

Promoting Queens

A Celebration Of International Women's Day The Chess Friends

The Man Benji, The Myth Sarang, and The Legend Vivi

<https://www.chessfriendsbooks.com/blog>

Howdy! It's the Chess Friends!

Welcome to March! Happy spring! Today we would like to talk about girls and women in chess, and most importantly, *listen* to them. The month of March is recognized as Women's History Month. This year, March 8 marks the [115th anniversary of International Women's Day](#). Created in 1911 to celebrate the amazing contributions of women, this day is a reminder that we all still have work to do to eliminate stereotypes and challenges that adversely impact women advancing, including in chess.

The first Women's Chess World Championship was held in 1927, more than 40 years after the men. Believe it or not, at that time, many countries didn't even let women vote. The US ratified the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees women the right to vote, in 1920. Vera Menchik became the first official Women's World Champion at age 21, winning 10 games and drawing 1. She ruled the women's chess world during the next eight championships, and received invitations to play alongside men, the first woman to do so. She won against legends like Max Euwe and Samuel Reshevsky and continued to have many chess successes in men's tournaments, a hero ahead of her time. To this day, she is a big inspiration for many of us!

As for the first woman to become a Grandmaster, please welcome GM Nona Gaprindashvili! She achieved this milestone in 1978, after holding the crown of Women's World Chess Champion for 16 years! For decades after, she dominated the chess world, winning a whopping 25 medals in the Women's Chess Olympiad. She also mentored many rising chess stars. More recently, at the age of 81, she won her eighth Women's World Senior Championship title!

Of course, an article about women in chess wouldn't be complete without mentioning the greatest family of women chess players, the Polgár sisters: Susan, Sofia, and Judit. Judit Polgár is widely regarded as the greatest woman chess player of all time, reaching a peak ELO of 2735. Not only did she earn the title of Grandmaster at the age of 15, but she also reached the top ten chess players! The Polgár sisters are all incredible role models, working tirelessly to combat the feeling of isolation chess girls might experience, and helping them achieve their dreams. Susan is also a phenomenal chess educator and author, and has completely changed the landscape of the chess world with her work.

The reality remains, though, that the number of girls playing competitive chess is far fewer than the number of boys. As of 2025 in the US Chess Federation, only 19% of junior players (under 21) were girls. This number has been slowly rising, and a recent [study shows](#) that girls, if starting competitive chess at a similar age, have comparable chess improvement rates as boys. That said, by adulthood, the percentage of women competing drops

off significantly, to 5%.

Why is that? What pushes girls and women away from chess? Why do they leave the game at a rate higher than the boys and men?

With these questions in mind, and in the spirit of celebrating women in chess, we decided to ask our chess girl buddies, who are loving the chess world as much as we are, about their experiences and aspirations for the future. Let's hear what they say.

Siana Razmov (8)

(Interviewed by The Legend Vivaan)

I have known Siana for about three years now, and she is one of my closest friends. I've probably played over a thousand chess games with her and play with her at least once a week. She's over 1500 FIDE and over 1100 USCF and NWSRS and is one of the most patient, calculated chess players I know. She and I are also teammates on our WIISER Rookly team, which won the esports national championship! She's also vegetarian, like me!

V: How long have you been playing chess?

S: Around three years.

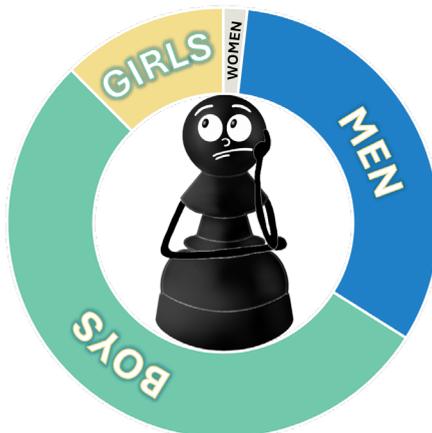
V: What got you into chess?

S: Since my brother and Dad both play chess, I thought it might be fun to play as well.

V: Who are your chess inspirations and why?

S: I am inspired by other chess players who are strong and are willing to teach me.

V: Do you prefer playing online or over-the-board chess? Why?



Peshka contemplating USCF active players demographics



Vivaan and Siana playing their weekly over-the-board game. Photo credit: Siva Sankrithi.

S: I prefer over-the-board because I can see tactics and variations better. There are some distractions in over-the-board chess though, but I can manage them.

V: Do you like girls only chess tournaments? What are the benefits?

S: I like girls-only tournaments because they give girls and women more chances to play. In the past, girls and women did not have the chance to play in tournaments at all.

V: What challenges have you experienced as a girl in the chess world?

S: I cannot think of challenges specific to being female.

V: Why do you feel so many girls quit chess? What has kept you excited about continuing to play the game?

S: They might quit because they have fewer of their friends playing chess. Maybe they compare themselves to other chess players and feel weak. I continue playing because when I go to a tournament, I see my friends and I want to achieve my goal of becoming a WGM (Woman Grandmaster).

