

US Women in Chess

A BRIEF HISTORY OF US WOMEN'S CHESS (BY THE NUMBERS)

By Phil Chase

INTRODUCTION

The first official championship for women chess players in the United States occurred in 1937. And just as gender roles, and the strategies that society has used to navigate the whole question of gender, have evolved in many ways since those Depression days, so have the ways that the American chess world approached the dilemma of women in chess. The recurring concern is, of course, that an infinitesimal fraction of players are female, and at least until the 1980s, those female players were relatively weak compared to their male counterparts. While today there is a group of strong female players (master and above) in the United States, the total number of participants is still far below parity. Girls do become involved at a significantly higher rate than in past years, but as in other fields that some see as congruent with chess (math, engineering, physics) most drop away by their college years or even later teens. One strategy for encouraging girls to play has been segregating tournaments, even up to the national or Olympic level, and while that process has undoubtedly created a more cohesive community of players with similar strength and interests, the long-term goal of increased female participation still seems to be elusive.

There have been four distinct eras in US women's chess, each illustrative of contemporary elements in American society (although metaphors should be used warily!) The first "age" would be the lengthy period dominated by Gisella Gresser and Mona Karff (1937-1974). Most participants in women's or mixed events lived in New York City, were often married to members of the Manhattan and Marshall Chess Clubs, and competed in an atmosphere where patronizing male spectators would, in the most gentlemanly way, correct the blunders made by women who were clearly thrilled to receive such chivalric instruction. That time was not so far distant from an era when women had been denied suffrage, in part because "scientists" had claimed that female brains would explode from the pressure of making electoral decisions. Within the context of second-class status, it is impressive that a few women were able to face disrespect and opprobrium to become strong players. Although official ratings were not developed until later in this period, probably Gresser and Karff were master strength, and Mary Bain, Lisa Lane, Jacqueline Piatigorsky and Helen Weissenstein were expert strength. However, most of the players in the women's championships during this era were at the "A" or "B" level, occasionally lower.

By the 1970s, the times had been changing, and within the rubric of liberation came the conclusion that talented women could legitimately devote themselves to activities previously reserved for men, including chess. There arose a pool of young women who took a more scholarly approach to chess mastery, now bicoastal rather than concentrated only in New York. There was an especially active group of players at UCLA in the early 1970s, including US championship participants Linda Mahan, Greta Olsson, Karen Street, and 5-time US champion Diane Savereide, who would dominate the US scene (along with Rachel Crotto) for the next decade (1975-1987). East coast stars included Crotto, (mentioned prominently in famous chess teacher John Collins' book "My Seven Chess Prodigies"), Dolly Teasley, and Kate Sillars (Gasser), who had been the youngest participant ever in the US championship at age 13. The average strength of championship participants



Lisa Lane (L) playing Gisella Gresser (R) in the USSR, 1962

was gradually increasing, with most reaching expert ratings or very close to it. Although American women had been invited to world championship qualifying events in the past, the best result to that time was achieved by Savereide at the Alicante (Spain) Interzonal in 1981, where she finished 5th, missing qualification for the Candidates Finals by ½ point.

In the 1980s, changes in the political world drastically affected the American chess world, as emigration from the Soviet Union accelerated, and many strong players, male and female, came to the United States. The women emigrants included several master-strength players, and even world championship candidates such as Anna Akhsharumova, Elena Akhmilovskaya (Donaldson), Irina Levitina, and later Anjelina Belakovskaia. Szusza (Susan) Polgar, women's world champion, was the strongest of the new Americans, but never played in the US Women's Championship, although she did represent the US in the Olympiad. During this period, it became more difficult to qualify for the US Championship, and the field was generally balanced between master and expert players.

In the fifteen years from 1995-2010, some players born in the United States reached master level, notably Jennifer Shahade, while there was still an influx of women

born elsewhere who have been able to mesh their own cultural embrace of chess with the freedom to pursue the game as a profession, or at least an integral element of daily life. In a world that loves potential and talent, US women's chess has had its share of prodigies, including Sillars, Crotto, Baraka Shabazz, Alexey Rudolph, Tatev Abrahamyan, Vanessa West, and soon Annie Wang, but the most polished of that select group must be Irina Krush, who won the US championship at 14, and, along with Anna Zatonskih, has been the strongest player of her era, maybe ever, in the US.

So at the top levels, American women are playing at the highest standard ever. There are more girls playing in scholastic tournaments, both open and girls-only than ever before. However, there is still the enigma that a very low percentage of players, especially at the adult level, are women. The USCF and other supporters of the game have tried many strategies, usually with meager results. Perhaps our culture must evolve, as it did in the post-war period and again in the 1960s, for the ratio of women players to reach a reasonable level. If we have imagination and perseverance, perhaps that process could occur in the very near future.

