



## COLUMNISTS

### Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



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## The Rise of Next Generation

This month I would like to profile two young rising stars: Magnus Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi. About the former, Leonard Barden wrote in his column in the *Guardian* on Saturday, February 9, 2008:

*Magnus Carlsen's joint first with Levon Aronian at the elite Corus Wijk event puts the 17-year-old Norwegian up to No. 9 in the world. Media coverage of his meteoric rise is growing, with comparisons to the teenage Bobby Fischer. It is already sure that Carlsen is the most credible Western-born world title candidate since the US legend. For the first time, too, Carlsen is now arguably ahead of the American at the same age. Fischer at 16 was fifth, though well behind the Soviets, in the 1959 candidates. But his next real breakthrough only came at 18, when he was second to Mikhail Tal at Bled 1961, winning their individual game, then won the Stockholm Interzonal by a wide margin.*



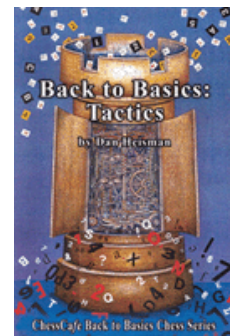
Magnus Carlsen

Only time can tell if Magnus is the next Bobby Fischer, or whether he will break Garry Kasparov's record rating of 2850; here is Magnus' rating progress over the past two years:

Period	Rating	Games
JAN 08	2733	37
OCT 07	2714	25
JUL 07	2710	19
APR 07	2693	27
JAN 07	2690	11
OCT 06	2698	46
JUL 06	2675	27
APR 06	2646	13
JAN 06	2625	40

With the exception of a minor bump between October 2006 and January 2007

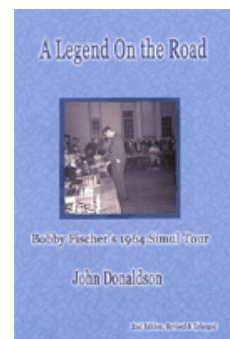
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[Back to Basics: Tactics](#)

by Dan Heisman

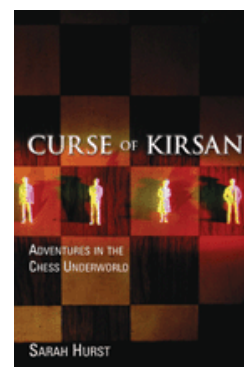
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[A Legend on the Road](#)

by John Donaldson

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[Curse of Kirsan](#)

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when Magnus lost eight points, the 17-year-old has been soaring to the top of the rating chart and is poised to break into the top five.

He began 2008 with an incredible result in Wijk aan Zee by tying for first with GM Aronian, ahead of Anand, Kramnik, Topalov, Leko, Radjabov, Ivanchuk, Mamedyarov, Adams, Gelfand and Judit. He even scored the most wins in the tournament (five) including a crucial win as black against Kramnik! Does anyone even remember the last time Kramnik lost with white? That is a headline in itself.

Now, after ten rounds in Linares, Carlsen is in clear second place with four rounds left. His four wins thus far were against Topalov, Aronian, Shirov and Ivanchuk! He is exciting, relentless, fearless and energetic. The fans love him; his opponents fear him; and the organizers want him. If he continues to win, stays humble, and learns to accommodate the fans and the media, his popularity will have no limit.



*Ian Nepomniachtchi*

Photo: [ChessBase](#)

The next featured player is Ian Nepomniachtchi. He may not be a household name yet, but he will be.

Born in Bryansk, Nepomniachtchi is a product of the Russian chess school. He is a former Russian junior champion and the runner-up of the world under 18 championship. He started playing chess at the age of four. Ian is a hardnosed player who likes sharp positions, and it is no coincidence that he names Mikhail Tal as his favorite player.

He almost ran away with the Corus – Group C last year, scoring 10 points in the first 12 rounds. Only a loss in the last round prevented him from winning the event. A few weeks ago, Ian won the 2008 Aeroflot Open, thereby earning a spot in the next Dortmund super-tournament. Nepomniachtchi scored 7 points (5 wins, 4 draws) to win clear first in a tournament with 23 grandmasters over 2600 and 61 players over 2500! That is quite an impressive feat! He may not get the same attention as Carlsen at the moment, but watch out for this young man in the future.



*Imre Hera*

### **Special essay by Grandmaster Imre Hera of Hungary**

People often ask me about what it takes to become a grandmaster and how they differ from a typical chess player. Here is an enlightening essay by Hungarian grandmaster Imre Hera. He is the first GM to receive a scholarship to Texas Tech University, and he hopes to attend in the fall of 2008.

#### **How was a grandmaster born?**

Everyone who wants to do something in a professional way knows well that success does not come easy. One has to work hard to achieve his goals and has to give up some of the comforts he is used to. When I was a child, the situation was quite the same and I learned this lesson at an early age.

