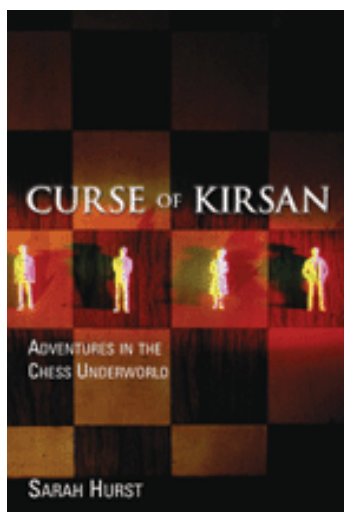




COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

\$155,000 in Prizes, Stipends and Scholarships!

I have often discussed ways of getting more girls into chess and how to retain their interest beyond the 3rd or 4th grade. This was one of the reasons why the annual Susan Polgar National Invitational was started. I am proud that from September 2004 until June 2005, approximately 3,000 girls from the age of 4 to 18 participated in regional and state qualifying events to earn the right to represent their states for this year's tournament. Each state creates its own criteria to select its best player. In only our second year, a record [48 girls](#) (four of them as young as 11-years-old) competed for a record \$155,000 in prizes, stipends and scholarships.



The second annual Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls (under 19) was held on August 7 – 12, 2005 alongside the 106th U.S. Open in Phoenix, Arizona. This is the most prestigious girl's event in the United States. After six grueling battles, the top three seeds tied for first with the score of 5-1 (4 wins and 2 draws – they drew each other):

WFM Alisa Melekhina – 14 years old (PA) – is the Top rated female player in PA. She tied for 2nd in the invitational last year and played board 1 for one of the Polgar US Amateur Teams in the 2004 US

Amateur Team East where her team won her division. Alisa was also a Gold Medalist at the Pan-American Youth Chess Championship a few years ago.

Abby Marshall – 14 years old (OH) – is the Top rated girl in Ohio and 2nd in the state only to WGM Anna Zatonskih. As the third seed in the invitational, Abby nearly pulled off the triple-crown by winning the Susan Polgar National Invitational Blitz Championship and finishing 2nd in the Susan Polgar National Invitational Puzzle Solving Championship.

WGM Anya Cork – 14 years old (CA) – was born in California and currently resides in Hong Kong with her parents. She won the Hong Kong National Championship a few years ago where she was the only female player. She earned her WGM title with an incredible performance in the 2004 Olympiad in Calvià while playing for the Hong Kong men's team. Even though she is a very experienced international player, she wanted to play in the invitational and received a personal invitation (from me).



Each co-champion was awarded a full scholarship to the University of Texas in Dallas (valued at more than \$40,000 each), which was presented by Dr. Tim Redman (UTD). Tied for 4th through 7th place with the scores of 4½ - 1½ were Louiza Livschitz (CA), Amanda Mateer (AZ), Emily Lau (HI) and Anjali Datta (TX).

After the last round, all of the participants were invited to a special Pizza Party. This was the perfect opportunity for the players to get together, relax, and have a good time. USCF Scholastic Director Gerry Nash, USCF Executive Director Bill Hall, USCF Scholastic Council Member Cindy Hawkinson, and a number of other important guests attended the party.



Mitchell Denker, Susan Polgar, and Stephan Gerzadowicz

I personally thanked Charles Hatherill (Chief TD of the Polgar / Denker), Mr. G (Stephan Gerzadowicz) and Frank Berry (as assistant TDs), Diane Reese (Chief Organizer) and others for their support and assistance. During the Pizza Party, each player received an autographed copy of my new book *Breaking Through: How the Polgar sisters changed the game of chess*, as well as autographed chess posters of the Polgar sisters and their stipend checks.

In addition to the main event, the players also competed in the Susan Polgar National Invitational Blitz and Puzzle Solving Championships. These two events were open to all of the participants of the Polgar Invitational from the past two years.

In the Blitz Championship, Abby Marshall (OH) scored a perfect 6-0 to win clear first. Anjali Datta (TX) and Elisha Garg (CA) tied for 2nd – 3rd with the score of 5-1. Eunice Rodriguez (FL) and Louiza Livschitz (CA) tied for 4th – 5th with the score of 4½ – 1½.



