



COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar on Chess

Susan Polgar



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The 2008 U.S. Championship

The 2008 Frank K. Berry U.S. and U.S. Women's Championships were held May 13-21 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They were once again sponsored by Mr. Frank K. Berry of Stillwater, Oklahoma. A number of top players such as Kamsky, Nakamura, Ehlvest, Christiansen, Benjamin, Ibragimov, Goletiani, Baginskaite, and Melekhhina, etc. did not take part in this year's event. Nevertheless, there were many exciting moments and controversies.



Yuri Shulman
 Photo: [ShulmanChess](#)

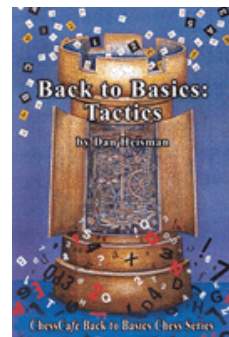
On the men's side, once GM Yuri Shulman took a commanding lead around the mid-point, he never relinquished it. He defeated grandmasters Gulko, Kaidanov, Kudrin, and Becerra as well as IM Pruess. He finished clear first with 7 points. Former U.S. #1 and Champion GM Alex Onischuk took second with 6½ points and GM Sergey Kudrin finished in third place with 6 points. IM Josh Friedel earned his third and final GM Norm by tying for fourth with GMs Akobian and Perelshteyn, winner of the 2007 SPICE Cup.



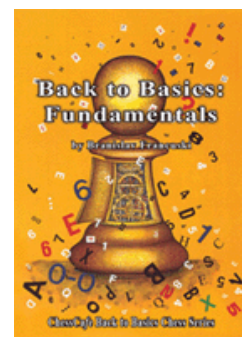
Irina Krush and Anna Zatonskih

On the women's side, it was a two-way race from the start with both Anna Zatonskih and Irina Krush going 5-0. In round six, Anna took a half-point lead when Irina drew Iryna Zenyuk. However, Irina took over the lead in round seven and held on to it until the final round when Anna

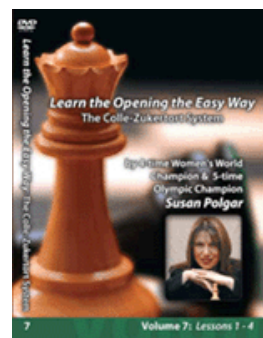
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unexpectedly lost to a very dangerous Chimi Tuvshintugs.

The biggest drama occurred on the last evening when three players technically could win the championship. Irina had 7 points, Anna had 6½, and Tatev Abrahamyan had 6 points. Irina had white against WGM Katerine Rohonyan. Anna had black against WIM Tsagaan Battsetseg, and Tatev had black against WIM Chimi Tuvshintugs.

Anna won and Tatev lost. It all came down to Irina and she was completely lost against Katerine. Luckily for her, Rohonyan botched a simple endgame win and they ended up drawing. Therefore, Anna and Irina tied for first. This is when things really got messy.

Irina's last game was over 100 moves! The rule states that they must play two rapid playoff games. In case of a tie, they will continue with two blitz playoff games. And if the tie continues, they will face each other in an Armageddon game for the title. I have a few problems with this:

- It is wrong to have the players play up to five playoff games to decide the title after they just finished a grueling final round. They actually finished around 11 PM local time, which is nine hours after the ninth round began.
- The rapid, blitz and Armageddon playoff have no relevance to the performance of the player in a regular time control national championship. They are completely different games.

In any case, Anna won the first rapid game, then blundered an exchange and lost the second game. In the first blitz game, she was completely winning only to hang her queen in one move. Anna came back to win the second blitz game to tie the match.

Now the U.S. Women's Championship title falls to one Armageddon blitz game with Black getting less time but draw odds. The action was fast and furious and Irina basically had a much better position. However, she lost on time by one second and the title went to Anna. There is a [video](#) on YouTube of the final game.

