



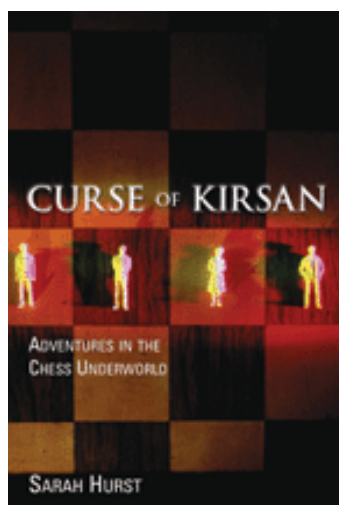
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COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

A Dream Come True

The US Women's Olympiad Team Makes History at the 36th Chess Olympiad!

Two years ago we began to dream of the impossible. In the long history of the Chess Olympiad, the US Women's Team has never captured a single medal. A few teams made it to the top ten, but always fell short of a medal. That all changed when, in 2002, the current President of the United States Chess Federation Ms. Beatriz Marinello called and told me that Mr. Frank Niro, then the Executive Director, would like to meet with me.

I accepted and we made arrangements to meet at my chess center in Queens, New York. During this meeting, Mr. Niro asked me to help promote the USCF and US Chess. We discussed many different projects, one thing lead to another, and the idea of the US Women's Olympiad Program was born. I knew that this was a very difficult project, which would require professional help, and that I needed to recruit the right talent to get this project off the ground, get it running, and complete the mission.

The only person I knew who could do this was my friend Paul Truong. He was the only candidate on my list and he agreed to help. The first piece of the puzzle was solved, but we also needed sponsors to help finance the project. Frank Niro and Paul Truong attracted many sponsors to come on board such as ChessBase, IBM, WCN, the USCF, the US Chess Trust and a number of others.

Greetings from the 36th Chess Olympiad
Calvia, Spain - October 14 - 30, 2004



Greetings from the 36th Chess Olympiad

Yet that was not enough, we needed more help, and that was when we approached Mr. Michael Khodarkovsky, VP of the Kasparov Chess Foundation. Michael liked the idea but he had to present it to Garry Kasparov and the board of the Kasparov Chess Foundation. After careful consideration, Michael agreed to participate in this project as a coaching consultant and the Kasparov Chess Foundation became our main sponsor.

That was when the Women's Olympiad Program officially started, approximately 18 months ago. During that time, we were very fortunate to have the unanimous support from Dr. McCrary and his board which include Dr. Frank Brady, Dr. Joe Wagner, Steve Shutt, Bob Smith, Frank Camaratta, and GM Arnold Denker.

At various times during the ensuing months, the members of the US Women's Olympiad Program received coaching help from Garry Kasparov, Boris Gulko, Gennady Zaitchik, Sam Palatnik, Alexander Chernin, and Michael Khodarkovsky himself. After a grueling year and a half of hard work, sacrifices and dedication, it was time to face the music. We went to the Olympiad knowing that we had a chance to make history. But we also knew that there would be many other stronger and more experienced teams.



Calvià at night

The 36th Chess Olympiad took place from October 14-30 in Calvià, Spain on the Island of Mallorca. There were 87 teams participating from all over the globe in the strongest Women's Olympiad ever. The pre-tournament team ranking was: 1) China 2) Russia 3) USA 4) Georgia 5) Ukraine 6) India 7) Poland 8) France 9) Bulgaria 10) Romania. There were a total of 14 rounds and the US team faced one of the toughest schedules. Our round-by-round opponents were:

- Round 1: Venezuela (Won 2½-1½)
- Round 2: Lithuania (Won 2½-1½)
- Round 3: Slovenia (Won 2½-1½)
- Round 4: Russia (Lost 1-2)
- Round 5: Sweden (Tied 1½-1½)
- Round 6: Georgia (Won 2-1)

- Round 7: India (Tied 1½-1½)
- Round 8: Armenia (Won 2-1)
- Round 9: Poland (Won 2-1)
- Round 10: China (Won 2-1)
- Round 11: Slovakia (Won 2-1)
- Round 12: Hungary (Won 2½-½)
- Round 13: France (Tied 1½-1½)
- Round 14: Vietnam (Won 2½-½)

At the end of the Olympiad, our team came in second behind China and ahead of Russia. We tied with China in match points with 11½-14 but we had one less loss. We beat them head to head and we also beat them on Bucholz points. This was the first ever medal in the Women's Olympiad for the United States.



