



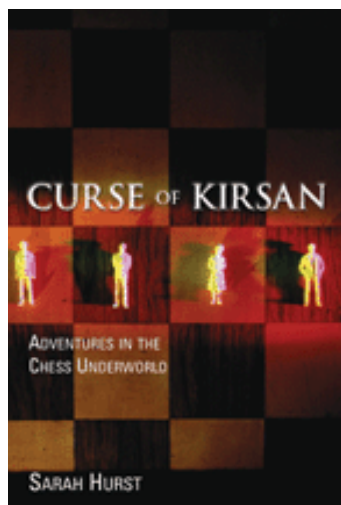
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COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

The Conclusion of Another Year in Chess: Questions and Answers

How does it feel to return to chess after an eight year lay-off and to have such magnificent results at the Olympiad? *Joseph (Bakersfield, CA)*

It felt fine, actually. I have been performing at a 2600 level since I began playing chess again last year. My match against former World Champion Anatoly Karpov shortly before the Olympiad helped somewhat and I also played some training games against friends.

It is hard for me to assess my results at the recent Olympiad. Personally, I felt that I could have done better. I missed some chances for a few additional wins because of the time control. Conversely, after such a slow start, I don't think anyone beside our team captain and I could have expected the final performance. I guess things evened out in the end.

How does this Olympiad compare to others that you have played in? *Malcolm (Alexandria, VA)*

I would say that this Olympiad is second only to the 1988 Olympiad, where my sisters and I made history by ending the dominance of the Soviet Women's Team to capture the Gold medals. The Soviet women won every Olympiad they played in up to that time. No one could have imagined that a group of young teenagers (I was 19, Sofia 14, Judit 12, and our teammate Madl 19) could dethrone the invincible Soviets. But my sisters and I believed in each other and we changed chess in Hungary forever.



The Polgar Sisters: Sofia, Susan, and Judit

The 2004 Olympiad was also very special because we made history as a team and it was the first time I played without any of my sisters. The core of the team came together in March 2003 and we had a very dedicated and tough captain, along with an extremely good head coach and a very experienced chief theoretician. That is why we were able to make history by capturing the first Olympiad medals for the United States. In the past, a team was thrown together at the deadline without much preparation. How can you win this way? This team had goals and direction. If the USCF would allow the experts to run the Women's Olympiad instead of the current bureaucracy, we could win the Gold with future teams. If not, we will return to the old ways and not much will happen. But I cannot control how the politics will play out.

I am also happy that I was able to capture the first ever Gold medal for the United States. Imagine that! The US has never won a single medal and in this Olympiad we won 1 team Silver, 1 individual Silver, and 2 individual Gold medals. That was quite special. Still, the most gratifying personal feat for me, beyond the countless e-mails of support I received from the fans, was to be able to silence my critics. Some did not even want this team to exist. Others were publicly criticizing me, saying that I could not expect to play at a 2600 level if I had not played competitive chess for more than 8 years. Some even wanted to change the rules so I would not qualify for the team.

After winning 4 World Championships and 6 Olympiad medals including 3 Gold, I had to listen to people say that I should prove to them that I am able to beat 2200 level players. Some said I would be lucky to play at a 2200 level and some suggested changing the rules to make me play at least 10-20 games each year against 2200+ players to qualify for the team. This was why the US Women's Teams have never won any medals. Everything was done to prevent the federation from sending the best team. Could you imagine someone asking Kasparov to prove himself before being invited to play in the recent Russian Championship? I just could not believe the constant attacks by some of these cynics. Instead of working hard to help US Chess, this is how they behaved.