Nine days later, Irina officially protested the result via the following open letter posted at *Chess Life Online*:

May 30, 2008

Dear CLO,

I would like to explain what really happened in Tulsa, which has so far been obscured by the final tournament report that you published.

Anna and I were tied at 7.5/9 points at the end of the tournament. We started our G/15 +3 second increment playoffs approximately fifteen minutes after my six hour, 106 move game against Rohonyan ended. We split these rapid games with one win each, then went into the blitz stage of G/5 + 3 second increment, which we also split with one win each.

We then proceeded to the final Armageddon game, that was to be played without increment. As the defending champion, I was told by the organizers that I had to choose how the time would be divided, and Anna would choose the color she wanted to play. I decided that White would be given 6 minutes, Black 4:30. Anna chose to be Black with draw odds. The relevant part of the game is not that I had the initiative throughout, and maintained a winning position until the end. The relevant part is, of course, the clock, since I was deemed to have "lost" the title of US Women's Champion due to my time running out while Anna had 1 second left.

So, about the clock. Tom Braunlich, one of the organizers of the event, wrote in his report "At one point Anna had 2 seconds left compared to about 20 for Irina." This is a plainly incorrect appraisal of the time

situation. Then Tom, in an attempt to explain how my 20 seconds ran out before Anna's 2, wrote that "Anna's draw odds were a big advantage here – she could blitz out moves hardly thinking (just moving the piece nearest to the clock), while Irina actually had to do something with her moves since she had to win." Unfortunately, this statement also has no basis in reality. Despite having a winning position, I didn't need to "do something with my moves"- all I needed to do was move quickly and the person with much less time would flag first. And, in fact, that's what I did. I moved instantly, as can be seen very clearly in the video you've posted of that game. I moved instantly, all the while having a significant time advantage until I got to 0 seconds while Anna had 1. How could this have happened?

First of all, let's establish what the true clock situation was. Tom was certainly off in his estimate, but the essence of what he said was absolutely true: I had a large lead in time, let's say 8 seconds to 3 at one point, or as Anna herself says in her interview, "I realized that I had two seconds. I was so shocked that I am going to lose right now. She has six (seconds). I played Rb8-e8 because it was so close to clock." So let's take 6 seconds to 2. Watching the video, seeing me move instantly, how could 6 seconds lose against 2?

And that's the crux of the matter. My opponent, seeing herself on the verge of losing on time, began playing moves before I had completed mine. She made her moves before I hit my clock, and as soon as I pressed the clock, it was punched back at me. That is how my lead in time was chipped away at, and this process began during the advance of Anna's c-pawn, quite a few moves before the game ended.

Obviously, making moves before your opponent completes theirs is illegal. Were it legal, White, having the "disadvantage" of the first move, would always lose on time to Black if the adversaries were to settle into the rhythm of Black using White's time to move their pieces. The sad thing is, no one stepped in as this was happening. No arbiter, no organizer, did anything to ensure that fair play was being observed in the final moments of the game. It was a free-for-all, where the person with the worse blitz habits "won."

People have pointed out that I should have registered my protest during the game, or immediately after. Unfortunately, while I was certainly in disbelief as I watched my opponent complete 3 moves with her last remaining second and saw myself lose on time despite starting out with a large time lead, during the game and immediately after, I had no clear grasp of how she had accomplished this. It happened too quickly for me to understand, but that doesn't mean that it didn't happen, and that it should be ignored.

An injustice that wasn't brought to light at the moment it occurred is no less of an injustice. Moreover, in our particular situation, it is not an injustice that is difficult to redress. As no one in our tournament was in any way affected by our playoff, no games need to be replayed, no scores adjusted, no ratings recalculated- all that needs to be changed is the way the ending of this story is told.

It has been announced that Anna, by virtue of conserving 1 second on her clock, is the 2008 U.S. Women's Champion.

I fervently dispute Anna's claim to the sole possession of this title. I do not believe that a Champion emerges through one second they have managed to keep on their clock through illegal means.