V: How does being a girl in chess impact your playing style, if at all?

S: I don't think being a girl impacts my style. I choose my style depending on the opponent I'm playing.

V: If you met a young girl playing her first chess tournament, what advice

would you give her?

S: I would tell her that losing is learning and no one is perfect.

V: What have your experiences been traveling for chess?

S: It is fun to travel for chess. You can sightsee and make new friends.

V: What are some of the differences you've experienced playing chess abroad or in other parts of the USA?

S: Some playing halls are louder (if there are many young kids) and some are quieter (when there are more TDs (tournament directors)).

V: What is a favorite chess memory?

S: I remember playing a rapid game in which I got down to thirty seconds but won. Another favorite is when I watch videos of Magnus Carlsen playing chess because he is my favorite player.

V: What are your chess goals for the future?

S: My goal is to become a WGM (Woman Grandmaster).

Darya & Sofia Byelashova (11 & 8)

(Interviewed by The Man Benji)

If you ever attend a tournament in the Seattle area, you can't miss these two sisters, Darya and Sofia. Lively and curious, they are always surrounded by

lots of friends, and they make our chess community a better place. I have known Darya and Sofia for two years now, and one of the things we have in common is we can speak Russian! On one Sunday morning, we sat down over Zoom to discuss their chess journeys (though we talked in English!).

B: How long have you been playing chess?

D: I've been playing chess since I was seven.

S: I've been playing since I was five.

B: What got you into chess?

D: I would say my grandpa. Well, technically, my dad taught me chess, but I really liked it when my grandpa played chess. It was really cool.

S: My mom and dad both learned how to play chess, when they were little, from their parents and grandparents, so my dad taught me how to play chess. It pretty much runs in the family.

B: Who are your chess inspirations and why?

D: My grandpa.

S: Dina, Magnus Carlsen, Ted Wang, my grandpa, and my great-grandpa.

B: You mean Dina Belenkaya?

S: Yes, I like watching her streams. I also met her in a Las Vegas tournament and played blitz with her.

B: I like that you mentioned a local inspiration. Why Ted?

S: He received an FM title when he was 10, and he is already coaching others, helping them to get titles too.

B: Do you prefer playing online or over-the-board (OTB) chess? Why?

D: I like to play OTB chess because you get to review your game with your opponent, but I enjoy online chess too, because you can text with your opponent to say hello and ask where they're from, but playing OTB is still my preference.

S: I like OTB chess because if your opponent makes a mistake or if I make a mistake, we can say after the game, hey, you could've played this move in this position...

B: Do you like girls only chess tournaments?

S: I don't really like girls only tournaments. I prefer the open format.



Darya, Sofia, Benji (and Peshka!), talking chess over Zoom.

D: Yeah, I feel the same way. The reason is because the open format has fun side events happening, but the girls only tournaments usually don't have that. And it's good to make friends with both girls and boys when you play chess.

B: What challenges have you experienced as a girl in the chess world?

D: Nothing, really. I guess, the main challenge is to get checkmated, but that happens to everyone, boys and girls.

S: It doesn't really matter who you play, like if you play a boy and they start pointing, it doesn't matter to me.

B: Why do you feel so many girls quit chess?

S: I think some girls quit because chess can feel hard and not very fun at the beginning. If you don't play a lot yet, studying and tournaments can feel stressful instead of exciting.

D: Yeah, tournaments can be tiring too. Games can take a long time, and that can make chess feel like a lot of work.

S: And playing with a clock can be frustrating. If you run out of time a lot, it can feel like you're failing, even if you had good ideas. That can make people want to stop playing.

B: What has kept you excited about continuing to play the game?

S: We get to play lots of opponents, and even GMs, and you never know, you could actually win against some, and that could be very exciting. You make lots of friends too!

D: To me, it's just fun to play chess!

B: So, it's about the positions that arise on the chessboards that keep you going.

D: Yes, that's right.

B: If you met a young girl playing her first chess tournament, what advice would you give her?

S: I would give her advice that if you don't really like playing chess that much, try doing puzzles first, and if you lose your games, maybe you can get an online coach, and they can teach you some cool things.

D: I would tell her to always eat breakfast before playing chess!

B: That's gold! What have your experiences been, traveling for chess?

S: In the UK, sometimes, there's no carbon copy for the notation sheet, so you have to duplicate your game on another notation sheet. That once happened to me and Darya.

D: In Canada, the people are really nice, and the chess tournaments are pretty well organized; it's really nice there.

B: What is a favorite chess memory of yours?

S: My favorite chess memories are when I got to meet popular chess Youtubers, and famous chess players, which is really fun.

D: My favorite chess memory was when we went to Marbella, Spain for a chess camp, and I finally got to meet with my online chess coach. We played chess for 10 days; I really liked it. In the morning, we would go to the beach and swim, and then come back, eat breakfast, and study chess.