What do you think of the new FIDE time control 90 30? Dee (Washington, D.C)

I am OK with it. It took me a while to get used to this time control at the Olympiad but once I got the hang of it, I was fine. However, if you want top level quality chess, don't expect to see it at this time control. I saw 2400-2450 players hanging rooks when they got down to just the increments. It was amazing! My biggest complaint was once you get down to the just the increments, the game can go on infinitely and yet the players wouldn't even have time to go to the restroom. If this is the time control they use, the players should have something like one or two 3-5 minute time-outs for bathroom breaks during the game. The worst part was that there were no separate restrooms for the players. They had to share it with the spectators, which caused long lines and severely affected the players' time.

Why aren't more top US players being promoted in the US? Don (Savannah, Georgia)

That is a very good question and I do not have an answer. I asked the same question myself. My teammates and many others complained about the current *Chess Life* editor choosing to promote the same Russian player every month, while absolutely refusing to publicize any of the top US players. This is one of the reasons why you need a serious editor who understands chess. Many of us worked hard to help US Chess, only to face these kinds of ridiculous obstacles.

The current USCF President Beatriz Marinello said that she agreed that this practice is ludicrous and I applaud her decision. She said that from now on *Chess Life* will promote many of the top US players. What I would suggest is to have one page each month devoted to the bios of the top 10-15 US players (male and female) and, in the issues that have scholastic inserts, the top juniors (boys and girls) in each category such as under 21, 18, 17, etc. If we can waste space on a useless article like *Chess and War*, we could afford a page to promote our top players.

Promoting our top players is very important to the growth of US Chess. I am willing to do free public announcements or promos to help US Chess and I am sure many of my colleagues would agree to do likewise. Why not use us to reach out to the younger generation and motivate more young players to join the USCF and stay in chess? We want to help, but are prevented from doing so for political reasons. Why does everything have to involve politics rather than the best interest of chess?

Have you ever considered running for the USCF Executive Board? Mimi (Dallas, Texas)

Many people have asked me to run for the board. I have considered it, but I don't think I would be too effective because of the divisiveness among board members. Unless people are willing to work together for the good of chess and put aside petty politics, I would rather work with my friends to help chess on our own. I may run in the future, but I don't think this is the right time for me.



What does it take to win a team Olympiad medal? *George (Red Bank, New Jersey)*

Blood, sweat and tears! Plus teamwork, a strong captain, and very good coaches. The first step is to take the Olympiad seriously. You must train hard for it and have a goal. Then you need to have a captain who is dedicated and fearless, a captain who is willing to make tough decisions and not political or popular decisions, and one who is a good strategist and has a deep understanding of chess psychology. And, last but not least, a coach who knows the players, their strengths and weaknesses, and can help the players in these areas. We had this in the recent Olympiad and, by the way, it does not hurt to have some luck once in a while.

Who do you think is the best player in the world today? *Aviv (Miami, Florida)*

The top 3 in my book are: Kasparov, Anand, and Kramnik. I choose Kasparov overall, Anand in rapid, and Kramnik is up there with the other two in match play. I hope those who doubted Garry prior to the recent Russian Championship will understand how wrong they were. I witnessed Garry's calculation skills and chess knowledge when he worked with our Women's Olympiad team and he is just an incredible player. I have never met anyone else like him.

Will you go back to chess full time in 2005 and beyond? *Carol (Lansing, Michigan)*

Unfortunately, no! I have two young boys (4 and 5 years old) and they are my number one priority. However, I will continue to help the USCF promote US Chess for young people, and especially for girls. I am working on creating interesting matches and here is an excerpt from my interview on ChessBase.com regarding this topic:

There could be many interesting matches. One should definitely be against Xie Jun. I think we are both for this and I think it can help boost chess and relations for both China and the United States. I did not like the way the way it ended last time in the hand of FIDE. Another one is a rematch against Karpov to settle the 3-3 tie. This was the first ever match between two World Champions of opposite gender, and it created a lot of excitement and interest for US Chess. I would also not mind to play a

match against the current FIDE Knockout Women's World Champion Antoaneta Stefanova. I think the contrast of our styles would create a very intriguing battle for the fans.