In my view, a winner of a tournament is someone who at some point, perhaps in some minuscule and barely perceptible way, lifts themselves above their competitors. I would be interested to hear any view that holds that Anna, through legal techniques, did anything to earn the title of Champion over me.

I'd also like to address my reaction at the end of this game, when I knocked a piece off to the side of the board before walking out of the room. This may seem like poor behavior to some, but I believe that my reaction was nothing compared to the aggression leveled at me by my opponent during the end of this game. Knocking off a piece and storming away had no power or intention to take away anything my opponent had been working for during this tournament. When my opponent moved on my time, however innocuous that may appear to be, I believe that she was committing one of the worst transgressions possible: depriving me, through unfair means, of the just rewards of my labor. That is where the aggression lies in this situation, and not in my expression of frustration and anger over being wronged.

I am pained that this incident has raised doubts about my sportsmanship. I have never in my entire career been accused of showing poor sportsmanship. I have never displayed any outward sign of anger or aggression at the end of a game, within sight of my opponent or spectators, or anywhere in the vicinity of the playing area. I have never failed to shake my opponent's hand at the end of a game. I lost two games to Anna in the playoff, and both times I offered my hand in resignation, even though this isn't even required protocol in blitz chess. And I have never been accused of cheating or violating my opponent's rights in any way. I want this point to be clear: my reaction at the end of the final game had nothing to do with "losing" and everything to do with the way it happened and my perception of something unfair having occurred. And although the following piece of information is not entirely necessary as I feel perfectly capable of defending my sportsmanship all on my own, it is rather funny. Guess what Frank Berry, the sponsor and organizer of the US Championship, stated I should get an award for during his closing ceremony comments: that's right, "sportsmanship." Thanks, Frank.

I had hoped to resolve this matter in a friendly way, without being forced to voice my indignation in public. Four days ago, I wrote a letter to Anna explaining my position, urging her to study the video of our final game, and if she agreed with my conclusions about what happened, to write a few sentences for uschess.org where she'd communicate her non-objection to sharing the title with me. In any case, I told her, I looked forward to hearing what she had to say. Unfortunately, I have not heard back from her, and since there is no guarantee that I ever will, I decided to go ahead and make my views known to the chess community.

What do I hope to accomplish through this letter? First and foremost, I want the truth to finally be relayed to the American chess public. As I've mentioned, the final tournament report that was offered to you was misleading, and I have yet to see a retraction of its false assertions. Secondly, I believe that to continue into the future, unthinkingly parroting that Anna Zatonskih is the 2008 U.S. Women's Champion with no regard for how she "won" this title, is a travesty of truth and justice. I believe I have at least as much right to this title as she does, and I would like this right to be acknowledged. To this end, I am asking for responses to this letter from Frank Berry and Bill Goichberg, the President of the USCF. This event was held under their auspices, and I would like to know what they think of the results, given the evidence of what transpired.

I'd like to use this opportunity to say that despite the unsatisfactory ending of the Championship for me, this letter in no way expresses my feelings about the organization of the Championship as a whole. I had a wonderful time in Oklahoma, and wish to thank Frank and Jim Berry for their unwavering kindness and hospitality on all my visits to their home state, as well as to Tom Braunlich, who, in his capacity as organizer, was solicitous and helpful throughout the event. To conclude, I will state that sharing the title would be an acceptable outcome for me, but I would certainly welcome any initiative to decide the title in over-the-board games, with real time controls that don't degrade the participants into clock punching monkeys.

Sincerely, Irina Krush

I made my opinion known during the playoff. I felt that it was absolutely ridiculous to have these two players play five playoff games after their last round match. In addition, there is nothing wrong with declaring co-champions. This has been done many times in the past. However, in this case, the games were finished and the title was awarded. I am not sure what can be done to change the outcome.

