



GLOBAL MOVES:

AMERICANS IN
CHESS OLYMPIADS

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Inspired by the American team's victory in the 2016 Chess Olympiad, *Global Moves: Americans in Chess Olympiads* examines the competition through just one of the many lenses we could use to explore its long and storied history—the experiences of American players. Chess Olympiads are biennial tournaments in which teams of players work together to represent their countries. The early years of the tournament marked a golden age of American chess, when teams brought home team gold four times in a row (1931, 1933, 1935, and 1937). 2016 marked the first team gold achieved by the United States in 40 years, and the first time they had won team gold in an Olympiad that included Russia or the Soviet Union. US Chess, Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis (CCSCSL), and the Kasparov Chess Foundation offered support to the team, which included Grandmasters (GMs) Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura, Wesley So, Sam Shankland, and Ray Robson, with International Master John Donaldson as team captain and GM Aleksandr Lenderman as team coach. Together they made history, bringing the Hamilton-Russell Cup back to the United States.

This victory was especially meaningful on the Saint Louis Chess Campus, which includes the CCSCSL and the World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF). The CCSCSL hosts many elite tournaments, including the U.S., U.S. Women's, U.S. Junior, and U.S. Girls' Junior Chess Championships, along with tournaments like the Sinquefeld Cup and Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz that bring in the top talent from around the country and the world. This is part of an effort to promote chess in the United States and provide opportunities for the best American players to compete on a global scale.

Global Moves features Olympiad artifacts from our own collection as well as materials from over 20 lenders and donors, among them inductees to the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame. Many of these treasures have never been exhibited at the WCHOF. The organization of *Global Moves* has resulted in several new donations to the WCHOF, including artifacts from the collections of GMs Arthur Bisguier and Isaac Kashdan as well as Jacqueline Piatigorsky and Dorothy Teasley's medals from Women's Chess Olympiads. We have also taken this opportunity to have one of the highlights of our collection—a suite of furniture from the 1966 Havana, Cuba, Chess Olympiad—newly conserved, restoring a beautiful piece of chess history.

Off view since the WCHOF relocated to Saint Louis from Miami, we are proud to present the Havana Chess furniture along with a video from the 1966 Olympiad, showing the tables from the tournament in use. The exhibition also includes a video produced for the exhibition featuring interviews with the American Open team from the 2016 Olympiad and several commentators who have participated in Chess Olympiads or Women's Chess Olympiads themselves. Longer excerpts of these interviews, conducted by Kevin Duggin and edited for clarity, are also included in this brochure, along with an essay by GM Lubomir Kavalek, a member of the gold medal-winning 1976 Olympiad team. It is our hope that through presenting these materials, *Global Moves* honors the rich legacy—and bright future—of American chess.

—Emily Allred, Assistant Curator
World Chess Hall of Fame



Creator unknown
**Chess Table from the 1966 Havana,
Cuba, Chess Olympiad**
1966

Wood, leather, fabric, and marble
Collection of the U.S. Chess Trust



CHESS GOLD RUSH

BY GM LUBOMIR KAVALEK

“Winning team gold at Chess Olympiads can be elusive.”

The Russians have not done it since 2002, and in the 90-year history of these competitions, Americans have won it only six times. Four of those triumphs came before World War II, but only U.S. Chess Champion Frank Marshall played on all four teams, earning four team gold medals. Three times, the U.S. victories were in jeopardy on the last day of play, and only luck helped to clinch the gold.

2016: BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

In the most recent Olympiad in Baku, the Americans fielded an incredibly strong team. Three members—Grandmasters (GMs) Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura and Wesley So—were rated among the top 10 players in the world. But in the last round GM Sam Shankland lost his game, and the gold medals were up for grabs. Nothing could be done because under an unusual tiebreaking system the gold medals were hanging on a game from the match Estonia-Germany. An Estonian player had a draw in hand that would have given the overall victory to Ukraine, but he did not see it, and the U.S. team could celebrate. It was a great success: 170 countries played in Baku and among the contenders, only Armenia, the winners from 2006, 2008, and 2012, did not take part.

Photographer unknown
**IM Kim Commons, GM Larry Evans,
 GM Robert Byrne, GM Lubomir Kavalek,
 FM Bill Goichberg, and GM William
 Lombardy from the 1976 Haifa, Israel,
 Chess Olympiad**
 Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame

LUBOMIR KAVALEK

A Czech-American Grandmaster, once rated in the World's Top Ten, Lubomir Kavalek won national championships of his native Czechoslovakia, the United States, and Germany, and more than 15 important international tournaments and matches. He played in nine Olympiads—seven for the U.S.—and won two European Cups and 10 German Bundesliga titles. He was awarded several brilliancy prizes in major competitions for his creative efforts. Kavalek was a second to Bobby Fischer in the last half of the 1972 World Chess Championship and coached world championship candidates GMs Nigel Short, Robert Hubner, Robert Byrne, Yasser Seirawan, Eugene Torre and World Junior Champion Mark Diesen. Kavalek organized the prestigious 1979 Montreal tournament and seven World Cup Grand Prix for the Grandmasters Association. As a journalist, Kavalek covered notable chess events in the last half century in several languages for different magazines; for 24 years, he wrote for the Washington Post and most recently for the Huffington Post. Kavalek was the editor-in-chief for the RHM Press Publishing and authored five books. He was inducted to the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame in 2001 and selected to the Gallery of Distinguished Chess Journalists in 2006.



1933: FOLKESTONE, ENGLAND

Before World War II, when the Americans were a dominant force, no more than 20 teams participated in the Olympiads in which they competed. In the 1933 Folkestone Olympiad, the strong U.S. team of GM Isaac Kashdan, GM Frank Marshall, GM Reuben Fine, GM Arthur Dake, and Albert Simonson was coasting towards first place. They could have even lost in the last round to their main rival, the Czechoslovakian team, with the score of 1-3 and still managed to get the gold. Everything went wrong early in the match. Around move 17 Kashdan, Fine, and Simonson were already utterly outplayed and Frank Marshall could only hope for a draw. A loss of 1/2-3 1/2 was very possible. The gold could have disappeared right there, but their fortunes changed on a dime. Fine's opponent International Master (IM) Josef Rejfir did not see the winning double-piece sacrifice and Fine escaped. Marshall exploited Karel Treybal's mistake and turned a draw into a win. Although the Americans lost the match against the Czechs 1 1/2-2 1/2, the overall victory was secured.

1976: HAIFA, ISRAEL

The Olympiad in Haifa in 1976 was played for the first time under the Swiss pairing system with 46 teams competing in 13 rounds. As in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia (present-day Croatia), in 1950, the Soviets and its communist allies stayed home. It was my third Olympiad with the U.S. team.

A story similar to Folkestone played out during the match of two contenders, the U.S. and the Dutch teams. GM Robert Byrne quickly lost to GM Jan Timman, and just before the time control GM Jim Tarjan blundered against GM Jan Hein Donner. I pressed too hard against GM Genna Sosonko and adjourned in a hopeless position. GM William Lombardy could not hope for more than a half point. We were looking at an embarrassing 1/2-3 1/2 defeat, but like our predecessors in Folkestone, we turned it around. Hans Ree resisted Lombardy's pressure for 60 moves, but his next move was a blunder and he lost. Sosonko was on his way to victory, but fumbled on move 71. My h-pawn sprinted fast and secured a draw. It was our trademark in Haifa to score much better than expected in the adjournments. We tallied 6 1/2 points more than we should have objectively gained. FIDE Master (FM) Bill Goichberg was the U.S. team captain and GM Pal Benko was the team analyst. The match was played in the first half, and we quickly fell behind the Dutch team. With three rounds to go, we were still 2 1/2 points behind them.

