



C O L U M N I S T S

Scholastic
Chess

Steve Goldberg



*Winning Chess
the Easy Way*
by Susan Polgar

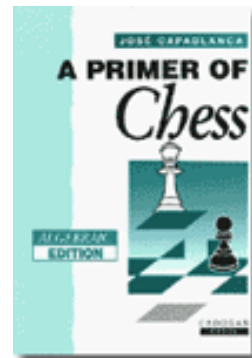
Does Crime Pay?

The SuperNationals III tournament is history now, but there is much going on in the scholastic chess world at the moment. This month we'll touch upon several recent events large and small, we'll hear news from Canada, WIM Jennifer Shahade shares her thoughts, and we'll discuss a distressing form of cheating that begs for a solution.

Do you have any specific topic you'd like to see covered in this scholastic chess column? I'd love to hear from you!

Everyman Quiz of the Month

We continue our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book, courtesy of Everyman Chess Books, to the first three respondents with correct answers. Remember, the questions are taken from one or more earlier ChessCafe Scholastic Chess columns, which can be found in the [ChessCafe Archives](#).. This month, our winners will receive the classic *A Primer of Chess* by the former world champion Jose Capablanca. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck! Please note – previous winners are not eligible to enter subsequent contests.



1. What school does FM Robby Adamson serve as chess coach?
 - a) Edward Murrow High School
 - b) Evanston Township High School
 - c) Catalina Foothills High School
2. Who is the current USCF Scholastic Director?
 - a) Jerry Nash
 - b) Jerry Meyers
 - c) Dr. Robert Ferguson
3. U.S. Junior champion Lev Milman is scheduled to play for which team in the new U.S. Chess League?
 - a) Dallas
 - b) Carolina

c) Baltimore

Did You Know?

According to USCF data, players from 48 U.S. states were represented at the SuperNationals III in Nashville this past April. Which two states did *not* have any players attending?

Upcoming Tournaments**Las Vegas International Chess Festival / National Open June 9-13, 2005**

This chess festival opens with a bang, with four separate events taking place on June 9: the Intergalactic Bughouse Championship, National Open Blitz Championship, the Las Vegas International Chess Camp with GM Susan Polgar, and the special tandem simul consisting of the three famous Polgar sisters Susan, Judit and Sofia. A breakfast lecture occurs June 10 and the U.S. Game/10 Championship will be on June 13. The 100-board Polgar simultaneous exhibition represents the first time in over ten years that the Polgar sisters have appeared together in the U.S.

**2005 U.S. Junior Open June 10-12, 2005**

Six rounds of Game/120 will produce the next U.S. Junior Open champion, who will receive automatic seeding into the 2006 U.S. Junior Invitational. The King's Island Resort & Conference Center in Mason, Ohio (located about 30 miles north of Cincinnati) is the site of this year's Junior Open. As of this writing about 80 players are registered, but organizers are hopeful to reach 125+ participants by the start of the tournament. All participants are provided with discounts to the King's Island Park.

2005 U.S. Blind Chess Championship June 24-25, 2005

While not a scholastic event *per se*, there may be a number of legally-blind young participants in this four-round tournament in West Virginia. To accommodate the special needs of the players, each player has his or her own board, with special pieces to help differentiate between black and white. Moves are announced and are either tape recorded or written down by a player's helper.

U.S. Open August 6-14, 2005

In addition to the primary 9-round U.S. Open, a number of

other major events are taking place:

- a four-round U.S. Open Scholastic tournament on August 6
- the seven-round, Game/5 U.S. Open Blitz championship on August 7
- a three-round U.S. Bughouse championship on August 8
- G/60 quads on August 9 and August 12
- the four-round, Game/30 U.S. Action championship on August 10
- Denker Tournament of High School Champions from August 6-11
- Susan Polgar Invitational for Girls from August 6-11

All players in the U.S. Open are entitled to receive a free copy of *Test, Evaluate and Improve Your Chess* by IM Dr. Danny Kopec and NM Hal Terrie.



**Chess'n Math Association Canadian Scholastic Invitational
August 19-21, 2005**

Thirteen sections from Kindergarten through grade 12 comprise this six-round event, to be held about 90 minutes east of Montreal in Trois-Rivieres. Canadian students ranked in the top 20 of each grade level are invited, as well as a select number of American children.

College Final Four Tournament

The annual round-robin tournament featuring the nation's top four college chess teams has been dubbed the Final Four. This event, held in April at the Karpov School of Chess in Lindsborg, Kansas, was won by the University of Maryland - Baltimore County (UMBC) team.



