

A World Champion Aims to Boost Chess for Girls in America

The inaugural annual Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls was held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida from August 8 to 13, 2004 alongside with the US Open Championship at the Wyndham Bonaventure Resort & Spa. The winner of the event earned a four-year full tuition and fees scholarship to the University of Texas at Dallas worth up to \$40,000 plus other incentives! There were four additional scholarships and all players received a small stipend.

This prestigious invitational tournament was created and sponsored by Susan Polgar and the Susan Polgar Foundation to give more opportunities to top young female chess players in the United States. It was a joint effort by Mr. Dewain Barber (American Chess Equipment), Frank Niro (former Executive Director of the USCF), Susan Polgar and me. The tournament was hosted by the United States Chess Federation with the support and assistance from Mr. Dewain Barber, Ralph Bowman, Jack Mallory, tournament TD Erv Sedlock and Chief TD Carol Jarecki. It is an invitational event and each state is entitled to nominate one representative under the age of 19. The state representative could either be the winner of the state girls' championship, qualifying tournament, or the top rated girl of that state.



(Representatives from all over the United States)

In its first year, while most people expected no more than 15-20 participants, the event drew a phenomenal 34 players from across the country, one as far as Hawaii. This is the first ever invitational girls' tournament in the United States. At the conclusion of the tournament, the clear winner was WFM Roza Eynullayeva from the state of Massachusetts, scoring 5.5 out of 6. Alisa Melekhina from Pennsylvania (who won the 2004 All Girls' Championship in Chicago), Anjali Datta from Kansas, and Elisha Garg from Northern California all tied for second place with 4.5.



(Susan Polgar and one of the sponsors Mr. Dewain Barber presenting the champion's plaque to the winner WFM Rosa Eynullayeva)

Susan spent the entire 6 days with the players, talking, motivating, and giving them pointers. On the last day, the group was treated with a wonderful surprise visit by World Champion Anatoly Karpov. He came to Florida to attend the World Chess Hall of Fame induction ceremony. He himself was inducted into the Hall of Fame along with the late World Champion Max Euwe.



(Chess Museum and Hall of Fame Executive Director AI Lawrence with World Champions Karpov and Polgar at the World Chess Hall of Fame, a must see place for all chess enthusiasts)

After the last round all the young ladies and their coaches and families were treated to a fun pizza party before the official prize giving ceremony. Two other players in the tournament also

received special awards: “Miss Congeniality” for the most friendly, hospitable, and sociable player and “Fighting Spirit” for the player who scored the biggest upset in the tournament. Stephanie Pitcher of Utah received the Miss Congeniality Award and Emily Nicholas from Idaho won the Fighting Spirit Award. The reasons for these awards are that Susan has always encouraged young players to be congenial and to fight hard on the board.



(Emily Nicholas of Idaho, winner of the Fighting Spirit Award)



(Miss Congeniality Stephanie Pitcher receiving her award)



(The Princesses)



(The players got together and presented Susan with a tiara. Jenna Haggard of South Dakota, Stephanie Pitcher of Utah, Susan Polgar and Elisha Garg of Northern California)

Next year the event will be held in Phoenix, Arizona. There will be additional programs added to this invitational event. One of them will be the Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls Blitz Championship. The other will be the Susan Polgar National Training Program, open only to the participants of this invitational and its alumni. Both will be held in conjunction with the main tournament. Because of the tremendous success of this inaugural event, there will be additional scholarships and opportunities opening up in the future for young female chess players all over the United States.

The United States has never produced a Woman's World Champion, Olympic Champion or Grandmaster. Hopefully, with tournaments like this and the All-Girls National Open Championship sponsored by the Kasparov Chess Foundation more and more young girls will be involved in chess. Perhaps one day, it can happen.



(Participants of the SP National Invitational for Girls posing with Susan Polgar and Anatoly Karpov)





(Susan awarding Dr. Tim Redman of the University of Texas in Dallas the Polgar Medallion.
Dr. Redman is the person responsible for building one of the best college chess programs in the US)





(Tournament Hall)



(The young ladies are looking at a newspaper article about them)

Article and all photos are provided by Paul Truong

Below are essays by two of the participants of the Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls describing their feelings.