Photographer unknown
**Fritz Brieger with GM Samuel Reshevsky,
 GM Isaac Kashdan, IM Al Horowitz,
 GM Reuben Fine, and GM Frank Marshall
 at the 1937 Stockholm, Sweden,
 Chess Olympiad**

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,
 gift of Richard Kashdan



Bad form is an uninvited guest at the Olympiads and could be unpredictable. Tarjan and I struggled in Haifa and had the worst results on the team, but two years later in Buenos Aires, we were the best performers. Tarjan ended his Olympiad career as one of the most successful American players with two gold and one silver individual medals. I finished in Haifa on a high note, winning the last two games, although I missed a queen sacrifice against IM Werner Hug, precisely the one that won World Chess Champion GM Magnus Carlsen the 2016 World Chess Championship match against GM Sergey Karjakin in New York.

“Tarjan and I struggled in Haifa and had the worst results on the team, but two years later in Buenos Aires, we were the best performers.”

We caught the Dutch team just in time before the last round started. The veterans GMs Robert Byrne, Larry Evans, and William Lombardy performed well throughout the event and won their last games against Wales. But our best performer IM Kim Commons misplayed his advantage and was in trouble. Did his opponent seal a winning move? Commons' opponent IM John Cooper was fighting for an individual board prize in Haifa. A win was important to him, but he did not seal the best move. Surprised by Commons' reply, he ran into time trouble and offered a draw. The U.S. team was done but could not control who would win the gold medals.

The fate of those medals was in the hands of FM Ilkka Saren, a relatively unknown chess master from Finland. His Dutch opponent, IM Frans Kuijpers, had to win the game to secure the top spot for his team. It was the last game of the event, and it went on for hours with no end in sight.

Photographer unknown
GM Jim Tarjan vs. FM Mehdi Mamouri
at the 1976 Haifa, Israel, Chess Olympiad
 Collection of Jim Tarjan

Nervous chess players were pacing back and forth in the reception hall of the Dan Carmel hotel, where the event was played. Occasionally, somebody came from the tournament hall to confirm that nothing dramatic had happened. On move 70, Kuijpers moved a pawn, a sign he wanted to prolong the marathon game by another 50 moves. Did he want to wear Saren down?

We admired the stoical look on Saren's face. Where did it come from? We did not know that in the last championship of his country Saren fought for 159 moves. Equally, we were not aware why Kuijpers was not trying to break on the kingside. It was risky, but it was his only winning attempt. Only later did we learn that he made a similar risky bid the previous December in a team match against England and got burned. There they were, two players moving back and forth, caught in their past. After 111 moves and 14 1/2 hours, they agreed to a draw, and we won the gold, and the Dutch got the silver.

In the report for the Dutch magazine *Schaakbuletin* Jan Hein Donner wrote: “The Americans humiliated us once more before departure when they declined to carry the Hamilton–Russell Cup with them and the Dutch—the irony of it all—ended up having to drag the thing with them to Amsterdam to be deposited with FIDE in their offices.”

In 1968, I was nominated to play top board for Czechoslovakia at the Olympiad in Lugano, but after the Soviet-led invasion of my native country, I escaped to the West. I could not have predicted that I would end up playing for the United States in seven Olympiads, three times on the top board, twice on the second, winning one gold and five bronze team medals. Only after my professional chess career was over, did I realize that with the help of 19 different teammates, I won six team Olympiad medals, the most by any American player since the U.S. began competing in 1928.

—Lubomir Kavalek, 2017

Bottom, from left to right:
 Photographer unknown
GMs Larry Evans, Lubomir Kavalek,
and Robert Byrne at the
1976 Haifa, Israel, Chess Olympiad
 Collection of Lubomir Kavalek

Cartier
GM Lubomir Kavalek's Bronze Medal from
the 1974 Nice, France, Chess Olympiad
 Collection of Lubomir Kavalek





Opposite:
London, England
Nayler Brothers
Hamilton-Russell Cup
1927
Gilt silver and mahogany
Collection of the Fédération
Internationale des Échecs

Top:
Bill Hook
**Tournament Play at the 2002
Bled, Slovenia, Chess Olympiad**
Collection of Lubomir Kavalek

Bottom left:
**GM Frank Marshall's
Cigarette Case from the
1935 Warsaw, Poland,
Chess Olympiad**
Silver
Collection of the Marshall
Chess Club

Bottom right:
Jerzy Steifer
**Reproduction of a Pin from
the 1935 Warsaw, Poland,
Chess Olympiad**
2011
Collection of the World Chess Hall
of Fame, gift of John Donaldson



FABIANO CARUANA

2016 BAKU CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ BOARD 1

“It is not something you can expect to win because there are so many strong teams...”

What was it like to win the Chess Olympiad?

Top, from left to right:
Mike Klein
Opening Ceremony at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Mike Klein
GM Fabiano Caruana Competes in the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

I don't know if we could have expected that we would win. We were second seed at the start, and first through third seeds were very close in terms of average rating of all the players. It is not something you can expect to win because there are so many strong teams, and so much is based on things which aren't really in your control. It's possible for one team to run away with it, and normally that is what we would have done because we had such a strong score. We tied two matches, and we won the rest, which is just phenomenal. Normally it would be enough for a clear victory, but we still didn't know if we had won because they had to calculate the tie breaks. There was a tie with Ukraine, and it was such a closely fought Olympiad. To be on the team like where every player contributed so much and managed to win an Olympiad where another team was doing so well like Ukraine was exciting. They made 10 out of 11, and we somehow managed to beat them and to keep the pace the entire way and to run away with it.

I think it was about 40 years. But I think the Olympiad the U.S. had won last time was not really comparable to this victory. I think this was even stronger in terms of all the countries which were playing. So you have to look back to the 1930s to find a comparable winning team.

How long had it been since the American team won gold?

“...You have to look back to the 1930s to find a comparable winning team.”



What is it like to be on a team with players against whom you normally compete?

Mike Klein
The American and Russian Teams Compete in the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

It's interesting because normally when I'm playing a tournament, I'm not rooting for them because they are my opponents. I'm hoping I'll score better than them, or that they'll not win their games. In the Olympiad, of course, I want them to win, which is a funny feeling. I'm looking over and Hikaru is next to me, and I'm desperately hoping that he will win his game and he does because he usually pulls through. But it was strange rooting for other players whom I normally compete against. Although I have to say, they all did very well. Everyone on the team had a great performance. I think individually we didn't lose a single match; even individually, we didn't lose many games. We might have lost two or three games, totally throughout the tournament.



HIKARU NAKAMURA

2016 BAKU CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ BOARD 2

“It’s very strange because somehow it all seemed a little too smooth at the Chess Olympiad in Baku.”

In the previous years when I played in the Olympiad, we often times were quite close. I was very lucky that in the first two chess Olympiads I played in (Turin in 2006 and then in Dresden in 2008), we got the bronze medal. I was 19 in Turin, and 21 in Dresden. It [Baku] was very special, but as I said before, it really didn’t ever seem like we were in danger. It all felt very very smooth from start to finish, and I think that’s probably the strangest thing about it. Normally nothing seems to be that smooth in life and the Olympiad just seemed to be very smooth. It was actually quite enjoyable for that reason. There wasn’t the stress or any of the emotions involved.

Was the U.S. team favored to win?

We were one of several teams [favored to win], including China and Russia. I thought, personally, we felt we had very good chances. But again, we did our job, no one really messed up any particular matches, and once someone did have a bad result, the rest of the team picked them up. So overall, everyone did their job, and it was very good and very historically important to win the Olympiad for the U.S.

Top, from left to right:
Mike Klein

GM Hikaru Nakamura and WGM Katerina Nemcova at the Closing Ceremony of the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Mike Klein
Opening Ceremony at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Well, I think the main thing is that we stayed out of each other’s hair. We all did our own thing obviously. We had communication; we had the team meetings every night; and we found a way to get along. Obviously we’re all very strong players and we’re competitors, but you know at the end of the day, there is a very small group of elite players who make a living out of playing chess. We were all able to put that aside and just focus on the task at hand. I think that’s one reason, for example, when you look at a team like Russia, which has probably had the best team, give or take for the last 20 years, they haven’t won in quite a while now. I think that’s because they don’t have the team chemistry, and they aren’t able to gel as well.

