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Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar

Women's Chess in America: A Social Dilemma

Last month, I discussed my opinion about the differences in chess for men and women, especially in America. Now I would like to share with you my ideas of how to correct these problems and raise the bar for women's chess in the United States.

1. Change the Image of Chess for Girls in America

Image is everything and right now, the image of girls playing chess in America is not too popular. We should start with the next generation, the young girls of America today. Change the image of chess in general for them. Let them know that there is nothing wrong with girls playing chess. "Chess is cool!", "Chess is fun!", "Chess is fantastic!", "Let's show the boys what girls are made of!", "You can do it!", "It is OK to be beautiful and smart at the same time!". Those are the things we should tell our youngsters.

Let's face it, until recently, this was the same problem for boys as well. Boys who play chess in America are considered nerds, geeks, social outcasts, etc. How many movies have we seen where this has been portrayed, where the school chess teams consist of the biggest losers, the most made fun of characters, the ones who button their collar buttons, the ones who have pen organizers in their pockets? All of a sudden, with the popularity of a movie like Harry Potter and with famous athletes such as Latrell Sprewell (New York Knicks superstar guard) and other celebrities stating that they enjoy chess, chess all of a sudden becomes "cool".

If you think the social pressure for boys is tough, it is equally tough for girls, if not more so. If we want to build champions, we have to help them. If a hit movie from Hollywood and the admission of a New York Knicks player can change the image of chess for boys in America, we can do the same for our young girls. And why not start now?

2. More Chess Promotions for Girls by the Top Women

Players

Our young girls need role models. They need someone to guide them, lead them, show them and set good examples for them. A few names that come to my mind are Irina Krush, Jennifer Shahade, Elina Groberman, etc., some of the top young female players in America today. There are many more. They are very valuable assets for the future of chess in America for the next generation. They are role models for younger girls.

I was very flattered when I read Jennifer Shahade's recent interview in *Chess Life* where she stated that the Polgar sisters were an inspiration to her. I would be happy to help them lead the way. In fact, I was in a way quite disappointed that I have not been asked to do more to promote chess for women in America in the past even though I have been living in the New York for a number of years. At this moment, I think we are going in the right direction under the leadership of Frank Niro, the Executive Director of the USCF. FM Paul Truong and I are thrilled to help him and USCF achieve this goal.

There are other women who are active and doing a good job in promoting chess in general such as Yvette Seirawan, Beatriz Marinello, Alexey Root, Shernaz Kennedy, etc., just to name a few. But we need more people like them. There should be no reason why American girls cannot compete at the same level as girls in Russia, China or other chess elite countries.

3. More Support from National and State Organizations

Our young girls need a lot more support. The Samford scholarship is awarded each year for the most promising junior. Has there ever been a single girl who received this? Frankly, if you compare the pure statistics among the top juniors in America, no girls deserve it. I understand that it is unfair to give it to promising girls when they don't qualify and disregard the talented boys. But why not help both? Solution? Why not have separate awards? In fact, why stop at just one junior per year? Why not have national training programs for our youngsters? It costs very little if it is done right without bureaucracy.

In addition, there can be similar programs and supports at the state level. I am sure if we put our efforts and work together, each state can find some sponsors to put up money for various activities for our young girls. It can be done if it is important for us. This has been long overdue. I think it is time to do something about it.

4. Separate Chess Training for Girls in Some Capacity

This is very important. When girls and boys reach a certain age, “distractions” will occur. In order to be a champion, the concentration level and commitment has to be maximized. By putting boys and girls together in all training sessions, it is harder to accomplish this.

In addition, there is the intimidation factor. The girls are not as good as the boys at the moment. Therefore, many girls would feel less intimidated if they are at least given a chance to catch up. This goes back to the first issue I stated. Due to the lack of social acceptance, a lot fewer girls are playing chess than boys and their level of play is also lower. Having some separate training programs will help build their confidence and give them a better chance to succeed. Once the acceptance and the level of play increase, we can slowly merge the programs in some capacity later.

5. More Opportunities for Girls

If we go strictly by ratings to receive invitations to special tournaments, then girls will have very little chance to compete to gain confidence and valuable experience. We can create special tournaments and give our top rated young girls a chance to compete and learn. It does not cost much if it is done right and it can bring tremendous results.

6. Financial Support and Incentives

Has anyone ever asked why for so many years women’s chess in the former Soviet Union and now in China is so much more superior to the U.S.? One of the answers is because they have financial support. It is hard if not impossible to make a living to pay the rent and be a champion at the same time.

I remember some years ago, a large sum of money was put up for the first computer program that could beat IM David Levy. Countries like England and France also had substantial incentives for the first player to achieve the grandmaster title. Has anyone checked the titled players list from England and France lately? I guess you can say it worked out quite well.

