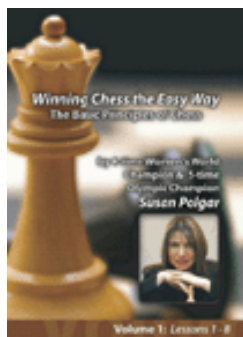




COLUMNISTS

Scholastic
Chess

Steve Goldberg



*Winning Chess
the Easy Way*
by Susan Polgar

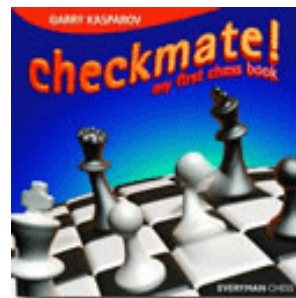
Inside the U.S. Chess School

This month we take another look at the inaugural Susan Polgar National Open Championship for Girls, held in Corpus Christi, Texas in January. Joyce Ramirez, a mother of three of the participants, shares their story with us. Plus, Stephanie Ballom, one of the more active young female players in the country, offers her insights as well.

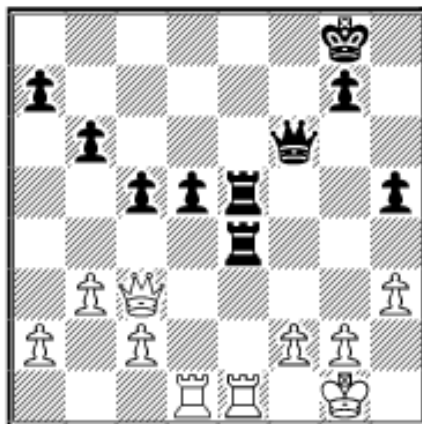
The new U.S. Chess School opened its doors to its first class of players in January and four of the participants provide us an insider's view of the proceedings. See what it was like to be among the top young players in the country, with a top GM available nearly non-stop.

Everyman Quiz of the Month

Each month Everyman Chess Books sponsors our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book to three respondents with correct answers. This month, winners of our quiz will receive *Checkmate! My First Chess Book* by Garry Kasparov. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck! Please note – winners within the last three months are ineligible for this month's contest.

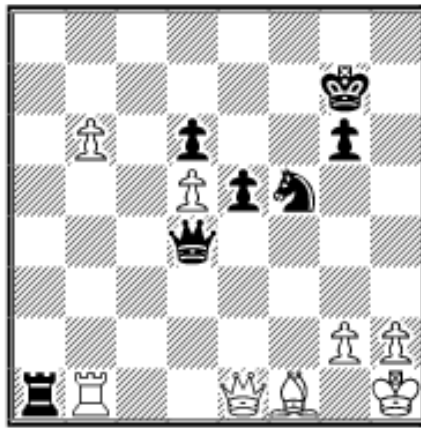


We will accept all contest answers for one week following the appearance of the column, then randomly select our three winners from this group. So please e-mail your responses to me by March 15, 2006.



Problem 1 is taken from *Think Like A King: More Tactical Thinking*, with Black to move.

How would you proceed?



Problem 2:

Also from *Think Like A King: More Tactical Thinking*, it is again Black's turn to move. What do you suggest?

For both problems, send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com.

***First Annual Susan Polgar National Open Championship for Girls:
January 27-29, 2006***

Joyce Ramirez is the mother of three girls who thoroughly enjoyed themselves at the inaugural Susan Polgar National Open Championship for Girls, held in their home town of Corpus Christi, Texas. Joyce spoke glowingly of the tournament, saying her daughters had a "wonderful time" and enjoyed the company of over 200 other girls.



L to R: Deanna, Courtney and Kimberly Ramirez

Deanna, age 11, and Courtney, age 9, were introduced to chess a couple of summers ago when Dan DeLeon taught the game as part of the summer day camp the girls were attending. They now take weekly lessons from DeLeon, director of the Susan Polgar South Texas Chess Center. Youngest daughter Kimberly is 5 years old and has just recently begun playing. Joyce told me that she is amazed that little Kimberly, whom she described as a "firecracker," could actually sit still for an entire game.

