



COLUMNISTS

Susan Polgar
on
Chess

Susan Polgar

The Gender Gap

The \$64,000 question is: “Can women play chess as well as men?” The answer is yes and no. If we talk about pure abilities and skills, I believe there should be no reason why women cannot play as well as men. Then why aren’t there as many top-level women players as there are men?

I would like to offer my personal point of view, especially as it may apply to women’s chess in America:

1. **Cultural and Social Acceptance:** Whether we like it or not, or whether it is politically correct or not, cultural and gender bias exist in our society every day. All you have to do is look at the world of sports and you will see what I am describing. How often do you see minorities in professional tennis, golf or hockey, etc.? Not often – there are only a handful. On the other hand, what about in professional basketball, football, or baseball? These sports are dominated by minorities. Is this just a coincidence? I don’t think so.

What would parents think if boys were interested in playing with Barbie dolls and girls were interested in playing with cars, trucks or collect Pokémon cards? This is cultural and gender bias at its best. As a result, it is a problem for girls who may be interested in chess at the early age. It is generally not accepted or at least not endorsed by our society. I remember the same problem from my own experience growing up as a young female chess star. I was not well received. Many people think it was absurd for a little girl like me to play chess. As I improved and showed promise in chess as a young girl, some even went as far as to imply that I may have been forced to play chess or it was a form of child abuse. But luckily for me, I had supporting and loving parents that helped me battle many of these serious obstacles.

I believe it is a lot more acceptable now for young girls to play chess. In the schools that I teach, there are quite a number of young girls wanting to learn to play chess. This is a good trend. Unfortunately, boys still outnumber girls by a large margin.

2. **Biological clock:** Women athletes, regardless of the sport, face the same dilemma. Their bodies are created differently than men. When a woman reaches the age between 20 something to 30 something, she must ask themselves a simple question: Which is more important? To have a family or to have a long (chess) career?

So far, the choice for many top women players, including myself, has been to have a family. Unless science can discover a way for women to have healthy children anytime they wish, a woman athlete must choose one or the other. This in itself limits the longevity of any player. Therefore, it is rare to see women with as long a career as, for example, Smyslov, Korchnoi, Portisch, etc.

This is not an excuse. This is a pure fact. After bringing a child into the world, being a full-time Mom is quite a job itself. It is hard enough to be a top woman player, competing against other male professionals. It is even harder when you have to nurture your children 24 hours a day. Imagine sitting across the board from Kasparov or Karpov playing a game while thinking if your child needs a diaper change or if he/she is hungry.

In addition, women have to face a “monthly problem”. For some women, it is devastating and it can affect them very negatively. For others, it is just unpleasant.

3. **Setting standards:** For years, women have set much lower standards than men. I remember a time when no women player was above 2400. When you set low goals and expectations, chances are, the results you achieve will be very low. The problem is many women do not look at chess as a full-time profession. Many do not regard it as seriously as male players do. Therefore, the results are obvious. If you do not put in the same work, you can't compete at the same level. It is simple as that!

4. **Opportunities:** In chess, if you want to improve, one of the many things you have to do to improve is to gain experience by competing at a higher level of competition. Many girls do not have this opportunity. This adds to the dilemma. When I was growing up, my father only wanted me to compete against men. I think this is the right approach. However, to receive an invitation to an all male tournament was not an easy feat. If you look at the top women players in the world today, they all have experience playing in men's tournaments. But for the next generation, without the opportunity to compete on the same level, women simply cannot catch up to men.

5. **A numbers game:** When the number of boys who play chess at the early age is far more than girls, then purely statistically there will be more top male players than women players. If you have a hundred boys playing chess for every ten girls, what will the future bring? When the amount of young girls playing basketball and soccer increased substantially, new opportunities opened up. So the WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) and the WUSA (Women's United Soccer Association) were born. Unless there are initiatives to change the image of chess for young girls in America and throughout the world, I don't expect to see many changes.

6. **Confidence:** When you add all of the above factors, the pressure for a young girl to succeed in this men's dominated game is incredible. When you are one of the few to reach the higher level in chess, the eyes of the world are on you. If a male player does badly in a tournament, people will say that player just had a bad tourney. But if a woman is competing in a men's tournament and does badly, people will have much more criticism. Some people just can't wait for a woman player to do badly to say she is not good or she is totally outclassed. So the pressure to succeed in the men's game is even more. Chess has a lot to do with psychology and the fear of being singled out does not help one's confidence.