The Karpov School of Chess

UMBC previously lost to arch-rival University of Texas - Dallas (UTD) in the hotly-contested Pan-American Intercollegiate tournament last December, but didn't lose a single game in this event, blanking Stanford University 4-0 and defeating Miami Dade College 3½-½ before beating back UTD 2½-1½ in the final round. 2005 represents the third consecutive year that UMBC has won the Final Four, so keep that in mind when completing your brackets next year.



Final Four Teams

Let's Play Chess Day

This fun event, hosted by the Marshall Chess Club, took place on May 1, 2005, in famed Washington Square Park in lower Manhattan. Featuring a game/10 championship and a simultaneous exhibition by GM John Fedorowicz, it had the additional attraction of the "Well-Lit Chess Pieces" display by artist Marjorie Kouns. The lampposts topped with chess pieces are a nice improvement over the multi-colored cow sculptures that adorned much of Manhattan a few years ago.

Kasparov Annual All-Girls National Chess Championships

The second edition of this national championship for girls occurred May 14-15, 2005 in Chicago, with 209 competitors. It was organized by the Kasparov Chess Foundation and co-sponsored by Chess Wizards and the United States Chess

Federation.

There were six age-based sections, with winners as follows:

- age 8 and under:
Ashley Xue
- age 10 and under:
Darrian Robinson
- age 12 and under:
Lisa Qiu
- age 14 and under:
Jessie Lopez, Anu Raman, Vickie Pierre
- age 16 and under:
Elina Chertok, Elina Kats
- age 18 and under: Olena Jaworska



Players in action



USCF President Beatriz Marinello and U.S. Women's champion WIM Jennifer Shahade both spent time with the chessplayers who ranged in age from 5 through 18. "Super Jen" (as Shahade is affectionately known) noted that there was a wide range of playing strength, from beginners to those who played on some of the top boards at the recent SuperNational tournament.

In a New York Times article, Michael Khodarkovsky, president of the Kasparov Chess Foundation, noted the common tendency of girls to drop out of chess in their pre-teen years. The All-Girls Championship is intended to stem this tide, as discussed in our March 2005 Scholastic Chess ChessCafe column. Since the majority of participants in the All-Girls Championship were age ten or under, there is clearly much work to be done in this regard.



I asked Shahade if she felt that chess among girls was experiencing an increase in popularity and she had some interesting comments. “Yes, and I hope to do my part to push it further,” she said. “The marketing potential of chess, and the atmosphere at tournaments would improve so much if we could get closer to a 50/50 male to female ratio at tournaments... There is a lot of criticism over having separate women’s tournaments. I think that criticism is based on a negative point of view which wrongly assumes that girls are playing amongst themselves because they are too weak to play against boys. Honestly, I used to believe this and felt guilty for playing in separate women’s tournaments. Now I feel this is an illogical line of thought. All-Girls tournaments are fun, and keep girls in the game, because for many females, especially young girls, it is disconcerting and boring to be one of the only girls at a tournament. Many of my students answered a survey after the tournament in which they claimed to prefer girls tournaments, because boys are ‘annoying’ or because ‘girls rule!’ I would never advocate for constant segregation of men and women into separate events. However, I think that knee jerk reactions from press and/or chess players that ‘women’s tournaments are sexist’ need to be calmly and thoroughly addressed.”



WIM Jennifer Shahade with winners

Super Jen works with a group of girls in the Chess-in-the-Schools program in New York and she accompanied them to the All-Girls tournament. Her hope is to expand the existing program and to have it grow to reach other parts of the country, so that more girls can learn to love the game of chess.

A comical but bittersweet moment occurred at the opening ceremony. When Shahade was introduced as a two-time national women's champion, one of her students turned to her and asked if she was rich. When Jennifer explained that this was unfortunately not the case, the student became upset and exclaimed, "You *should* be rich!" Shahade could only laugh and agree.

HB Global Chess Challenge

This major event was held May 18-22, 2005 and saw 1600 players jockeying for a portion of the \$500,000 guaranteed prize fund. The side scholastic event was not the focus of the tournament but did offer the kids the opportunity to mingle with nearly 50 grandmasters present. Frequent contributor Brad Rosen noted, "It seemed very nicely done and well organized. Maurice Ashley and Josh Waitzkin addressed the crowd at the Opening Ceremony



GM Maurice Ashley at a simul

and then later on the two of them played a Kangaroo Simul against about 30 kids – alternating on their moves. It looked like a lot of fun. Also after the tourney, a group of GMs came over and did autograph signings. Again, this all looked well done.” The main tournament (and the \$50,000 top prize) was won by 21-year-old Zviad Izoria of the Republic of Georgia. See below for further commentary on events at the HB tournament.

