

Questions and Answers with Former World Chess Champion Anatoly Karpov

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The ex-World Chess Champion was in Oak Brook, Illinois recently promoting his “*Chess for Peace*” and “*Chess in Schools*” initiatives to the local community. This was part of a one day festival of chess activities including a scholastic team chess tournament, a presentation of awards, and an open Question and Answer forum in front of students and parents interested in finding out what championship chess is all about.

As an ex-world chess champion for 16 years, Mr. Karpov now travels around the world promoting the use of chess as a vehicle to increase understanding between nations and to sponsor chess as a learning tool for children in school. He was interviewed by the local press and then stepped in front of a live audience to talk about those initiatives.



Mr. Karpov Meeting the Press

His “*Chess in Schools*” is being supported in all 17 provinces in Brazil. This is in addition to programs he sponsors in Prague, Czech Republic and Lindsborg, Kansas. He believes that chess is “*good for our children*”. It helps them create strategies which results in better decision making on and off the board. He is a member of the Parliament in Russia (the State Duma) and that requires him to stay in Russia and only travel on the weekends. He still likes to offer a challenge to a young player when the opportunity arises.



Making their Way to the Speaker Presentation

Here are Mr. Karpov's answers:

Q: Why didn't you play the 1975 match again Fischer for the World Championship? (This was a tough way to start off but a question I am sure he has answered many times.)

He said he met Bobby Fischer in 1972 in San Antonio, TX during a strong international grandmaster tournament. Bobby had been invited to play but came by to observe the proceedings. The 1975 match situation was very dynamic and Bobby kept making demands about match conditions that never seemed to end. One variable he considered critical was the age difference of the players. When Fischer played Spassky in Iceland in 1972 he was 8 years younger than Boris. If Anatoly had played Bobby in 1975 he would have been 8 years younger than Bobby much less experienced and a certain underdog. He said it would have been interesting to see how Fischer would have reacted facing new situations they had intended to create during a match.

Q: How did you get so good?

I was fortunate to have chess in the household. My father was a strong 1600-1700 level tournament player. He said he was lazy at chess and was fortunate to have good friends that played and a good teacher. Chess books in the USSR were rare back in that day and one that he remembers was the Game Collection of Capablanca.

He was a good pupil in school earning medals and such receiving a Director of Economy degree from Leningrad University. He said he likes and plays tennis, skiing, soccer, billiards and backgammon.

Q: What openings do you play?

Up until he was 22 years of age he only played e4. After that he started to play d4 and then some c4 games as well. To get better he strongly suggested the “*theory of endgames and not so much openings. You can earn so many extra points and half points by being able to calculate positions that may arise.*” (This comment should be well heeded by younger players who tend to fantasize about all the pieces and how they should invoke their whole armies. Instead, practice your endgames.)

For black he does not fianchetto the King-side bishop. Only the Queen-side bishop leading to the Queen’s Indian Defense one of his specialties. He plays the Spanish (Ruy Lopez), Russian (Petroff) and the Caro-Kann.



Q & A from the Audience

Q: Any suggestions on how to handle the pressures of playing in a tournament?

Try to relax for 1 to 2 hours after the game, especially if you lose. Be out of the situation and make an effort to forget the result. But don’t relax too much because there will soon be another round.

Q: Asked by a young player which drew immediate chuckles from the audience, **what moves do you play to beat your opponent?**

He replied that he plays the best moves and left it at that.

Q: Your reporter asked this question: If you could rewrite the history of chess during the era you were involved would you change anything?

At first he did not understand the question but after getting it translated, he immediately said: *“Of course I would like to play Fischer for the championship. He was trying to negotiate with Fischer during this time but Fischer didn’t like Jews and he didn’t like Russians so there isn’t much left”*, which drew a few chuckles from the audience. *“As long as you talked about chess he was OK, however if he had something to say he would just interrupt people or whoever was talking.”*

Karpov then made the claim that *“if he had won the 1984 World Championship match against Garry Kasparov he would have been world champion much longer and he didn’t think that Kasparov would have ever been world champion!!!”*

He was very upset that the officials decided to stop the match that was in progress. He said we should resolve our problems and observe the rules that were established at the beginning. The officials however said since both of them are Soviet citizens they were not showing favoritism but they did not do what I said.

Q: Why aren’t there more girls playing chess?

He answered that more girls are playing and getting better. He thought they need more role models of women who are successful at the game and that things should continue to improve.

Q: What is your opinion of Magnus Carlsen?

He is clearly the best player in the world right now. I think it is great that other countries are creating players that can challenge for the top. He has great potential and I think will do great things for the game.

Q: What is your opinion about the upcoming Anand vs. Gelfand World Championship match in May 2012? Who do you think will win?

As I said Carlsen is the best player in the world and he is not playing in the match. I think this is a mistake. Several years ago the chess federation started to destroy the series of world championship matches and what we have now is not the best match. In such a short series of games anything can happen and either player can win but Anand having the experience of having and defending his title is probably the favorite.

With that the Q and A was over and Anatoly Karpov then went to the area where awards were being presented to the tournament players.



Handing out the Awards

Where Did Karpov Go Next?

So you think Mr. Karpov immediately flew home to Russia? Well no, actually he spent part of his next day at the Cook County Jail observing the inmates playing chess in the jail. See WGN story for the details: <http://www.wgntv.com/news/wgntv-chess-program-introduced-at-cook-county-jail-apr02,0,1426001.story>

For an article describing the program and how it came about see: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/03/cook-county-jail-chess-pr_n_1399438.html

Karpov was impressed by the players and said some of them are ready for tournament play. This “chess in the jail” program was declared by the Sheriff, Tom Dart, as one of the best programs they have ever implemented at the jail. The prisoners paid for the chess sets out of their own money. Some were interviewed and said that there is less violence in the jail, inmates have something to look forward to, they can work on their decisions and that there is a 150 person waiting list to join the chess club. In fact the word is that Cook County has challenged DuPage County to a match. Now that is putting out the challenge.

Playing chess in prisons was the topic of a presentation made at the 2nd George Koltanowski Memorial Conference on Chess and Education, in Dallas, Texas, November 18-19, 2011. Professor Charles Moura Netto spoke on the development of cognitive and social skills that can be stimulated by chess outside a formal educational setting. He spoke about the Brazilian experience of teaching chess in prison in the state of Espirito Santo, Brazil, a project called “Chess That Brings Freedom”. Many of the prisoners are there for non-violent crimes and being associated with the illegal drug business. The program has worked to rehabilitate prisoners through chess. They bring in local chess experts to teach the prisoners. Prisoners make boards and sets for 890 public schools upgrading the culture and means for the people who live in Brazil. There will be some

recognition in the Brazil World Cup and Summer Olympics about the chess program. He also said there is a reduction of violence and a lower recidivism rate in the prisons.

For a complete list and review of all the sessions at the Koltanowski Chess in Education Conference, including the PowerPoint presentations of all the speakers see:

<http://www.utdallas.edu/chess/education-camp/second-koltanowski-conference.html>



And where will Mr. Karpov appear next? He is the scheduled attraction at the National Open chess tournament in Las Vegas, NV set for June 15th through the 17th at the Riviera Hotel. The year he appeared there previously set a record for the number of players in the tournament. Can he top his previous best? Who knows at this point, but it sure will put some fun back in chess and just might be the chess vacation of the year.