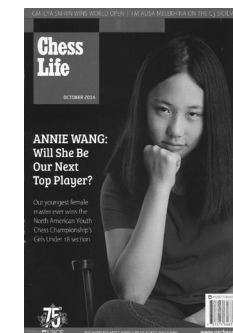
ADDENDUM (2016)

The preceding notes were written in 2010. At that time, Annie Wang was an 8-year old 1700 player who had upset a few experts. Since then, she has reached a 2300 rating, been featured on the "Chess Life" cover, and played in the US Championship. Other developments, both general and specific, have followed a related pattern. The USCF President from 2009-2015 was Ruth Haring, a 6-time US Championship participant and multiple Olympian. Haring's active promotion of girls and women in chess has had a salubrious effect on female tournament participation. The USCF committee on Women's Chess has been forceful and ambitious in promoting a variety of programs to solve the long-term issue of gender equality in chess. More important, the success of women players in tournaments has become more common, even taken for granted. For example, in a recent large open tournament, the Pacific Southwest Open in Los Angeles, the winner of the B section was a 14-year old girl, the winner of the A section was a 16-year old girl, and the overall tournament winner was Tatev Abrahamyan, likely to become a GM in the near future. The fifth era of women's chess is now in full mode, featuring players like Annie Wang, Carissa Yap, Ashritha Eswaran, Jennifer Yu, and many more. The next Judit Polgar or Hou Yifan may come from Hungary or China—or she just might come from a lot closer to home.

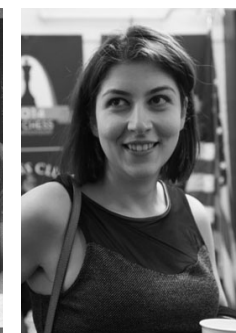
STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Included below are:

- Names of all participants in US Women's Invitational Championships (1937-2015), and years of participation
- Also participants in Olympiads (O), World Team Championships (WTC), and Women's World Championship events (WWC)
- Cumulative scores in above listed events
- Since championships in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006 were mixed (women and men), cumulative scores for participants in those years are included along with scores versus female opponents (vW)
- Names in parentheses are other names used by players in competition
- Lifetime/career leaders in various categories for championship and other noted events.



