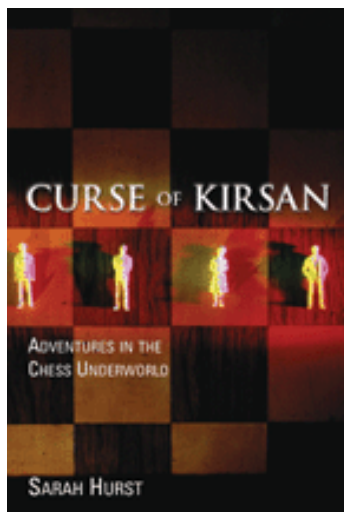




COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

The "No Draw" Rule

I have very mixed opinions about the “no draw” rule that has recently been imposed at top-level chess events. GM Maurice Ashley, FM Paul Truong and I discussed this issue in detail before Maurice wrote his “no draw” article in *Chess Life* magazine in 2003.

Fighting chess games are exciting and are good for promoting chess. It is OK to have the “no draw” rule in an invitational event such as the Mtel Masters, the US Championship, Linares, Corus, etc. The organizers can make any rule they wish if they are paying the appearance fees and expenses for the players.

However, if a player is spending \$200-\$400 in entry fees, plus money for airfare, hotels and meals, then I am totally against the idea of organizers requiring such rules in Open tournaments. The draw is a part of chess and there is nothing illegal about it. GMs should be motivated to fight harder, but not forced to fight when they are not being fairly compensated. When organizers are using the names of grandmasters to draw larger entries and more spectators, the players deserve fair compensation and conditions.

There are many cases where it is absurd for a player to go all out for a win. For example, if a grandmaster is leading an Open tournament by a full point going into the last round, and his opponent offers him a draw after 22 moves, it is ridiculous to refuse the offer when a draw will guarantee him clear first and a big payday. How many players would risk everything in this case?

I agree that it is bad sportsmanship for grandmasters to accept draw offers after 5-10 moves in early rounds. However, there are plenty of situations where draws should be acceptable. The following is a comment from IM Silman:

Chess pros have no certain income, no health insurance, and often no retirement nest egg. Making them pay to attempt to earn a living, while organizers use their names for free and chess fans watch their games, makes no sense whatsoever in an Open event. Nobody in their right mind (unless they live in an incredibly selfish space) can blame a chess pro for making a quick draw in the final round if it means food on the table and a few month's rent safely covered.

I couldn't agree more and I have nothing to gain from my opinion because I no

longer compete in Open tournaments. I like GM Maurice Ashley and consider him a good friend. I admire his dedication to promote chess and am very happy that the HB Foundation provided an incredible amount of money to promote the game. My main interest in this issue is only to help my fellow chess professionals improve their standard of living.

The average US grandmaster makes less than \$20,000 a year at tournaments and they have to pay their own expenses to compete. Chess professionals have few opportunities to earn a moderate living in the US unless they quit playing serious chess and become full-time chess teachers. They obviously play chess because they love the game. Most of the talented American juniors from the past few decades have quit chess to go into other fields because of this serious problem.

The HB Global Challenge drew around 1,600 players out of which 49 were GMs (according to my manual count) with a prize fund of \$500,000. In comparison, the 2005 Dubai Open drew 48 GMs with a prize fund of \$40,000, while the 2005 Aeroflot Open drew 143 GMs with a prize fund of \$175,000, with about 50 GMs rated around 2600 FIDE, along with quite a list of superstars!

The HB did not draw a single woman from the top 25 in the world and from the list of prize winners we can glean that:

- 11 grandmasters made decent money.
- Out of those 11 grandmasters, one grandmaster won \$50,000 plus a nice watch.
- 10 grandmasters made \$5,500 minus \$1,500 in expenses and even less after taxes.
- The other 38 grandmasters came out on the negative end.
- Some GMs made \$20.84 and they had to fight each game without early draws.

Overall, I think the HB Global Challenge did very well promoting chess in the US and I hope they will continue to support chess for years to come.

In Europe and in Asia, grandmasters can make a decent living playing in team events. Some players are sponsored by corporations and some are supported by their federations or governments. Grandmasters are generally well-respected around the world, but in America many of them are disparaged. Our national federation is powerless to fix this dilemma and some even say that it is not our federation's business to help professional players. I will leave it up to the readers and chess fans to come up with their own conclusions.

Is it any wonder that many GMs pre-arrange the outcome of a last round game to guarantee a paycheck? I am lucky I never had to face this problem. But what would you do? Every story has two sides and we need to look at both sides justly. If organizers are paying fair compensation for the services of grandmasters, they can demand a certain condition in return. Professional chess

players should be treated better and fairer and the players should do everything they can not to embarrass the organizers.