I started playing chess at the age of 4. First, I learned the basics: the name of the squares, the pieces, the openings and the endings from my father. I was only 6 years old when a friend of our family asked me to give a simultaneous for a group of journalists during an event. Everybody was surprised when I defeated six of the eleven players and drew with three others. A daily newspaper wrote an article about the event and the official Hungarian chess magazine *Sakkélet* gave a full-page of coverage about me.

These first tastes of success encouraged both me and my father to put more effort into chess. When I turned 7, my father searched for a personal trainer to help develop my skills. As we were not a rich family, we had to save money for the trainer's wage. Therefore, we did not buy as much clothes, toys, or accessories as other families did. First I was going to school in the mornings and had chess lessons in the afternoons. But as I developed more in chess, I needed more and more training sessions. My parents decided to put me in a 'private pupil' status, so that I had more time for chess. This meant having exams in Math and other subjects during the summer when other children were on their vacation.

My very first adult Hungarian team championship came in 1996. My debut couldn't be better: I won the championship. Everybody who has achieved an aim for what he had worked for many years knows it well – that sweet taste of victory. And when one has tasted it for the first time, he wants it again. That success – still at the age of 10 – made me even more determined to become a better player.

My second big challenge was the 1996 world championship finals at Menorca. It was my second time traveling abroad. Traveling through Barcelona was a huge experience for me. My whole family supported me all the way – my mother accompanied me to Spain. In the end, I finished fifth in the tournament. Many of the competitors who appeared there already had their master or grandmaster titles by then.

After Spain things sped up: I was signed by a club participating in the Hungarian First Division - Matador – and was immediately given the third place in rank. In that same year I was invited to the '98 Rapid World Championship Finals in France. In the end, I won the world championship, which is one of the most favorite memories of my life so

far. This can be better understood if one imagines that he is in EuroDisney – one of the children's favorite places in Europe for free and finishes a competition with a perfect of 8 points out of 8 games. I was even interviewed by the Chinese National Television. When I finally got home, I was on the front page of the national sport newspaper and several other newspapers. For a while I felt like a star. In those days I also learned a lot about how to deal with success and how to put behind achievement when I had to go forward.

Though it seemed that success followed success in my life, there were always lows to bring me back to reality. Meanwhile I had graduated from primary school and started my secondary school in which they did not allow me to continue my studies as a private student. For that I had to focus less on chess for a long time. Little successes – like participating in the secondary school's team – cheered me up during that time. Our school won the first place in the national "student Olympic" championship twice. For the second championship I requested from our trainer to share my knowledge with my teammates in order to help them develop into better players. I was also invited to other schools to give simultaneous exhibitions, but I did not take part any active tournaments. I just played team games.

School was not the only problem during those days. Two other shocking events happened to me: my parents divorced and our club went bankrupt – which of course meant that we had to give up participating in the First Division. I had to look for a new club for the first time in four years. Fortunately, my father not only taught me how to face success but failures as well, so I could get back on my feet.

Three years passed with practicing and I continued my path of collecting new championships. I won the European Rapid Championship trophy in Graz 2000. After secondary school, I decided to return to chess. I wanted to be an IM, as I had one norm before at the age of 11. I reached the international master level unexpectedly quickly in two months in 2005, which opened the gates for me to foreign championships. I got signed by a Polish, a Slovakian and a new Hungarian club. I had my first league victory with my Slovakian team (Komarno) in 2006 and in 2007 we repeated the victory.

My biggest challenge was to become an international grandmaster, which I reached at the 2007 European Individual Championship in Dresden. I even received an invitation to the final 128 in the World Cup in Khanty Mansysk, Russia. I saw some of the top players in the world there and had to fight against grandmaster Rublevsky. Unfortunately, he was a too big of a 'fish' for me to defeat.

Now, in the 14th year of my professional chess career, I have almost attained all that I wanted. I have signed with several clubs, earned the grandmaster title and several titles as well. But I am still far away from being number one in my sport and I still have plenty to learn. I saw many players who got stuck in development at my level. This happened because of laziness in some cases, while with some others it was because they could not set up new challenges for themselves. I do not want to lay back in my armchair because I feel that I can reach whatever I want in chess.

On the way home from Russia I was wondering on the plane whether all these efforts were worth it all. I have to say: totally. I have learned a lot about how to appear, how to communicate and how to behave among foreign people. I even learned how to live on my own – for a week or more – in a foreign country and be away from my family. Sometimes I feel like I should regret the many things that I gave up for practicing chess when I was a child, but the success that I have achieved has compensated that feeling.

With my short autobiography I wanted to show that one can achieve success (or even more) that one has dreamed of, but only if he works hard and brings his best to the game. That is the only way to become a 'grandmaster' in any aspect of life.