In the Puzzle Solving Championship, WFM Alisa Melekhina (PA) correctly solved 9/10 puzzles to win clear first. Abby Marshall (OH) and Alexandra

Wiener (CT) both scored 8/10 puzzles correctly. However, Abby Marshall was awarded second place for a faster time. Jessica Harris (GA) finished 4th and Ashley Carter (MI) finished 5th.

This event was sponsored by:

The [Susan Polgar Foundation](#), UTD (University of Texas in Dallas), US Chess Trust, PolgarChess.com, Excalibur Electronics and the World Chess Hall of Fame, Everyman Chess, International Chess Marketing, Chess4Less, American Chess Equipment, Rochester Chess, Frank Berry, ChessOnDVD, and the USCF, etc.

In addition, to boost the popularity of chess among girls in the United States, the Susan Polgar Foundation will organize two major additional girls event in 2006: **The Susan Polgar National Open Championship for Girls (under 21)** will be held in Corpus Christi, Texas (January 27-29, 2006) and the **Susan Polgar World Open Championship for Girls (under 21)** will be held in Las Vegas (August 16-18, 2006). The third annual **Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls** will be held in Chicago, IL from August 6-11, 2006.



Making the First Move

A few of the participants from this year's event share their impressions below:

The Polgar Invitation for Girls

by Anna Ginzburg, New York

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do." Last week, I played at the second annual Polgar Invitational for Girls. Going into the tournament I was terrified, for I knew that the competition would be very difficult. I was to be playing with state champions from across the United States. That thought alone left me very scared. Even as I boarded the plane for Phoenix I could not believe that I would be playing at such a prestigious event. When I first heard about it, I was terribly

excited because it sounded so amazing. An invitational tournament for girls, where tiaras and boas are worn!



However, as I read the rules I worried that I would have little chance of being chosen as the New York representative. Still, I didn't give up on my dream and tried my hardest at the nationals to qualify; yet I didn't. I remember crying on the last day as I talked to my friends and teammates. They didn't understand why I was so upset, but I had really wanted to play at such an amazing event. Nevertheless, about two weeks later a teammate of mine told me that I was to be one of the New York representatives. When he had told me this, no words could possibly express the joy that filled my heart.

For the next few days all I could think about was that in four months I would be playing along side state champions. For the next week, all I could do was smile. I would sit in math class watching my teacher draw geometric figures on the board yet all my thoughts were focused on the tournament.

Thus, as I walked in for my first game I was filled with anxiety, yet I knew that my strong will and determination would look fear in the face, and tell it to back down. My fears were proven correct as I quickly realized that this was the hardest tournament I had ever played in. This was extremely weird for me because I had never believed girls could be such strong players. Wow, did this tournament prove me wrong!

Aside from it being the strongest tournament, it was also the one filled with the most fun. I had left home very scared because I would only know three other girls, but I left Arizona with many new friends, friends that I talk to every night on ICC, and various instant-messaging programs. I could have never imagined that a chess tournament could help people form such close bonds. It seemed that everybody wanted to befriend you and enjoy your company. Other tournaments are never as much fun since hardly any girls, or none at all, play there.

Since the boys dominate all of the events, it's hard to have fun because there

aren't any other girls to talk to and it's scary to talk to the guys. Thus, after you finish your game, instead of retreating to a conversation, you retreat to a far corner and the only bonding you have is with your CD player. Yet, here it was different. Nobody knew each other, but everybody wanted to know you and was super-friendly. The Polgar Invitational showed just how special of an event it was. When one looked at the Denker event it was as if the two tournaments were not being played in the same hall, but rather on two different planets! The boys barely talked to each other nor did they become good friends amongst themselves.

The Polgar Invitational for Girls was a dream of mine, a dream that became a reality. I never could have imagined all the fun I would have there. From the new friends made, to the blitz tournament, and to the puzzle solving competition, it was all fantastic. I had been invited because of my hard work, determination, and dedication. Yet, this tournament did not only serve as a chess tournament and a social scene, but also as an inspiration. As a girl in chess, there are very few events that one can qualify for and that discourages many from playing. However, this tournament showed me that no matter what the circumstances in front of a person may be, if one works hard, and ignores the negative comments that others thrust towards them, then they will achieve success.

The Polgar Invitational was unlike any tournament I had ever played in before and I can only pray that I will have the honor of being the New York representative again next year. The event was a major breakthrough for women's chess and I believe future generations should organize more women's chess events. It may be impossible to change the world, but if we all work together, then maybe that impossible can turn into a possible.