I am not saying we need an enormous dollar grant or incentive to accomplish this. But there should be some incentives out there for our youngsters. How many promising juniors (girls and boys) have given up chess when they reached a certain age because there was simply too little incentive for them to continue. I know many who did that. Why spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to become a GM so you can barely make \$20,000 a year? Some say they play chess for the love of the game. It is a noble concept but the love of

the game does not pay the rent or put food on the table for your family.

7. Patience

It took approximately a decade for China to see phenomenal results in women's chess. Two of the last three Women's World Champions (Xie Jun and Zhu Chen) are from China. Even with an incredible amount of support from a national system, it took time to make a difference. If we want to change chess for girls and women in America, we have to make a long term plan and stick with it. We need a true commitment and we need to be patient. You cannot build Rome in one day but it does not hurt to start now.

8. Stop the Politics

There is too much chess politics at every level, from local clubs, state or regional organizations, USCF to FIDE. Have we lost sight of our objectives? When was the last time that the US sent a Women's Team to the Olympiad with a realistic chance of bringing home the Gold? I urge everyone to put off his or her differences and work together for the common good of chess in America, especially for our youngsters, the next generation.

So what is my conclusion? There is no reason why the United States cannot develop a successful chess program and system for women to compete with other chess elite countries. Look at how much grandmaster Yasser Seirawan has done for chess in America as well as for the world. He needs help. My goal is to help improve chess for women (and youth). I hope with the cooperation and support from the USCF and other various organizations, we together can make it happen.

Many of the things that I just mentioned also apply to chess for boys. I will discuss general chess issues in the future, maybe in a different forum.

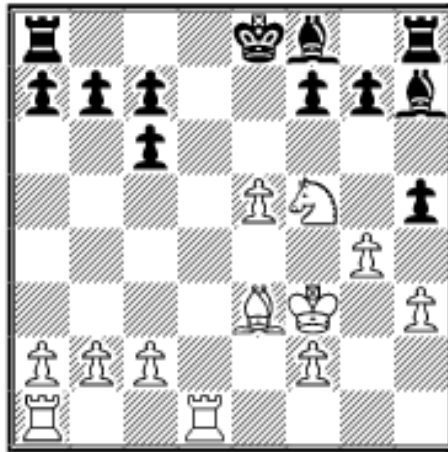
I include three games by three top women players against top male grandmasters. You can be the judge whether women can play chess or not.

GM Judit Polgar – GM Gary Kasparov (Russia vs. The World 2002)

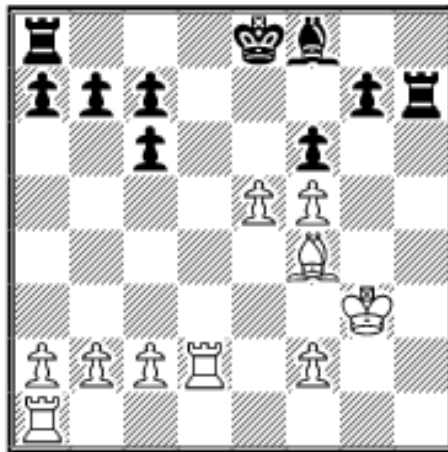
The first time Kasparov has lost to a woman.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nf6 4. 0-0 Nxe4 5. d4 Nd6 6. Bxc6 dxc6 7. dxe5 Nf5 8. Qxd8+ Kxd8 9. Nc3 h6 10. Rd1+ Ke8 11. h3

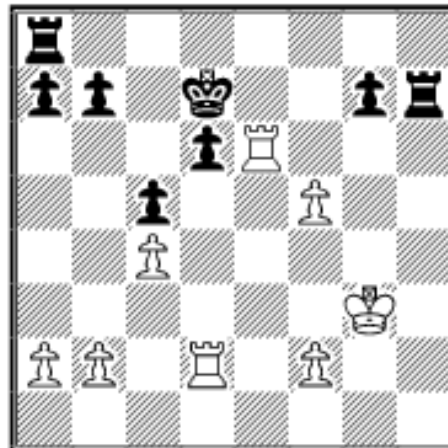
**Be7 12. Ne2 Nh4 13. Nxh4 Bxh4 14. Be3 Bf5 15. Nd4 Bh7 16. g4
Be7 17. Kg2 h5 18. Nf5 Bf8 19. Kf3**