What is it like to be on a team with players against whom you normally compete?



What’s the impression of the United States players on the international stage?

I think we are all considered very, very strong chess players. We’re in the top five or top 10 in the world, give or take which month it is. So, I think in general there is a lot of respect for what’s going with American chess. I think certainly when you have three players who reach that level, it’s very rare, and so clearly something is going right here in the United States.

The Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis helped fund the Olympiad team. They helped cover some of our expenses as well as some of the expenses necessary for training for the event, so it was very helpful and beneficial to have their support. Whereas some other teams like Russia, for example, don’t get a lot of funding for the actual event, but if they win, there’s a huge, huge bonus, and I think certainly there are different ways of approaching it. However I think it’s a lot easier to just focus and try and play your best when everything is covered up front as opposed to having to worry about the result and all the other extraneous things that can potentially go wrong.

Mike Klein
GMs Wesley So, Hikaru Nakamura, and Fabiano Caruana Compete in the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com



WESLEY SO

2016 BAKU CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ BOARD 3

“The event was much harder to win than expected; in the end, we needed 20 points out of a possible 22...”

This is the first time the U.S. has won since 1976. What was it like to win the Chess Olympiad?

It was my first year representing the United States for the Olympiad, and it was a really, really huge win for us and for the country. The event was much harder to win than expected; in the end, we needed 20 points out of a possible 22—any less than that and we wouldn't have gotten anything but silver or bronze. Even in the end, it was not clear that we would win clear first place. So there was tension, and it was quite nerve-racking in the end. But fortunately, we managed to pull through. We had a great team. The good thing about this is that it takes pressure away from our shoulders so that in the future Olympiads we know that we have to defend our title, but at the same time we know the feeling of having won it in the past. So it's huge and we all celebrated that, and we hope to continue that in the years to come.

What is it like working with people against whom you usually compete?

Opposite, from left to right:
Mike Klein
GM Wesley So Competes in the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Mike Klein
Opening Ceremony at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Bottom:
Mike Klein
GMs Wesley So and Ian Nepomniachtchi Compete in the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Chess is a really an individual sport, unlike basketball where you play with four other people in the same game. Chess is a little bit different because you can't really talk to your teammates when the game starts, but of course it's important to see how they are doing in the Olympiad since four players compete in each round, and you have to score at least 2 1/2 to win the match. I think the important thing about the Olympiad is it showed us how to work together, how to share ideas, and how to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of each member of the team. While the game is going on you need to see how everyone is doing. For example, in our match against Russia, Fabiano had a difficult position against GM Sergey Karjakin. He was black, and he was slightly in trouble in that game, and Hikaru was going to draw. Even though I had the black pieces, I kind of had to steer the game into a longer game and that just forced the issue. In situations like that, you need to know when to play for a win and when to play for a draw. If our team is up by two points already, then the other teammates just need to secure the draw to seal the win. Basically, the important thing about the Olympiad is just to win each match by at least 2 1/2 because it's based on team points. Getting 10 wins out of 11 matches is really difficult, and we managed to get that. It has been a memorable experience, because I don't get to play many team events. I only played in the Olympiad last year and the PRO Chess League this year, which is also similar.





SAM SHANKLAND

2016 BAKU CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ BOARD 4

What was it like to be part of the historic 2016 Olympiad team?

In a lot of ways, it was similar to any other tournament. I did all the same things. I went to bed at the same time. I regulated my eating the same way. I played as best I could, but at the end, it really made a difference that we really rewrote history as opposed to playing another event where you had a strong result. I've had a lot of good results in my life, but I've never been welcomed by my Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors as a returning hero. For the first time, it really felt like I was playing for something much bigger than myself. Chess is usually a very individual game, and it was a real honor to bring back a gold medal for my country.

I can't really speak for all the members of the team, but I think we largely still approached the game as individuals just because in every match you have individuals playing on four separate boards. It's not a really cohesive team sport like soccer where you'd be passing from one player to another. We definitely helped each other before games. It was really great having the coach and the resting player. So I played eight games and rested three. The three games I rested, I made myself available to my teammates to help them prepare. However, once the games actually started, we obviously weren't allowed to help each other out. I barely even looked at their boards. I just trusted my teammates to do the best they could and tried to focus as much as I could on my own game because I should be worrying about the things I have power over, not the ones I don't.

How did you prepare for the competition?

Where do you think American Chess stands?

I've grown up in the U.S. my whole life, and I've seen the chess scene go through many changes. When Rex Sinquefeld came along, it really helped a lot because he provided the money for very good players to start playing the U.S. Chess Championship again and creating very competitive Olympiad teams. I also got more of a sense of professionalism from it, playing for serious money and having conditions where you're expected to dress appropriately among other standards. It made it feel more like a real sport. In addition, it gave me the opportunity to play with these really big guys who weren't in my first U.S. Chess Championship. I think it helped. It certainly helped train me for being ready to compete at the Olympiad. I can probably say the same for my teammate Ray Robson. By this point, Hikaru was already very strong, and the other two players had only recently transferred their allegiance to the United States from other federations. We were also seeing a fair amount of that, people coming from other federations to play for the U.S., which makes the team stronger.

"It really felt great to win. I raised the trophy over my head. I was really proud to bring home the gold for the United States. It's the country that raised me. It's the country I love, and I'm really glad to see us win."

It was tough because the score we got normally would win by a mile, except that Ukraine played exceptionally well. We actually beat them 2 1/2-1 1/2 when we played against them. However, they won all of their other matches. It really put a lot of pressure on us because they just would not stop winning, so it was really tense all the way until the end. Even after we won the last match, there was a tie break score. We were following the results of other games just to see who would have better tie breaks at the end. It really felt great to win. I raised the trophy over my head. I was really proud to bring home the gold for the United States. It's the country that raised me. It's the country I love, and I'm really glad to see us win. I hope we can do it next time.

What was it like to win?



Opposite:
Mike Klein
GM Aleksandr Lenderman, GM Hikaru Nakamura, IM John Donaldson, GM Sam Shankland, GM Ray Robson, GM Wesley So, GM Fabiano Caruana at the Closing Ceremony of the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Right:
Mike Klein
GMs Sam Shankland and Hikaru Nakamura Compete at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com



RAY ROBSON

2016 BAKU CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ RESERVE

How was your experience in the Olympiad?

It was really exciting for me to play in the Olympiad. This year we had Hikaru, Fabiano, Sam Shankland, and myself. I think the difference this year is that with such a strong team, we were all only aiming for first place from the start. I don't think any of us on the team questioned our ability to get first, and so we were all just motivated to do our best to work together and try to get the gold. Obviously everyone did incredibly well including our coach, Alex Lenderman, and captain, John Donaldson. I had lost to GM [Alexander] Grischuk in an important game, and so then Sam played the last few games, and he did really well, so I was just watching him. It really is nerve-racking when you are playing, but watching those last few critical rounds was really hard to take, but everyone did so well. Even in the end, I thought that Ukraine might have passed us on tie break because they won their last match 3 1/2 - 1/2, which seemed almost impossible. It seemed like they had overtaken us, but then somehow we finally learned that we had still gotten gold on tiebreaks. That was the best achievement that I've been a part of in chess so far and will definitely be one of the top achievements for the rest of my whole career.

Top, from left to right:
Mike Klein

GM Ray Robson Competes at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Mike Klein
Closing Ceremony at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Opposite:
Mike Klein
The American and Russian Teams Compete in the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

“That was the best achievement that I’ve been a part of in chess so far and will definitely be one of the top achievements for the rest of my whole career.”



What is it like to be on a team with players against whom you normally compete?