The girls seem to love the game, as evidenced by the "roomful of trophies" at their home. They typically play in one or two tournaments monthly at the Polgar Chess Center, in addition to other events in the area. Joyce reports that chess tournaments are available locally nearly every weekend. Deanna and Courtney have also played in the state "grades" championship the past two years in Plano, Texas, and had the chance to attend the National K-12 tournament in Houston last December. They are planning on traveling to Las Vegas in June to play in the Susan Polgar World Open Championship for Girls.



Although about 90% of the tournaments they play in are mixed, with both boys and girls, they do enjoy the all-girls events. Their mother says that they are “sometimes intimidated by boys” and seem to be more comfortable playing other girls. Joyce laughed as she recalled one of her daughters commenting about a male opponent, “he’s gi-normous!”

One of the unique aspects of the recent Polgar tournament was the free hair and nail care provided for all of the players that, according to Mrs. Ramirez, “took their minds off the stress” of the tournament. She speaks highly of GM Susan Polgar, who has visited the area several times and “never turns anyone down for an autograph or picture.”

Another participant at the January Susan Polgar National Open Championship for Girls was 17-year-old Stephanie Ballom, from Mansfield, Texas, near Dallas-Ft. Worth. Stephanie had an excellent performance at the tournament, finishing third in the main event. She also placed second among high school girls in the puzzle solving contest, and won first place in the blitz tournament. For her efforts, she received a trophy, a Susan Polgar Staunton Edition chess set, a digital chess clock, and a chess DVD.



Stephanie Ballom

She said her favorite aspect of the event “was taking notation on the Monroi Personal Chess Manager. It’s a system that enables you to record your notation electronically on a portable, wireless device that looks like a PDA. Not only was I able to take notation more efficiently, my parents were able to view my games in real time over the Internet. After my games I was able to go back to

my hotel room and access the Monroï website to view my games, and other games played at the tournament, as well as download them to my personal Chessbase database. I'm into technology."

No stranger to girls' tournaments, Stephanie was selected as one of Texas' representatives for the Polgar National Invitational Tournament for Girls in August 2005, and also played in the Kasparov All-Girls National Championship in May 2004, winning her section. When asked about her preference for mixed or girls-only tournaments, Stephanie replied, "Personally, I just enjoy playing chess and it really doesn't matter to me if I'm playing boys or girls. I think girls' tournaments are a great way to encourage more girls to play and to continue to play."

Stephanie has been enjoying chess for some time now. "I first took up chess in the 4th grade" she said. "I was walking through a Barnes and Nobles bookstore with my dad and there was a chess book on the shelf and it came with a chess board and pieces. I was interested in the pieces and asked my dad about them. He bought the book and taught me to play."

Since then, Stephanie has played in nearly 300 USCF-rated tournaments, including a number of national events. In addition to the tournaments noted above, she has also played in the U.S. Open, National Open, and a number of national scholastic events. At age eleven, she placed first in the under-15 section of the National Junior Open. In 2003 she swept the Texas State High School Girls Championship with a perfect 6-0 score, winning a full four-year scholarship to the University of Texas - Dallas (UTD).

"I attribute my success in chess," Stephanie said, "to my supportive parents, who have given me the opportunity to play chess in different venues, such as playing at the Dallas Chess Club and attending national tournaments. I have had a lot of encouragement and support from so many people. One of the great things about chess is that players will go over games with you, look at positions and give you advice."

For other kids looking to improve their game, Stephanie advises, "I found out the hard way that there is no substitute for studying (especially tactics and endgames) and playing a lot of chess." She also suggests that chess coaches "teach kids on their level with positive reinforcement and fun activities."

Like most teenagers, Stephanie's interests are wide-ranging. "Some of my non-chess interests" she says, "include tennis, photography, scuba-diving and volunteering my free time to organizations, such as Toys For Tots, the local nursing homes, and the Special Olympics. I feel that I have been blessed in my life and I encourage everyone to help people less fortunate. I also like studying languages. I'm learning Spanish and Russian now and belong to clubs at my high school." She plans on

graduating from high school a year early to begin her studies at UTD in psychology and neuroscience.