My proposed solution is simple. If it is an invitational event where the organizers are paying appearance fees, they are welcome to create “no draw” or “fighting chess” rules. If a player does not comply, you simply do not invite that player back. The players will quickly learn to fight. In Open events, why not do what Erik Anderson did by giving a special “fighting chess” prize? This allowed GM Fishbein to win \$5,000 during the recent US Championships. The organizers of Open tournaments could also decide to offer better conditions for chess professionals with a strong history of fighting chess.

These solutions may not be the perfect, but they may help. As long as professional players are not making a decent living, let’s not punish them even more.

Corpus Christi, Texas

I just returned from the grand opening of the Susan Polgar South Texas Chess Center in Corpus Christi, Texas. The event was fantastic and many parents and local businesses donated their time, money, products, and much more to support chess and the local youths. These folks worked very hard to get the chess center ready with only a few weeks notice, and extensive renovations were necessary to get it done. It was truly a community team effort.



Coach DeLeon said, “The center was funded entirely by donations from the community and parents of chess team students from around the area.” He estimated that sponsors donated approximately \$200,000 in materials, including the building, which houses a main chess room, a room each for private and group instruction and a gift shop.

I am very proud of their efforts and I strongly believe that this can be done in every city in America. All it takes is a few motivated and enthusiastic parents or coaches to make it happen.

The official opening ceremony took place at around 11 AM on Saturday May

28, 2005. People arrived early and some traveled more than eight hours to be in attendance. The fans could not contain their excitement for a full-time chess club in South Texas. The enrollment for the full day summer camps filled up at an incredible rate. In fact, the regional and state scholastic chess championships in Texas frequently draw 1,000 – 2,000 kids.



The fans begin to gather

Here are links to the media coverage of the event:

- Kristv.com
- Caller.com

Now the same folks from Corpus Christi are putting together the Susan Polgar National Open Chess Championships for Girls under 21 to be held at the end of January 2006. The name of the event is not yet finalized, but the idea is to motivate young female chess players and give them an opportunity to excel.



Young dancers at the opening ceremony

They are actively recruiting sponsors to donate laptop computers, a brand new car, US savings bonds and chess scholarships for the winners. They have already made agreements with local hotels to offer room rates of only \$59 per night and \$89 for a suite that can accommodate two full families. This was one of my requirements, because I am tired of seeing scholastic events where parents have to pay over \$100 (plus tax) per night and \$20 or more for dinner per person.

This event will be fun, affordable, and will provide memorable experiences for these young ladies and their parents and coaches. We will also make sure to include parents and coaches when planning the many extracurricular activities. We want to show everyone that we truly care and we appreciate their support for chess. Detailed information will soon be available and it will be posted on my [website](#).

Blogging with the Fans

I have always championed the idea of top chess players being more interactive with the everyday fans. Chess has a big fan base (nearly 45 million strong in America and around 700 million worldwide) and we need to maximize it.

I have followed my own advice by allowing fans to vote for the opening of their choice in my monthly award-winning "Opening Secrets" column in *Chess Life*. My personal e-mail address has always been available to the public and I correspond with thousands of fans each month about a variety of topics. I hope more people will join my crusade by making chess friendlier, more popular, and more interactive.

A friend of mine named Amy recently taught me about blogging and she helped me build a [website](#) where fans can blog 24/7 and communicate directly with me. I encourage chess fans and chess enthusiasts to express their views, but to leave ugly chess politics at the door. The only thing I ask is to keep it clean so fans of *all ages* can enjoy it! I am always interested to hear what they have to say! Happy blogging everyone!

The Polgar Sisters in Las Vegas

As I had mentioned last [month](#), for the first time in over 10 years, my sisters Judit, Sofia and I will appear in an event together in the United States. On June 9th, we will be giving a 100 board tandem simul in Las Vegas where we each alternate moves.

I will also be conducting a unique one day Chess Camp on the morning of June 9th with the assistance of IMs Ben Finegold, Igor Ivanov and GM Walter Browne. In addition, before the first round on June 10th, we will meet the fans for breakfast. At that time, we will talk about our chess experiences and the fans will have a chance to ask questions. These should be fun events.

This is part of the effort to promote chess in America. I hope to see many of you in Las Vegas during the National Open. For more information, please visit the official [website](#).

Double Standard in Chess?