I have played on a team before as part of the Webster [University] team. Being on a team with people whom I usually only play against in the U.S. Chess Championship is a bit different. Everyone is really professional and supportive, and so no one really questioned whether I should be playing this round or he should be playing. We just decided whatever was best for the team. It's a bit of a challenge, but everyone worked together really really well.



JOHN DONALDSON

2016 BAKU CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ CAPTAIN

“[Since you are] playing for your country, it’s a very special situation.”

The Chess Olympiad that was held last September in Baku, Azerbaijan, was quite a remarkable event. It’s hard to explain how big Olympiads are in the chess world. Outside of the World Chess Championship, they are probably the most important event, and they attract a huge number of chess players from all around the world. There were over 170 countries represented and probably somewhere in the neighborhood of about 1500 or 1600 players. This included both men and women and most of the very top players in the world. [Since you are] playing for your country, it’s a very special situation. You play for yourself for the most part for a two year period, but then at the end of the second year, you play for your national team. That’s a special honor to have. You also play for the members of your federation and your teammates. I would say, out of all the activities I’ve been engaged with in chess since the mid-1980s, the Olympiad definitely is the event that’s number one for me.

Top, left to right:
Mike Klein
IM John Donaldson and GM Fabiano Caruana at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

IM John Donaldson's Team Gold Medal from the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Medal and ribbon
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of John Donaldson

“Winning the Olympiad—I can’t overstate—it’s just a huge deal.”

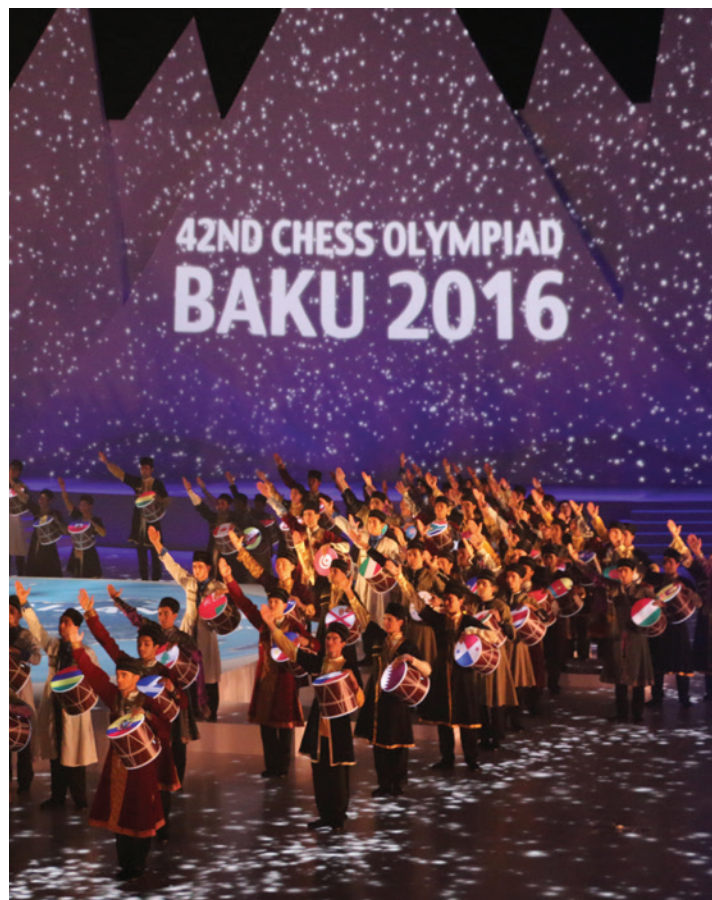
The government of Azerbaijan spent 16 million dollars organizing [the 2016 Chess Olympiad]. You get to see countries trying to put their best foot forward. I’ve had the occasion to go to Armenia, China, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates. The Olympiad and the World Team Championship, which is held every other year, are held all over the globe. They are really special opportunities. Until the emergence of what I’ll call “the big three,” we never really had any world-class player except for GM Gata Kamsky. Of course, Hikaru also competed in the 2000s and later. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, we won many medals, but never team gold. We didn’t have dominating teams. It was like people punching above their weight, doing their very best, and rising to the occasion.

In Baku, it was something quite different. We were one of the favorites; we were expected to do well. We were seeded second behind Russia. All of the contending teams were in the same hotel, and so there was a lot of tension. And while in the United States we are used to doing things as individuals or groups, we don’t think of chess, for example, as a sport that’s done at a national level. That’s not the case in Russia, China, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. In these countries, where they get heavy government support, and it’s a big propaganda tool if they do well. For example, if these players from Azerbaijan had won gold the last year, each player would have received \$350,000.

Winning the Olympiad—I can’t overstate [its importance]—it’s just a huge deal. When we won the event it was really the most important moment in my mind for American chess. Someday hopefully again we’ll have an individual World Chess Champion, but at the moment this is number one. I’ve been the captain on and off for the last 30 years and this last Olympiad was the the first time we went in as a legitimate contender and that wouldn’t be possible without the things that have happened here in Saint Louis like the Sinquefeld Cup, the U.S. Chess Championship, the invitational tournaments, and the team in the Pro Chess League and before that the US Chess League. All of these things together build on that—having all the strong foreign students go to school at Lindenwood, Webster, and other universities in the United States.



Mike Klein
GM Hikaru Nakamura and IM John Donaldson at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com



ALEKSANDR LENDERMAN

2016 BAKU CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ COACH

“What differentiates the Olympiad from other team competitions is that in the Olympiad, there are around 200 teams participating and fighting to honor their country.”

What makes the Olympiad special?

Top, from left to right:
Austin Fuller
GM Aleksandr Lenderman
2017
Courtesy of the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis

Mike Klein
Opening Ceremony at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

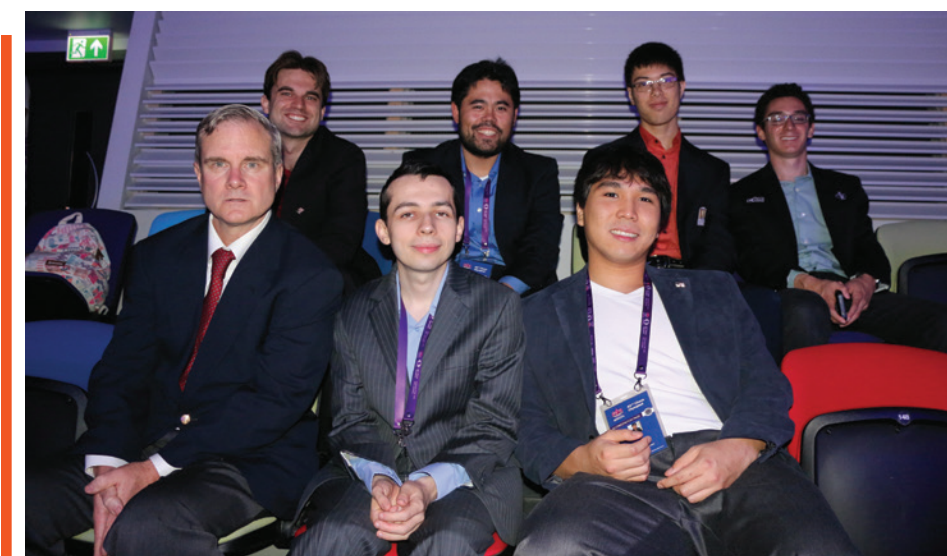
This was my first time ever in an Olympiad, either as a player or a coach. It was an interesting experience, just to see what the Olympiad is all about. One difference between the Olympiad and other competitions is that it's a team competition, and you're playing for the country. What differentiates the Olympiad from other team competitions is that in the Olympiad, there are around 200 teams participating and fighting to honor their country, whereas in other team competitions there are many fewer teams; it's much less crowded. The Olympiad involves a lot of weaker teams, so it doesn't have a stronger average, but it's also a much bigger, prestigious event with a lot more on the line.

