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COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar

Special Women's World Chess Champions

Menchik, Gaprindashvili, Chiburdanidze, and Jun. What do these names have in common? These are the names of four Women's World Champions that have made a special impact on chess and for their countries, each in their own special way.

Vera Menchik, born in Moscow and later residing in England, became the first official Women's World Champion in 1927. Even though she never reached the same level as other top male players, she was the first modern woman to regularly defeat male grandmasters in an era when chess was not so popular among women. Some of her wins included victories over world champion Max Euwe, Sam Reshevsky, Sultan Khan, etc.

Nona Gaprindashvili, from Georgia (part of the former Soviet Union), was the first woman player to achieve good results competing against male grandmasters. She marks the beginning of the Georgian dominance of the women chess scene in 1962 when she became the Women's World Champion by defeating Yelizavyeta Bykova. Some of her best results were equal first at Lone Pine in 1977 (with Grandmasters Panno, Balashov, and Sahovic) and at Wijk aan Zee (B group) in 1987 (with Grandmasters Farago and Winants).

Maia Chiburdanidze, also from Georgia, continued the long tradition of Georgian (and old Soviet) dominance in women's chess by becoming the Women's World Champion after she defeated Nona Gaprindashvili in 1978; she held the title until 1991 when she lost to Xie Jun. Maia had some excellent results during her career, and also met and defeated many male grandmasters. Some of her best results included finishing first at New Delhi in 1984 and Banja Luka in 1985.

Xie Jun became the first Chinese to become a World Chess Champion when she defeated Maia Chiburdanidze in 1991, ending decades of Georgian and Soviet dominance. Asia, and China in

particular, is known for Xiangqi (Chinese Chess), not for Western chess. What Jun has done for chess in China and Asia overall is remarkable. With a formidable career as a Xiangqi champion, Jun made a smooth transition to Western chess and put China in the map as one of the chess powerhouses. Her celebrity in China is often compared to that of Michael Jordan in the US. She has often competed against male grandmasters with good results. Her crucial win against one of the top American grandmasters, Alexander Shabalov, in fact gave China a 1-point victory over the United States in the recent China-US Summit match. Jun is known for her positive, cheerful outlook on life. With her accomplishments in chess, she has cleared a path for a whole new generation of young Chinese girls. And with the support from the Chinese government, I fully expect China to be a dominant force in women chess for years to come.

Since Susan is too modest to talk about herself, I was asked to do it. I have known Susan for more than 16 years, practically half her life. She is one of the nicest people you could ever meet. The same goes for her 2 sisters, Sophia and Judit. This material is from my personal knowledge of and interview with Susan. –Paul Truong

Susan Polgar, the eldest of the three legendary Polgar sisters, became Women's World Champion in 1996 when she defeated both former World Champion Maia Chiburdanidze (in the semi-final match) and the reigning World Champion Xie Jun of China for the title.

What makes Susan different from the other champions? For one, the road she took to get to the pinnacle of chess was quite unique and turbulent. Born in Budapest in April 1969, Zsuzsa Polgar is the proud daughter of two Hungarian schoolteachers, Laszlo and Klara Polgar.

Susan took up the game quite by accident. One day, when she was a little older than 3, Susan came across a chess set in the family house and developed a curiosity for it. At the age of 4, Susan won her first "official" tournament, the Budapest Championship for girls under 11, scoring a perfect 10 wins in 10 games!

Susan's father, Laszlo, a chess enthusiast, understood that his daughter's special potential. He helped her with her chess, but his knowledge was very limited. Therefore, he hired trainers to help her. The Polgars, an average Hungarian family, had to work very hard just to survive. So, they saved as much as possible and gave up everything to give their daughter this opportunity.

Due to the logistical situation and financial hardship of the family, it would have been awkward for her two younger sisters to afford to develop a major interest other than chess. So in a way, Susan paved the road for her two sisters. Susan had to put in a lot of hard work. The more success she had in international competitions, the more financial rewards the family received. Eventually, her parents gave up their jobs to help Susan's career on a full time basis. When Sophia and Judit were old enough to learn chess, Susan helped to train her sisters.

Susan speaks 7 languages fluently. This is a great help when she travels abroad. These languages have also played a big role in getting her published as a chess columnist worldwide. Her first book, published by a German firm, was released when she was only 16.

Right after Susan turned 15, she became the #1 ranked woman in the world, higher than Gaprindashvili and Chiburdanidze, even though she was the youngest player among the top 25 women players in the world. But success did not come easy. There were many pitfalls (such as having to face religious, gender and age discrimination, and much more...) on the way to the top. But Susan worked hard to overcome each and every one of them.

At 16, Susan's rating was higher than Anatoly Karpov at the same age. The following year at the age of 17, Susan became the highest rated player for men or women under 18 years old. That in itself is an incredible achievement.

With a stellar career that includes 4 World Championship titles (1981 World Champion - Girls under 16, 1992 Women's World Rapid Champion, 1992 Women's World Blitz Champion, 1996 Women's World Champion), 6 Olympic Medals (3 Gold, 2 Silver and 1 Bronze), becoming the first woman to ever qualify for the Men's Zonal for the World Championship as well as the first woman to "earn" the overall Grandmaster title, Susan could not have done it alone.

