5 consecutive wins to pull within 1 point from the rock solid GM Onischuk, who quietly had the best overall tournament of any player. Hikaru pushed very hard and came within a hair from catching up. However, GM Onischuk played perfectly to hold on with the black pieces to win Group A and eventually the national title.

The championship offered a \$250,000 prize fund, which is an impressive total amount, but after it is distributed, most players barely broke even, considering it was a twelve day event (9 rounds plus break day and arriving early to adjust to time zone change). Only 18 players received more than \$3,250, while 46 players received less than that. After deducting the cost of airline tickets,

transportation, meals, hotels (around \$150 per night at the tournament's official hotel: Humphrey's Half Moon Inn and Suites) and miscellaneous expenses, perhaps there would be enough left over for a good dinner in San Diego. Also many players had to take approximately 2 weeks off from their jobs.

Another odd thing about the distribution of prizes was that, for an identical score of 6½ points, Yury Shulman, Gata Kamsky, and Larry Christiansen received \$17,000, \$10,300, and \$6,000 respectively. This is quite stunning, as tie-breaks are usually used to determine placements, not the actual prize money, especially with a ratio of nearly three times more.

There have been countless discussions about the two section format, which inevitably leads to some inequity in the playing field no matter how it is divided up. Most of the people I spoke to did not like it. I have heard many fans suggest lowering the number of participants to 32, which is an excellent idea. It would increase the quality of the participants as well as provide bigger prizes for the players. The US Championship should only include the absolute best players in America and having 32 of the strongest players in just one section would be better and fairer in my opinion.

However, the biggest debate among many chess players was the actual championship match format. The first nine rounds were all played with a standard time control. Yet, in the championship final, the players had to play a 2-game rapid match for the national title! It really sounds crazy, but it is true and it raised quite a few eyebrows.

This is simply unthinkable in the serious chess world. What does rapid chess have to do with a standard time control national championship? Nothing whatsoever and the formats should never be mixed! This can be compared to the failed FIDE World Knockout Championship format.

Defenders of the format point out that most of the top players participated in this year's US Championship. So, the format is fine. Well, most of them would also play bullet chess while wearing polka-dot outfits if the organizer was offering \$250,000 in prizes. Most players have to compete to make a living, and others compete because of the prestige of qualifying for the US Championship. But that does not mean that the format is not flawed. The AF4C is a wonderful organization and I very much appreciate what it has done for US chess, but I hope that the folks in charge would seriously consider protecting the integrity of our national title.

### **The Women's World Championship**

Xu Yuhua of China is the very deserving winner of the Women's World Knockout Championship. She defeated Alisa Galliamova of Russia to become the 11<sup>th</sup> Women's World Champion. Xu won the 4-game match 2½-1½, collecting full points in both games with the black pieces. She was one of my pre-tournament favorites along with Humpy Koneru of India. Congratulations to Xu, a new World Champion and a Mom to be!

As I've stated before, the knockout format can be very exciting and it is good in events such as the World Cup, but definitely *not* in the world championship. The world championship is meant to select the best player, and a two-game knockout round, followed by rapid and blitz games, is too much of a gamble and relies too much on the element of luck. FIDE organized a double round-robin tournament to determine the overall world championship in San Luis last year, so I am unsure why the Women's World Championship continues to use the knockout system.

In the first round, quite a number of shocking upsets occurred. Big names such as Lahno, Kosintseva, N., Socko, Zhao, Dembo, Skripchenko and Paehtz all lost.

Zapata, Karen (2218)	1½-½	Lahno, Kateryna (2500)
Hou, Yifan (2269)	1½-½	Kosintseva, Nadezhda (2480)
Ju, Wenjun (2290)	1½-½	Socko, Monika (2475)
Kursova, Maria (2319)	1½-½	Zhao, Xue (2473)
Lujan, Carolina (2346)	1½-½	Dembo, Yelena (2461)
Houska, Jovanka (2355)	1½-½	Skripchenko, Almira (2461)
Ruan, Lufei (2361)	1½-½	Mkrtchian, Lilit (2453)
Ushenina, Anna (2398)	3-1	Korbut, Ekaterina (2427)
Peng, Zhaoqin (2407)	4-2	Paehtz, Elisabeth (2422)

Big upsets also occurred in round 2. Defending champion Stefanova bowed out at the hands of Radziewicz, and Koneru, the top rated player in the tournament, lost in the rapid playoff to Sebag.

