

Interview with former World Champion Anatoly Karpov by Willy Iclicki  
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"A number of interviews with former World Champion Anatoly Karpov, have been carried in 64, Chessbase and more recently "Chess Fidelity", the website for the election campaign of Kirsan Ilyumzhinov carried an interview by Karpov with a radio journalist Sergey Korsun. This interview raised many eyebrows as Karpov was quoted as stating certain things about the forthcoming elections which he fundamentally disagreed with, more so since for a long time he had been considering running also as a Presidential candidate.

To clarify the issue, once and forever, the Right Move has given Anatoly Karpov the floor through today's article to explain his perspective on the election campaign, developments and the requirements of FIDE for a new chess world :

Quote of the day : It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause, who at best knows achievement and who at the worst if he fails at least fails while daring greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. Theodore Roosevelt - 1910

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Q1. In the recent interview published on Chess Fidelity you were quoted as saying that Kirsan Ilyumzhinov will win 100%. This caused quite a few raised eyebrows in the chess world since a few months ago you said that anybody could do a better job than Kirsan .. Has your opinion changed ?

I had this interview on radio with Mr. Korsun . Of course you can't say that a candidate has a 100% chance of winning before the elections are over.... Today we have 2 candidates for elections: Ilyumzhinov and Kok. It's quite clear to me that this is the first time (in the modern history of chess, since Campomanes) that there is a real election in FIDE and teams are ready to fight for the Presidency.

The 2 candidates are working very actively and both have a good campaign. According to my knowledge at that moment Ilyumzhinov had an advantage but

now with 6 weeks to go before the elections I must say surely the last few days in Turin will be decisive.

Q2. What led you to withdraw from the Presidential race ?

I must say that I took seriously the initiative of the USCF to be candidate for FIDE President and I was also supported by different countries but I wish to thank especially two federations, the French Federation and USCF for their clear and uncompromised support. I was working on the elections since June 2005 and I made several trips in the world because I believe many things should be improved in the chess activity around the world. We also had an idea to unify teams with Kok and European countries.

Later in January, after negotiations with Kok, I understood that he wanted to campaign separately. This proposal was against my convictions and our chances of success, so I decided to step down and continue my chess activities which don't depend on the Federations. It was wrongly published that the Russian chess federation didn't support my candidacy. Let me remind you that I took the decision to withdraw without an official declaration from the race on January 29th.

In the beginning of February some rumours emerged, that had I made a decision to stop my campaign because the Russian Chess Federation decided to support Ilyumzhinov. This is untrue because the Russian Federation never discussed the Fide elections before its scheduled meeting on February 17th and if I would have continued my campaign, the Board would have had to decide between the 2 candidates. Since I withdrew, the board decided to support and nominate Ilyumzhinov as the official Russian candidate

Q3. Although you decided not to continue with your Presidential bid, you have undoubtedly an important role to play in promoting chess as an icon for a younger generation. What role do you see yourself playing in the future ?

My activities will involve developing children's chess with the traditional Children Olympiads for team under 16 years old (there have already been 10 competitions), developing chess education with recent agreements with governments in Brazil and Chile, developing chess in schools in Argentina with big activities in Buenos Aires and of course Russia and Germany where I opened an academy 10 years ago.

I believe this is the future of chess. Unfortunately, chess has become much less popular so we must increase our activities and increase publicity to attract chess players who play privately at home. Imagine in Germany, one of the biggest chess Federations, only 10% of the country's chess players are members of the federation, that leaves us with 90% of potential players to attract.

Q4. What are the critical problems FIDE is facing today and why ?

I just explained in the previous question some of the critical problems and we are also missing general sponsors for chess activities. Sponsors could be different for classical chess, rapid chess, children chess or a global one. A professional management team should take care of this PR and marketing job as it can't be done by the team which runs FIDE today.

It is clear that for the last 20 years we haven't progressed much in this area. Ilyumzhinov tried to find sponsors but was unsuccessful; most of the time he spent his own money, which is not bad, but generally is not good, because nobody should spend his own money but search for international sponsors like 25 years ago and more.

We may mention a computer company like IBM which unfortunately was destroyed by the strange behavior of Kasparov. Similarly a few years later with Intel. With the activities around the continent and the increase in the number of players, the chance to catch such awaited sponsors will be much better.

Q5. What future lies ahead, in your opinion, for the chess world and what is required from a FIDE administration to deliver results to its members ?

Since 1980, I have been telling Campomanes and other FIDE officials that we were missing chess statistics which reflect the number of players, their performance and their history. We have many chess magazines but this is not the material to give to sponsors, FIDE urgently needs material and statistics to be used as PR and Marketing tools.

This also shows the lack of interest on FIDE's part for this type of advertising. FIDE also has a problem in communication. And this problem has become even worse with internet and email. A question that should be answered in 20 minutes is answered only after a few weeks!

Regarding chess competitions, fortunately FIDE has realized the mistakes of the KO system format used for the World Championships. They didn't change everything but at least they have started to do so.

No doubt that the best format would be to come back not to the old format but to a combination that will end in individual matches or match tournament like the one that took place in Argentina in 2005..

The chess world is missing a lot of strong world champions which the KO System could never deliver. I am against the KO System for World Championship because it mixes different rules and time controls.

It's hard to imagine how you could play classical chess followed by rapid chess and to finish with Blitz in the same tournament. Previous champions such as Botvinnik and Spassky would never have agreed to play in such a tournament !