



COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



Breaking Through by Susan Polgar

Top Ten Q&A

I meet tens of thousands of chess players from all over the world during my appearances, and during these events I often conduct Q&A sessions. Here then are the ten most popular questions that I have been asked.

Q1: Can more women break into the top 100 of the overall rating list as you and your sister Judit did?

Yes, I strongly believe that others can do it and I hope that they will eventually surpass what we have accomplished. This would be good for chess, so I am rooting for the young ladies of the next generation.

However, no one will be able to do this unless they are willing to work just as hard if not more. The secret of our success has always been our willingness to work harder and be more diligent than anyone else. We made many sacrifices to be the best. There are no shortcuts, and natural talent can only take players so far. Talent is 99% hard work.

Both Humpy Koneru of India and Yifan Hou of China have the ability to at least break the 2600 rating mark. If they continue to focus on their chess, they can go a long way.



Budapest Cruise with Pal Benko

Q2: How do you feel about college chess and tournament chess?

I strongly believe that college chess is a critical bridge between scholastic and adult chess. If we can successfully promote college chess, we will retain many more scholastic players and transition them to adult chess. Otherwise, our USCF adult membership will continue to decline and our sport will be in big trouble.

I have mixed feelings about the various types of tournaments. Many players of all levels enjoy the competition. However, if I were an amateur player, I am not sure that I would

spend up to \$400 for entry fees, plus another \$1,000 in expenses, to play in a tournament with very little chances of recouping the money. I prefer other types of tournaments.

I think club, local and state tournaments are just as fun and very good for chess. If I want to have the feel of big time competition by playing alongside grandmasters, I believe an event like the annual National Open in Las Vegas would be ideal. This has the feel a big Swiss event. However, the entry fees, meals and hotel costs are very reasonable and there are plenty of free side events, such as lectures and game analysis, etc. There are also tons of other fun and exciting things done by the organizers.

Chess as a sport has plenty of room to grow. But all types of chess such as scholastic, college, adult, correspondence, Internet or military chess must co-exist. Therefore, it is vital that we must find the right formula to help our sport grow.

Q3: What is the future of chess in the United States?

This is an excellent question. I believe that the future of chess in America will greatly depend on the future direction of the USCF. In this country it is very difficult for young talented players to receive proper chess training to compete against the best in the world. This is why the United States produces far fewer grandmasters than many other countries. There is no set system and the federation is incapable of changing this with the current leadership. If chess has no superstars, it will stay stagnant.

The Samford Fellowship is the top chess award in the United States. It offers a substantial monetary award for top American players to spend two years training and playing high level chess. It is a wonderful award, but it can only help one or two top players each year. Other top players are on their own and this is a big problem.

GM Gregory Kaidanov and IM Gregory Shahade have a very good training program for promising players and I have something similar through the Susan Polgar Foundation. However, these programs are conducted by various individuals or foundations. There is very little assistance coming from the USCF itself. It is a pity for a major organization like this.

Kamsky, Nakamura, Onischuk, Zatonskih and Krush are the top American male and female players. But they basically got there on their own, without any help from the USCF.

Gata is still one of the best players in the world, but if he is to again compete for the world championship, he must work with a second to improve his opening repertoire. Yet, who will pay for this assistance? American professional players cannot afford this luxury.

Nakamura wants to be among the top ten best players in the world, but he has to work with a competent trainer to help him with various phases of his game. If he does not, he will not be able to keep up with the progress of Carlsen (who just broke 2700), Radjabov, Mamedyarov or Karjakin. I am rooting for him and I would of course help him if he asks.

Krush and Zatonskih both have the ability and talent to be grandmasters. The question is *if* they are willing to continue to improve and can the USCF assist them in any way? Anna just had a baby, which will make things more difficult for her. If Irina continues to improve and play, I not only expect her to become a grandmaster but also one of the five best women players in the world. She has the talent to do it, yet she must work hard to get there.

My goal is to help the younger generation of girls and boys excel in chess through my foundation and the Texas Tech SPICE program. I have accomplished all that I want on a professional level. Now it is time for me to share my knowledge with the next generations.