The Most Enjoyable Tournament

by Abby Marshall, Ohio

I barely notice the hundred-degree heat as I walk down the long and winding road to the tournament site. My thoughts are on the round ahead where I'll be playing up on stage for a chance at first place. A win would get me clear first, a draw may evolve into a massive tie, and a loss brings nothing.

Before I know it I'm there and I cross the huge playing hall to the black and rickety stage. The stairs creak as I step steadily up and take a seat at my board in the center. My back is to the demo board as I search for my state flag to hang by my board. Eventually I find it and I sit down to wait for the round to begin. Fiddling with my nametag, I look over the small sitting area and the sea of chessboards, letting my thoughts wander to previous rounds. Every game was close. In the round yesterday, luck had been on my side, getting me a win instead of a draw.

Soon some of the other participants arrive and wish me luck. Then my



opponent appears and the last round of the Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls 2005 begins. Inspired by the thrill of playing on stage and having my game up for all to see, I play well, getting out of a difficult situation to draw, earning me the title of co-champion for the Polgar.

What impressed me most about the tournament was the way the participants were treated like professional players. Receiving nametags and state flags, along with getting a chance to play on stage with a demo board showing the moves, was great. We also got to practice with international time controls.

Nobody could say the competition was weak. The Polgar attracted some very good players. When I first heard about the tournament, I thought that, except for two or three girls, the event would be a walkover. How wrong I was. As the tournament boasted a handful of 1800 rated players plus one girl rated over 2000 and another over 2300(!), I knew it would be tough. After all, every single girl had to be the best in her state.

Because of the strong competition, a lot of people followed the Polgar. After I drew the girl rated 2300, some people asked me how it went, including some of the strongest Denker players. However, the most exciting thing happened the morning after I tied for first, when Greg Shahade, who's an IM, congratulated me on winning the event! I just think it shows people respect the Polgar and know it's a strong event.

I had to play some of my best chess and have a little bit of luck to be co-champion. Every game was definitely a struggle. In my games, only one player resigned while I had to mate the others. My first two games each lasted three and a half hours! My shortest game went three hours! I had to work hard to draw the games I drew and even harder to win the games I won. Of course, I wouldn't have been co-champion of the tournament if I hadn't been lucky, too. In the next-to-last round, in a completely even position, my opponent blundered and a few minutes later graciously turned down her king.

Turning away from the competitive side, I have to say everyone was friendly and enjoyed themselves. I have never felt more at home in a tournament. At the opening ceremonies, while the Denker players looked like they were in pain as they got their pictures taken, all of the girls were laughing, talking, and actually smiling in the picture. I felt like I could go up to anyone, introduce myself, and be welcome. The most enjoyable tournaments I've been to have been all-girls tournaments.

All in all, I thought the tournament was fantastic and I really hope to come next year. I'm moving to Virginia this week so the Polgar gave me a chance to scout out the competition. It looks really fierce (if the Virginia representative had won her last round she would have been tied for first too!), but that is all the better as it'll inspire me to work harder.

The morning after the Polgar was finished I decided to walk down to the tournament room, just to remember what it felt like. I can almost still see the players like ghosts playing their games. I can see me up on stage and the position on the demo board. The feelings of tension, pressure and excitement

still hang thick in the air. Sighing, I turn around and walk out, dreaming of next year.

I didn't want to Depart

by Alisa Melekhina

It was the final round of the Pennsylvania State Scholastic Championships, and it would determine whether or not I would rank as the first girl in the Pennsylvania K-12 Open and qualify for the 2005 Polgar National Invitational. Last year, I had qualified with five points, and managed to obtain the spot by overcoming my contender by mere tiebreak points. This year, it seemed like the same situation was about to repeat itself. I had 3½ points going into the 6th round, and so did the other candidate whom was aiming to qualify for the Polgar. There were no other challengers, so it was just between the two of us. A draw or especially a loss were unthinkable at this stage; all I needed to do was win, and if my rival was also victorious, once more the tiebreak points would have to create the decision of who is going to qualify.



I won the concluding round very easily, but the other girl lost. Therefore, I filled the qualifying spot, and was prepared to travel to Phoenix, Arizona to compete for the title of Polgar Champion. It was only the beginning of March at the time, but before I knew it, it was August and I had arrived at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Spa where the championship was being held.

