

## **2005 SUSAN POLGAR GIRLS INVITATIONAL CHESS TOURNAMENT**

### **PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

**Daily Diary for Alisa Spittle** – Girl's Representative from Delaware

#### ***Saturday, August 6***

An exciting week that I have waited for finally begins. I was awakened at 4:00 AM to get ready to take the shuttle to the Philadelphia Airport. Our flight left a few minutes late, but we were finally on our way. The ride was fairly smooth with a few bumps at times.

Wow, it's really hot out here! The high today is about 104 degrees and that is only about average. Maybe that is why they call it "The Valley of the Sun". The site of the tournament is located at an exclusive resort with a spa called the Arizona Biltmore. It is really a beautiful place with mountains in the background. It looks like something found on a postcard. We took some great pictures today.

I thought we might get into the pool after lunch, but I guess we were more tired than we thought. We all fell asleep. I hope we can get adjusted to the time change soon.

#### ***Sunday, August 7***

All the tournament participants and their families attended a reception in the morning. Another tournament's (Denker) participants were also in attendance. This one was for the high school boys championship – but no Delaware representative. It would be something for the Bear Library Chess Club or the Delaware Chess Association to consider for the future.

At the reception, all forty-eight participants were introduced to some important persons who are involved with national youth tournaments including the President of the U.S. Chess Federation. Susan Polgar was also introduced. She had just completed a world record-breaking exhibition in Florida. In a span of sixteen hours, she played a total of over one thousand one hundred games. At one point, she played three hundred twenty-six simultaneous games. All this was done with only four 5 minute breaks in all that time. She is truly an amazing player.

Every player was recognized and given a medallion. This is only the second annual tournament and some of the girls were returning to compete again. The officials hoped that Delaware would be more active in both tournaments. I was able to get my copy of Susan's book autographed and got my picture taken with her.

We then went over to another area to begin play. I found out that I was the lowest rated player there with a 639 rating. The competition was going to be tough as these were the best scholastic players in the country. I went into it with a lot of confidence and with a lot of preparation. It is just that I had to put them to good use.

My first opponent was Stephanie Friedman from Kentucky with a 1499 rating. She beat me in 19 moves. I played White and started off fine by starting to control the center, but I made a crucial mistake. My Bishop was left unprotected near the front pawn line while I had brought out my Queen to attack too early. By defending the Queen, I lost my Bishop to her Knight. I missed the opportunity to further develop my position and I did not get the opportunity to Castle. I need to learn from this and hopefully play better in the next round.

The second round was held later in the day. My next opponent was Taryn Gerdes from South Dakota with a 1256 rating. I played even with Black, but still lost in 31 moves. My biggest mistake was losing my Queen early due to a fork by her Knight and again, not being able to Castle. I have to do a better job of early game development to protect my position and my King. Well, there is still tomorrow.

### ***Monday, August 8***

Today, playing White, I was matched against Liz Hassig from Louisiana with a rating of 1199. This was a better played game on my part although I lost again after 39 moves. This time I was able to Castle and things were going well. We both were able to penetrate each other's defenses. I used two Knights and she used her Bishop. We exchanged Queens, but somehow I got on the short end of further exchanges and ended up with no major pieces left while she still had a Rook and a Knight. There was not much I could do and played until I was checkmated. The one thing I learned is that I need to look further ahead better to anticipate the outcome of exchanges. This game was much more competitive and I still feel pretty confident that I hope to win at least one game this week.

### ***Tuesday, August 9***

I played Black today and my opponent was Kathleen Coccio from Rhode Island with a 944 rating. Hopefully, my game will improve. My opening game was okay and I was able to Castle. However the usual pressure from the White Bishop on c4 attacking my f7 Pawn is something I have to overcome. One mistake this game was the placement of my g8 Knight to h6 to protect the f7 pawn, but her c1 Bishop took my Knight and disrupted my pawn line protecting the King.

At this point, I still thought I was in decent shape since I had captured both of her Bishops with the loss of only one Knight and a Pawn. However she was able to work her Knight and Queen to attack the exposed King and I could not bring over enough pieces in time to protect and eventually was checkmated in only 13 moves. I was a bit more

disappointed after this loss than the others, but I have a whole day to recover and hope for the best tomorrow.

### ***Wednesday, August 10***

Today I played Rose Lombard from Nebraska who has an 824 rating. My beginning game with White went fairly well by developing my pieces and Castling, however her Knight was able to penetrate and fork my King and Queen and again, lost the Queen early. The rest of the game was played evenly. I played the longest game so far going for 52 moves before I lost. Again, I was disappointed, but I need to continue to learn and hope to play better tomorrow.

### ***Thursday, August 11***

In my final game of the tournament, my opponent was Dhrooti Vyas from Iowa. I am playing Black. My opening was okay and I was able to develop my pieces and Castle. This game turned out to be more competitive for me. I was able to bring pressure on the White King and Queen. I was even in position to set up for a checkmate; however she made one crucial move with her Knight that got her out of trouble. In the meantime, her other Knight and her Queen attacked my King and was finally able to put me in checkmate after 28 moves.

In looking back over this whole week, I fell short of my goal to win or draw at least one game, but realistically, I finished in last place since my rating was the lowest with comparatively very little tournament experience. I'm not totally disappointed since I look on this as a great experience to build on for the future.

As expected, the top three rated players finished in a tie for first place with 5 points each - Anya Corke from California, Abby Marshall of Ohio and Alisa Melekhina from Pennsylvania. These girls were exceptional. The others were not far behind in talent and knowledge of the game. I can only hope to someday play at that level. It will just take time and dedication.

Later that day, all the girls were invited to a pizza party where we were all given a copy of Susan Polgar's newest book entitled "Breaking Through" and a neat poster of Susan and her two younger students. We also received our travel stipend checks for one hundred dollars each.

### ***Friday, August 12***

Today, most of us were present to participate in some fun activities such as problem solving and a Blitz Tournament. I didn't have much luck in either event, but at least it was great to be a part of it.

We also voted for a Miss Congeniality. The winner was Gabriella Rader of Washington State. Later in the day, we attended the awards ceremony that recognized the winners from both tournaments.

I cannot thank enough Mr. Robert Wilder who spent some time every week for about six weeks tutoring me and Mr. Richard Martin for his support. Both are directors of the Bear Library Chess Club. Their assistance is very much appreciated. I consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity to participate in such a great tournament and to meet some wonderful people. I did get some time to enjoy the pool and the exciting water slide on several occasions.

I would also like to thank my Dad for helping me to write this diary and to the rest of my family for their support. It is my hope that more girls will participate in next year's in-state tournament.

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