So what is my conclusion? Well, I think women can compete as well as men in chess. However, if a woman wants to succeed, she must put in the same amount of work and make the same amount of sacrifices. There is no other way around it. There are no excuses and there should not be.

Recent Women's Event

WorldChessNetwork.com is one of the first Internet chess servers to recognize women's chess on the Internet. Their inaugural Women's Week of Chess, a WCN exclusive event ran from August 26th - September 1st, 2002. The women who participated competed in Banter Chess and Master Challenges each and every evening throughout the event! There were multiple daily events featuring female chess stars like WGM Martha Fierro, WIM Nava Starr, WIM Natalia Khoudgarian and me.

The young Canadian sensation IM Pascal Charbonneau, 2002 Canadian Champion and Canadian Open Champion, also was on hand taking part in various activities.

This is the first time I have played public competition other than blitz and simuls since 1997. The reason why I agreed to do this

event is because of the names such as Bill Church, Dato' Tan Chin Nam, Yasser Seirawan etc. Since these people have done so much for chess, I wanted to show them my appreciation and support.

To be honest, it was strange to play in this event after such a long hiatus. I must say I am quite pleased with the final result, considering I did not prepare for it.

The stars of the events were:

WGM Martha Fierro

A four time Pan-American champion, Martha Fierro hails from Ecuador. She was the winner of a silver medal at the 1996 Chess Olympiad in Armenia where she played first board. Martha became a WFM in 1994, a WIM in 1995, and WGM in 1997. She currently teaches chess to children in Charlotte, North Carolina where her students are state champions.

WIM Natalia Khoudgarian

Originally from Moscow, Natalia started playing chess at the age of 7. In 1989 she became the under-21 Moscow women's chess champion and that same year took third place in the under-21 USSR women's championship. 1992 saw Natalia take third place in the Moscow women's championship. Natalia graduated from the Russian State Academy of Physical Education with a diploma in Teacher of Physical Education and Coach of Chess. Natalia arrived in Canada in 1995 and took top honors at the Canadian Open Women's Chess Championship. She played second board at the 1996 Chess Olympiad.

WIM Nava Starr

Nava's resume speaks for itself. She is a true Canadian superstar. Nava Starr is an 8-time Canadian Women's Champion (1978, 1981, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1991, 1995, 2001).

Nava also won a Gold medal on Board 2 for Canada in the 1976 Olympiad as well as a Bronze medal on board 1 in the 1982 Olympiad.

Day 1: WGM Martha Fierro (*Olympics Silver Medalist, 96*) 0 – 1 GM Susan Polgar

Day 2: GM Susan Polgar 1 – 0 WIM Nava Starr (*9-time Canadian Women's Champion, winner of 2 Olympics medals: Gold, 76 - Bronze, 82*)

Day 3: GM Susan Polgar 1 – 0 WIM Natalia Khoudgarian (*Moscow women's under-21 champion 89*)

Day 4: WIM Nava Starr 0 – 1 GM Susan Polgar

Day 5: WGM Martha Fierro ½ – ½ GM Susan Polgar

Day 6: GM Susan Polgar 1 – 0 IM Pascal Charbonneau (2002 Canadian Champion & 2002 Canadian Open Champion)

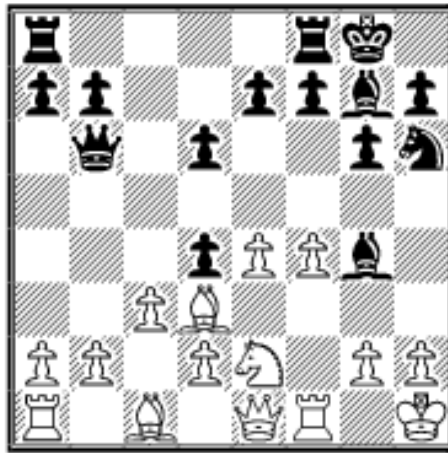
Day 7: WIM Nava Starr 0 – 1 GM Susan Polgar

