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Women in the Spotlight

Let me begin this article by congratulating three fine young women players: GM Antoaneta Stefanova, the 2004 Women's World Champion; IM Alexandra Kosteniuk, the 2004 European Women's Champion; and WIM Jennifer Shahade, the 2004 US Women's Champion.

GM Stefanova of Bulgaria became the 9th Women's World Champion by soundly defeating WGM Kovalevskaya of Russia by the score of 2½-½ in a four game match. She struggled in the middle of the event, having to win three matches in tiebreak playoffs, however; she really hit her stride in the semifinal and final. In the semifinal, Stefanova defeated former Women's World Champion GM Maia Chiburdanidze of Georgia. Below is the table of her results during the World Championship:

- Round 1 Stefanova **2-0** Tan (China, 2250)
- Round 2 Stefanova **1-1** [tiebreak 1-1 / 1-1 / 1½-½] Vasilevich (Ukraine, 2386)
- Round 3 Stefanova **1-1** [tiebreak 1-1 / 1-1 / 2-0] Zhukova (Ukraine, 2471)
- Round 4 Stefanova **1-1** [tiebreak 1½-½] Dzagnidze (Georgia, 2452)
- Round 5 Stefanova **1½-½** Chiburdanidze (Georgia, 2502)
- Round 6 Stefanova **2½-½** Kovalevskaya (Russia, 2467)

There are many young women players who showed promise in recent years and will be forces to be reckoned with in future women's world championships. Five who stand out are: GM Koneru of India, IM Kosteniuk of Russia, WGM Dzagnidze of Georgia, IM Lahno of Ukraine, and WGM T. Kosintseva of Russia.

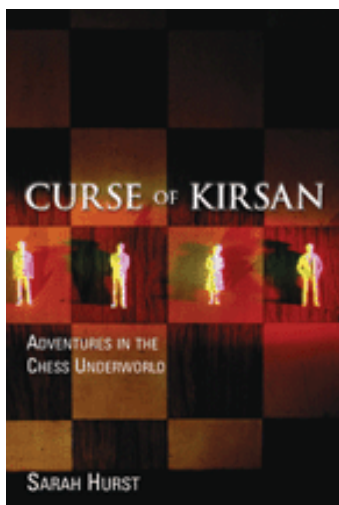
IM Alexandra Kosteniuk tied for first with WGM Zhaoqin Peng of the Netherlands (via China) in the recent 2004 European Women's Championship. Both scored 9½ points in 12 rounds and Kosteniuk beat Peng in the playoff to win the title. Each finished ahead of a number of impressive players such as the 2004 Women's World Champion GM Stefanova and 2003 European Women's Champion GM Cramling. IM Kosteniuk earned a GM norm for her performance. When the next rating list is published in early July, she is expected to jump from #15 in the world to #5, behind GM Stefanova at #4 and GM Xie Jun at #3.

On the US front, WIM Jennifer Shahade convincingly won the 2004 US

COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

Women's Championship with the score of 4½-6. She started out with 4½-5 and won the championship with one round to spare; only her last round loss to IM Irina Krush made the final score closer. This is the third consecutive year that Shahade either tied for first in the US Women's Championship or won it outright.

Last year, Shahade had the best performance rating among all the women players in the US Championship, nearly 200 points ahead of the playoff winner WIM Anna Hahn. She also finished first on all tie-breaks. Unfortunately, due to typical Swiss system pairings, in the last round Shahade was paired against a 2600+ opponent, while Krush was paired against a 2500+ opponent, and Hahn was paired against a 2100+ player. Shahade lost a hard fought battle, while Krush drew and Hahn won, creating a dramatic three-way tie for first place.

Rather than going by performance ratings or tie-breaks it was decided to use rapid games to determine the championship and a spot in the Women's World Championship. Shahade lost her rapid games and Hahn won the tournament. Although Hahn performed fantastically in the playoff and beat both Krush and Shahade, I cannot understand why rapid games are used to determine a traditional time control event.