I am sorry that both Irina and Anna have to go through this. The USCF President was there, as were the tournament arbiters and organizers. If they approved this outcome at that time and there was no complaint during the game, how can they go back and change their position now? Now, on the technical issue, both players committed violations. If you watch the YouTube video, you will see that around the 1:10 mark, Irina knocked over a rook and did not pick it up. On the other hand, Anna also moved before Irina punched her clock. I have played in countless blitz tournaments and this looks like a normal blitz game to me. I do not see anything unusual and I do not think that either player was doing anything “illegal” on purpose.

This is a very unfortunate ending and I hope this will never happen again. Private organizers can use an Armageddon system or Blitz playoff if they wish. But this is the national championship and it should not be decided this way.

Goddesschess once again sponsored a \$350 Fighting Chess Award, and the Susan Polgar Foundation added \$150 to bring the award to \$500. I was asked to be the judge and I decided to give the award to Tatev Abrahamyan for her $+6 -3 =0$ score. She held nothing back and went all out each game. She was the only competitor without a single draw.

A look back at a historic moment

Here is a game between two former Women’s World Champions. This was the match that changed women’s chess, as for the first time ever a non-Soviet player dethroned the representative of the “Soviet School of Chess.” Because of Jun’s success, she almost singlehandedly changed China’s outlook on chess. The crop of young players today owes many thanks to what she has done for chess in that country.

Xie Jun - Maia Chiburdanidze

Women’s World Championship, Manila (3), 1991
Ruy Lopez [C96]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6



In her book *Chess Champion from China*, Jun wrote: “I was pleased to see a main-line Ruy Lopez....” This is not surprising, because I can testify to Jun’s understanding of the white side of the Ruy Lopez from my own match against her in 1996.

5.0–0 Be7

In my match with Jun, I experimented with the Open variation, 5...Nxe4.

6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 0–0 9.h3

In this position, Black has numerous choices including 9...Nb8, 9...Bb7 etc.

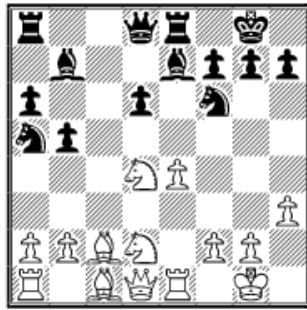
9...Na5

This is the old main line.

10.Bc2 c5 11.d4 Bb7

The main line continues with 11...Qc7.

12.Nbd2 cxd4 13.cxd4 exd4 14.Nxd4 Re8



Up to this point, both players had played relatively fast. Indeed, this position has been reached in countless games. However, Jun took her time here to decide between 15.Nf1, 15.b3, 15.a4 and the game move.

15.b4

The idea is to gain a tempo to develop the dark-squared bishop to the ideal b2-square.

15...Nc6 16.Nxc6 Bxc6 17.Bb2 Bf8?



This natural move is typical for the Ruy Lopez, but it is passive and is the cause of Black's upcoming problems. Black has much better chances to equalize with 17...Nd7 and 18...Bf6.

18.Qf3!

Despite the fact that the queen moves into a pin, this is an excellent move.

18...Rc8 19.Bb3

A great square for White's light-squared bishop, aiming at f7. Having the bishop-pair, Black has no fears of the endgame arising after 19.Bxf6 Qxf6 20.Qxf6 gxf6.

19...Qe7?!

According to Jun this is another mistake. Black's best bet was 19...d5, although then White is also somewhat better, after either 20.Bxf6 Qxf6 21.Qxf6 gxf6 22.exd5 Rxe1+ 23.Rxe1 Bxb4 24.dxc6 Bxd2 25.Rd1 or 20.e5 Bxb4 21.exf6 Rxe1+ 22.Rxe1 Bxd2 23.Rd1.

20.Rad1

White has finally mobilized all her pieces, mostly on ideal squares. Black has a passive position with a long term weakness on d6. Therefore, White is clearly better.

20...Bb7

Opening the c file.