Budapest Cruise past Parliament

Q4: What is going on with the USCF election?

I decided to run in this election because I owe it to my sport to make things better. The USCF is in bad shape. It has been run for years as an amateur hobby organization. We have board members who micro-manage and make political policies, instead of sound business policies in the best interest of the game. It is operated very inefficiently and there is too much waste. The problem is that many board members do not have the expertise or experience that is needed. The USCF has lost millions of dollars in recent years and it has lost money in nine of the last eleven years. In any normal company, every single board member would have been dismissed long ago.

I am hoping to make serious changes to help US chess and the USCF. I have some of the most qualified people willing to help me, including my husband, who is a premier chess marketing, promotion and PR person in the United States. Several other professionals such as Dr. Mikhail Korenman (an incredible chess organizer and promoter for scholastic, college, adult and professional players) and Randy Bauer (a very experienced and successful financial person) are also willing to help.

I am willing to work with every qualified person for the best interest of chess and the USCF. I welcome the cooperation of other chess leaders. But I am not willing to compromise my personal integrity and the welfare of this federation. The best interest of chess should always come first, before personal interests and accolades.

If I win, I expect to be able to help US chess and the USCF a great deal. But I need a strong team with the right experience and expertise and that is why I recommended Mikhail, Paul and Randy.

Q5: What do you think of the upcoming world championship in Mexico City?

I think it will be fantastic. This world championship has a mixture of “veterans” such as Kramnik, Anand, Leko and Gelfand with the relatively new comers like Aronian and Grischuk. Then you also have the unpredictable Morozevich and Svidler. This is what makes it exciting. I do not think that anyone will run away with it like Topalov did in San Luis.

I would have to pick Kramnik, Anand and Aronian as the three favorites. I would be surprised if any of the other five win, although it could happen. There may even be a tie for first, which would be decided in a playoff.

I know the organizer Mr. Jorge Saggiante very well and I have no doubt that he will stage an incredible show. Everything will be top notch. It will be a spectacular event.



Budapest Cruise at dusk

Q6: What are some of the changes that you would like to see within the USCF?

- a) Improve its respectability, integrity, efficiency, professionalism, image and reputation.
- b) Set up a state of the art marketing, promotion and PR system to help bring in additional revenues and sponsorships.
- c) Establish a sound and balanced budget to ensure the viability of the entire federation.
- d) Increase the cooperation and support for adult, scholastic, collegiate, correspondence and military chess, which in turn will raise the membership level and lead to more revenue.
- e) End chess politics and make every decision based on what is in the best interest of chess and the federation and not for political reasons.

Q7: How do you manage to keep so many blogs updated regularly?

It is not an easy task. It is time consuming and costly. I approach it the same way as I approach my chess career. My blogs are very important to me. It is my gift to the chess world. I want people to see how chess should be positively promoted *everyday*!

I believe in positive promotion. If players, organizers, supporters and sponsors get the proper promotion and recognition, it will help the entire sport. It is good for chess. We must work together to help our sport. All anyone has to do is send me the info and I will do everything I can to promote something if it is good for chess. Free of charge!

This is one of the dozen things my husband and I do each day. But we can manage everything because we work very efficiently and we are very passionate about what we do. I also hope that this will inspire others to do the same. With the incredible technology available today, there is no reason why chess cannot be better promoted. If someone with no technical or computer training can do it, why not others. Again, it all comes down to hard work and diligence.



Budapest Cruise at night

Q8: Do you train your children to be chess champions?

No. I have no interest for my children to be world champions or top chess players. This has to be their choice and not mine. I taught my kids chess because it helps expand their minds and develops various skills for school and life.

If my children want to be the best in chess, my husband and I will help them as much as we can. However, if they just want to be hobby players, that is fine as well. It is more important for me to see them become happy, wonderful and productive human beings.

Q9: How did you come up with the idea for your “Chess, Education and Cultural Tour” to Budapest, Hungary?

One of the things that first attracted me to the game of chess was the ability to meet new people and go to new places. Over the years, I have traveled to more than fifty countries and learned seven languages. Each city and country is a whole new experience for me, and each has something different to offer. Nothing can compare to experiencing a new culture firsthand.