I have spoken to hundreds of people about this situation and almost everyone agreed that rapid games are not the proper way to determine such an important and prestigious title. I truly hope that this will be changed in the future. There is nothing wrong with playing rapid games to determine who takes home the actual trophy, but not the serious cash prizes and especially not the national title. It cheapens the value of the title because it does not truly represent the best chess player; it only represents the best rapid player.

We should not financially penalize chess players based on one or two rapid or blitz games. The other major problem is sometimes a blitz or rapid game may also determine a qualifying spot to the World Championship or the Olympiad, which makes it an even more absurd way to choose the winner. While it may create some onsite excitement, it is not in the best interest of the US National Teams.

In my opinion, the fairest solution is a combination of tie-breaks and/or tournament performance ratings to choose the winner. I also have no objection with a playoff system that utilizes the same time control, not rapid or blitz. You can also declare them co-champions, but the playoff winner (at the same time control) would qualify for the Olympiad or the World Championships.

Below is the final standing of the 2004 US Women's Championship. Out of 42 games in the tournament, there was only 1 draw! The other 41 games all produced decisive results (98%). I do not recall any other tournament that produced similar results.

- 1. WIM Shahade 4½-1½
- 2-3. WGM Zatonskih, IM Krush 4-2

- 4. WIM Battsetseg 3-3
- 5. WGM Goletiani 2½-3½
- 6. WFM Abrahamyan 2-4
- 7. WGM Belakovskaia 1-5

FIDE Knockout World Chess Championship

It was shocking to see that an official world chess championship can be held in a country that excludes certain participants. It is disingenuous to say that “all players are welcome,” but if you happen to be Jewish, you cannot bring your family or Jewish coaches with you. I was proud that many players spoke out and boycotted the tournament, thereby relinquishing a decent payday to stand up for their principles. This is 2004; I thought the days of discrimination were over.

My other problem is with the knockout system format. This event should not be called the World Chess Championship. It should be called the World Knockout Chess Championship. You cannot compare the recent knockout championships with the thrilling championship matches from years gone by, which are still talked about today. Those world champions had a distinct aura and have been immortalized. Are the knockout events as memorable? Do the fans bother about who wins or loses the draw odd sudden death blitz playoff games that determines a new World Champion? And if the answer is no, is this in the best interest of chess?

Young American Sensation

GM Hikaru Nakamura is no stranger to the spotlight in chess. At the age of 16, he has some incredible achievements on his resume. His strength and rating have continued to rise steadily – to nearly 2600 FIDE. His opening preparation and chess knowledge is very good for his age, but his real strength is his energy, fighting spirit, and fearless aggressive style. Still, not many could have predicted his current performance in the FIDE Knockout World Championship.

In the first round, he scored an upset against GM Sergey Volkov (2629) of Russia. In the second round, he scored his second upset against GM Aleksei Aleksandrov (2668) of Bulgaria. In the third round, Nakamura was paired against GM Alexander Lastin (2622) of Russia, and once again emerged victorious. Three matches against three 2600+ GMs and three upset victories! His quest to become champion finally ended at the hands of super GM Michael Adams (2731) of England, as Nakamura lost ½-1½.

Nevertheless, it was quite a remarkable achievement for this dynamic young man. I hope the USCF will offer more support for such young talents in the future. Nakamura will be around for many more years to come, but it is upsetting to see an incredible talent like this denied the opportunity of qualifying for the 2004 US Men’s Chess Olympiad team. Some critics unfairly said that Nakamura had his chance to qualify at the 2003 US Championship, which is very disingenuous. For one thing, he was a year and half younger at that time and was not as strong as he is today. In addition, it was never announced prior to last year’s tournament that it would be the official Olympiad qualifying tournament.

This was the same argument that I made for the women's team and luckily for us, a few sponsors stepped in to support the 2004 US Women's Championship, which also served as the official Olympic qualifying tournament; many thanks to all the sponsors for their support.