The last day was the most stressful day of all for me. I didn't have that much sleep, and it was a morning round. I had to help the team prepare, and I was trying to get some sleep while the players were playing, just to relieve the stress. I couldn't [sleep]—the games were just too stressful. I had to watch... I've played in many big competitions, and it was not as nerve-racking as watching our compatriots play. There were a lot of swings, both on our team on the last day, and for the team we were competing against, Ukraine. It was not clear until the very end who would win—us or the Ukraine. It meant a lot for us to win because we haven't won in 40 years, so it was very stressful. I knew that there were a couple of moments where maybe I wasn't perfect, and it might have affected some minor results and everything mattered for the tie-breaks in the end, so I was probably the most relieved when we ended up winning gold, because I knew that whatever I might have been doing that wasn't perfect at some point will just be like a little footnote which will go unnoticed instead of everything being magnified if, let's say, we weren't able to win. So, I'm very thankful that the tie-breaks went in our favor. Of course, I feel very bad for Ukraine, who played an amazing tournament and got unlucky with tie-breaks like that. At least, in their consolation, they won in 2010. I guess this was our turn this time.

“I would really love to thank Rex Sinquefield for his love of the game and his real support for chess in America.”

What does this win mean for American chess right now?

U.S. chess is growing monumentally. Ever since Rex Sinquefield started to sponsor chess in America, starting with the U.S. Championship and moving up the ladder, all the way to the Sinquefield Cup, chess in America has grown exponentially. People are now super attracted to come to the U.S., whether it's going to college here or switching federations. That helped us get two great players—Fabiano Caruana and Wesley So—who were originally playing for different federations. However, the scene in the U.S. was so attractive for them that even despite the fact that they were already elite players, they were still attracted to come to the U.S. because of all the support here. I would really love to thank Rex Sinquefield for his love of the game and his real support for chess in America and his dedication to trying to help our team at the Olympiad and potentially, hopefully, developing a World Champion. I'm very happy for this growth in U.S. chess. It's great to see.

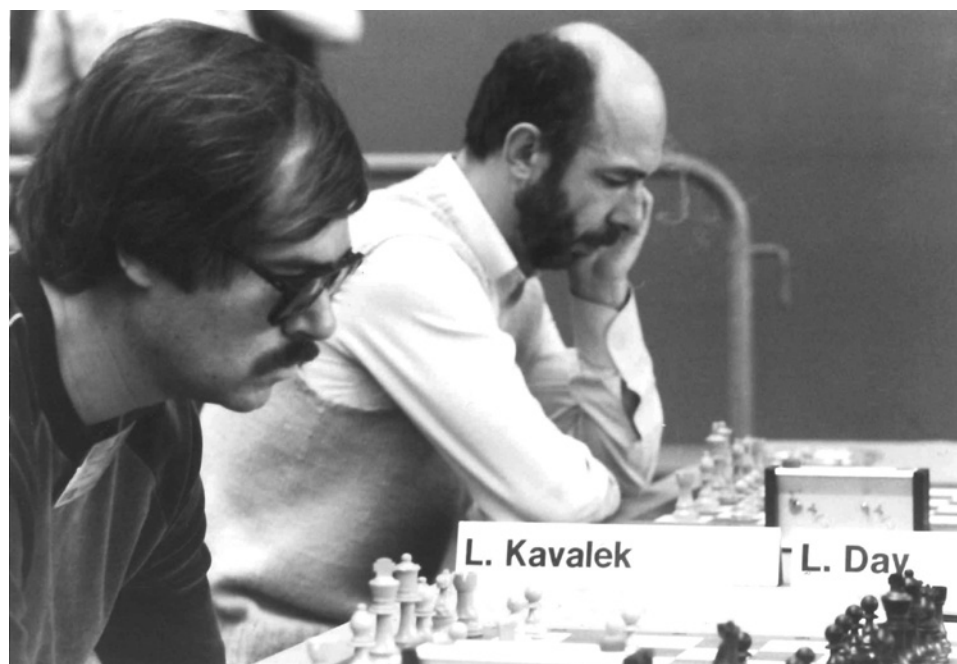


What was it like when you found out that the U.S. had won gold?

Mike Klein
IM John Donaldson, GM Sam Shankland, GM Aleksandr Lenderman, GM Hikaru Nakamura, GM Wesley So, GM Ray Robson, and GM Fabiano Caruana at the Closing Ceremony of the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com



Top:
Henry Kroon
Jacqueline Piatigorsky in Deep Concentration at the 1957 Emmen, the Netherlands, Chess Olympiad
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of the family of Jacqueline Piatigorsky

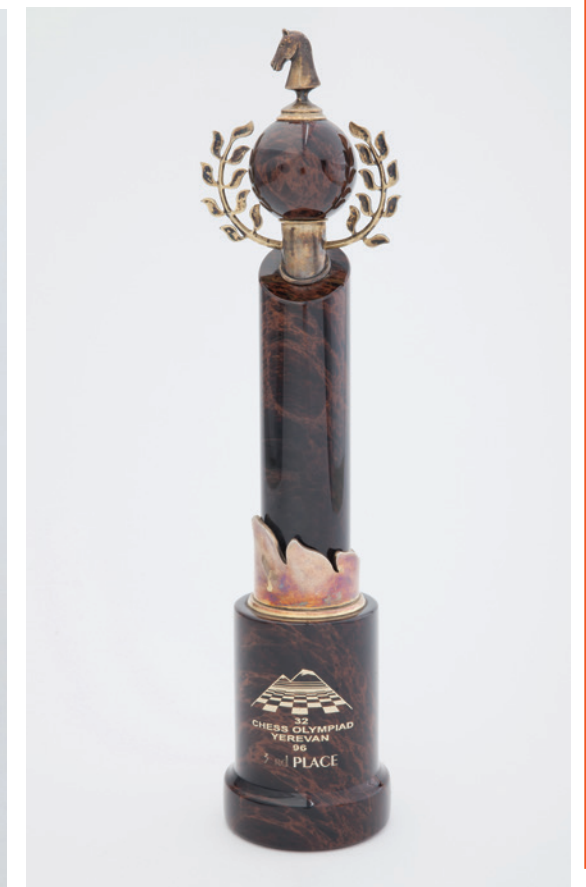


Bottom:
Bill Hook
GMs Walter Browne and Lubomir Kavalek (USA) at the 1982 Lucerne, Switzerland, Chess Olympiad
Collection of Lubomir Kavalek

Opposite, clockwise from top:
Nathan Divinsky
IM William Addison Watching GM Larry Evans at the 1966 Havana, Cuba, Olympiad
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of Judy Kornfeld

3rd Place Trophy from the 1996 Yerevan, Armenia, Chess Olympiad
Collection of the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis

Team Bronze Medal from the 1996 Yerevan, Armenia, Chess Olympiad
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame





TATEV ABRAHAMYAN

2008 DRESDEN CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ BOARD 3

"The Olympiad is my absolute favorite event of the year."

Why is the Chess Olympiad important?

The Olympiad is my absolute favorite event of the year. It's one of the few tournaments that has a team component, and it's the only tournament that has representatives of every country of the world. My favorite part is that we can walk around. I'm playing my game, and I can walk around and see Magnus Carlsen and Fabiano [Caruana] all playing in the same hall. At the same time, you have all these players from these countries who don't get the experience to travel abroad to see these players playing in real life. I think it is a different experience for everyone because some teams have a better chance of winning. So for them it's probably just another tournament, just high intensity. At the same time, you have all these other teams who don't have a realistic chance of winning, but they still have good players. For some of them who do have grandmasters that don't have a good chance of winning, they get the chance in the earlier rounds to play world-class players like Magnus [Carlsen] and Hikaru [Nakamura] and others they don't get a chance to play regularly. Then you have the teams that don't have a chance. For them, just to be there in the same hall as all these players and playing the game that they love is just a celebration of chess. Everyone is there for the game that they love.