She was fortunate to have the unconditional love and support of her family. Laszlo and Klara basically gave up their lives for Susan and her 2 sisters. Susan, Sophia and Judit not only are close sisters, they are also each other's best friends. They supported each other through the good time and bad. When Susan played Xie Jun for the World Championship title in 1996, Judit and Lev Psakhis were there every step of the way to help. Her parents played a critical role. Many of Susan's friends and supporters also helped her a

great deal in various ways.

So what legacy does Susan want to leave in chess? She will always be known for being a pioneer. She raised the bar for women's chess to a whole new level. When women were rated barely over 2400, she was striving for 2500. When it was absurd to think that a woman could "earn" the overall grandmaster title, she was the first to do so. When it was common for women to play in women-only events, she competed against men on a full-time basis. When it was inconceivable for a woman to qualify for the men's championship cycle, she did it. Each time when someone said that some things were just not possible for a woman in chess, she tried to prove that it could be done. Her dedication, hard work, sacrifice, courage, vision and will power propelled her career to the top.

Susan believes that women can play chess just as well as men if they put in the same work and dedication. I think the Polgar sisters proved that. Her sister Judit has been consistently ranked among the top male players in the world for a number of years. Her sister Sophia achieved one of the highest performance ever in chess (over 2900) in Rome.

Her parents taught her strong values, but with all her success, Susan is still like the girl next door. Her friends never see her as a chess champion, only as Susan, a nice and wonderful human being. Countless people worldwide admire her. She has great respect for past great women champions like Menchik, Gaprindashvili, Chiburdanidze and Jun. She is proud to join these great women in bringing women chess to a whole new level. She is a role model for the next generation of young players to follow. Kasparov, Kramnik, Ponomarev, and Anand. Look out! There may be a young girl somewhere out there right now that has her eyes on replacing you as the next World Champion and that day may come sooner than you think.

FIDE Women's World Champions

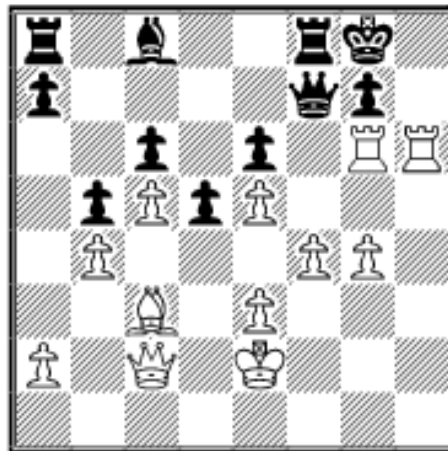
- **1927 - 1944: Vera Menchik, USSR/Czech Republic/England**
- **1950 - 1953: Lyudmila Rudenko, USSR**
- **1953 - 1956: Yelizaveta Bykova, USSR**
- **1956 - 1958: Olga Rubtsova, USSR**
- **1958 - 1962: Yelizaveta Bykova, USSR**
- **1962 - 1978: Nona Gaprindashvili, USSR**
- **1978 - 1991: Maia Chiburdanidze, USSR/Georgia**
- **1991 - 1996: Xie Jun, China**

- 1996 - 1999: Susan Polgar, Hungary
- 1999 - 2001: Jun Xie, China
- 2001 - Chen Zhu, China

The following are some of my games against other World Champions:

GM Susan Polgar – GM Anatoly Karpov (World Champion 1975-1985 and 1993-1999) Roquebrune (Blitz game), 1992

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. g3 Ba6 5. b3 Bb4+ 6. Bd2 Be7 7. Bg2 c6 8. 0–0 d5 9. Ne5 Nfd7 10. Nxd7 Nxd7 11. Bc3 0–0 12. Nd2 f5 13. Rc1 Ba3 14. Rb1 Bd6 15. b4 Qc8 16. Qb3 b5 17. c5 Bc7 18. e3 Qe8 19. f4 h6 20. Nf3 Kh7 21. Kf2 Nf6 22. Ne5 Bxe5 23. dxe5 Ng4+ 24. Ke2 Nxh2 25. Rh1 Ng4 26. Bf3 Qg6 27. Rh4 Kg8 28. Qc2 Qe8 29. Rbh1 Bc8 30. Bxg4 fxg4 31. Rxg4 Kh8 32. Rg6 Qf7 33. g4 Kg8 34. R1xh6



34...a5 35. Rg5 axb4 36. Qh7#

GM Nona Gaprindashvili
(Women's World Champion 1962-1978) - **GM Susan Polgar** Shanghai, 1992

1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 c6 5. e4 b5 6. e5 Nd5 7. a4 Bf5 8. Be2 b4 9. Nh4 bxc3 10. Nxf5 e6 11. Ng3 cxb2 12.

