



## Chess for Peace and a Candid Q & A

*Below is a candid Q&A between correspondence master Stephan Gerzadowicz and Susan Polgar. Because of Susan's activities in the Chess for Peace initiative it was received too late for inclusion in the original article.*

### **What is your impression of the FIDE World Championship in San Luis, Argentina?**

I think the event was a big success. Plenty of exciting chess was played and, during the first half of the tournament, we witnessed one of the most spectacular performances in a world championship. As a fan, I really enjoyed it.

### **What is your impression of Veselin Topalov's performance?**

Simply incredible! His performance in the first half was right up there with Fischer, Karpov and Kasparov, etc. He played very exciting chess and wisely played it safe in the second half to secure the championship title. I am very happy for him and I am very happy for Bulgaria, which now has three world champions: Topalov, Women's World Champion Stefanova, and World Senior Champion Spassov.

The keys to his success were:

- He was very patient and was able to win in positional or tactical positions and endgames.
- He played with a very high energy level.
- He played to win and wasn't afraid to lose.

### **What was the biggest surprise of the tournament?**

Obviously the magnificent performance of Topalov! Additionally, I was also very surprised with Leko, Anand and Svidler. I expected Anand to be neck in neck with Topalov and Leko to be a contender and finish with perhaps +2, while I thought Svidler would finish with an even score.

### **Do you recognize Veselin Topalov as the legitimate world champion?**

Absolutely! It was a well-deserved win. Moreover, he also proves it with his rating which is expected to be around 2806.

### **Do you think there should be a unification match between Vladimir**

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Susan Polgar



### *Breaking Through* by Susan Polgar

### **Kramnik and Veselin Topalov?**

If Kramnik can find the money for it, then yes – why not? I am sure the fans will enjoy it. However, I absolutely don't think FIDE should seek funding for this because it would be unfair to the other top players. Kramnik didn't win the candidate's match against Shirov and he shouldn't have been playing against Kasparov for the world championship in 2000 because he didn't earn this right. He broke off from FIDE to play against Kasparov for his own personal benefit and glory. But he's only played one match in 5 years and there's no cycle in place. He refused to play in San Luis and he's the only world champion in recent memory to finish last in a tournament. So why should FIDE reward his actions with a multimillion dollar payday while most other grandmasters are having a hard time making a living?

I understand that the fans want to see exciting matches, but I recently polled nearly 100 random chess enthusiasts and their overwhelming choice was for a Topalov – Kasparov match with Topalov – Anand a distant second, and Topalov – Kramnik in last place. The other issue is money. Where can one find a sponsor that is willing to put up \$3 million for Kramnik when he has a hard time drawing media attention?

On the other hand, more than 2,300 tickets were sold for the Gorbachev address and my 8-game blitz match with Anatoly Karpov in a little town of 3,200 people. There was even a \$1,000 a plate black-tie dinner with Karpov, Gorbachev and me as part of the gala and it was sold out in advance.

### **What do you think is the best format for choosing a world champion?**

I think there should be a round-robin tournament for the top 16 players by ratings and official qualifications. The top 3 finishers and the reigning world champion should be placed in the semi-final. Then the four players would have to play matches (8-games for semi-final and 14-16 games for the final). The world champion would play the 4<sup>th</sup> seed while the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> seed would face each other. Then the winners would face-off for the title. I just spoke about this with Karpov and he agreed with my suggestions in principle.

A world champion must prove themselves in a round-robin and match play. This way there would be no disputes. The champion should then again be seeded to the semi-final in the next cycle, while the runner-up should automatically qualify for the 16 player round-robin event in the following cycle.

### **Your Olympiad teammate Jennifer Shahade just came out with her first chess book titled *Chess Bitch*. Have you read it and, if so, what was your impression of it?**

Yes, I have read it. Jennifer is a creative and interesting writer. She is very passionate about her beliefs. I like Jennifer and know that she spent plenty of time doing research for this book. I would have chosen a different title though. I'd rather let the readers judge the merits of my book rather than having to defend the title. But she did fine for her first book.