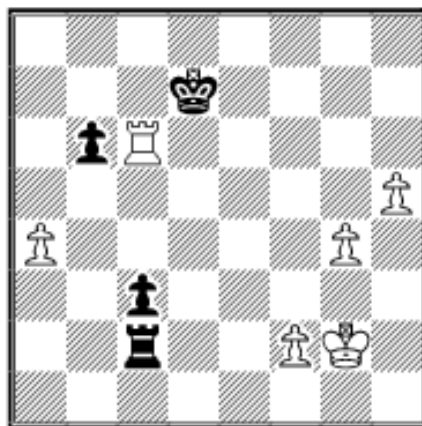
Pandolfini congratulates Stephanie after her win

As for her favorite chess game, Stephanie fondly recalled her time at Green Country Chess Camp in August 2000 when she was one of 52 participants in a simul given by NM Bruce Pandolfini. Age 11 at the time, she was the only player to defeat Pandolfini. As she explained, “Not the greatest game, but pretty exciting for an eleven-year-old to beat a master.” Here is that game:

Bruce Pandolfini - Stephanie Ballom

Simultaneous Exhibition, August 2000

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Bb4+ 4.Bd2 Qe7 5.a3 Bxd2+ 6.Qxd2 O-O
7.Nc3 d5 8.e3 b6 9.cxd5 Nxd5 10.Bd3 Bb7 11.e4 Nxc3 12.Qxc3 f5
13.Qc2 Nd7 14.O-O c5 15.Rfe1 Qf6 16.Ne5 Nxe5 17.dxe5 Qxe5
18.exf5 Qf6 19.fxe6 Rae8 20.Bxh7+ Kh8 21.Re3 Rxe6 22.Rh3 g6
23.Bxg6+ Kg7 24.Rh7+ Kg8 25.Rxb7 Qxg6 26.Qxg6+
Rxxg6 27.Rxa7 Rgf6 28.Rf1 Re8 29.Rd1 Re2 30.Rd8+ Rf8 31.Rxf8+
Kxf8 32.g4 Rxb2 33.Rc7 Rc2 34.h4 c4 35.a4 c3 36.Kg2 Ke8 37.h5
Kd8 38.Rc6 Kd7**



Down two pawns and in a lost endgame, Stephanie nevertheless continues to play and takes advantage of a simul-induced mistake by her famous opponent.

39.Rxb6? Rb2!

Stephanie finds the best move; an alternative is 39...Rxf2+ 40.Kxf2 c2 and White cannot stop the pawn from queening. After the game,

Pandolfini complimented his young opponent, saying she was very resourceful.

40.Rg6 c2 41.Rg7+ Kd6 42.Rg6+ Kd5 43.Rg5+ Kd4 0-1

U.S. Chess School

As noted previously in this column, IM Greg Shahade and GM Gregory Kaidanov have teamed to form the U.S. Chess School, whose stated purpose is to “train our young players to their fullest potential.” The plan is to have periodic week-long programs providing intensive study for a small group of players. The first class, consisting of nine students, inaugurated the school this past January. Several of them shared their thoughts with me concerning this very promising project.



U.S. Chess School session

Goldberg: Had you previously had an opportunity to work with GM Kaidanov?

IM Josh Friedel: I had a couple lessons with him when I was about 10 or 11.

FM Daniel Rensch: No, but his reputation certainly played a role in me coming.

IM-elect Robert Hungaski: No, this was the first time I had the opportunity to work with him or any GM for that matter, and now that I have this new experience I certainly hope it won't be the last.

Goldberg: What was your overall impression – was the week about what you expected?

FM Salvijus Bercys: A lot of work and I'm really happy that I accepted the invitation. The best training camp I've ever been to.

Rensch: It was more than I expected. It was extremely tiring, but well worth it.