Annie Wang



Tatev
Abrahamyan



Anna Zatonskih

Statistical Information

ABRAHAMYAN, TATEV 04-05-06-07-08-09-10-11-12-13-14-15 (61-49) (vW=55.5-43.5) (O=13.5-7.5) (WTC=7-14) (WWC=.5-3.5)
AIRAPETIAN, CHOUCHANIK 99-00-02-05-06-07-08 (19.5-43.5) (vW=17.5-32.5)
AKHMILOVSKAYA (Donaldson), ELENA 90-93-94-02-03 (29.5-15.5) (vW=26.5-6.5) (O=30-23)
AKHSHARUMOVA, ANNA 87-97 (15.5-2.5) (O=20-13)
ARONOFF, IRENE 84 (7-3)
ARONSON, EVA 57-59-62-64-66-67-69-72-74-75-76 (59-49) (O=2-4)
BABAKIN, M 53 (3-5)
BAGINSKAITE, CAMILLA 00-02-03-06-07-09-10-11-12-14 (42-51) (vW=36.5-36.5) (O=14-12) (WWC=0-2)
BAIN, MARY 37-38-40-42-46-48-51-62-64-66-67-69 (66-42) (O=4.5-9.5)
BATTSETSEG, TSAGAAN 02-04-05-0708-09 (23-28) (vW=9.5-17.5)
BELAKOVSKAIA, ANGELINA 93-94-95-97-98-99-04-13 (38.5-24.5) (O=19.5-15.5)
BERT, ALISON 79-81 (9-13)
BRAGG, DONNA 72 (4-6)
BRAUN (Koput, Simmons), MARILYN 69-72-75-76 (25-15)
BURLINGAME, MABEL 59-66-67-72-74 (19-29)
BURTMAN, SHARON 87-89-90-91-92-93-94-95-97-98-99-00 (41-61)
CESTONE, _____ 69 (0-1)
CHIANG, SARAH 13 (2.5-6.5)
CHRISTIANSEN (Us), NATASHA 89-06 (4.5-13.5) (vW=4.5-8.5)
COMINI, DIANE 74 (1-9)
CONLON, MARY 78 (4-6)
COTTRELL-FINEGOLD, KELLY 06 (0-9) (vW=0-5)
CROTTO, RACHEL 72-75-76-78-79-81-84 (47.5-24.5) (O=21.5-14.5)
DAVEY, W 37 (3-3)
De SERRANO, ROSALIE 53-55 (8-11)
DMITRIJOVIC, VESNA 89-90-91-92-93-94 (22-42)
DODSON, CATHERINE 86-87 (7.5-10.5)
DONNELLY, RUTH 72-76-78-81-84-86-87-89 (33-44)
EPSTEIN, ESTHER 90-91-92-95-97-98-99-00-02-03-05-06-08 (58.5-52.5) (vW=46-34) (O=32-29)
ESWARAN, ASHRITHA 14 (3.5-5.5)
FAN, YUN 09 (2.5-6.5)
FAWNS, C 42 (0.5-7.5)
FINEGOLD, GINA 94 (1.5-7.5)
FOISOR, SABINA 09-10-11-12-13-14-15 (28-35) (O=10-5) (WTC=3.5-9.5)
FORD (Ruggiero), PAM 78-79-81-84-90-91 (25-31)
FRENKEL, VERA 84-86-92 (9-18) (O=3.5-3.5)
FRENKLAKH, JENNY 95-97-98-99-00 (16-23)
FUCHS, GRETA 62 (1-9)
GHERGHE, DIANA 86-89-90 (11-16)
GODDARD, ADELE 64 (2-8)
GOLETIANI, RUSUDAN 04-05-06-09-11-12-15 (29,5-32.5) (vW=23.5-24.5) (O=13.5-5.5) (WTC=4-5)
GORLIN, YELENA 00 (4-5)
GRAF (Stevenson), SONJA 57-64 (18-3)
GRESSER (Kahn), GISELA 40-42-44-46-48-51-53-55-57-59-62-64-65-66-67-69-72-74-75-76-78-79 (152-54) (O=20-15)
GROBERMAN, ELINA 99-00-02-03 (14.5-21.5) (vW=13-14)
GRUMETTE, LINA 48-51-55-57-59-67 (21.5-34.5)
GUINAN, RACHEL 65-69-72 (10-19)
HAHN (Khan), ANNA 03 (4.5-4.5) (vW=4-0) (O=6.5-5.5)
HARING (Biyiasas, Orton) 74-75-76-78-79-81 (38.5-23.5) (O=22.5-22.5)
HARMATH, MATHILDA 38-40-42 (9-17)
HARRISON, EDNA 38 (3.5-6.5)
HENDRICKSON, CHRIS 89 (2-7)