However, there are a few erroneous items about me. Perhaps I didn't explain myself clearly during our interview or perhaps she misunderstood what I said:

- Jennifer mentioned that I know few people in New York, but I probably know thousands of people in New York alone and I have many good friends.
- I was completely stunned when I read a remark that I allow someone other than myself to write e-mail on my behalf. This is completely false. I write my own e-mail. I have no problem seeking advice on various issues, but I make my own decision and I speak for myself.
- Another fact that I dispute is the issue of what women have to face each month. Each woman is different, and maybe Jennifer is lucky, but I actually fainted once when I was around 13 years old. It was so painful, I thought I was going to die. It was a horrible experience, after which I lost my perfect vision and had to start wearing glasses, while neither of my sisters wears glasses. This is something I haven't spoken about too much publicly and only a handful of people know about it. Still, I've never used this as an excuse. I worked hard to overcome the obstacles in front of me to win 4 Women's World Championships and 10 Olympic medals. But that doesn't mean it wasn't a problem. It's a serious problem for some women and many top woman players, including world champions, have told me that they suffer the same problem. To say that it's not a problem is incorrect and unfair. Ignoring a physiological fact is not the correct way to go. I would say that in spite of this, women *can* play chess as well as men do *if* they work as hard. My sisters and I certainly proved it. This is not a problem that exists for all women, but over a long career it will be problematic from time to time for some women.

**You have always refused to sign *The Polgar Sisters* by Cathy Forbes.**

**Why?**

Because Cathy never interviewed any of us, she wrote the book based on rumors and speculation. However, I read in Jennifer's book that Cathy realized her mistake and would have done things differently today. If that's true then I give her credit for recognizing it and I have no hard feelings. I wish her the best.

**Who are some of the top young female talents in the world today?**

Humpy Koneru, Lahno, the Kosintseva sisters, Zhao Xue and Dzagnidze, etc., all have great potential. Humpy takes her chess very seriously. She is humble and she lets her chess speak for itself. They are all very talented and they can go far if they're willing to put in the time to train and study.

**Which players have positively impacted chess the most in the last 10-15 years?**

Definitely Kasparov, Karpov, Anand, Topalov, my sister Judit and Xie Jun, etc. I will let others judge what I have done.

### **What are some of your upcoming activities?**

There are so many up-coming events. In a few weeks I am going to Lubbock, TX. Then I will be in Houston in December for the National Scholastic Event and Corpus Christi in January for the [1<sup>st</sup> Annual Susan Polgar National Open Championship for Girls under 21](#). I also have new books and DVDs being released, including the first ever animated instructional DVD for absolute beginners, especially for children as young as 4 years old. I'm also bringing a group of about 200-300 children to Moscow next March for a match against Russian kids as part of Chess for Peace initiative. The best way to keep track of my itinerary is to check my [website](#) or my [blog](#).

### **How is the Susan Polgar National Open for Girls in Corpus Christi, Texas different than any other tournament?**

It will be so different than any other girl's event. It will be one that the players will remember for the rest of their lives. They will compete for the championship, but they will have fun and they will make tons of friends. We are giving out cool prizes including a laptop computer for the winner of each section! There will be a live band, games, trivia, fun contests, etc., all weekend long. I am committed to keeping girls interested in chess and there will be plenty of reasons for these young ladies to stay in the game.

### **Why is it so important for you to organize girl's events?**

Because they have been forgotten. I believe that girls can play chess as well as boys if they are motivated and encouraged. It is important for them to see other girls who love chess just as much as they do. They also need to see and understand the purpose of playing chess. Promoting chess for girls the same way as boys simply hasn't worked in this country. Girls approach the game differently and it's time to do something positive.

There have been countless debates for decades, but not much has happened. I would like to see a chess boom for girls in America the way it happened for chess in general back in 1972. But I'm not just doing this for girls. My goal is to give the girls a boost and then get the girls and boys to merge and compete on an equal footing. That is my ultimate goal, to get the girls to stay in chess and play chess at a higher level while having a blast.

### **What is your recommendation for choosing a good coach?**

Some of the things that I would look for as a chess mom are:

- Select a coach who clicks with your children. Some coaches may be really good, but they may not be compatible with your kids.
- Select a coach who has plenty of enthusiasm and passion to teach instead of one who does it just for the money.
- Select a coach who is level appropriate. Not all coaches know how to teach or have the patience to teach beginners, especially children. I would stay away from coaches who teach children to play 1.e4 2.Bc4 3.Qh5. Teaching kids like this will only end up harming their progress.
- Select a coach who is willing to work with your children long-term and

has the best interest of your child at heart.

- Beware of negative coaches. I don't like coaches who disparage other coaches for their personal benefits. That is unprofessional.

One of the problems with finding a good coach is that there are too few of them. Everyone has their own system of teaching and some of these systems just don't work.