Hungaski: I thought it was a fantastic experience, it was a week packed with high quality chess and intensive training. It completely surpassed my expectations, since I wasn't expecting the level of the other players to be so high.

Goldberg: Did you find the training too demanding, too light, or just

about right?

Bercys: Well, we worked an average of 7 hours a day. I guess it was just about right.

Friedel: It was the right combination of intense and laid back.

Rensch: It was demanding, but worth it.

Hungaski: That's a tricky question. One as a chess player is always aspiring for more, but to say I would have needed the training to be more demanding would be wrong. Everyday we left the work place, I felt exhausted from the intensity of the sessions. Everyday I left with new ideas and always something to think about. To me the training was just right.

Goldberg: Are there one or two specific aspects of the training that stand out as particularly beneficial?

Bercys: How GMs beat weaker players and the lesson about analyzing a specific player for you to improve in his strongest point.

Friedel: Kaidanov liked to focus on the psychological aspects of the game, which I found to be both interesting and helpful. For example, in a game of mine I described how since I was leading the tournament, and I was playing the highest player, a draw would be "OK." He described how this mentality affected my play, which is one of the reasons I lost the game.

Rensch: His ability to talk about practical issues that all chess players have. Not just the moves on the chessboard, but also psychological patterns that tend to repeat themselves in every player's game.

Hungaski: What I found particularly appealing was having at our disposal a GM like Mr. Kaidanov, to whom I felt I could ask anything and always get a straight answer. This is not something I'm used to and I found it to be very important to understand many aspects of the game seen by a GM's perspective.

Goldberg: Has your personal training regimen changed in any manner as a result of this session?

Bercys: I analyze more with my chess partners.

Friedel: It hasn't completely changed, but I've adjusted a few things. For example, I found that I was a bit too opening-focused, and manage my study time differently as a result.

Hungaski: I wouldn't say it's changed very much, but it has improved.

Goldberg: Do you plan to return for further training at the U.S. Chess School?

Bercys: If I get invited again, then yes.

Rensch: If I am invited, I will never refuse.

Hungaski: If I get the chance, of course!



Dinner break at the Kaidanov home

Goldberg: Can you provide brief snippets of some of the analysis that took place?

Bercys: Well, we went over a lot of games; searched for specific mistakes of each other. We looked at some GM games, some analytical positions.

Friedel: It was mostly discussion between the students, with Kaidanov channeling it and adding a few things. Occasionally he would lecture, but it would be on a specific point, and wouldn't be too long. Also we did some problem solving and working in small groups.

Rensch: Mainly we analyzed each others games in detail, so we were able to see a lot of problems that people had in their actual games.

Hungaski: Well, when you have so many talented players with so many different points of view it's hard to always stay on the same track. I think what Kaidanov aimed to do, and brilliantly succeeded in, was to present the topic in his own way and then help us develop it in our own ways.

Goldberg: Was there camaraderie among the players, or did it seem like everyone was competing against one another?

Bercys: Competing? I don't think so. Sometimes we disagreed, but not competing.

Friedel: Both.

Rensch: There was definitely more of a learning together environment than any kind of negative competitiveness.

Hungaski: No, there was a great atmosphere. If I get the chance to take part in another one of these sessions, I hope I'm lucky enough to share it with guys as cool as these.

Goldberg: Do you have any game scores from the week of training that you can contribute?

Bercys: What game scores? We didn't play any chess games there; just a blitz tourney the last day.

Hungaski: Nope, we didn't really play any chess games! Only analyzed games we had previously played. At the end of the event we all were invited to Gregory's house, where a small blitz tournament took place, but no records were kept.

Goldberg: Any other thoughts you'd like to add?

Hungaski: I believe that this is an exceptional idea and it should be supported, since it will undoubtedly help to develop the chess that will represent this country in the future. It is a fantastic opportunity not only to improve one's skills, but also to form tight bonds that may last a lifetime.