**19...Bg6 20. Rd2 hxg4+ 21.
hxg4 Rh3+ 22. Kg2 Rh7 23.
Kg3 f6 24. Bf4 Bxf5 25.
gxf5**



**25...fxe5 26. Re1 Bd6 27.
Bxe5 Kd7 28. c4 c5 29.
Bxd6 cxd6 30. Re6**



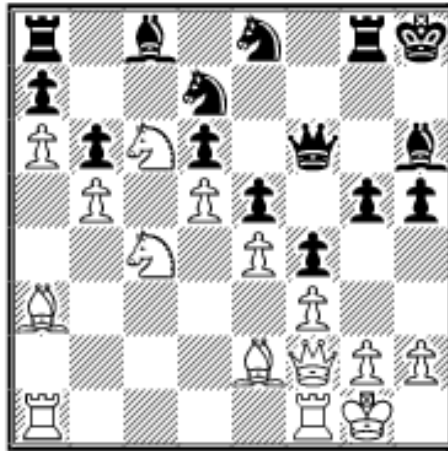
**30...Rah8 31. Rxd6+ Kc8
32. R2d5 Rh3+ 33. Kg2
Rh2+ 34. Kf3 R2h3+ 35.
Ke4 b6 36. Rc6+ Kb8 37.
Rd7 Rh2 38. Ke3 Rf8 39.
Rcc7 Rxf5 40. Rb7+ Kc8
41. Rdc7+ Kd8 42. Rxd7
Kc8 Black Resigns**

**GM Alex Shabalov – GM
Jun Xie (USA vs. China Summit 2002)**

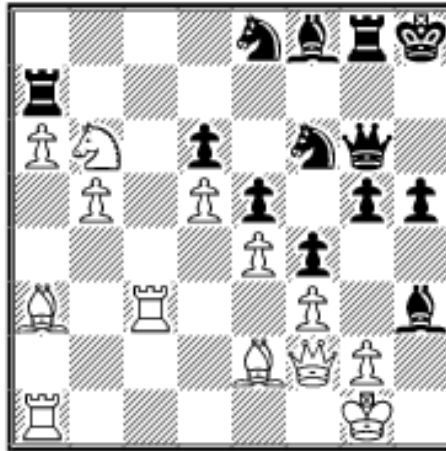
A beautiful game by Xie Jun, a key win to help China defeat the US by one point.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nf3 0–0 6. Be2 e5 7.

0-0 Nc6 8. d5 Ne7 9. b4 c6 10. Nd2 cxd5 11. cxd5 Ne8 12. Nc4 f5 13. b5 Kh8 14. a4 Ng8 15. Ba3 f4 16. a5 h5 17. a6 b6 18. Na2 Ngf6 19. f3 g5 20. Nb4 Nd7 21. Nc6 Qf6 22. Qe1 Rg8 23. Qf2 Bh6



24. h3 Bf8 25. Rfc1 Qg6 26. Rc3 Ndf6 27. Nxa7 Rxa7 28. Nxb6 Bxb3

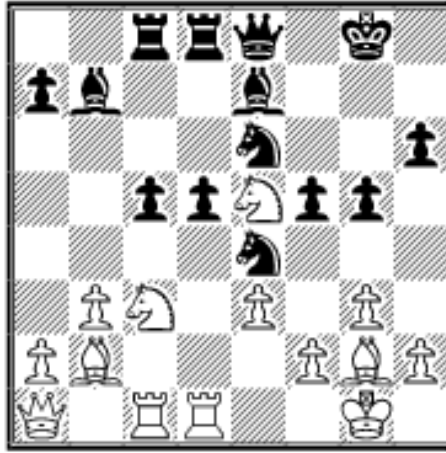


29. Nc8 Rag7 30. gxh3 g4 31. hxg4 hxg4 32. fxg4 Nxg4 33. Bxg4 Qxg4+ 34. Kf1 Rh7 White Resigns

GM *Lajos Portisch* - GM *Maia Chiburdanidze* (Veterans - Women 1998)

A former Women's World Champion dismantling a legend.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6 4. g3 Ba6 5. b3 Bb4+ 6. Bd2 Be7 7. Bg2 Bb7 8. 0-0 d5 9. cxd5 exd5 10. Nc3 0-0 11. Qc2 Na6 12. Rad1 Qc8 13. Bc1 Rd8 14. Bb2 h6 15. Qb1 c5 16. e3 Nc7 17. Rc1 Qd7 18. dxc5 bxc5 19. Rfd1 Ne6 20. Qf5 Qe8 21. Ne1 g6 22. Qb1 Rab8 23. Ne2 Ne4 24. Nd3 g5 25. Qa1 Rbc8 26. Nc3 f5 27. Ne5



**27...h5! 28. f3 Nxc3 29.
Bxc3 d4 30. Ba5 Rd5 31. f4**



**31...Rxe5 32. Bxb7 Rxe3
33. Bd2 gxf4 34. gxf4 Re2
35. Qb1 Qd7 36. Bf3 d3 37.
Bc3 Re3 38. Kf2**



**38...Rxf3+ 39. Kxf3 Qd5+
40. Kg3 Nxf4 41. Rg1 Kf7
42. Rce1 Rg8+ 43. Kxf4
Bd6+ 44. Be5 Bxe5+ 0-1**

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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