Day 7: GM Susan Polgar 1 – 0 World Chess Network (members vote on the moves)

Final score: Susan Polgar 7½/ 8

Day #1 WGM Martha Fierro (Olympics Silver Medalist, 96, 4-time Pan-American champion) - GM Susan Polgar [B23] 08-26-2002

**1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.f4 g6 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Bb5 Nd4 6.Bd3 d6
7.Nxd4 cxd4 8.Ne2 Nh6 9.0–0 0–0 10.c3 Qb6 11.Kh1 Bg4
12.Qe1**



**12...Rac8 13.Qf2 Bxe2
14.Qxe2 e6 15.c4 Rce8
16.Rb1 f5 17.b4 Ng4 18.c5
dxc5 19.bxc5 Qxc5 20.e5
Rb8 21.Bc4 Rfe8 22.h3
Nh6 23.Rf3 Qc6 24.Rfb3
Rec8 25.d3 Rc7 26.Kh2 Bf8
27.a4 Bc5 28.Qa2 Nf7**

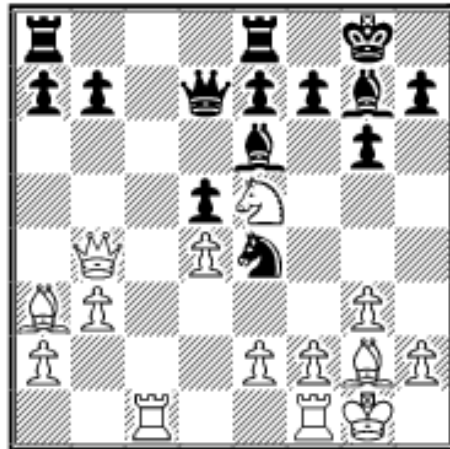


**29.a5 Qd7 30.Rb5 Nd8
31.Bd2 Kg7 32.Be1 Rbc8
33.Bh4 Be7 34.Bf2 Kf7
35.g4 fxg4 36.hxg4 Kf8
37.Kg3 Bc5 38.Qe2 Kg7
39.Kh3 Qf7 40.Qe4 a6
41.R5b3 Nc6 42.Be1 Rf8
43.Bd2 Qe7 44.Be1 g5
45.fxg5 Kh8 46.R3b2 Qg7
47.Bg3 Qxg5 48.Rxb7
Qh6+ 49.Kg2 Rxb7
50.Rxb7 Nxa5 51.Rc7 Bb6**

**52.Rd7 Nxc4 53.dxc4 Rg8 54.Rd6 Bc5 55.Rxa6 Qd2+ 56.Kh3
Qd1 57.Rxe6 Qf1+ 58.Kh4 d3 59.Qf4 Qh1+ 60.Bh2 Rf8
61.Rf6 Be7 62.g5 Bxf6 63.gxf6 Qe1+ 64.Bg3 d2 65.f7 Qh1+
66.Bh2 Qg2?? (66...Qxh2+!! 67. Qxh2 d1(Q)--+) 67.Bg3
Rxf7 68.Qxf7 Qh1+ 69.Kg5 h6+ 70.Kf5 Qh3+ 71.Ke4 Qg4+
72.Bf4 d1Q 73.e6 Qgf3+ 74.Kf5 Qdd3+ 0–1**

Day #2 GM Susan Polgar - WGM Nava Starr (9-time Canadian Women's Champion, winner of 2 Olympics Medals, Gold, 76 - Bronze, 82) [D78] 08-27-2002

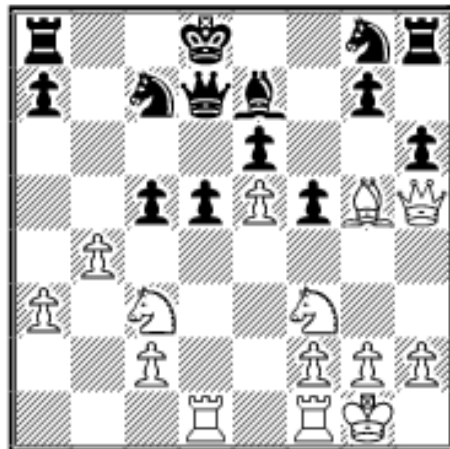
1.Nf3 g6 2.g3 Bg7 3.Bg2 Nf6 4.0-0 0-0 5.c4 c6 6.d4 d5 7.b3 Bf5
8.Bb2 Ne4 9.Nbd2 Nd7 10.Nh4 Nxd2 11.Qxd2 Be6 12.cxd5 cxd5
13.Ba3 Re8 14.Rac1 Nf6 15.Nf3 Ne4 16.Qb4 Qd7 17.Ne5