The hotel was absolutely magnificent, but I didn't allow the gorgeous surroundings to distract me from my game, and attempted to play my best. I began with a good start in the first round with a win, but since I was also playing in the U.S. Open in the evening, I soon realized the pressure of playing in two tournaments simultaneously, with different time controls. Nevertheless, I managed to maintain my focus on the Polgar, and defeated opponent after opponent with a few difficult games (some even in a losing position) until I had a score of 4 out of 4 points. Rounds five and six would be the crucial rounds, and I did not get an easy pairing in round five when I was paired against first board. We drew after a tough game, and I was half-a-point ahead of her. My chances were looking pretty good at that point. I had 4½ points, and so did only one other person. I was extremely nervous, and the final, anticipated round came too soon.

I clearly remember seating myself on first board with the white pieces, and noticed everyone staring at our demo board, even though the round had not yet begun. As we started to progress into the game, I managed to acquire a slight advantage, and was a pawn up. My opponent and I played into a rook ending, and unfortunately, my extra pawn was not enough to prevail. We each concluded with five points, but I couldn't help feeling a bit disappointed.

Later that day when I came to check on the tournament standings I brightened

up a little as I discovered that I was one of the three co-champions in the Polgar (I started out as second board, and finished in second place!), and that UTD was generous enough to award full scholarships to all three of us!

The organization and tournament environment was remarkable. I came to play chess and win, but I got even more than I expected. Along the way I met many new friends, and we had so much in common because of our mutual enthusiasm for chess, and there was always a subject (chess!) to discuss. There were also fun side events such as the Polgar Blitz Championship and Puzzle Solving Competitions that were not only chess-stimulating, but also helped everyone get to know each other better without the competitiveness of the tournament. I had such an enjoyable time that I didn't want to depart, but all too soon the Polgar and the U.S. Open ended, and it was time to go home.

I had such a great experience, and I would like to thank Susan and Paul for organizing and arranging such a wonderful tournament, and I am looking forward to participating in more Polgar events in the near future.



A Dream

by Laura Lee

This year I was lucky enough to experience one of the greatest chess opportunities I ever had. During the second week of August, I participated in the Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls. Not only did I get to play exceptional chess, I also was able to meet new and old friends in the beautiful state of Arizona.

First, I must explain how lucky I was to be able to play in this tournament. Every state that participated had at least one and sometimes two representatives. This meant that I was playing the best girls in the country. I am truly amazed to be given this honor.

However, chess was not the only great part of this event. I felt welcome from the moment I came into the tournament hall. I became friends with a whole group of girls from the Polgar Invitational. One moment I was at a pizza party,

another day we went swimming, and two other times my roommate and I visited museums. Clearly, I never felt lonely during my stay.

Finally, I also got to spend some time with my grandmother and the two other representatives from my state. Since my grandmother lives in Idaho and I live in North Carolina, it can be very difficult to see each other. This tournament was one of the only chances to see her. Because of this, the Polgar Invitational gave me new memories of my grandmother to cherish. Two of my friends were also with me, one was playing in the Polgar Invitational and another was playing in the Denker tournament, which lead to fond memories as well.

To get to the point, the week I had in Arizona was a dream that I didn't think I could make come true. Because of financial and family problems, I was not going to be able to go to this wonderful event. But this experience shows that little miracles can happen.

A quote from Richard Bach states, "You are never given a dream without also being given the power to make it true. You may have to work for it, however." With help from a lot of people my dream did come true and thanks to those people I was able to participate in one of the greatest chess events of my life.

Irresponsible Journalism

An article was recently published about the American Continental Championship, which was staged in Buenos Aires, Argentina from August 5–17. Below is an excerpt of what the author, Carlos A. Ilardo, a journalist for the newspaper *La Nacion* wrote:

"Gastón Needleman, the big discovery of the Campeonato Continental, knew that his attempt to make one of the six places available for the World Cup was like climbing a greased pole. But *he never expected his GM opponents*, with the exception of his compatriot Rubén Felgaer, to actually *come up with such an insidious plan to gang up against the weakest player. But this is what happened.*

The tiebreak tournament was arranged as a seven round all-play-all semi-rapid, to be played at the rate of 15 minutes + 10 seconds, with five minutes between games. The event was moved from the original venue to the Club Argentino. The well-known GMs and the attractive rapid chess format encouraged around 80 spectators to gather in the local chess club just before midnight.