What was significant about the American team's victory at the 2016 Olympiad?

Top, from left to right:
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan's Bronze Medal from the 2008 Dresden, Germany, Chess Olympiad
 Glass
 Collection of Tatev Abrahamyan

Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam
U.S. Women's Team from the 2008 Dresden, Germany, Chess Olympiad
 Courtesy of Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam

I've played in the Olympiad since 2008, but I had to skip the last one. It's a very stressful tournament because you are responsible to the whole team. Sometimes you're playing, and then you look around at the other games because you're playing next to people and it causes you feel just this pressure. For instance, if the person next to you is in a bad position, and the other person next to you in a bad position, you know things are not going well. It's a really hard thing to do because the feeling of responsibility is strong, and if you're losing a team tournament, it's difficult. Losing a chess game is bad enough, but losing a tournament—especially if you're the reason why the team loses—it's one of the worst feelings ever. The U.S. team winning the Olympiad is a huge accomplishment, because we have seen teams like Russia, who are always the favorites, never manage to win. There are so many aspects to winning a tournament like this—you have to have the team chemistry and be well prepared. All four people have to be in good form or you need one person to carry the team. There are so many ways to win the Olympiad, and so many things have to go right. It's such a long tournament that you can have an accident and slip up. So I think for the U.S. team to win the Olympiad, even if they were one of the favorites and were highly-rated, it's still a huge deal.

"For the U.S. team to win the Olympiad, it's a huge accomplishment..."

During the many times I've played, I've seen Armenia win many times. They've never been the favorite on paper because they've never been one of the highest-rated teams. But they do have this great chemistry they are all best friends. They hang out before and after the games and help each other prepare. They have the external pressure of the team. There are so many things that can affect you. I think in any game you can lose to lower-rated players. However, in a team tournament there are so many other factors that can affect you. If your teammates are doing badly, it shouldn't affect you, but it does. For example, if you see your teammates are not playing well, then all of a sudden you have the pressure to possibly take a risk or do something you wouldn't normally do to try to avoid losing the match. Then all of a sudden you see one game, two games, three games—everyone starts to lose.

What is it like to play in tournaments of that scale and work together as a team?

We haven't had a team this strong on the American side in so long. Why did that happen all of a sudden?

Bottom:
 Austin Fuller
WGM Tatev Abrahamyan
 2017
 Courtesy of the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis

In every team that's extremely strong like the U.S. or Russia, the players are rivals because they are fighting for a number one spot in the country. When you are playing on a team, it's very important to put this aside because you have to make certain sacrifices. For example, if your team is winning, and you are in a situation where you are playing a lower-rated player. Normally, you would maybe want to play on and take a risk to try to win the game, but in team situations sometimes you have to make a draw and drop a couple of rating points. It's very important to put your ego aside and to just remember that the most important part of your team tournament is how your team does. Whatever is going on with you or your rating is just completely irrelevant to the event because you are there to win for your team and your team is just the number one priority for you.

I think that the U.S. team was able to do that because, for one thing, they had Wesley So, who just had an amazing tournament. He won a gold medal, and it always helps when one person is just always winning and they are kind of carrying the team. When you have one person winning or at least when they finish early, then you know there's less pressure on the team. So then they can make their safe draws and win the tournament.



ROBERT HESS

2016 BAKU WOMEN'S CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ COACH

What was so significant about the American team's victory in 2016?

The open team won a gold medal, and that has not happened for decades. The last time it did happen, the Soviet Union wasn't playing. The fact that an American team can go in there and beat the very best of the world, whether that be Russia, Ukraine, and all the other strong teams, that's pretty much a once in a lifetime experience.

I wouldn't say I was necessarily expecting it because the Olympiad is a very tricky event. There are a lot of younger teams with promising players who are there to showcase their talent and so a lot of upsets do happen, but at the same time, Hikaru Nakamura, Fabiano Caruana, and Wesley So are three of the top players of the world. So it's not a surprise that we won, but it definitely defied our expectations.

Were the Americans expected to win? What were your thoughts when they actually won?

"It is just a game of chess at the end of the day, and everyone is there to compete, so it was truly an honor to be on the team."

What has been your involvement with the competition?

I played in the 2010 Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad in the middle of Siberia, and it was really an honor to represent [the United States]. America is one of the top chess teams, so it's very difficult. There are a lot of nerves that go on the stage, because there are lofty expectations to try to get medals. That is very nerve-racking, but at the same time, you get over it. It is just a game of chess at the end of the day, and everyone is there to compete, so it was truly an honor to be on the team.

What makes a team successful in the Olympiad?

It's true that chess is an individual game, and even within an Olympiad context, everyone is playing their own game. At the same time, chemistry is of the utmost importance. There are five players on the team and only four play, so the resting player is often preparing the other players in addition to the coach. There is huge element of trust when I see that my fourth board is playing someone that they don't have a great record against, and I'm working with them, going through all these openings. There is an element of trust and at the same time, being from the same country, you may compete in the U.S. Chess Championship, so you're not used to sharing your materials with the other players. Building that chemistry can be quite difficult but at the same time incredibly worthwhile.



Opposite:
Mike Klein
GM Fabiano Caruana, GM Robert Hess, WGM Katerina Nemcova, GM Alejandro Ramirez, and IM Nazi Paikidze-Barnes at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

Left:
Mike Klein
GM Irina Krush, IM Anna Zatonskih, and WGM Katerina Nemcova Compete during the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

"I coached the U.S. Women's National Team in Baku, and we had an amazing result."

I coached the U.S. Women's National Team in Baku, and we had an amazing result—we beat the Russian team. They [Russia] were huge favorites against us, and after eight rounds, we were tied for first place with China. We were right up there start to finish, and we ended up just out of the medals. We had two ties in the last two rounds against Mongolia and India, but it was an incredibly difficult experience. Coaching some of the best players in the world is very taxing and time consuming. I slept maybe three hours a night, just working countless hours preparing just every variation I could to make sure that they could just do everything at the board. I did all the homework, and I'd meet with them before the round. You have to both show them chess against a specific line but the same time calm nerves. It is a very difficult situation to be in when you're playing on the first board against the Chinese women's team, which has many of the best female players on the planet. That kind of element was not something that I was expecting, but it was also very rewarding.

What was it like to coach the women's team in 2016?



YASSER SEIRAWAN

2016 BAKU WOMEN'S CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ CAPTAIN

You've represented the U.S. in 10 Olympiads—how has the competition changed since you started playing?

The change has been huge. My first Olympiad was in 1980 in Malta, and I was the second board for the U.S. team. The winner of that competition was the Soviet Union. Garry Kasparov was the second reserve for that Soviet team, so you can imagine how strong the Soviets were. With the breakup of the Soviet Union 15 countries were created—from Armenia and Georgia, to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and so forth. All of those countries today have really, really strong teams. So instead of having a single competitor, we suddenly have 15 enormously strong opponents playing in the competition, so that is the biggest factor, as well as the breakup of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was a great country for chess and they broke up into many independent countries.