17...Bxe5 18.dxe5 b6 19.Qd4
Rac8 20.f3 Nc5 21.Rfd1 Qb5
22.Rd2 Rc7 23.e3 Rec8
24.Rcd1 24...Qd7 25.e4 dxe4
26.Bxc5 bxc5 27.Qxd7 Black
Resigns

Day #3 GM Susan Polgar - WIM Natalia Khoudgarian (Moscow women's under-21 champion 89) [C16] 08-28-2002

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 Qd7 5.Qg4 f5 6.Qg3 b6 7.a3 Bf8
8.Nf3 Ba6 9.Bxa6 Nxa6 10.Bg5 c5 11.0-0 h6 12.Qh4 Nc7
13.Rad1 Be7 14.Qh5+ Kd8 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.b4

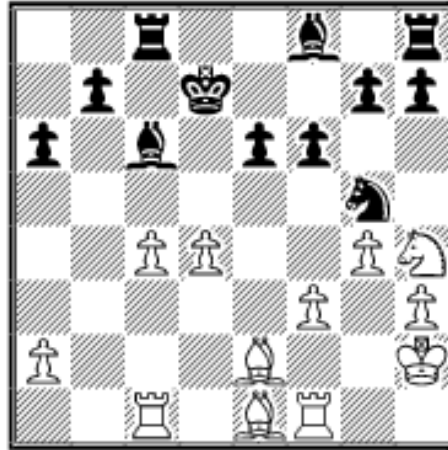


16...g6 17.Bxe7+ Nxe7 18.Qh4
cxb4 19.axb4 Ke8 20.Ra1 Kf7
21.Na4 g5 22.Qh5+ Kg7
23.Nc5 Qe8 24.Qxe8 Rhxe8
25.Nd4 Kf7 26.Ra5 Reb8
27.c3 Ng6 28.Rfa1 a6 29.Nxa6
Nxa6 30.Rxa6 Rxa6 31.Rxa6
Nxe5 32.Rxe6 Ra8 33.h3
Ra1+ 34.Kh2 Nd3 35.Rxh6 f4
36.f3 Nf2 37.g4 Ra2 38.Kg1
Nd1 39.Ne6 Nxc3 40.Nxg5+
Ke7 41.Rh7+ Kd6 42.Nf7+
Kc6 43.Ne5+ Kd6 44.Ng6 44...Ne2+ 45.Kf1 d4 46.Rh8 Kd5
47.Rc8 d3 48.Rd8+ Kc4 49.Ne5+ Kxb4 50.Nxd3+ Kc3 51.Nf2
Ng3+ 52.Kg1 Ne2+ 53.Kg2 Kc4 54.h4 Ra1 55.h5 Rg1+ 56.Kh2
Rf1 57.Ne4 Rxf3 58.h6 Kb5 59.h7 Black Resigns

Day #4 WIM Nava Starr (9-time Canadian Women's Champion, winner of 2 Olympics Medals, Gold, 76 - Bronze, 82) - GM Susan

Polgar [B22] 08-29-2002

1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 Qxd5 4.d4 Nf6 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Be2 cxd4
 7.cxd4 Bg4 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.0-0 e6 10.h3 Bh5 11.Qb3 Qb4 12.Qxb4
 Nxb4 13.g4 Bg6 14.Bb5+ Ke7 15.Bf4 Nbd5 16.Bd2 Nxc3
 17.bxc3 a6 18.Be2 Ne4 19.Be1 Rc8 20.c4 f6 21.Nh4 Be8 22.Rc1
 Bc6 23.f3 Ng5 24.Kh2 Kd7