### **How do you plan to correct this problem?**

I am working on a standard curriculum for chess teachers, parents and coaches. My first official certifying class will be held early next year in Texas. I will show them how to teach, what to teach and provide them with all the necessary materials to teach in a chess club or school. I will do similar classes across the country as time permits. I hope that there will soon be enough qualified coaches out there with similar training curriculum. It's very important to give the parents, coaches, teachers or local volunteers the proper tools to help our children.

### **You are probably one of the most accessible chess superstars. What are some of the pros and cons that come with it?**

I think that more chess professionals should do this. This is one of the best ways to get greater support from the fans. The drawback is that there will always be a few bad apples. While 99% of the fans are supportive and courteous, a small number will be rude, obnoxious and feel that they can do or say whatever they want because you are a public figure. My overall experience is positive, but it is very time consuming. I feel that I need to do this for the benefit of chess. I have to conduct myself with class and grace 24/7.

### **Will you be participating in the 2006 Olympiad?**

No! When I helped form the U.S. Women's Olympiad Program to prepare for the 2004 Olympiad, it was done to help women's chess in America. Even though we came back with the first ever team medal (silver) in addition to 3 additional individual medals (1 silver and 2 gold), some chess politicians managed to destroy the most successful women's chess program in U.S. history. A program that helped produce two National champions (Rusa Goletiani 2005 and Jennifer Shahade 2004), a Continental champion and first ever female Samford Fellowship winner (Rusa Goletiani 2004) and an IM (Anna Zatonskih 2005).

I wish the future U.S. teams the best of luck. It will be a long uphill battle for our players. Other countries are improving at a rapid rate while we have no plan to help future generations. It shows that chess and politics just don't mix. I am very disappointed that I was not even consulted about the 2006 Women's Olympiad and backroom deals were quietly made for political reasons and not for the good of U.S. chess or women's chess.

### **You and Paul Truong have collaborated on some spectacular projects in the past 3-4 years. How did that come about?**

We have known each other since 1985 when I first came to New York to

participate in the New York Open. We met again at the 1986 New York Open and he's become one of my best and most trusted friends. In 2001, I decided to ask Paul to help me with my chess promotional initiatives since he is a marketing and PR professional. I was very happy that he agreed and the rest is history.

None of the events from the past 3-4 years would have happened without the tremendous collaboration between us. We work well together because we have similar vision, goals and ideas. I trust his commitment and passion to do good things for chess. He is diligent and works tirelessly to make things happen. Just about every project he's touched has resulted in positive headline news for U.S. chess.

**What is your opinion about how some female players have marketed themselves?**

This is a tough question. On one hand, I am happy that there are more top female players getting involved in chess promotion. On the other, I am disappointed that some use more hype than substance. I like to represent myself with class and grace and I strongly believe that it's important for young people to have strong and positive role models. I disagree with using hype and sexuality to promote chess or to feed an individual's ego.

I think such behavior is disgraceful and it hurts the credibility of women's chess. I don't need to flaunt myself in a bikini or skimpy outfits to get headlines or to make a statement that I can play chess as good as a man. I don't need to take my clothes off for people to hear what I have to say. How do these things help women's chess? I have a strong chess resume to stand on and I want to be a role model that parents can be proud for their children to follow.

**Andrew Martin recently made some unkind remarks about your record breaking simul. Did you officially respond?**

Yes, I responded on [ChessBase.com](http://ChessBase.com). I did everything that was asked of me. I trained very hard physically to break the record, which in the end turned out to be multiple records. Members of the USCF Executive Board and the Mayor of Palm Beach Gardens were the official record certifiers. There is nothing left to say. I will stand by my motto: win with grace, lose with dignity and let the result speak for itself.

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**Chess for Peace**

Chess is a game of war, but no human lives are at stake. By nature I am a mild mannered person and I always like peaceful resolutions when conflicts arise. Therefore, when I was asked by Mikhail Korenman to take part in the Chess for Peace initiative with Anatoly Karpov and former President Mikhail Gorbachev, I jumped at the opportunity.



I arrived in Lindsborg, Kansas on Thursday night at around 7PM and Anatoly Karpov arrived slightly after midnight. On Friday, Anatoly was busy with a special engagement regarding his environmental platform, during which time I was busy with the media. President Gorbachev arrived late Friday night for the festivities on Saturday after conducting another event nearby. This was his fourth visit to Kansas and the trip to Lindsborg was the highlight for him.

The spectacular Chess for Peace parade began at 10AM on Saturday. Anatoly and I were in the first car followed by many other dignitaries. Thousands of people were watching the parade and thousands more were taking part in it. There were floats, marching bands, and other cool stuff. Everyone was so enthusiastic.