Radziewicz, Iweta (2421)	3-1	Stefanova, Antoaneta (2499)
Sebag, Marie (2415)	3-1	Koneru, Humpy (2537)
Peng, Zhaoqin (2407)	1½-½	Cramling, Pia (2515)
Hou, Yifan (2269)	2-0	Zhukova, Natalia (2432)
Ju, Wenjun (2290)	2½-1½	Dzagnidze, Nana (2452)

In round 3, Russian women's champion and the runner-up of the 2001 World Knockout Championship lost badly to Cmilyte.

Sebag, Marie (2415)	4-2	Qin, Kanying (2469)
Cmilyte, Viktorija (2475)	1½-½	Kosteniuk, Alexandra (2514)
Matveeva, Svetlana (2428)	1½-½	Vijayalakshmi, Subbaraman (2479)

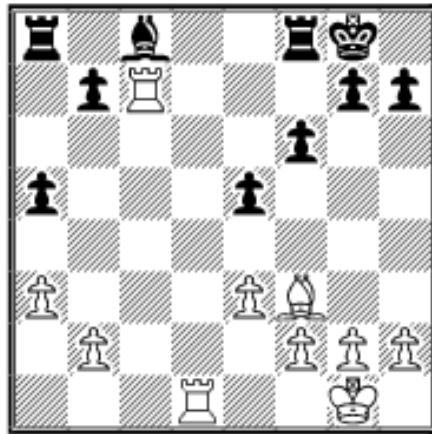
### ***IM Viktorija Cmilyte (2470) – GM Alexandra Kosteniuk (2540)***

Women's World Chess Championship (3), March 16, 2006 [E37]

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 d5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.Qxc3 Ne4 7.Qc2 c5 8.dxc5 Nc6 9.e3 Qa5+ 10.Bd2 Qxc5 11.Rc1 a5 (11...0–0 12.Nf3 Qd6 13.Bd3 f5+=) 12.Nf3**

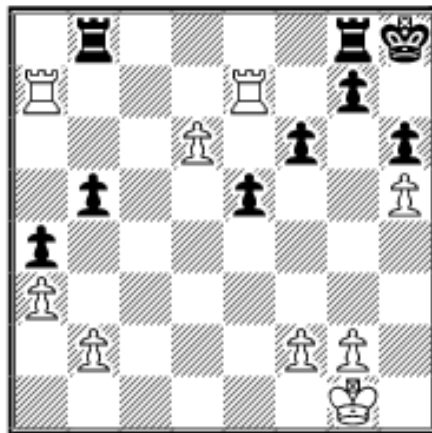


**12...Nxd2?! (A positional blunder. 12...Bd7 13.Bd3 Nxd2 14.Qxd2 d4+=) 13.Qxd2± dxc4?! (Losing more time. 13...0-0 14.cxd5 Qxd5 15.Qxd5 exd5 16.Bb5 Bf5±) 14.Bxc4 Ne5?! (Another positional blunder 14...0-0 15.Bxe6 Qe7 16.Bxc8 Raxc8±) 15.Be2+- Nxf3+ 16.Bxf3 Qb6 17.0-0 0-0 18.Rfd1 e5 19.Qc3 f6 (19...Re8 20.Rd5 f6 21.Rcd1+-) 20.Qc7! Qxc7 21.Rxc7+-**



**21...Rb8? (21...Be6 Sacrificing the pawn to open up some space was the best way to hold on: 22.Rxb7 Rab8 23.Re7 Rfe8) 22.Rd6 b5 23.Ra7 a4 24.h4 Bf5 (24...Kh8 25.h5 b4 26.Rxa4 bxa3 27.bxa3+-) 25.Bd5+ Kh8 26.e4! (White has completely dominated the positional game so far.) 26...Bc8 27.Rf7 (27.Rc6 Bb7 28.Rc7+-) 27...Re8 28.Re7 Rf8 29.Rc6 Bb7 30.Rcc7 Bxd5 31.exd5 Rg8 32.h5 (32.d6 h5 33.d7 Rgd8 34.Rc6+-) 32...h6 33.Rb7 (33.d6 Rgd8 34.d7 Kg8 35.Rc6+-)**

**33...Rgd8 34.Rbc7 Rg8 35.Rb7 Rgd8 36.Ra7 Rg8 37.d6**



**37...Rb6? 38.d7 Rbb8 39.f3 Rgd8 40.Rb7 Ra8 41.Rxb5 Kg8 42.Rb6 Rf8 43.Rbe6 Rad8 44.Kf2 f5 45.Rxe5 f4 46.Re4 1-0**

In round 4, Cmilyte (2475) defeated the legendary Women's World Champion Chiburdanidze (2511) 3-1.