Polgar Scholastic Tournament and News

Friday, May 20, 2005, GM Susan Polgar held a promotional event with a local Girl Scout troop, followed by her May Scholastic Tournament on May 22 at her Chess Center. I caught her as she was preparing to leave to open her new Susan Polgar South Texas Chess Center, but she was kind enough to discuss this monthly scholastic event.



GM Susan Polgar entertaining the girl scouts

Typically about thirty kids attend these game/30 tournaments each month. Both the May and April tournaments were won by young ladies with perfect 4-0 scores. It seems that they are trying to emulate Susan herself, who rarely loses. The events are divided into three sections: K-3, grades 4-6, and grades 7-12. The top three finishers in each category receive trophies and the Susan Polgar Foundation also awards prizes to the top female player and to the best result by siblings, a rather unique award. In a display of good sportsmanship, every child who does not win a trophy is presented with a medal for their efforts.



Polgar and players

Is there anyone doing more for chess in general, and scholastic chess in particular, than Susan Polgar? Since last month's [column](#) appeared, a number of interesting developments have occurred:

As of May 23, Susan joined the world of bloggers by introducing her new chess weblog at www.SusanPolgar.blogspot.com. As she describes it, "This will be a site where fans can communicate directly to me and where we leave ugly chess politics at the door. Please feel free to visit this site and express your views. I would like to make chess better and more popular than ever. I need your help and I am always interested to hear what you have to say! The only thing I ask for is to keep it clean so fans of *all ages* can enjoy! Happy blogging everyone!"

May 28 was the opening date of the new Susan Polgar South Texas Chess Center in Corpus Christi, Texas. Funding for the center came entirely from local groups and individuals interested in providing a safe, instructive environment for children in the region.

On August 1 and 2, Susan will hold a World Record Chess Challenge, attempting



Polgar with the tournament winner

to set a new world record for most chess games played simultaneously. More than 350 chess stations will be set up at The Gardens Mall in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, with one opponent per station. The event will be monitored by the Guinness Book of World Records and Susan needs to win at least 80% of the games to be eligible for the record. Funds raised will go to the Susan Polgar Foundation to further promote chess in the U.S. The current record for a simul is 321 games, conducted by IM Andrew Martin in England, in February 2004.

Scholar-Chessplayer Outstanding Achievement Award

The USCF recently announced the winners of the 2005 Scholar-Chessplayer Outstanding Achievement awards. Seven high school juniors and seniors were selected for this award, meant to honor those who have excelled in the areas of academics, chess and sportsmanship. Scholarships varying from \$200 to \$2000 were presented to the following students: Keaton Kiewra, John Bartholomew, Laura Ross, Matthew Ho, Kevin Binz, William Stewart and Eduard Shalimov. Congratulations to these fine chess ambassadors!

Canadian Update

Our [December 2004](#) column noted a hospital fundraiser by 12-year-old Shiyam Thavandiran, with the next fundraiser to involve Canadian under-16 champion Jonathan Tayar. These two young idealistic players are in the news again. Jonathan just won the Canadian Grade 11 championship, and Shiyam did likewise with the Canadian Grade 7 championship, part of the annual Canadian Chess Challenge, held May 22-23 in Ottawa, Ontario. We hope to hear more from these two in an upcoming Scholastic Chess column.

Shiyam also placed first in the 2005 Canadian Junior (Under 20) Championship with a nearly perfect $8\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$



Champion Shiyam Thavandiran (above) and Yummy chess cake at the Canadian Chess Challenge (below)

score, beating much higher rated Zhe Quan in the process. The event was held from April 30 through May 4, in Brantford, Ontario. Still only 12 years old, Shiyam is the youngest-ever Canadian Junior Champion.



The 2005 Canadian Youth Chess Championship took place March 24-27 in the beautiful city of Vancouver, with the top three finishers in each section qualifying to represent Canada in the World Youth Chess Championship July 18-29, 2005 in Belfort, France. GM Mark Bluvshtein, profiled in the December Scholastic Chess column, finished first in the Under 18 boys division, and Anastasia Kazakevich topped the Under 18 girls section.



Players at 2005 Canadian Youth Chess Championship

David Cohen from Toronto also reports that as of this writing filming is taking place in his fine city for the movie *Knights of the South Bronx*. The story apparently is about a fellow sentenced to do community service who chooses to fulfill his obligation by coaching his local school chess club. Ted Danson plays the starring role.



Happy players at the 2005 CYCC

Sandbagging (maybe) Rears Its Ugly Head

The practice of sandbagging, where a player deliberately loses games in many “minor” tournaments in order to decrease his rating and thereby qualify for a lower class in a major tournament with large cash prizes, has been going on as long as there have been ratings and class divisions.