Mike Klein
WGM Katerina Nemcova, IM Nazi Paikidze-Barnes, GM Yasser Seirawan, WGM Sabina Foisor, IM Anna Zatonskih, and GM Irina Krush at the 2016 Baku, Azerbaijan, Chess Olympiad
 Courtesy of Mike Klein, Chess.com

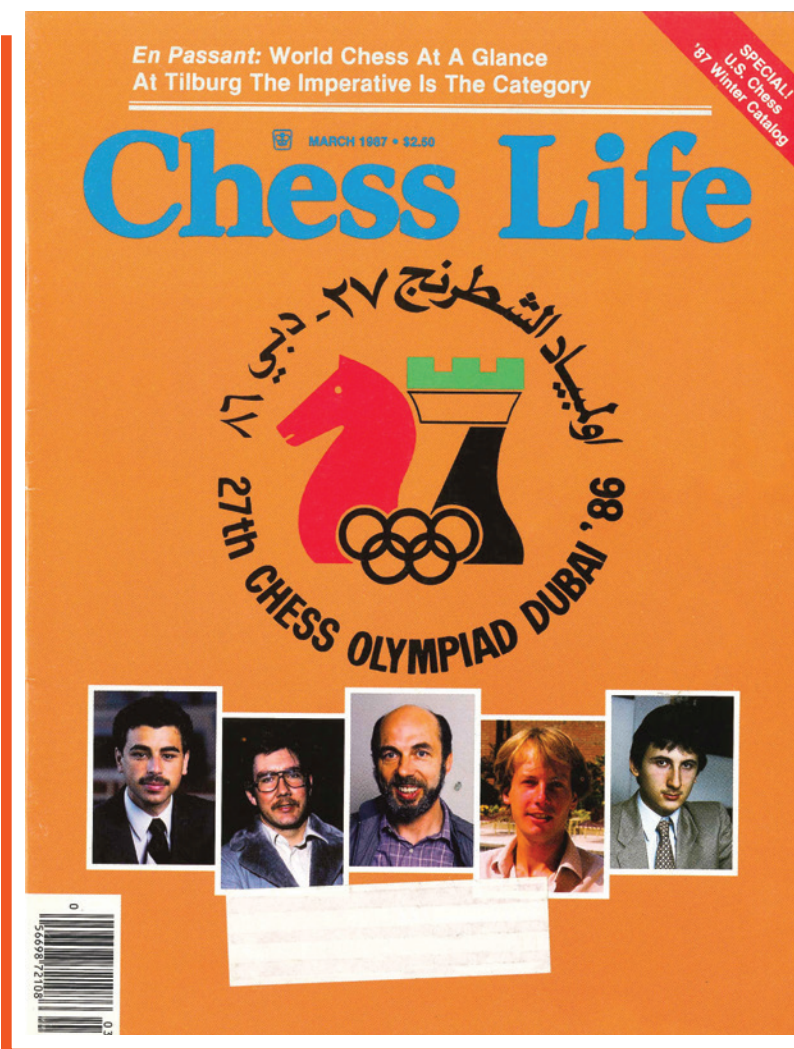
Without question, 1986, Dubai. The U.S. led the competition from the start to the finish. We actually got nipped in the very last round as the Soviet Union beat Brazil 4-0. However, we had been in gold medal position thanks to the match-up of U.S.A. vs. U.S.S.R. We were playing in Dubai, and I was leading a team and with each victory that I had, I performed incredibly well—way, way, way above my grade or my rating. There was a match between Garry [Kasparov] and me. In those times, there weren't electronic DGT boards or anything like that. Instead, they had these enormous chessboards that measured about 30 feet by 30 feet. The guy who was making the move was standing on this enormous ladder on this platform, and he had a big fish hook that he used to put the moves onto the board. There were about 2000 Emiratis from the National Guard watching this game. We got into time trouble, and the moves were coming fast and furious, and the guy wasn't making the moves. My flag finally fell, but thankfully it had made the time control. The game stopped and would be postponed until the next day. However, as the guy caught up to the moves made, it was clear that my g-pawn was going to promote to a queen, and that I had won the game. With each victory, I was becoming more and more popular with the local press. They would write "Arab-born player (because I was born in Damascus) leads America to victory." When the final move had been played where I promote the g-pawn, the whole crowd in the playing hall spontaneously started chanting—it was great! We had finally defeated the Soviet Union and it was a really, big moment.

What is one of your favorite games from the Olympiad?

Bottom, from left to right:
Chess Life Vol. 42, No. 3
 March 1987

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,
 gift of John Donaldson

Team Bronze Medal from the 1986 Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Chess Olympiad
 Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame



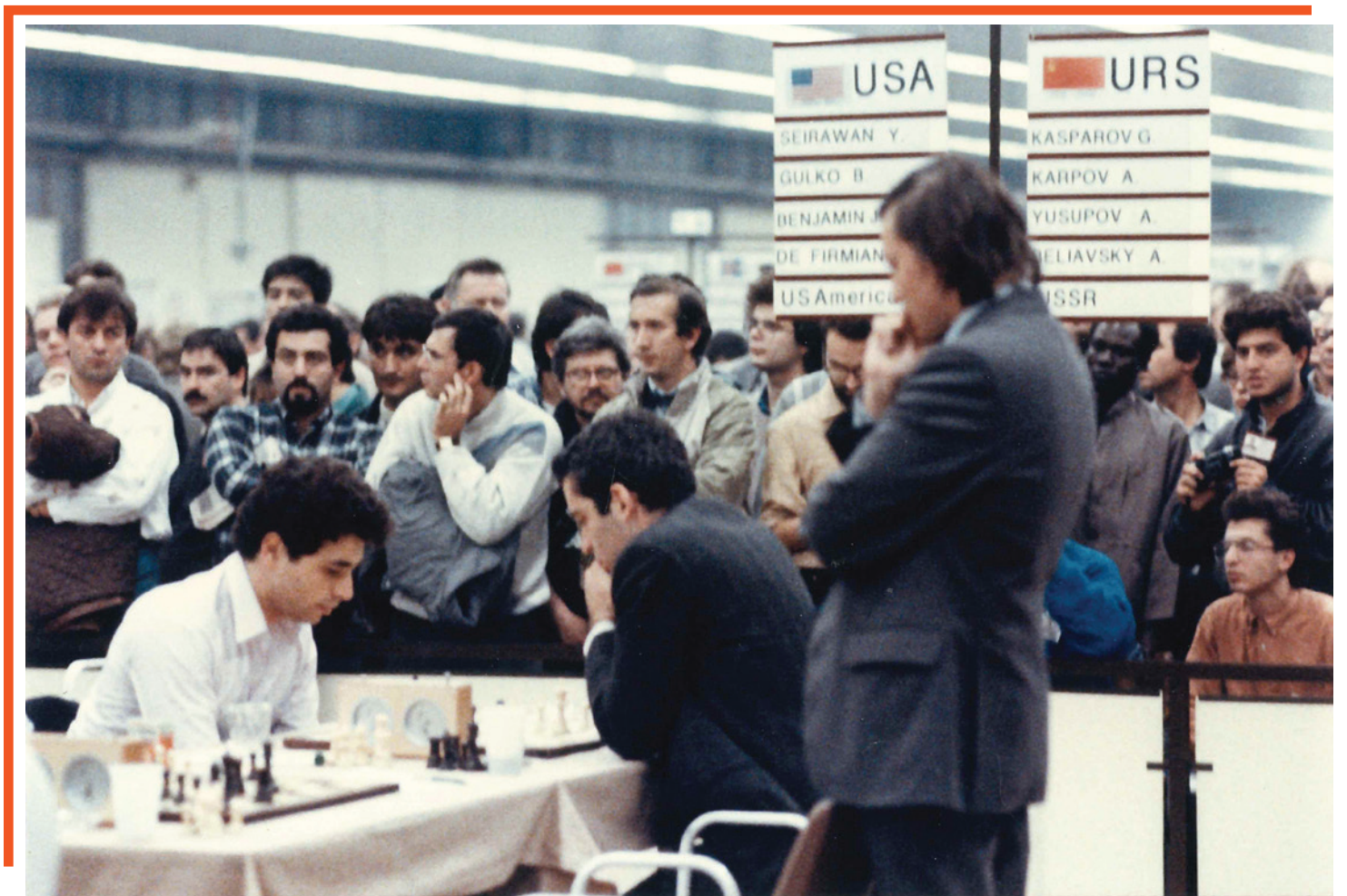
As someone who has competed in the Olympiads yourself, what was your reaction to the 2016 victory?