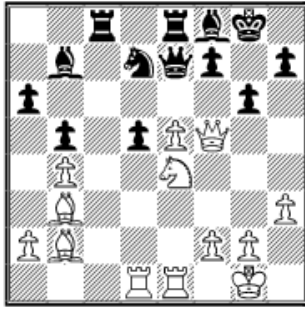
21.Qf5

It was time to move the queen out of the pin.

21...d5 22.e5 Nd7

The tricky 22...Qd7 would fail to 23.Bc2 g6 24.Qxf6 Re6 (24...Rxc2? 25.e6) 25.Bf5.

23.Ne4 g6?



This is the final error. 23...dxe4? fails to 24.Rxd7. While 23...Qxb4 24.Ng5 Nf6 25.Re3 h6 26.exf6 hxg5 27.fxg7 Bxg7 28.Qxg5 Qf8 29.Rg3 is also hopeless. Black's best option is 23...Qe6 24.Qf4 Bxb4, but White's attack after 25.Re3 is quite dangerous anyway.

24.Qxd7!

This is a simple, elegant combination

based on the fork motif.

24...dxe4

If 24...Qxd7, then 25.Nf6+.

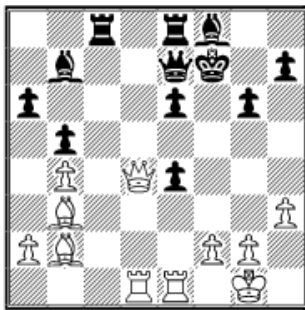
25.e6!

This is a very important move to open the long diagonal for the final attack.

25...fxe6

If 25...f6, White responds with another sacrifice: 26.Bxf6! Qxf6 27.Qf7+ Qxf7 28.exf7+.

26.Qd4 Kf7



Black would end up a piece down after the exchanges on g7: 26...Bg7 27.Qxg7+ Qxg7 28.Bxg7 Kxg7 as 29.Rd7+ forks.

27.Qh8

This is a killer move.

27...Qh4

27...h5 would save the pawn, but not the

game after 28.Qh7+.

28.g3 1-0

Black resigned, as after 28...Qxh3 29.Qf6+ Kg8 30.Rd7, White's attack is decisive.

World Chess News Update

World Champion Vishy Anand has captured his fifth Chess Oscar. Former World Champion Vladimir Kramnik finished second in the balloting and American Gata Kamsky finished third.

In Prague, former World Champion Kramnik easily defeated Czech top GM Navara in an eight game rapid match by the score of 5½ - 2½. Kramnik's only loss was in the eighth round.

GM Vassily Ivanchuk won the 2008 M-Tel Tournament 1½ points over former World Champion Veselin Topalov. Ivanchuk's performance is considered to be one of the most impressive in chess history. He began the six player double round robin event by scoring 5-0 in the first half before coasting to four consecutive draws and winning the last game.

Cuban GM Lenier Dominguez defeated fellow Cuban GM Arencibia in the final round to capture the Capablanca Memorial tournament that took place in Havana, Cuba.

With one round to go, super GM Alexander Morozevich has captured the Sarajevo tournament with a performance of 2900. His incredible performance in this tournament may lift him to the #2 ranking in the world.

The Norwegian wunderkind Magnus Carlsen just defeated Hungarian top GM Peter Leko in an eight game rapid match in Miskolc, Hungary by the score of 5-3.

After winning the M-Tel tournament, GM Ivanchuk defeated World Champion Vishy Anand by the score of 2½-1½ in a four game advanced chess match in Leon, Spain.

The final game was only 16 moves!

Vassily Ivanchuk (2740) – Viswanathan Anand (2803)

Leon Advanced Chess, 01.06.2008

Nimzo-Indian [E55]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 0-0 5.Bd3 d5 6.Nf3 c5 7.0-0 dxc4 8. Bxc4 Nbd7 9.Qe2 cxd4 10.exd4 b6 11.d5 Nc5 12.Rd1 Qe8 13.Nb5 exd5 14.Nc7



14...Qe4?? (14...Qxe2 +/-) 15.Rd4 Qg6 16.Nh4 1-0

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