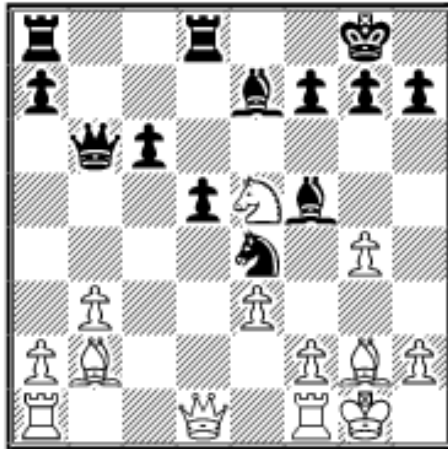


25.Bg3 b5 26.cxb5 axb5
 27.Rc2 Ba3 28.Rb1 b4 29.Rd1
 Bd5 30.Rdd2 Rc3 31.Rxc3
 bxc3 32.Rc2 Bb2 33.Be1 Rc8
 34.a4 Bb3 35.Bd3 Bxa4 36.f4
 Bxc2 37.Bxc2 Nf7 38.Nf3 Nd6
 39.Kg2 Nc4 White Resigns

Day #6 GM Susan Polgar -
 IM Pascal Charbonneau
 (2002 Canadian Champion and
 2002 Canadian Open

Champion) [D02] 08-31-2002

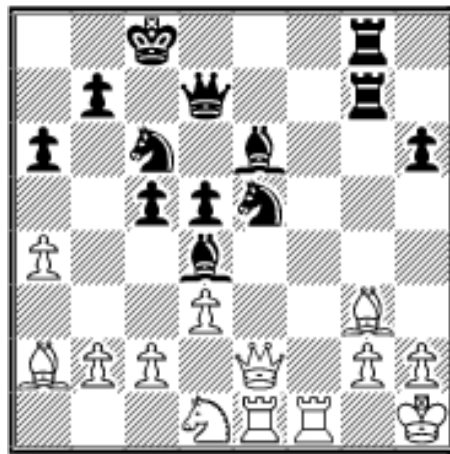
1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.g3 d5 4.Bg2 Be7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 c5 7.Bb2
 Nc6 8.Nbd2 cxd4 9.Nxd4 Qb6 10.e3 Rd8 11.c4 Bd7 12.cxd5
 exd5 13.N2f3 Ne4 14.Nxc6 bxc6 15.Ne5 Bf5 16.g4



16...Be6 17.Qc2 Bf6 18.Rfc1
 Rac8 19.Bxe4 dxe4 20.Nc4
 Qb5 21.Bxf6 gxf6 22.Qxe4
 Qg5 23.Qg2 Bxg4 24.Kh1 Be6
 25.Rg1 Qxg2+ 26.Kxg2 Kf8
 27.Rac1 Ke7 28.Kf3 Rd5
 29.Rg3 Rcd8 30.Ke2 h5 31.h4
 Bg4+ 32.f3 Be6 33.Rgg1 R5d7
 34.Na5 Rd2+ 35.Ke1 R8d3
 36.Nxc6+ Kd6 37.Nb4 Black
 Resigns

Day #7 WIM Nava Starr - GM Susan Polgar [B23] 09-1-2002

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.f4 g6 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Bc4 e6 6.f5 gxf5 7.d3
 Nge7 8.0-0 a6 9.a4 Rg8 10.Ng5 Ne5 11.Qh5 h6 12.Nxf7 Nxf7
 13.exf5 d5 14.fxe6 Bxe6 15.Ba2 Qd7 16.Bd2 Bd4+ 17.Kh1 Rg7
 18.Rae1 0-0-0 19.Qe2 Ne5 20.Bf4 N7c6 21.Nd1 Rdg8 22.Bg3



22...Rxf3 23.hxf3 Bg4
24.Qd2 Qe8 25.Nf2 Qh5+
26.Kg1 Nf3+ 27.gxf3 Bxf3
28.Re3 Rxf3# 0-1

The turn out for the event was fantastic. The staff was extremely professional all across the board. I hope that there will be more events like this to promote women chess in the future. Bravo World Chess

Network!

Susan Polgar is available for chess instruction. For more information, visit the Polgar Chess Center, 97-09 64th Road, Rego Park, NY 11374 (Tel: 718-897-4600) or email:

PolgarChessInc@aol.com

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