The rating system has been corrupted by the increase of class prizes to almost ridiculous dimensions. Human nature being what it is, sandbagging has become so common as to be almost an accepted practice within the chess community. Does anyone seriously believe any longer that a player who wins a multi-thousand dollar prize in a B section is really a B player? At the National Open last month in Las Vegas Mike Cavallo told me that the Unrated section was being called by some the ‘foreign expert’ section. In an attempt to curb these abuses, the Federation has evolved an ever more elaborate system of rules and regulations to prevent them. I think that by and large this approach, meant to keep the great tournaments profitable for large organizers, has failed. Competitors no longer believe in the fairness of class prizes and legitimate class players are discouraged and no longer compete. No system of rules and regulations will ever keep up with the human ingenuity employed in circumventing them, so it is time to start deregulating USCF chess. Of course I do not want to prevent any organizer from offering large class prizes and developing rules to keep up at least the appearance of fairness. But an organizer who was willing to limit large class prizes only to players who had maintained a rating in that class for a period for three years or more after continuous play might be pleasantly surprised at how many class players returned to play at the prospect of honest competition.

- Dr. Tim Redman, 1999

Several years ago, tournament guidelines in the World Open had to be adjusted due to 'sandbagging' FIDE-rated foreign players who would play in low sections and walk away with thousands of dollars...

Unfortunately, TDs are not trained in human conflict resolution and frankly do not know how to properly deal with certain contentious situations.

- *The Chess Drum*, 2002

[At the 2004 World Open] in some of the lower divisions, it seemed like the sandbaggers predominated. 'Sandbagging' essentially is a form of chess hustling, where a player will intentionally play to lower his rating (yeah it's usually guys) in a minor tournament so he qualifies to play in a lower division in a big \$\$\$ tournament. In Philadelphia the prize money was huge with a \$10,000 first place prize in U1600 division, and in U1400 it was \$6,000. So 'sandbagging' may have been irresistible for many.

- *The 64 Square Jungle*, July 2004

Managers reserve the right to deny eligibility to the U2000 section to certain participants who they suspect have intentionally lowered their rating ('sandbagging'). Note that no proof is necessary. We also reserve the right to impose further restrictions on a player, like a tournament floor and/or a restriction on rated games if we suspect that a player is sandbagging.

- Internet Chess Club regulations, January 2005

And on and on it goes. The recent HB Global tournament, with its huge cash outlays to top finishers in each class, thus presented an enticing sandbagging opportunity for those whose chess ethics are lacking – in other words: those who outright cheat.

Mind you, the organizers of the HB event were very aware of this danger and took a number of steps to minimize the risk. I want to emphasize that the problems discussed below that allegedly occurred at this tournament are chess issues, not specifically HB issues. In fact, on the "FAQ" (frequently asked questions) page of the HB website, they published the following strong statement:

The organizers of the HB Global Chess Challenge wish to ensure, to the maximum level we are capable, that this historic tournament is handled in a way that

guarantees the maximum fairness to all participants. While we believe that 99% of all chess players are honorable competitors, we are well aware there is a small minority who do not put a premium on fair play. Because of this unfortunate reality, we are instituting a strong ratings policy to counter sandbaggers and cheaters. This will work in concert with our Security Policy, which together should cover most of the circumstances that may arise.

Cheating, a Zero Tolerance Policy: On-site security will be very tight at the tournament. Any player who is proven to be cheating by using electronic devices or computers, talking to anyone without permission from a TD, speaking in a different language to anyone while that person's game is in progress, making unusually frequent or lengthy trips away from the board or any method of illegally exploiting the system will be kicked out of the tournament and no longer allowed to play in any future HB or Generation Chess events. There will be no refund of entry fees. USCF Ratings Alert: To prevent sandbagging, the tournament will use each player's highest published rating between October 1, 2004, and April 2005. Also, the Tournament Director reserves the right to use CCA ratings, which are fair assessments based on Continental Chess Tournaments held by premier organizer Bill Goichberg over the last 30 years.

Players with multiple ratings: The tournament will use players' highest rating on any official rating list... Foreign players must provide proof of their rating in the last year in order to play in sections other than the Open or Unrated. No player will be allowed to play in any class section without a rating (provisional ratings do not count).

It seems clear that the staff of the HB tournament went to great lengths to put on an event where class players would have a realistic opportunity to win large cash prizes. GM Maurice Ashley specifically arranged the prize structure to be attractive and attainable for the average player.