Statistical Information Cont'd

HENSCHHEL, KATE 44-46-53-55 (13.5-22.5)
HENSCHHEL, WALLY 44-46-53-55 (12.5-23.5)
HERSTEIN (Fitzgerald), RUTH 65-75-76 (18.5-11.5) (O=17.5-12.5)
HIGGINS, OLGA 57 (2.5-8.5)
HUBER (Wagner), ZENAIDA 64-65-66-67 (16.5-22.5)
ISODAKOVA, NATALIE 95 (1-2)
ITKIS, HANA 02-06 (2-16) (vW=1.5-7.5)
IZRAILOV, INNA 84-86 (13-5) (O=9.5-9.5)
JACKSON, _____ 38 (2-8)
JAMISON, COURTNEY 08 (0.5-8.5)
JEZIERSKA, IVONA 84-87-97-98 (14-22) (O=12-9)
KAGANOVSKA, POLINA 95 (1.5-1.5)
KARFF (May), MONA 38-40-42-44-46-48-51-53-55-57-59-62-64-65-66-67-69-74-75-76 (133-52) (O=6.5-4.5)
KASHDAN, HELEN 38 (3-7)
KATS, ALENA 12-13 (4.5-13.5)
KAUFMAN, SARAH 64-67 (5.5-14.5)
KELLNER, LUCILLE 48-51-55-57-62 (22.5-25.5)
KENNEDY (Mistry), SHERNAZ 81-84-86-89-90 (20.5-26.5) (O=3-7)
KORHONEN, ANNA LISA 65 (3-7)
KOSTENIUUK, ALEXANDRA (O=14.5-3.5) (WTC=8.5-5.5) (WWC=2-2)
KRUSH, IRINA 95-97-98-03-04-05-07-08-09-10-11-12-13-14-15 (93-39) (vW=89-31) (O=52.5-24.5) (WTC=11-6) (WWC=3-3)
KUHNER, MARY 87 (4.5-4.5)
LANE (Hickey), LISA 59-62-66 (23-5) (O=3-7)
LANNI, DIANA 79-81-84-86 (15-26) (O=6.5-4.5)
LEVINA, ANNA 02 (2.5-6.5) (vW=1.5-3.5)
LEVITAN, YULIYA 92 (5.5-3.5) (O=6.5-3.5)
LEVITINA, ANNA 03-05 (4.5-13.5) (vW=1-6)
LEVITINA, IRINA 91-92-93-94 (28.5-7.5) (O=7-5)
LINN, GINA 86-87 (6-12) (O=9-4)
MAHAN, LINDA 75-81 (7.5-13.5)
MARINELLO (MacArthur), BEATRIZ 91-92-93-94-99-10 (26.5-28.5) (O=4-3)
MARSHALL, ABBY 10 (0.5-8.5)
MCCREADY, RAPHAEL 37-38-40-46 (16-20)
McGRUDER, COLETTE 89 (1.5-7.5)
MCLEOD, NANCY 57-59 (8.5-10.5)
MELEKHINA, ALISA 07-09-10-11-12-14-15 (25.5-37.5) (WTC=8-6)
MORRELL, MILDRED 57-59-62-65-66-67 (17-41)
NEELY, ELIZABETH 86-87-89-90-91 (23.5-21.5)
NEMCOVA, KATRINA 14-15 (12.5-7.5) (O=4.5-2.5)
NI, VIKTORIJA 12-13-14-15 (17.5-20.5) (WTC=3.5-7.5)
NYE, _____ 46 (4-5)
OLSSON, GRETA (Hedwig) 69-74-75-76-78-79 (26-33)
OWENS (White), WILLA 51-55 (7-13)
PAIKIDZE, NAZI 15 (7.5-3.5)
PELECH, LESLIE 92-93 (7-11)
PETERS, M 44 (0.5-7.5)
PIATIGORSKY, JACQUELINE 51-55-62-64-65-66 (32-28) (O=7.5-3.5)
POLGAR, SZUSZA (Susan) (O=10.5-3.5)
RAETTIG, ADELE 37-38-40-42-44-46-48-51-53 (23-53)
RIPPETH, JUDY 74 (3-7)
RIVERO (Belcher), ADELE 37-38-40-42 (29-6)
ROCK, CECILIA 64 (5-5)
ROGERS, HENRIETTA 53 (1.5-6.5)

Statistical Information

ROGOSIN, ELSIE 37 (3-6)
ROHONYAN, KATERINA 07-08-10 (17-10) (O=6-4)
ROOS, NANCY 42-44-51-55 (22.5-13.5)
ROSS, LAURA 03-05-06 (10-17) (vW=5-4)
RUDOLPH (Root), ALEXEY 81-84-86-89-90-91-92-93-94-95 (34-52) (O=0.5-1.5)
SAGALCHIK, OLGA 94-95-98-99-00-02-03-05 (24.5-41.5)
SAVEREIDE, DIANE 75-76-78-79-81-84-87 (51.5-18.5) (O=37.5-33.5)
SCHMIDT, JOAN 72-74-75 (11.5-18.5)
SELENSKY, MARY 48-55-57-59-62-64-65-67-69 (34-51)
SHABAZZ, BARAKA 81 (4.5-6.5)
SHAHADE, JENNIFER 97-98-99-00-02-03-04-05 (40-31) (vW=29.5-19.5) (O=14-10)
SHAREVICH, ANNA 15 (6.5-4.5)
SHIBER, JULIA 03 (3.5-5.5) (vW=2.5-1.5)
SILLARS (Gasser), KATE 62-65-66-78-79 (24-24)
SIMON, LENORE 57 (0.5-10.5)
SLATER, KATHRYN 37-46-51-57-69-72-74 (28.5-38.5)
STEPHENS, W 44 (0.5-7.5)
STERNGOLD, SUSAN 72-74-78-79 (16.5-22.5)
STOLYAROV, EKATERINA 79 (2.5-8.5)
STORY, M.M. 53 (0-8)
STREET (Goldwater), KAREN 78-79 (7.5-13.5)
TEASLEY, DOROTHY (Dolly) 69-76-81-87 (23-16) (O=10-6)
TSAI, CINDY 02-03 (5-13) (vW=3.5-6.5)
TUVSHINTUGS, BATCHING 06-07-08 (14.5-12.5) (vW=11-8)
TVERSKAYA, JULIA 91-92-93-94 (19-17) (O=6-6)
VAYZERBERG, TATIANA 05 (3-6)
VICARY, ELIZABETH 06-07 (6-12) (vW=3.5-7.5)
VINES, EDITH 55 (7.5-3.5)
VIRKUD, APURSA 15 (3.5-7.5)
WAGENER, ANNA 93-95-97-98-99-00-02-05 (33-33) (vW=32.5-20.5)
WANG, ANNIE 15 (3.5-7.5)
WEART, EDITH 37-38 (9-9)
WEISSENSTEIN, (Dr) HELEN 40-46-65-66-67 (27-20)
WEST, VANESSA 05-06 (6-12) (vW=4-3)
WHITE, HELEN 37 (4-5)
WIECKJEWICZ, KRYSTINA 90-91 (6-12)
WRAY, ELIZABETH 37-38-40-42-44-48 (10.5-39.5)
YU, JENNIFER 15 (2.5-8.5)
ZATONSKIH, ANNA 04-05-06-07-08-09-10-11-12-13-14 (69.5-33.5) (vW=63-25) (O=36.5-18.5) (WTC=4.5-10.5) (WWC 2.5-1.5)
ZENYUK, IRYNA 05-06-08-09-10-11-12-14 (27.5-42.5) (vW=26.5-34.5)
ZITSERMAN, TATYANA 97-98 (1-17) (O=3.5-5.5)