The Silver Medalists: (l-r) Susan Polgar, Anna Zatonskih, Jennifer Shahade, and Irina Krush

This was the first time that I competed in the Olympiad without either of my sisters, but I was in good company. I am very proud of my teammates IM Irina Krush, WGM Anna Zatonskih, and WIM Jennifer Shahade. They fought hard and they gave everything to the team. Everyone contributed to make this historic feat happen. There were some tough times but we managed to overcome them. Win, lose or draw, we did it as a team.

The teams Chief Theoretician GM Alexander Chernin and Head Coach Michael Khodarkovsky worked very diligently everyday to make sure that the players were properly prepared before each round. They worked very late every evening and they continued their preparation very early each morning. Their opening choices and recommendations helped our team tremendously. They played a major role in our success. We would have been in big trouble without their assistance.



Susan Polgar

I am also very happy that I kept some very important personal records intact. I played all 14 games on board 1 without a day off in all of my Olympiads. I have never lost a game in the Olympiad and I scored 7 wins and 7 draws in this one. I have won at least 2 medals (team and individual) in all of my Olympiads. I won four here, including: Gold (Best overall individual performance [2622] in the entire Women's Olympiad), Gold (Most points scored in the entire Women's Olympiad with 10½ points) and Silver (Second best percentage on board 1 with 75%).

This was very rewarding for me since I have not competed in the International circuit for nearly 9 years. My last International game was the final game in the 1996 World Championship. Very few people believed that I could still play top-level chess. Some journalists even voiced their doubts publicly before the Olympiad. Others suggested changing the rules so I would not be able to compete for the US in future Olympiads. All this made our accomplishment extra sweet.

In the end, the difference between winning the Silver, Bronze, or missing out in the medal race completely came down to some gutsy decisions made by the Team Captain Paul Truong during critical moments. His strategy helped us become the first team to defeat China in this Olympiad. They had a perfect 9-0 score and had been unstoppable up to that point. Furthermore, we had two Blacks out of the three boards against China.

His strategy was to even out the odd. He instructed WGM Zatonskih and me to offer early draws with the Black pieces. He knew that they would accept a draw on board 1, but not on board 3, since their board 3 was in contention for an individual Gold medal. But he wanted them to think that we would be content with a tie. We were not! In the meantime, his gut instinct was that IM Krush could beat the reigning World Cup Champion WGM Xu Yuhua with the white pieces, as Irina had beat the same opponent two years ago at the Bled Olympiad.

He was absolutely correct. My opponent Xie Jun accepted an early draw, but WGM Zhao Xue of China rejected the offer on board 3 and she spent nearly 25 minutes making this decision. This was crucial because in this fast time control,

it helped our player to be way ahead on time. In the end, we held them off on board 3 and Irina won on board 2 to give us a match win by the score of 2 – 1.



The US Women's Team

Another prominent moment was his call in the last round against Vietnam. Russia was tied with us, Georgia was only half a point behind, and the French were only half a point behind Georgia. The Vietnamese team wanted to hold us to a tie. They made draw offers in very decent positions. But his decisive and firm public rejections helped break down my opponent's resolve. Even with me in a difficult position on the board, he believed that my opponent would misplay it and she eventually did.

Teamwork is crucial in a very difficult and long event such as this. Michael, Alex, Paul and the team members worked very well together. We trusted their judgments and they trusted our abilities. When I was struggling, my teammates rescued me and when they needed help, I returned the favor.

I was very touched to receive countless e-mails supporting the team. We did it for America and I hope this will be the beginning of many more good things to come for US Chess. We would not be able to accomplish this without so much support from so many people, so thank you everyone! While we were in Mallorca, Dr. Tony Saidy came all the way from the US to cheer us on for a few days. International Arbiter Robert Tanner, who was directing the men's section, came to visit the team at the playing hall every day after he finished his duties. It was nice to see such friendly faces during an intense competition.



The US vs. Georgia

We also received warm congratulations from the US delegation after we won the Silver. Last, but not least, thank you Garry and Michael for believing in this project. Without the Kasparov Chess Foundation, our team sponsor, this medal dream for the United States would not have come true.

Complete daily reports from the Olympiad can be seen at www.USChess.org or on my website www.SusanPolgar.com.

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

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