### Game Analysis

Here is a recent game between France's #1 female player, IM Marie Sebag and Ivan Popov, one of today's top young talents. The game took place in Round 1 of the 2008 Aeroflot Open – Group 1.

**Marie Sebag (2510) – Ivan Popov (2595)**

Aeroflot Open Moscow (1), 14.02.2008 [B12]

**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 Bf5 4.Be3 e6 5.Nd2 Nd7 6.Ngf3**

At this early stage of the game we are already out of the main theoretical lines; ahead looms an interesting long term strategic battle.

**6...Ne7 7.Be2 Bg4 8.h3 Bxf3 9.Nxf3 c5 10.c3**



Now we have reached a type of pawn structure that is typical for the French Defense. Of course, the big difference is that Black has already gotten rid of his “bad bishop,” which generally would be stuck on c8 at this point. While that is a plus for Black, at some point, he may feel weak on the light squares, because Black has traded his bishop for a knight and not White's light-squared bishop.

10.dxc5 would only be a very temporary gain of pawn, as after 10...Nc6, White cannot hold both the e5- and c5-pawns.

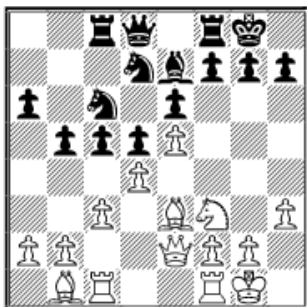
**10...Nc6 11.0-0 Be7 12.Bd3 a6 13.Qe2 Rc8 14.Rac1**

Getting ready for the potential opening of the c-file by the cxd4 trade; White also has a “hidden agenda,” as we shall see in the next two moves.

**14...0-0 15.Bb1**

Now we can see White's idea, which is to create a battery with 16.Qd3, trying to provoke a pawn move to weaken the dark squares in front of the king.

**15...b5**



If Black tries to avoid having to play g7-g6 by playing 15...Re8 (to clear the f8-square for the knight), then 16.Qd3 Nf8 and 17.dxc5 and White wins a pawn, which later can be comfortably defended by b2-b4 if needed.

After the game move 15...b5, ideally Black would advance with c5-c4, a6-a5, b5-b4, open the b-file, try to enter on b2 with his rook and target White's a2- and c3-pawns. However, Black's plan seems too slow in this case.

**16.Qd3 g6**

Black had no other choice. 16...f5 would not only be a strategic mistake, by weakening the e6-pawn, but would also actually lose at least a pawn after 17.exf6 Nxf6 18.Ng5.

**17.Bh6**

Definitely the logical follow-up, to take control of the freshly weakened dark squares around Black's king.

**17...Re8 18.Qe3**

White's position is very nice. If Black plays passively, White has two attacking

ideas to choose from after Qf4: Nf3-g5 or h3-h4-h5, followed by g2-g3, Kg1-g2 and Rf1-h1 and then opening the h-file.

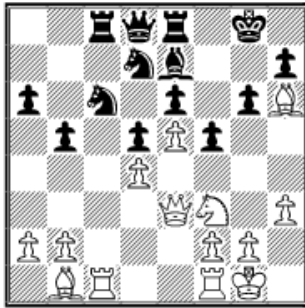
**18...cxd4**

Black is looking for some air.

**19.cxd4**

Now we see why 14.Rac1 was a smart move.

**19...f5**



This is the best defense. Now White has a tough choice to make: keep the position closed or open it by playing 20.exf6. I like White's position in either case. I would say that this is one those situations when it is a matter of taste (or style) as to which way to go. A more aggressive player may prefer the latter choice. The more cautious player would rather maintain the closed character of the position and try to squeeze the full point in a long battle (as we shall see in this game).

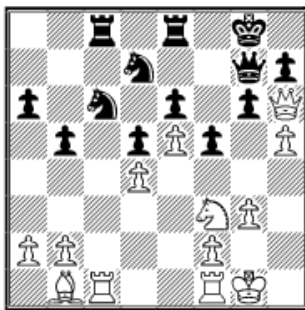
**20.g3**

Marie is thinking along the lines that I described in my comments after White's 18th move.

**20...Bf8**

Generally the trade of the dark-squared bishops favors White in the given pawn structure. However, Black needed to do something against White's upcoming attack. Also, when being in a passive and cramped position, every equal trade is usually helpful.

**21.h4 Bxh6 22.Qxh6 Qe7 23.h5 Qg7**



White has been playing quite logically and Black has also defended well. While White still has an advantage (space advantage and all of the black pawns are on the color of White's bishop), Black has at least survived the attack.