In the semi-final, both favorites moved on to set up a China versus Russia final. WGM Xu Yuhua defeated WGM Matveeva of Russia by the score of 1½-½, while IM

Galliamova of Russia defeated IM Cmilyte of Lithuania by the same score to advance to the final match.

### Chess for Peace

From March 25 through April 1, 2006, I led a group of 54 chess enthusiasts from all over the United States to Moscow, Russia as part of the Chess for Peace initiative. This was the brain child of Mr. Mikhail Korenman, who worked very hard to put together this amazing trip. Part of our activities included touring Moscow and its many famous landmarks such as St. Basil Cathedral, the Church of Christ the Savior, the Kremlin and Lenin's Tomb,

Red Square, Arbat Street, etc.



St. Basil Cathedral

With the help of Mr. Alexander Bah (ED of Russian Chess Federation and Mr. Alexander Kostyev (President of International School Chess Union), our group also visited some of the biggest and most famous chess schools in Moscow such as the Petrosian School of Chess, the Botvinnik School of Chess, and the old Pioneer's Club. They got to see Russian chess first hand.

During the week, our young players competed in four matches against four different Russian youth teams from various clubs. We lost the first two matches 15-11, edged out the third match by a score of  $13\frac{1}{2}$ - $12\frac{1}{2}$ , and decisively won the last match by the score of  $20\frac{1}{2}$ - $4\frac{1}{2}$ .



The Chess for Peace group also got to meet the brand new US Champion GM Alexander Onischuk at the Petrosian School of Chess. He was returning from a tournament in Siberia, Russia and stopped over in Moscow to greet the group, then headed back to Baltimore the next day.

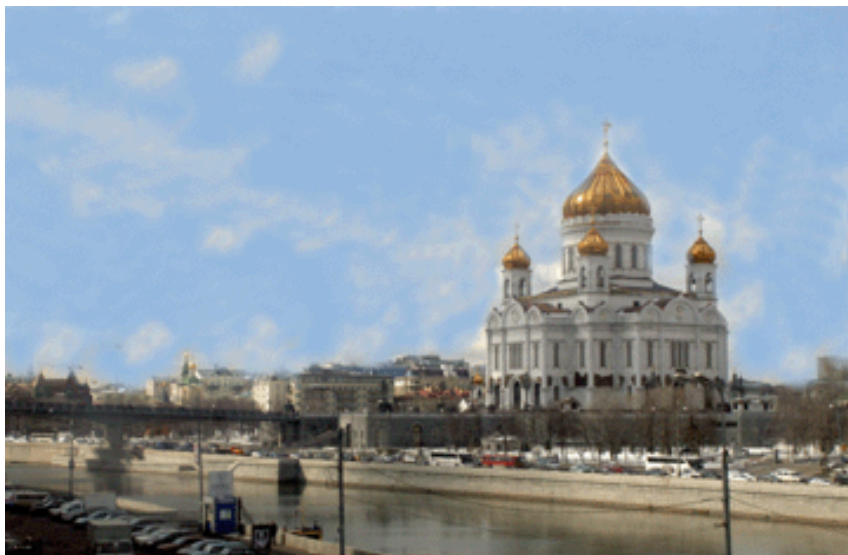




The group was also able to visit with 7-time World Champion Anatoly Karpov at his Peace Headquarters in Moscow. Anatoly was headed to Italy to attend another chess event, but joined super GMs Onischuk (2650), Vadim Zvjaginsev (2670) and Viktor Bologan (2666) and his wife and I for dinner to celebrate Onischuk's success.



On the last day, before leaving Moscow, I gave a 27-board simul at the Russian Chess Federation (27-0). After the simul, everyone received an exclusive tour of the Moscow Chess Museum, which gave me the chance to visit an old friend Mr. Alexander Roshal, Editor-in-Chief of 64, the most famous Russian chess magazine. After an in-depth interview, Mr. Roshal invited me to visit the last round of the very strong Moscow Championship.



The Church of Christ the Savior

I have been to Moscow many times before; however, this trip was very special, as it was not only about chess. It offered our young players a whole new perspective about Russian culture and its rich history, along with priceless memories. Future Chess for Peace trips are planned for St. Petersburg, Russia and my hometown of Budapest, Hungary. We may also travel to Latin America.

Countless pictures from the trip have been posted [here](#) and [here](#). Please feel free to check them out.

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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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