

# 'I like good, star games'

**S**HE hates playing against women. That is Judit Polgar, the strongest woman chess player the world has ever seen. Judit competes in men's only events and is ranked 14th in the world among men. The chess playing level of women has gone up since Judit arrived on the scene.

Judit, born on July 23, 1976, is the youngest of the three Polgar sisters from Budapest. She is a Grandmaster among men, something which only a handful of women have accomplished. Her sisters Sofia and Zsuzsa are both woman Grandmasters. Sofia is also a men's International Master and Zsuzsa, the oldest is the world women's champion and a Grandmaster among men.

Moving between various top-level chess venues, Judit is today very much a professional who is in good business. She adds colour to any chess event in which she participates. Her fighting spirit is such that she bagged the award for it in Dos Hermanas tournament. Judit, who moved around with her sisters and parents in the past, now has her mother accompanying her when she travels. She keeps fit by swimming and playing table tennis.

She made her presence felt in the international scene for the first time in 1988 when she teamed up with her two sisters and Ildiko Madl to win the gold medal for Hungary in the Thessaloniki Olympiad and thereby stopping decades of Soviet supremacy. Soon, she became the No. 1 in the FIDE rating list. She heads the women's rating list with 2670, leading second-placed Zsuzsa by a big 105-point difference.

Her first encounter with world

## INTERVIEW



champion Garry Kasparov in Linares 1994 was shrouded in controversy even though it was a historical clash between the best man and woman in the world. She won the Madrid super category tournament in 1994 which recorded her best rating performance. Ever since, Judit is more a part of the men's fold than the women's circuit.

Men players like Evgeny Bareev, Vassily Ivanchuk and Nigel Short have had horrifying moments when she sat across them. Judit has worked with sister Zsuzsa more than anyone else. No other professional sport has a woman competing and threatening the men than Judit Polgar in chess. She is a unique personality.

Judit accomplished feats which have never been dreamed of before by women across the world. Immediately after her last round game in the Chess Meeting '97 at Dortmund, she gave an exclusive interview to *The Sportstar*. Excerpts:

**Question: Which has been your most memorable chess performance?**

**Answer:** One of my first big successes which I consider memorable is the Hungarian championship in 1991, when I won in front of Lajos Portisch, Andras Adorjan and others. As a

tournament result the first Olympiad at Thessaloniki 1988 was important. Later on it was Madrid 1994. There are a lot of them but these are the ones I would like to single out.

**Q: In the last few events you have been starting very well but something goes wrong in the second half. Is this due to lack of stamina?**

**A:** Somehow, I get stuck when I play against Kramnik or Vishy (Viswanathan Anand). In this tournament I survived Vishy but Kramnik beat me. After that I forced too much against Yusupov. I think my whole result would have been different if I had made a draw against Yusupov. There was no problem in the game. I was just pushing it too hard.

**Q: You and your sisters did not play in the women's events. Suddenly Zsuzsa has started to play. What is the reason and when can we expect you and Sofia to join her?**

**A:** Zsuzsa started to play since she felt that she did not have chances for the absolute world championship. She gave it a try and did it and now she is waiting for the next challenger. About Sofi (Sofia), I don't know. I think she doesn't want to do it in the near future. For me, I don't plan it at all.

**Q: Does your father decide about your programme or do you?**

**A:** My father gives the direction. In the past he told us not to play women's tournaments as it gave less opportunities to improve our game. It is necessary to play against tougher opponents.

Nowadays it is my father who tries to convince me to play in the women's Olympiads and the women's championships and I am tough with this.

**Q: Many players like Bobby Fischer and Anand have played against you? Have you been influenced by any of these famous people or by any other player?**

**A:** Basically I like good, star games. There are lot of players whom I like: Paul Keres, Boris Spassky and there are lots of them. There is no one specific person that I can name.

**Q: How do you see your chances in the coming world championship cycle at Groningen?**

**A:** It is a sort of a lottery. It is a knock-out system with two games. So, they are very short mini-matches. I hope I have a chance. It will depend in one second in some situations.

**Q: What happened in your much-publicised first game against Garry Kasparov in Linares 1994 when he took back a move? Did you miss beating him?**

**A:** It was a very strange situation. Before that incident happened, he was completely winning. I was also in time trouble. Which wasn't usual for me. I played on. He started to play the best moves and then he took it back. It was a strange situation. In the video you can see that I am looking around turning my head and nobody says a word.

On the other hand, I just couldn't believe it. Also there is a rule and I think it depends on the tournament. If you claim something, if it is not true, they give you a penalty of two minutes or on the other hand they give two minutes to the opponent. But I wasn't sure about this. Hundreds of people sitting in the audience, the organiser is right there, the arbiter is there and he is the world champion. He also knows what exactly is going on. Somehow I didn't say anything.

In a way it was stupid not to have said anything. They say there is no

video and nothing happened.

**Q: How does it feel to be the strongest player in Hungary?**

**A:** Of course it is a good feeling. Of course there are other players who are really on my neck now (laughter). Zoltan Almasi, Peter Leko are all there and any time they can be better. Unfortunately, in the Olympiad, I didn't show my best result.

**Q: What is your ambition for the year as well as for the future?**

**A:** I don't have any specific goals. Actually, I never had a dream either. But I want to play more stable chess and try to improve my play and be more secure.

**Q: Is Azmaiparashvili your permanent second or do you just fix seconds per tournament like Chernin?**

**A:** Well, with Chernin I was studying for a short while. It was not very good. Azmai worked for a year and a half as my trainer. Now I don't have any permanent trainer.

**Q: Do you work during or before events or all the time?**

**A:** It would be nice to have a trainer full time. With Azmai, he is a foreigner, so the trainer has to travel and this can be a problem. But I try to train now with Lev Psakhis as much as possible. ★

**Judit Polgar in action against former world champion Anatoly Karpov in the Chess Meeting '97 at Dortmund.**

**ARVIND AARON**