Bear, Delaware

On June 19, 2004, I traveled to Bear, Delaware for a chess exhibition. The event was held at the beautiful Bear Public Library. I did not know what to expect, but as soon as I walked into the building I saw a big sign with my name on it. Richard, the organizer, greeted me warmly and a room full of people arrived early to ensure a seat for my lecture. Soon there were no empty chairs and many people had to stand or sit on the floor. There is no greater feeling than to connect with a keen group of chess enthusiasts.

Immediately following the 90-minute lecture was a 40-board simul against opponents of all ages and levels, from novice to master. There were many exciting games as every player gave their best. In the end, I was lucky to survive and win all my games. The library was kind enough to stay open late so that we could finish the event with an autograph session.



Book signing in Bear

I have to give a lot of credit to the organizers for putting together a fantastic event. They were able to get local sponsorship, assistance from volunteers, and local media coverage. They even created a cool commemorative T-Shirt for the occasion. In a little more than a year, the folks at Bear have managed to build their chess club membership to about 130 members. Two thumbs up to Bear, Delaware!

Origins Gaming Convention

From June 24-27 I attended a gaming convention in Columbus, OH that was held to promote the USCF and US chess. Approximately 15,000 game lovers attended this amazing event. Just about every game imaginable was available and people from ages 5 to 85 competed against one another 24 hours a day.



The audience at the Origins Gaming Convention

Chess made its debut entry this year and there were quite a number of gaming companies promoting various forms of chess, including live chess. Mr. Grant Perks was the USCF representative. It was very interesting to see the level of enthusiasms for all types of games. The next gaming convention will be in August in Indianapolis, Indiana and close to 30,000 people are expected to attend.

Interview with Judit Polgar

1. What is your opinion about FIDE holding the World Championship in Libya?

I was very surprised by the fact that FIDE originally wanted to organize the World Championship in two different venues, Libya and Malta. Yet I have come to realize that sooner or later, FIDE officials can always produce a worse decision than their previous one. In the past FIDE has created many “surprises” for the chess world, but what happened with the World Championship is simply unbelievable. It is shocking that an International Federation can subject their members to such decisions, thereby making it impossible for some great players to participate in the World Championship. When FIDE chose Libya as the venue, it is clear they didn't care that very few of the top players were willing to participate.

2. Why did you choose not to participate in this World Championship? Was it because of the Libya situation?

I am expecting a baby so that is the main reason, but I wouldn't participate in any case. I can't condone the discrimination that is in effect during this year's World Championship in Libya.

3. What are your plans after August? How soon do you think you will participate in major events? Will you be at the Chess Olympiad?

You never know when I will show up again, but I will come back :)

4. Would you want your children to have a chess career in the future?

It seems too far away to seriously think about this question.

5. What is your opinion of the knockout format and the faster FIDE time controls? Do you think it cheapens the respectability and credibility of the champion?

The knockout system can be very interesting for the public and it does not necessarily create a lower quality event. However, the 90 minute time control can lower the quality of the games. I don't really understand FIDE's decision about the time controls.

6. Who do you think will win this World Championship?

I would think Topalov or Adams. (They are the two top rated players in this event)

7. Are you following the games of this World Championship and what is your opinion of the quality of the games?

I do follow some games, but I was only briefly looking at them so it would be unfair to comment on the quality.

8. Who do you think is the favorite in the Leko-Kramnik match?

That is a hard answer and I would not even venture a guess.

9. Tibor Karolyi authored *The Princess of Chess* the new book about your games – yet neither consulted nor interviewed you in the process of writing the book. Have you read the book? What do you think of the games that were selected and their annotations?

I would rather discuss other issues. I hope readers will enjoy my games and I am proud of the fact that I have so many interesting games.

10. Are you planning to write an autobiography anytime soon?

I have thought about it, but it will not happen in the near future. I hope one day I will write such a book.

11. Who do you think is the strongest player today and what can be done to better popularize chess?

Probably Anand and Kasparov; generally it would help chess if we had an organization that could arrange a fair tournament cycle and have stable events.

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, 97-09 64th Road, Rego Park, NY 11374 (Tel: 718-897-4600) or email: PolgarChessInc@aol.com



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