Nevertheless, a distraught chess parent reports the following: "When the rubber hit the road, I think the tournament directors put the blinders on or looked the other way. Let me briefly relate my experience at the HB." He goes on to describe that his son was playing in the Under 1800 section and in one of the later rounds was paired with a player who had achieved a rating in the high 1900s less than a year earlier but who subsequently

played in events where he routinely lost to players rated under 1400, some even rated under 1000.

The chess parent notes, "Since this downward spiral commenced in the summer of 2004, this player's rating was well within the criteria dictated by HB to play in U1800 (which went back to the Oct. 2004 supplement). Thus, it eluded their anti-sandbagging policy." This parent was concerned and brought this information to the attention of two TDs prior to the round. According to the parent, the TDs were "abrasive and insulting and would not even hear me out." He was told that in the opinion of the TDs, this player's history did not constitute sandbagging. "I did not expect nor ask the TD to forfeit the game and award the point to my son before the round. I did ask that they review this matter and that they consider taking action. I don't think this happened in a serious way. If egregious sandbagging is a form of cheating, then this player should have been treated like any other cheater." The player in question, the one who frequently lost to players rated several hundred points lower, ended up winning a rather substantial class prize. This parent commended the HB organizers for vigorously promoting an anti-sandbagging policy, but he obviously wasn't pleased with its implementation.

So is this a case of sandbagging? Certainly player ratings can rise and fall, sometimes rather dramatically, and it may be nearly impossible to prove underhanded intent.

A different type of cheating was also described at the www.ilchess.org discussion board:

Another story from the HB Challenge. Round 8 saw a player in the Under 2000 section make yet another trip to the bathroom. This time the intrepid tournament staff was ready and an NTD followed him into the bathroom, catching him on his cell phone. Meanwhile another director was closing in on his accomplice upstairs playing chess on his laptop and talking on the phone. Realizing he was caught, the player bolted for the back door and escaped. Sadly the computer-toting individual also got away but there is already an ethics complaint on its way to the USCF. I suspect both have played in their last USCF event.

With the possible exception of a couple of tournament directors, it appears that the HB staff took very seriously activities detrimental to chess. It's difficult to imagine putting policies in place more stringent than what was done at HB, yet if these stories are true, obviously some level of cheating

continues. What must be going on at events where there is not as much concern for unethical activities? Having spoken with GM Maurice Ashley and others of the HB group, I am certain that they are doing and continue to do everything in their power to ensure enjoyable and fair tournaments.

My questions to the chess community are:

- Is this a wide-spread problem, or are these very isolated exceptions?
- What can be done to further minimize cheating at tournaments?

There will always be those who skirt the rules as long as they feel that they can get away with it. I'd like to believe that such offenders are few and far between (there were, after all, some 1600 participants at the HB tournament), but I'm interested in hearing from tournament organizers and directors, parents and players, coaches and teachers. Tell me your experiences and how these issues have been dealt with. By the way, these problems are certainly not limited to chess tournaments. Similar issues are faced in golf, bowling, and even cycling. Any sport involving handicaps and ratings is prone to manipulation.

Do we need to use firm and established rating floors to eliminate sandbagging? Should a TD use a player's highest rating over the previous 12 months to determine which class he can play in? Maybe we need to go even further back, perhaps using the highest rating over the previous 24 months. Is there software developed yet to mathematically analyze a player's rating and performance history to flag suspicious individuals? How can determinations be made that won't wrongfully penalize players whose skills, attention, motivation, and rating truly do fluctuate wildly?

Do we need electronic monitoring devices to detect unscrupulous communication between players and outsiders? Do we want such imposition? How can cell phones, PDAs, hand-held computers and the like be eliminated as sources of cheating?

Is this all being over-blown? Probably it is, but I am concerned that children should be exposed to the beauty of chess and to the excitement and challenge of fair and upright competition, not to a hidden and dark underbelly.

I'd like to hear what you think.



Young HB Global players enjoying chess

Answer to Did You Know?

North Dakota and Vermont were the only states not sending players to the SuperNationals III tournament.

Have something newsworthy you'd like to share? E-mail me at scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. I can't promise that I'll be able to respond to each e-mail, but every one will be read and considered. For all games submitted, please provide the following information: (1) Names and age of both players; (2) Ratings of both players; (3) When and where the game was played; (4) The time control used in the game; and (5) Any other information you think would be helpful for us to know.

Copyright 2005 Steve Goldberg. All rights reserved.



[TOP OF PAGE](#)



[HOME](#)



[COLUMNS](#)



[LINKS](#)



[ARCHIVES](#)



[ABOUT THE
CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)

[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)

[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2005 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**The Chess Cafe®**" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.