Another idea would be against US top player Gata Kamsky. We left chess a number of years ago and now we are both back and it would be nice to have the number one US male and female player to play a match against each other.

But of course the one premier player for a match would be against Garry Kasparov. I have very high respect for Garry. He is not only a dynamic chess player but a dynamic person as well. I think this match can generate interest for US Chess the way Fischer-Spassky match did in 1972. Of course I would be the big underdog, because Garry is one of the greatest World Champions ever. But it would definitely be worth it. Other fantasy ideas that people have often asked me are matches against my sister Judit or Bobby Fischer in Fischer Random. My answer would be yes on both only if the conditions are right.

Who do you think will win the US Championship? Renee (Seattle, Washington)

This is a hard question. The top 5 favorites in the Men's category are: Kamsky, Nakamura, Shabalov, Onischuk, and Kaidanov. For the women, I would say Zatonskih, Krush, or Shahade. I would be very surprised if one of the above mentioned names does not win the championship.

Mig Greengard has often contradicted you about the Anna Hahn/Jennifer Shahade issue and the selection of the 2004 US Women's Olympiad Team. What is the real story? Cindy (Phoenix, Arizona)

I like Mig. He is a nice guy and a good journalist. He is funny and does good work. Unfortunately, he got the facts wrong and his opinion was biased because of his personal friendship with Anna and Jennifer. You cannot be objective when you are too close to the people involved. He was also fed incorrect information by people who did not know the facts. I have spoken about this many times. I don't want to explain it all over again in detail, but I will give a general summary.

There was a lot of confusion about the USCF rules. Many people believed that the US Championship was to be held annually. Others believed that it would be held every two years. The previous Executive Board and Executive Director believed that it would be unfair to put a January 2003 Champion into the October /November 2004 Olympiad team since the 2004 US Championship would be held immediately after the Olympiad. Additionally, it was never announced before or during the tournament that the 2003 US Championship would decide a spot in the US Women's Team.

This harmed many people and it was definitely wrong and unfair. Since the rules were so vague the decision was made to hold a 2004 US Women's Championship in which Anna Hahn chose not to play. I understand Anna's

position, but there was no other equitable solution. At no time were we given the right to pick our own players for the Olympiad team. That was a total fabrication. We could choose anyone we wanted for the US Women's Olympiad Training Program because it was privately funded, but never the actual team. In fact, we went strictly by a combination of ratings.

Jennifer Shahade won the 2004 US Women's Championship over Irina Krush and Anna Zatonskih to earn the last spot in the team. That was the end of the story. In regard to how many games each player played in the Olympiad, it was total nonsense. How can anyone second guess the decision of the captain and head coach when they were not there? The US Women's Team has never won a single medal. This team captured a historic Silver medal and 3 individual medals including 2 Gold medals, yet the captain (Paul Truong), head coach (Michel Khodarkovsky) and chief theoretician (Alex Chernin) are being second guessed. We won, in part, because our captain and coaches made tough decisions and did not defer to politics and popularity. Our captain and coaches were among the best that I have played for.



Gold and Silver medals from the Calvià Olympiad

On a different note, I would like to congratulate Garry Kasparov for his magnificent results in the recent Russian Championship. He once again showed his dominance in the chess world. I hope Vladimir Kramnik will now agree to play a rematch against Garry. This match is what the chess world needs and not some lame excuse that further divides the chess community as to why it could not happen. I would also like to thank Garry and the Kasparov Chess Foundation for their support of the US Women's Olympiad Team. Without this help, we would have not achieved such a level of success.

Last but not least, I would like to wish all of you a wonderful Holiday Season! This has been a very difficult year for chess worldwide. But I see the light at the end of the tunnel. Chess has grown leaps and bounds recently and the proof is in the sales of chess sets. I see the opening for chess to become a game-sport to be reckoned with. But that will only happen if and when we all can work together for the good of chess. I urge everyone to unite and help the game we all love. Happy Holidays to all!

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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