Unfortunately, in my entire experience, from 10 Olympiads and from two World Team Championships, we never won the gold medal. We got a couple of bronze and a couple of silvers. I won individual gold, but as a team, we never won. The Soviets were just too strong. To witness the victory for the open team in Baku was just thrilling. I was probably more excited and nervous than any of the players. Our players were remarkably calm. It was like, they were professionals—the attitude was very clear. We're here to play and do our job. I was just scared to death, feeling nervousness everywhere.

"To witness the victory for the open team in Baku was just thrilling. I was probably more excited and nervous than any of the players."

That's always been the case. Each succeeding generation has gotten stronger, and there's no question whatsoever that the teams that we sent to Baku were the strongest teams we've ever been able to field, including teams that featured Bobby Fischer. Bobby Fischer was great, no question, but he didn't have the support that Wesley, Fabiano, and Nakamura—three of the top six players in the world—have. We had Sam Shankland and Ray Robson. They are two incredibly strong grandmasters, among the top 100 players in the world. So we knew going in we were close to being the favorite, if not the outright favorite. However, there's a lot of pressure being the favorite because you've still got to perform. They did it marvelously. They were really impressive.

What does it feel like to see this group build on the foundation that you and others built for U.S. chess?



From left to right:
Medal from the 1982 Lucerne, Switzerland, Chess Olympiad

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame

GM Yasser Seirawan's Individual Medal for Best Score on 4th Board from the 1994 Moscow, Russia, Chess Olympiad

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame

Opposite:

Bill Hook

GMs Yasser Seirawan and Garry Kasparov Compete in the 1988 Thessaloniki, Greece, Chess Olympiad

Collection of the U.S. Chess Trust

Do you have any favorite stories from your Olympiad career?

In 1980, I was 20 years old. For the first time, I qualified for the U.S. Olympiad team, [which had] six members at that time. Today it's five. In those days, we had two reserves, while today we have a single reserve. In 1978, the ratings had been frozen, and even though I was in the top six, the computer of the USCF failed, so all the ratings were frozen for a 9 month period. As a result, I didn't make it to the Olympiad team. I was so unhappy, I would have been 18. As a result, my first Olympiad experience was as a 20 year old, and I was Board 2.

We were nervous about our big match versus the Soviet Union. The evening before the competition, our captain, GM Pal Benko, sat us all down. He said, "Okay, this is the way it's going to work." Our strategy... here it comes...our great strategy

for the great Soviet team. If anybody offers a draw, tell the team captain because maybe he can parlay that into a second draw. We would be begging for a 2-2 result. Lev Alburt on Board 1 just got crushed by GM Anatoly Karpov. Board 4—GM Garry Kasparov—kills our guy GM Leonid Shamkovich. We're down 2-zip. Board 3 makes a draw. And I'm playing the great GM Mikhail Tal on Board 2. Our team captain looks really forlorn, poor Pal. His head's down as I'm worst against Mischa [GM Mikhail Tal]. And Mischa makes a move, a good move, and offers me a draw. So, draw offer—what do I do? Of course, being a loyal soldier, I go tell my team captain. So I go Pal, he offered me a draw. And Pal said, "Really?" I say, "Yeah, he offered me a draw. What am I supposed to do?" He responds, "Well, all the other games are finished; do what

you want." So I go back to the board and Mischa stands up to accept my handshake, and I say, "I'd like to play." At the time, Pal was collecting these game bulletins of each round. He throws them up in the air behind me, and starts cursing loudly in Hungarian because he was afraid I was going to lose and make 3 1/2. Again, I was worse in the position, and I knew I was worse. However, it's a position I really like to play, and I was way ahead on time. We got to adjournment, when I had many helpers, because at that point I was winning and the match ended 2 1/2-1 1/2. We got a little of honor and prestige restored. Defeating a former world champion at the Olympiad—my very first—was very special. I got a silver medal on the 2nd board but we didn't get a team medal.



JENNIFER SHAHADE

2004 CALVIA CHESS OLYMPIAD ★ TEAM USA ★ BOARD 4

There were so many great moments. One specific moment I remember was at the Bled Olympiad, which was a beautiful competition in a lake town in Slovenia. We defeated the Chinese team, which was just super strong. We were definitely the underdogs. It was just such a meaningful moment for me. I won my game as well, and I just remember that team spirit. Irina [Krush], who was one of my best friends at the time, and I were both on that squad. It's just so great because when you win and you're on a team because it feels like a double win.

What is unique about the team aspect?

You have to change your mindset when you're on a team—it's not all about you and your individual results. Sometimes, if you're playing on a team, you'll get more blacks than you would in a normal tournament. As long as it's good for the team, you have to keep that in perspective as the number one goal. Sometimes your teammates might need some assistance or for you to share some opening knowledge that you wouldn't always share. However, in the team context you're ready to work as one unit.

Bill Hook
GM Irina Krush, WGM Jennifer Shahade,
and WGM Elena Akhmilovskaya at the
2002 Bled, Slovenia, Chess Olympiad
Collection of Lubomir Kavalek

"You have to change your mindset when you're on a team—it's not all about you and your individual results."

You represented the U.S. in three Women's Chess Olympiads—what were some of your favorite moments as a competitor?

How does the team dynamic affect your play in the Olympiad?

If you're in a team situation where match points are important, and a draw clinches you a match victory, then you would take a draw when you wouldn't in other circumstances, or fight on in a situation where you probably aren't going to win, but it's your only chance. I find these dynamics really interesting since there's a different layer of competition—not just the board you're playing on, but the four boards. You see that it's good for spectators as well—they really eat up the team dynamic because not only are they watching one game, but they're also watching a game within a game.

2004 is when Susan Polgar got involved. We also had Garry Kasparov come in to do training as well as Michael Khodarkovsky. To this day, they work with the Young Stars program developing American talent. That was a mind-blowing experience to be able to get that type of coaching, and it was a real privilege, of course.

What was your preparation like for the 2004 Women's Chess Olympiad?

What is significant about the 2004 Women's Chess Olympiad victory?

Back when we won the silver medals in the 2004 Olympiad, it was significant because women's chess in America hadn't been that massive force that we wanted it to be. As a result, I think that [the victory] was very impactful. And, of course, Susan Polgar came out of retirement to play that tournament and she played so well. It was a huge story.



From left to right:
WGM Jennifer Shahade's Team Silver Medal from the 2004 Calvià, Mallorca, Spain, Chess Olympiad
Metal
Collection of Jennifer Shahade

GM Susan Polgar's Individual Gold Medal from the 2004 Calvià, Mallorca, Spain, Chess Olympiad
Metal and velvet
Collection of GM Susan Polgar

What was it like to see the American team's victory in the open section of the 2016 Olympiad?

Seeing our American team prevail in the 2016 Olympiad was so meaningful as a chess fan, as a chess commentator, and as a chess player. I love all those guys on the team, and I knew they had a good chance, but to see it really materialize... I was just really on the edge of my seat, and so grateful that all the things the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis, the Young Stars program, and the U.S. Chess Federation do to make that possible.

But, obviously, it's really the players. The fire that the players bring and the fact that they were able to work as a unit, because sometimes I believe they've had some ups and downs. People know that Hikaru and Fabiano and Wesley are the best of the best, but some had their doubts because they are such three unique individuals with such different personalities—and they're not like BFF's in real life. It was so wonderful to prove the doubters wrong and to show how in the end, these three very different individuals could lead the team to victory.

GLOBAL MOVES:
AMERICANS IN
CHESS OLYMPIADS

NOVEMBER 10, 2017 ★ MARCH 31, 2018

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Interviewees:

WGM Tatev Abrahamyan
GM Fabiano Caruana
IM John Donaldson
GM Robert Hess
GM Aleksandr Lenderman
GM Hikaru Nakamura
GM Yasser Seirawan
WGM Jennifer Shahade
GM Sam Shankland
GM Wesley So

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Bill Hook

Playing Hall for Female Competitors at the 1990 Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, Chess Olympiad
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