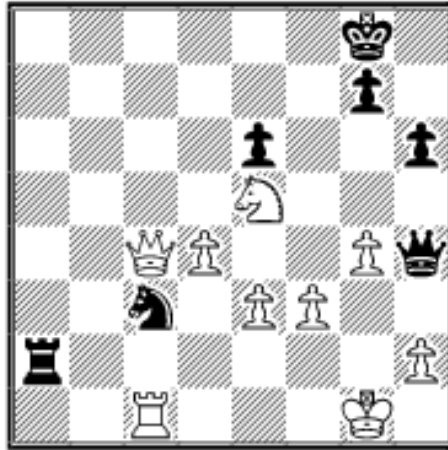
Bxb2 Bb4+ 13. Kf1 c3 14. Bc1 0–0 15. Ne4 Nd7 16. Bd3 f5 17. exf6 N7xf6 18. Ng5 Qd6 19. Qc2 h6 20. h4 hxg5 21. hxg5 Ng4 22. Bh7+ Kf7 23. Qe4 Nxf2 24. Kxf2 Ke7+ 25. Ke2 Qg3



White resigns

GM Susan Polgar – GM Vasily Smyslov (World Champion 1957-1958) Vienna 1993

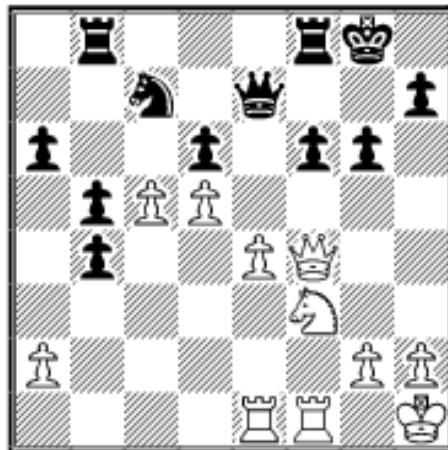
In this position, it seems that Black poses a very strong threat of mating White with Qxh2+. White, however, found an incredible combination to save the mate and won the game.



39. Qxa2 Nxa2 40. Rc8+ Kh7 41. Rh8+ Kxh8 42. Ng6+ Kh7 43. Nxh4 This is a lost position for Black as White is two pawns ahead. Black resigns shortly.

GM Susan Polgar – GM Maia Chiburdanidze (Women's World Champion 1978-1991) St. Petersburg, 1995, World Championship Semi-Final (Final Game to advance to the World Championship Final)

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. f4 0–0 6. Nf3 Na6 7. Bd3 Bg4 8. 0–0 Nd7 9. Be3 e5 10. fxe5 c5 11. d5 Nxe5 12. Be2 Nxf3+ 13. Bxf3 Bxf3 14. Qxf3 Qe7 15. Bf4 Nc7 16. Qg3 Rad8 17. Kh1 Bd4 18. Rae1 f6 19. Ne2 Be5 20. Ng1 a6 21. Nf3 Bxf4 22. Qxf4 b5 23. b3 Rb8 24. b4 cxb4 25. c5



25...Rd8 26. Nd4 dxc5 27. Nc6 Qd7 28. Nxd8 Qxd8 29. Rc1 c4 30. d6 Ne6 31. Qd2 Qd7 32. Qxb4 Ng5 33. Qc5 Re8 34. Rce1 Re6 35. e5 f5 36. a4 Nf7 37. axb5 axb5 38. Qc7 Qxc7 39. dxc7 Rc6 40. e6 Rxc7 41. e7 Nd6 42. e8(Q)+ Nxe8 43. Rxe8+ Kf7 44. Rb8 c3 45. Kg1

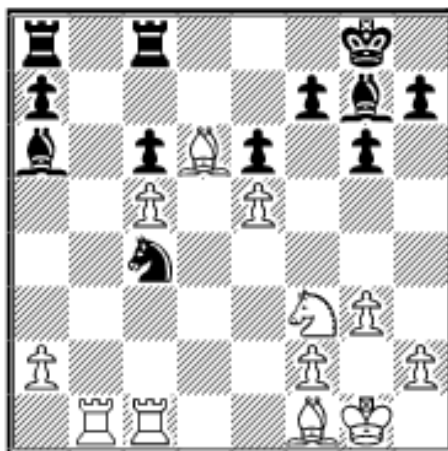
Black Resigns

GM Susan Polgar – GM Jun Xie (Women's World Champion 1991-1996 and 1999-2001) Jaen, 1996, World Championship Final

(Final Game to capture the World Championship Title)

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 g6 3. c4 Bg7 4. g3 0-0 5. Bg2 d5 6. cxd5 Nxd5 7. 0-0 Nc6 8. e4 Nb6 9. d5 Na5 10. Qe1 Nac4 11. Nc3 e6 12. b3 Qf6 13. bxc4 Qxc3 14. Qxc3 Bxc3 15. Rb1 Bg7 16. Bf4 c6 17. dxc6 bxc6 18. Bd6 Re8 19. c5 Nc4 20. e5 Ba6 21. Rfc1 Rec8 22.

Bf1



22...Nxe5 23. Nxe5 Bxf1 24. Kxf1 Black resigns

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:

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