Where's my Attack?

Demetra P. Chernesky Fotis (Ohio Representative)

August 17, 2004

I am sitting at my sixth and final game and studying my board. I just finished my Sicilian Dragon defense, and am trying to develop my pieces to get a good position and a strong center. Should I castle, and protect my King? Do I develop my white squared Bishop? E6 looks like a good square for the Bishop. Look at that guy playing to my left. The dude's hot! Does my opponent's brother have to keep coming over to look at her game? Now he's a distraction, too!

I like playing chess, but if you asked me to explain why, I might have trouble explaining it to you. Traveling, playing the game, and meeting new people are all integral parts of why I enjoy the sport. I find that strategizing for my attack can be intense, but enjoyable. If I've played a strong game, win or lose, I leave the table feeling that I have accomplished something. I can sit for 4-hours during a game and not even notice the time flying by. To say that I am in a parallel universe might be close to how I feel when I am involved in a chess game. I am aware of what is going on around me, but focusing on my game is my top priority.

To be chosen as Ohio's representative to the Polgar Invitational is an unbelievable honor for me, and I have been playing all week for a personal best. As an underdog in the rankings, there is nowhere to move but up! I am trying to win my games not only for myself, or my state, but also for my chess team at Columbus Alternative High School. I want to earn the spot of team captain for the CAHS Girls' Chess Team. The fact that I am the only girl who plays tournament chess for CAHS will not ruin my vision. Have you heard the saying, "build a stadium, and they will come?" I am sure that there's something in that message that would apply to girls and chess! Thanks for throwing the first ball, Susan!

My Experience at the Inaugural Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls

By Emily Nicholas (Idaho Representative)

August 19, 2004

The Susan Polgar National Invitational for Girls was the best tournament I have ever been to. It was very exciting because there was always something happening, always some girl to hang out with or watch the chess games with. It was cool to be around so many nice girls interested and serious about chess, and we hung out and laughed a lot. Having this tournament along with the Denker and US Open made it even more exciting. There were so many chess games to watch being played in the evenings. I was so involved with chess that I didn't want to leave the hotel and do other things.

It was so much fun just to play whether you won or lost. It was so much fun to go over our games with all these other girls and talk about how we played. When I'm around the girls in chess, it puts more fun into chess. We even bought tiaras to wear while we played.

Meeting Susan Polgar made me feel important. She really made us feel like she cared about us and that she wanted us to keep playing chess. She made me feel like I could really do something and advance in chess, not just get better but like I could really go far in chess. She made me feel like this was not just some regular tournament but something special. Susan met with us to go through chess questions and give advice. She even had a pizza party for us at the end of the tournament. I hope that she keeps her tiara to wear next year.

I met so many other girls that I hope to be able to see again. I will work hard to try and qualify to go next year.

Polgar Essay

By Ettie Nikolova (Virginia Representative)

August 23, 2004

There is only one word to describe the way I felt as I walked from my hotel room to the reception area for the Polgar tournament. Nervous! Even my stomach had felt queasy that morning to the point that I had trouble eating breakfast. What if I tripped onstage, or all the girls in the tournament hated me, or I ended up losing every single game? These were just some of the questions plaguing me. Needless to say, I was pleasantly surprised when I discovered how nice and down to earth everyone turned out to be. Even Susan Polgar, one of the biggest Chess celebrities, was as kind as could be.

When the reception was over and the first game began, I started to understand what the Polgar was all about. In Virginia, as in many other states, there are barely any girls past elementary school who play chess. Before I played in the Polgar Tournament, I could have counted the games that I had played against girls on a non scholastic level on one hand. When I played in the Polgar, I was in a place, for the first time in my life, where girls were not only excited about chess, but also advanced enough to play good games. As a result, the Polgar tournament has made me want to improve the way I play Chess because it helped me realize the true potential that women have in the world of Chess.

Although I didn't win a prize in the conventional sense at the Polgar tournament, I certainly left richer than I was when I had first nervously entered the reception room. I gained good experience from the games that I was able to play at not only the Polgar tournament, but also the US Open, which was held at the same place. I was also inspired to develop my abilities with regards to the game of Chess. Most importantly, I left with a few new friends.