International competitors Diane Saveride (U.S.A.), left, and Sheila Jackson (U.K.) – U.S. and British women's champions.

Diane Saveride (L) with Sheila Jackson (R), US and UK champions



Irina Krush at the 2012 Chess Olympiad
Photo by David Llada



Mona May Karff on the cover of Chess Review Magazine, 1942

GAMES PLAYED IN US WOMENS CHAMPIONSHIPS

1. Gresser 206
2. Karff 185
3. Krush 132
4. Epstein 111
5. Abrahamyan 110
6. Aronson 108
7. Bain 108
8. Zatonskih 103
9. Burtman 102
10. Baginskaite 93

POINTS IN CHAMPIONSHIPS

- 1.Gresser 152
2. Karff 133
3. Krush 93
- 4.Zatonskih 69.5
- 5.Bain 66
6. Abrahamyan 61
- 7.Aronson 59
8. Epstein 58.5
9. Saveride 51.5
10. Crotto 47.5

WINNING % (vW)(30 or more games)

- 1.Rivero 82.7
2. Krush 74.1
- 3.Gresser 73.8
- 4.Saveride 73.6
- 5.Karff 71.9
- 6.Zatonskih 71.6
7. Crotto 65.9
- 8.Braun 62,5
9. Roos 62.5
10. Belakovskaia 61.1

OLYMPICS (GAMES PLAYED FOR US)

- 1.Krush 77
2. Saveride 71
- 3.Epstein 61
- 4.Zatonskih 55
5. Akhmilovskaia 53
6. Haring 45
7. Crotto 36
8. Belakovskaia 35
9. Gresser 35
10. Aksharumova 33

CHAMPIONSHIP WINNERS

1937-Adele Rivero
1938-Mona May Karff
1940-Rivero
1942-Karff
1944-Gisela Kahn Gresser
1946-Karff
1948-Gresser, Karff
1951-Mary Bain
1953-Karff
1955-Gresser, Nancy Roos
1957-Sonja Graf Stevenson
1959-Lisa Hickey Lane
1962-Gresser, Lane
1964-Gresser, Graf
1965-Gresser
1966-Gresser
1967-Gresser
1969-Gresser
1972-Eva Aronson, Marilyn Koput Braun
1974-Karff
1975-Diane Saveride
1976-Saveride
1978-Saveride, Rachel Crotto
1979-Crotto
1981-Saveride
1984-Saveride
1986-Inna Izrailov
1987-Anna Akhsharumova
1989-Alexey Rudolph Root
1990- Elena Akhmilovskaya Donaldson
1991-Esther Epstein
1992-Irina Levitina
1993-Akhmilovskaia, Levitina
1994-Akhmilovskaia, Levitina, Angelina Belakovskaia
1995-Sharon Burtman, Belakovskaia (shortened event)
1997-Epstein
1998-Irina Krush
1999-Belakovskaia
2000-Camilla Baginskaite, Elina Groberman
2002-Jennifer Shahade
2003-Anna Hahn (check)
2004-Shahade (shortened event)
2005-Rusudan Goletiani
2006-Anna Zatonskih
2007-Krush
2008-Zatonskih
2009-Zatonskih
2010-Krush
2011- Zatonskih (Tatev Abrahamyan) (first named won tie-breaker)
2012-Zatonskih (Krush)
2013-Krush
2014-Krush (Zatonkih, Abrahamyan)
2015-Krush