Shortly after Anatoly and I arrived at the viewing stage near the chess school, President Gorbachev arrived with his daughter Irina, and the rest of his entourage to enjoy the parade. He even suggested they take part in the parade, but unfortunately the secret service would not permit it.

Gorbachev was charming and funny, and when he was presented with a key to

the city he jokingly apologized to the citizens of Lindsborg for entering their city illegally the night before, which got everyone laughing.



After this short speech at the conclusion of the parade, he visited the Chess School, and he was very impressed with the enthusiasm of the people. He quickly posed for a few pictures with Mikhail Korenman, Anatoly and me; then we all attended the press conference.

The conference hall was filled with reporters who asked a variety of questions ranging from the situation with the war in Iraq, the future of the world and global warming, to how chess helped him become a great leader and whether chess can really help promote World Peace. He answered all questions with aplomb, class and a sense of humor.



One of my most memorable moments occurred during the press conference when President Gorbachev wanted to have some special tea, which he had requested in advanced. But as he looked around, he only saw one cup. So he turned and offered me the tea. I declined, saying that the tea was for him, but

he insisted on me having it and wouldn't take no for an answer. He then prepared the tea for me just the way he likes it. I was so embarrassed, but he kept on insisting. Anatoly smiled and said that it was a zugzwang position and I had no choice but to accept his generous offer.

As the press conference continued, one of the reporters asked what had been the most surprising part of the event and I responded that it was President Gorbachev's demeanor. He was so pleasant, friendly, warm, and thoughtful, etc. When he heard this, he gave me a kiss on both cheeks. I thought he was done, but he said no, the Russian tradition is to kiss the cheeks three times and all the media people busted out laughing.



After the press conference, President Gorbachev toured Lindsborg, while Anatoly and I attended a special luncheon with members of the local community and some members of the USCF where many wonderful ideas were exchanged.

Following the luncheon we had a short break to freshen up before our match, which was originally planned to be an eight-game blitz match, but it had to be shortened to six games because of time constraints. While we waited for President Gorbachev to arrive to make the first move, Anatoly and I answered questions from the large audience.

President Gorbachev arrived at 4PM and we were ready to start. Anatoly had white in the first game, so President Gorbachev made his first move. As he arrived at the board, he told the audience that this was a wonderful match between two great champions. "I am going to cause some difficulties for the older player," he said and then proceeded to play 1.g4. Both Anatoly and I were shocked. Anatoly thought the President was joking and he commented that he would like to make another move, but the President held firm and insisted there were no take-backs in chess. So off we went.



I achieved a very good position when President Gorbachev, who stood next to us throughout the entire game, suddenly opened two bottles of water and poured it into glasses to serve us. I was astonished that one of the most important human beings on the planet during the last century was serving me water! I was in such a state of disbelief that I froze and lost badly thereafter. Yet it was surely worth it, because President Gorbachev is such an incredible person.

Anatoly won the first game, I won the second, and the third was a draw. I lost the fourth game, drew the fifth, and then managed to win the final game to tie the match 3-3. Unfortunately, the moves were not registered properly because of technical difficulties with the Shahcom sensory board.



*President Gorbachev with his daughter Irina and Susan Polgar*

After the match we only had about 10-15 minutes to rush back to our rooms to change and then return for a \$1,000 a plate black-tie fundraising dinner, which was sold-out far in advance. However, my business manager Paul and Mikhail Korenman's wife Tamara managed to get Anatoly and I back and forth in no

time.

Countless dignitaries attended the banquet and city and state officials presented President Gorbachev with several gifts. I, of course, gave him a signed copy of my book *Breaking Through*. The evening was capped off by a Q&A session between President Gorbachev and Alan Murray (assistant managing director of the Wall Street Journal) while playing a game of chess, during which Anatoly and I went up on stage to join them.



The evening ended with the children of Lindsborg singing a song to honor President Gorbachev, who was also given an honorary Doctor of Law degree from the President of Bethany College. It was a memorable day that I will treasure for the rest of my life. It was a wonderful ending to a wonderful cause! I am privileged and proud to have been a part of it.

On a final note, about 2,500 tickets were sold for the Clash of the Titans II match and the address by President Gorbachev. That's 2,500 tickets for a one day chess event! Thank you Mikhail Korenman! Thank you Lindsborg, Kansas! Also, as a continuation of the Chess for Peace initiative, I will be leading a group of 300-500 American student chess players to Moscow next March to play a friendly match against Russian youths. This will be a very exciting event for our young players and the Russians will then visit America the following year.

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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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