S: Yes, we would study chess for four hours, looking at very hard positions! I remember another fun story, when in the UK, I was playing in a chess tournament on my birthday, and I made a lot of friends who I invited for my birthday party. We even had a chess cake, and I won both my matches that day! That was the best birthday ever!

B: What are your chess goals for the future?

D: My goals are to become a WGM, play smart, and make zero blunders. OK, fewer blunders.

S: I also want to be a WGM. I want to become a coach and help others with chess.

Deeksha Shankaranand (13)

(Interviewed by The Myth Sarang)

I've seen Deeksha around the chess scene for many years and became close friends in the last year. We were in Milwaukee airport after the US Open waiting for our flight and realized we had a ton in common. She's nearly 1700 FIDE and USCF and over 1700 NWSRS. She's an awesome WIISER Rookly esports teammate, and I would describe her play as deeply positional, just like me. She's also vegetarian and a chess coach, like me!

S: How long have you been playing chess?

D: I learned chess when I was four and started playing tournaments when I was nine.

S: What got you into chess?

D: My grandpa taught me and I got attached.

S: Who are your chess inspirations and why?

D: I find tons of players inspiring, especially ones who are hardworking, and their hard work shows visible progress in their play.

S: Do you prefer playing online or over-the-board chess? Why?

D: I prefer playing online chess because I prefer being able to move or be wherever I want!

S: Interesting! Do you like girls only chess tournaments? What are the benefits?

D: I do like girls only chess tournaments but I have never been able to place why.

S: What challenges have you experienced as a girl in the chess world?

D: I have not experienced many challenges. I have had people look down on me and question if I should be there but it's very rare.

S: I'm sorry you've had to deal with trash talk but I'm glad it's rare. Why do you feel so many girls quit chess? What has kept you excited about continuing to play the game?

D: I was actually unaware that many girls quit chess and I don't know why. I still enjoy the excitement of playing the game.

S: How does being a girl in chess impact your playing style, if at all?

D: Being a girl in chess doesn't impact my playing style.

S: If you met a young girl playing her first chess tournament, what advice would you give her?

D: In my first tournament I lost all five games. Ironically it was also an all-girls event. I would tell that girl that she will face lots of challenges, setbacks, and losses, but that she should not give up.

S: What have your experiences been traveling for chess?

D: I don't travel often because I don't like flying, but when I do I enjoy the tournaments I play.

S: What are some of the differences you've experienced playing chess abroad or in other parts of the USA?

D: I haven't noticed any differences in other parts of the USA.

S: What is a favorite chess memory?

D: I had just finished a game in the afternoon, and I was eating my lunch and I saw this group of kids who couldn't have been older than eight. They were all laughing and playing chess with one another and it was so wholesome to watch.

S: What are your chess goals for the future?



Sarang and Deeksha about to enjoy some ice cream. Photo credit: Siva Sankrithi.

D: I want to improve my skill and rating, and talk to more people at tournaments.

Wow! Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with all the readers, Siana, Sofia, Darya, and Deeksha! We truly appreciate your time in helping us with this article, and, most of all, thank you for your friendship. We were very happy to see that, though some struggles were faced, for the most part, your experiences were overwhelmingly positive and that you enjoy the chess community and are in it for the long haul.

There's so much wisdom we can learn from you. You all value the power of hard work and friendship, and love the challenge of learning and improving in chess. Family inspiration was a common theme (yay for grandpas teaching chess!), and we agree that having friends and family who play goes such a long way in helping us grow in our love for chess.

"Losing is learning and no one is perfect" is sage advice from Siana.

"You will face lots of challenges, setbacks, and losses, but you should never give up" from Deeksha is exactly the motivation many of us need, to keep our heads up, even in the tough times.

"It's just fun to play chess!" Darya perfectly sums up the fundamental joy of the game we love.

We are rooting for our friends to follow their dreams: improve their chess, reach WGM titles, and make friends. And we salute Sofia highlighting her goal to *"become a coach and help others with*

chess." We can attest that helping others with their chess is even more rewarding than helping yourself, much like in other areas of life.

Though Siana, Sofia, Darya, and Deeksha are still early in their chess journeys, we hope their chess experiences and enthusiasm for competitive chess inspire you, our readers, as much as they inspire us! We also want to mention another dear friend and one of the greatest supporters of us, The Chess Friends, WIM/FM Megan Lee. She runs Snippet Studios and Cloth Tattoo, and has won multiple Washington State Championships, and finished fourth in the US Women's Championship. She's got IM and WGM norms already, and those titles should come soon! Go Megan!

As we close our March article, we should remember that March is only one month, and that we should celebrate the girls and women in our lives every day! As in the butterfly effect, when a butterfly flapping its tiny wings on a tiny meadow can cause a hurricane in the ocean, we hope that your flipping these delicate pages of the *Northwest Chess* magazine will produce a positive shift in the chess world where all who play can keep improving and enjoying the game for a long time!

Three Cheers, Fellow Future Master Chess Friends!

The Man Benji,
The Myth Sarang,
The Legend Vivaan



Happy March 8! (Art by Sasha)