In a recent interview in *Sport Express* on May 26, 2005, Vladimir Kramnik bravely spoke about his recent disastrous performance at the Mtel Masters tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. He said, "I have not yet completely recovered from the match against Leko. In all three tournaments, which I played after Brissago, I made so many blunders, like never before."

The Kramnik – Leko match took place from September 25th – October 18th, 2004. We are now in June 2005, approximately seven months after that match. I sense some serious double standards here.

After I had won the Classical World Champion, FIDE was not able to organize a championship match for more than two years, and when they finally did, they did not give me proper preparation time. They wanted me to defend my title within weeks from the expected due date of my first son. My request to postpone the match for a few months was rejected and then FIDE illegally stripped me of my title.

My sister Judit just gave birth to her son last August and she has already competed at Corus in January of this year, as well as at the same Mtel Masters tournament with Kramnik. She finished in a tie for third ahead of Kramnik and Adams with only one loss out of ten games against the best competition in the world.

If a male World Champion admitted that he still cannot recover from a chess match after seven months, then how can FIDE expect a woman to compete in the Classical World Championship within weeks after giving birth? Did they expect me to run to the back of the playing stage to nurse my son between moves? Isn't this a double standard?

Separate Tournaments for Girls?

A reader recently posed this question:

...give me one good reason why there should even be a women's chess championship...are our brains physiologically different? If women want to rise to an equal level of chess (across the board) they shouldn't be held to a lower standard in terms of championships, separate prize funds, women's titles, etc. In my humble opinion, there should be one world championship, no women's international titles, and no separate prize funds for women.

No one has ever championed the idea of women competing against men on an equal level more than the Polgar sisters. Most of the games my sisters and I played were against male players. In the last few years, I have played matches against GMs Gulko, Stripunsky, Alburty, Karpov and Nakamura. All of them were USCF rated over 2600 and 2700. I won the first two matches by the score of 4-0 and tied the last three. I did not lose a single match against these male

grandmasters.

I do not approve of women becoming sex symbols to further their chess careers. Prove yourself on the chessboard first, if you are a chess player and if you want to be taken seriously. The Polgar sisters turned down millions of dollars in endorsements at the height of our careers because we wanted to concentrate on our chess and not outside activities. I guess our results speak for themselves. I find many of the pictures flaunted by women chess players distasteful, but that is only my opinion and other women may disagree with me. I also find the so-called World Chess Beauty contest appalling. Many of the comments by the voters are mean, sexist, rude, demeaning, obnoxious, and atrocious.

However, I still strongly endorse the idea of an all-girls event. People need to understand the issues before they can make the proper decision. Women and men look at chess differently. Most guys are more results oriented, while women are more into the artistic aspects. For example, last year I attended an all-girls event where a six-year-old girl got checkmated and then walked to the other side of the table to give her opponent a hug. She said, "Wow! That was a beautiful checkmate. Congratulations! I am so proud of you!" After the game, they went out to the hallway and played other games. They were giggling, laughing, and had a good time. For these girls, they enjoyed the new friendship and the fun experience more than what happened in their games. Who am I to say that they should not? Or that they should only worry about their results?

In my own Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls event, many of the participants write to me and say that they still have daily contact with the other girls either by phone, IM, or e-mail. Many of them have visited each other during their school vacations.

I advocate different issues when it comes to chess for the female gender:

- My number one priority is to get as many girls to play chess as possible.
- My next priority is to retain their interest in chess for years to come. The problem the USCF has right now is that most girls quit after the 3rd or 4th grade. The USCF has no idea of how to fix this problem and they are doing things to make girls want to quit even sooner. The girls have to have something to look forward to; there has to be a reason for them to stay. That is why I created so many different activities for girls. In the last 10 months, more than 3,000 girls competed in regional events to qualify for 50 spots in the 2005 Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls, and this is only our second year. Meanwhile, I am actively soliciting sponsors to donate special prizes and scholarships to give more incentives for girls to be in chess.
- For those girls who want to be competitive in chess and be the best, I support them and encourage them to put in the same amount of effort as the boys. If they work hard, then the sky is the limit. I have created special free training programs for serious young female players, and I also created the 2004 US Women's Olympiad Training Program to help

our top young stars. Within two years, we captured the first ever Women's Olympiad medals. The other member who did not make the Olympiad Team won the 2005 US Women's Championship title. Unfortunately, the USCF has officially canceled this program even though it was financed by my foundation and outside sponsors.

I don't expect every girl to be competitive, but I give them that option. The main thing in chess should be personal satisfaction and enjoyment if that is what they choose. Yet if some girls aspire to be better than the Polgar sisters, I wish them the best!

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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