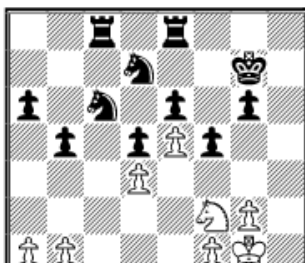
**24.Qxg7+**

After the retreat with 24.Qf4, Black has to take courage and play 24...gxh5, followed by Nf8-g6 and Qg4, hanging on.

**24...Kxg7 25.hxg6 hxg6**

We have reached a whole new stage of the game, as the queens are off the board and king safety is no longer an issue. While Black still faces the same strategic problems as described earlier, White's challenge is how to break through.

**26.Kg2**



**26...a5?**

This makes White's life easier. An interesting try to get counterplay would be 26...g5. However, after 27.Nxg5 Nxd4 28. Rxc8 Rxc8 29.Rd1 Kg6 30.f4 Nc2 31.Kf2, White comes out ahead. Black's best



defense would have been to sit and wait; for example, 26...Na5 27.Ng5 Nf8.

**27.Bd3 Na7**

27...b4 would be quite bad after 28.Bb5 Ncb8 29.Ng5.

**28.Ng5**

Threatening to win a pawn by Rxc8.

**28...Nf8**

After 28...Nb6, White gains control of the c-file with 29.Rxc8 Nbx8 30.Rc1.

**29.b3 Red8 30.Rfd1 b4**

Sooner or later, White would have played a2-a4 otherwise.

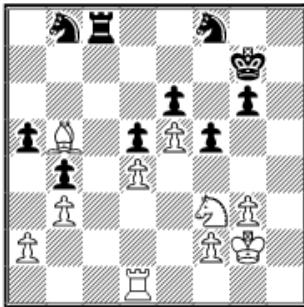
**31.Ba6 Rc6**

31...Rc3 32.Rxc3 bxc3 33.Rc1 Nc6 34.Rxc3 Nxd4 35.Bc8 looks quite attractive for White.

**32.Rxc6 Nxc6 33.Nf3**

An inaccuracy. It was more accurate to use the king to defend the d4-pawn by 33.Kf3, followed by Ke3. I would feel sorry to retreat White's knight from its excellent position at g5; for example, 33...Nb8 34.Bb7 Rd7 35.Bc8 Re7 36.Rc1.

**33...Nb8 34.Bb5 Rc8**



Finally Black gets some counterplay.

**35.a3!**

Another fine move!

**35...Rc3**

If 35...bxa3 36.Ra1 Nh7 37.Rxa3 Rc3 38.Ng1 and Ne2 next.

**36.axb4 Rxb3**

36...axb4 37.Ra1 Rxb3? 38.Ra7+ Kh6 39.Rb7 traps the knight.

**37.Ra1 Rxb3 38.Rxa5**

Black successfully eliminated most of the queenside pawns, but still has to deal with a major weakness on e6 and the horribly positioned knight on b8.

**38...Kh6**

After 38...Nbd7, White wins a knight thanks to the pin after 39.Bxd7 Nxd7 40.Ra7.

**39.Be8 g5**

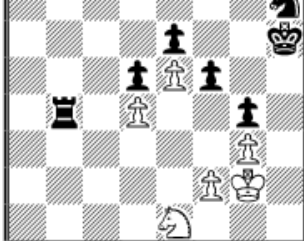
After 39...Nbd7, White can play 40.Ra7 Nb6 41.Rf7 Nh7 42.Re7 Nf8 43.Bf7 and the e6-pawn is lost.

**40.Ra8 g4 41.Ne1 Nh7**



**42.f4!**

42.Nd3 looks tempting (to get to f4), but Black can also try to get a nice outpost on



f3 by 42...Rb1 (not 42...Rxd4 43.Nf4) 43. Nf4 Ng5.

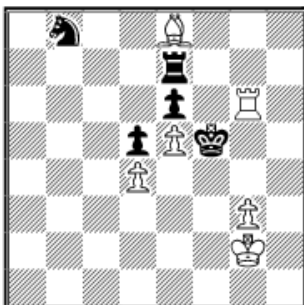
**42...gxf3+ 43.Nxf3 Ng5 44.Nxg5 Kxg5 45. Ra7 Rb6 46.Rh7!**

A cute checkmate threat of Rh5.

**46...f4 47.Rh5+ Kg4 48.Rh4+ Kg5 49.Rxf4**

Finally, all the positional advantages are transformed to material!

**49...Rb7 50.Rf6 Re7 51.Bb5 Rb7 52.Be8 Re7 53.Rg6+ Kf5**



**54.Kf3 1-0**

An elegant finish! The checkmate after 54... Rxe8 55.Rg7!! and 56.g4 is quite brilliant! A great positional game by the top French female player!

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](mailto:PolgarChessInc@aol.com)

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