The hopes of the promising Gastón were just a short dream, lasting for as long as a sigh. The *foreign GMs Granda (Peru), Kamsky and Onischuk (USA) and the Brasilians Vescovi and especially Milos*, who was very upset at losing his game against the boy from Mendoza, *shamefully agreed to draws amongst themselves*. They would play just three or four moves against each other, while they would use up their

entire thinking time against Needleman, in order to exhaust the resistance of the Mendocino boy.” (emphasis added)

As a professional chess player, I find this article very disturbing and consider it irresponsible journalism. The writer made direct insults and false accusations against five foreign world-class players. Where is the proof that all the grandmasters were colluding against a local Argentinean, beside his own speculation to sell a story? Even the “alleged victim” Gastón Needleman and his father said this was not true. Below are some of the comments from the players:

“After the final round had finished we first had to go through the closing ceremony that started around 8 pm, and then we were driven half way across the city to the Argentina Chess Club. We commenced our playoffs around 9:45 PM. Frankly, that was quite demanding, because our final round game had started at 2 PM, and a bit unnerving. All the players were tired... I would also like to comment on the public that were observing the tournament. They obviously had no clue as to the physical state of the players, and once they started to see short draws happening, booing and whistling were heard. I find this understandable from their perspective, but completely unacceptable from mine. Here we are, with practically little rest between the last round, playing in this glass “fish tank” with five minutes between games, under the observance of people who are sitting, watching us play, while they have the luxury of being seated at the cafe, with TV news on and numerous loud conversations, as well as obviously some drinking going on at the same time.” – Gata Kamsky

“I understand that chess fans want to see fighting, interesting games, but you cannot demand it from us at 2 AM or if it is the second long game of the day. Before criticizing professional players please think about the reasons that can be behind short draws. Better conditions in chess, not rules like a ‘thirty move rule,’ can improve the situation.” – Alexander Onischuk

“With regard to the tiebreak games I must say that I do not believe that the behavior of the players was directed against me personally. It seems logical that if all the grandmasters were rated over 2600 and one in fact was 2700 they would only risk something against the weakest player with 2200 rating points. Also, not all the games were quick draws.” – Gastón Needleman

“We mustn’t forget that these tiebreak games were played in the same night as the final round, and that all the players were exhausted. It ended at three in the morning.” – Alejandro Needleman (Father of Gastón Needleman)

Instead of attacking the professional players, why not question the absurd

condition of making the 7 players play a 6-game play-off starting at 10 PM? What do you expect from the players who had to play the last round game and a 6-game rapid play-off on the same night? Did the organizer make any contingency plan in case such a situation like this occurs? On top of that, there were complaints by many players that the high cost of the entry fee was outrageous.

I absolutely support the opinions of my chess colleagues. It is totally unprofessional to force the players to start a play-off at 10 PM which ends at 3 AM. I have discussed this issue many times, but I would like to take this opportunity to share my point of view once again.

The general financial conditions for professional chess players are not very good and sometimes the playing conditions are horrible as well. Most professional chess players struggle to make ends meet, especially in the United States. Many grandmasters earn less than \$15,000 a year from tournament winnings. In Europe, grandmasters are generally well respected, but this is not the case in the United States.

Instead of making the conditions better for the professional players, new “anti-draw” rules are being implemented that make it harder for professional players to make a living. Such rules are only acceptable when an organizer fairly pays the expenses and appearance fees of the players. However, I will never agree to participate in any event that imposes such rules without proper conditions for the players. Chess players have no real union to protect their rights and some organizers seem to take advantage of this. That is unreasonable exploitation, and it is totally unacceptable. My only way to protest is by boycotting all such events.

I understand that the fans want to see blood. I am also disappointed to see a lack of fighting chess and I wish the professional players would fight harder for the fans. But in many cases, a draw is perfectly acceptable.

In two events this year (HB Global and European Championship), grandmaster Beliavsky spurned a last round draw, lost twice and ended up getting almost nothing. Some people applauded his fighting spirit and some made negative comments about his inability to properly assess his situation. However, in one event, an “anti-draw” rule was imposed.

I obviously know the importance of making chess events exciting for the fans and I understand the importance of public opinion. These are some of the things I have worked very hard in the past 3-4 years to accomplish. But booing the players who are tired because of unconscionable conditions is outrageous. Each player should have the right to make their own decision on the best way to approach the game.

There is an important relationship between professional players, the organizers and sponsors, and the fans. All three have to show respect to each other to help

chess. There is no place for irresponsible journalism. This will only create more division and further harm our game.

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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