According to Greg Shahade, the next session of the U.S. Chess School, with another group of players, is scheduled to immediately follow the 2006 National Junior High School Championship in April. We'll keep you posted as new developments occur. To make a donation or to read more about this excellent program, see www.uschessschool.com. U.S. Chess School president Greg Shahade can be contacted at admin@uschessschool.com.

As this column goes to press, the 2006 U.S. Championship is taking place, with GM Kaidanov and four U.S. Chess School players as participants: Josh Friedel, Sal Bercys, Igor Schneider and Lev Milman.

2006 Kasparov All-Girls National Championship: March 17-19, 2006

The third annual edition of the Kasparov All-Girls National Championship takes place in Chicago, with a special appearance from long-time world champion Garry Kasparov. He is scheduled to play a 40-game simultaneous exhibition against section winners from the two previous All-Girls tournaments and those other players fortunate enough to be selected in the lottery drawing for the remaining simul players. Kasparov will also conduct a book signing and autograph session and is scheduled to be present at the award ceremony, as well as throughout the event, for photo opportunities.

The six-round event is open to all girls age 18 and under and offers six sections, based on age. The top 15 finishers in each section win trophies, and all participants are provided with a souvenir medal as a memento. A blitz tournament and bughouse tournament take place on the first day of the event.

Richard Krueger of the Kasparov Chess Foundation notes that over 200 girls played in the tournament last year. With the presence of Kasparov, even more are expected this year. The goal of this event is to provide another outlet for a real "sisterhood" for the players, in an environment they may be more comfortable with than regular tournaments, where lasting bonds can form among the players.

2006 Elementary, Junior High, High School Championships

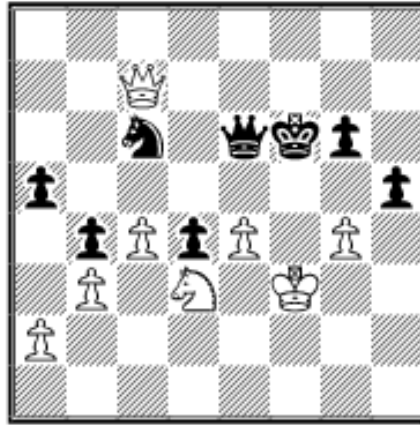
It's getting close to that time of year again, for another round of scholastic championships. The schedule is as follows:

- 2006 National Junior High School (K-9) Championship, April 7-9, Louisville, KY

- 2006 National High School (K-12) Championship, April 21-23, Milwaukee, WI
- 2006 National Elementary School (K-6) Championship, May 12-14, Denver, CO

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

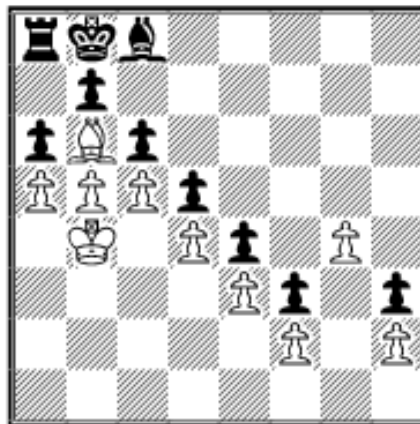
Below are the questions and answers from last month's quiz:



Problem 1:

Again we gratefully borrow from GM Yasser Seirawan's instructive book *Winning Chess Tactics*. In the diagram above, it is White to move. How would you proceed?

Answer: 1.g5+! Kxg5 2.Qf4#.



Problem 2:

Also from *Winning Chess Tactics*, it is again White's turn to move. Can he manage a win or a draw? If so, how?

Answer: 1.Ba7+!! Rxa7 2.b6 Ra8 3.Kc3 (to get to the g-file) Bxg4 4.Kd2 Kc8 5.Ke1 Kd7 6.Kf1 Rg8 7.Kg1! Bh5+ 8.Kh1! As Seirawan

explains, "The game is a draw because neither the black king nor the bishop can penetrate White's position, and if the black rook stays on the g-file with 8...Rg2, the game ends in stalemate."

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.

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