In Europe, countries are much smaller, and it is easy to travel to multiple bordering countries. This gave me the idea for the trip. I think it is very important for people to learn and share their knowledge, experience and culture with others. I definitely plan to do this again next year. Soon, I may expand it to other countries as well. Here is a quote from Nikita P., a participant of my recent tour to Budapest:

A journey creatively organized, well-coordinated, and richly fulfilled, the Polgár Chess Trip combines chess, culture, and recreation in an unforgettable way.



Budapest Cruise Closing Ceremony

Q10: What is your short and long term vision for the USCF if you are elected?

This is an excellent question. There must be short and long term goals for this federation to succeed. Here are the twelve critical areas that must be improved in order for the USCF to grow and prosper.

1. Building a strong membership base via grassroots marketing, promotion and strong structural support for the local clubs, affiliates, organizers, volunteers and supporters. We need to develop a high level of mutual respect and cooperation among these groups.

2. Building a strong membership recruitment plan with excellent incentives for organizations to partner with us. There are more active players who are *not* members of the USCF than there are USCF members. Many of these players do not see the benefits for joining the USCF. This has to change. We must get our message out much better. We must also work with our partners to offer our members and potential members more value and greater benefit for their money.

3. Building a strong support system for scholastic, college, adult, tournament, correspondence, Internet and professional players. As we have seen over the years, adult and college chess suffers from the lack of a cohesive plan to retain scholastic players. We must also recognize that there are many more Internet players than ever before, but we cannot ignore our correspondence or professional players. It is vital to the health of this federation that we have communication and joint effort between all of these membership groups.

4. Building a strong and respectable image and reputation for the USCF. Without this, we cannot get support from the private sector or local, state, or federal government. Any of these agencies and organizations can do a background check on the USCF and this is the chief reason why we keep losing one sponsor after another. We cannot have incompetent and unprofessional people leading this federation. We need to bring in people with proper experience, expertise, energy and passion for chess along with strong records of success.

5. Building a strong, sensible and cost sensitive marketing, promotion and PR project. It does not have to cost tens of thousands of dollars to be effective. I have proven that with the Susan Polgar Foundation. It can be done if we know how. Too many people are bickering about dollars and cents while throwing away opportunities to increase revenues through sponsorships, grants and other avenues.

6. Building a sound and fiscally responsible budget with minimal waste. The savings from the inefficiency alone can fund many additional projects to help the USCF. We must build the USCF into a viable organization. This federation is not running at an optimal level right now.

7. Building a strong relationship and partnership with countless other chess organizations nationwide and worldwide. We need to unite to win. Constant political wars and infighting will only harm chess and the USCF. As a leading federation in the world of chess, we should lead by example and work with everyone to better our sport.

8. Building a strong relationship and partnership with countless volunteers and supporters to help improve many current weaknesses of this federation. There are plenty of people who are willing, ready and able to help, but they are not being utilized properly because of chess politics.

9. Building a strong relationship and partnership with kindergarten, elementary, middle and high schools, as well as colleges and universities across the country to promote chess and education. We also have to work with parents of home-schooled students, in addition to organizations that represent them.

10. Building a strong relationship and partnership with countless companies around the world to promote chess and all its benefits. They want to promote their companies, products or services and we want their sponsorship. It is a win-win situation for both sides.

11. Building a strong communication channel with all members, volunteers, supporters and sponsors, etc. We need to get our strong and positive message out to the people.

12. Building a strong business vision and plan. We need to run this federation like any successful and reputable company. All business decisions must make sense financially or help this federation in one way or another. We cannot make business decisions as a way to reward our political supporters.

We have the numbers and strength to be a competitive and viable organization. All we need is to take advantage of the opportunities and change our approach to running this federation. Instead of saying why it cannot be done, we have to be willing to sit down and figure out what it would take to make things happen for the best interest of chess and the USCF. Just as in a chess game, we must be able to maximize every single advantage and improve every weakness.

But the most important thing is to vote! Let your voice be heard! Together, we can turn around this federation and build it into a strong and viable organization!

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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