

Interview with GM Mikhail Golubev

Written by content team 20 March 2009

Ukraine Grandmaster Mikhail Golubev is a fine Chess player, Author of the 3 popular chess books and a journalist. He is working with GM Alexander Baburin's ChessToday.net since last 7.5 years. He is also involved in the main Ukrainian sport newspaper Komanda, he often contributes to the most popular chess site in Russian, chesspro.ru. He has worked as a regional correspondent for Kasparovchess.com. He was a member of the Board of the Association of Chess Professionals. In this interview with GM Mikhail Golubev, he talks about his transition from playing to writing, his books, experiences working with Karpov, Korchnoi and Ponomarev, FIDE president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, FIDE and ACP.

LatestChess :- Hello Mikhail, We are glad to have you on LatestChess. You are working for Chess Today, you have worked with top chess magazines like New in Chess, BCM etc, you are a tournament organizer. Could you please share your experiences with these activities?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- Thank you for presenting me in that way. I would not say that am a tournament organiser though. I was involved in organisation of the Odessa ACP events, but mainly as a press officer, it is not the same thing. Yes, I contribute occasionally, when there is mutual interest and possibility, to New in Chess (as it happens, most often my articles are for the NiC Yearbook rather than the NiC Magazine), and British Chess Magazine, which has outstanding traditions. GM Alexander Baburin's ChessToday.net is my main basic occupation. I am very glad to be involved in this unique project, already for 7,5 years. (Annotated more than thousand games there, and working on news and most of other types of content). I am also involved in the Russian language chess journalism: for six years I am observing chess in the main Ukrainian sport newspaper Komanda and quite often I am contributing to the most popular chess site in Russian, chesspro.ru.

LatestChess :- You have written three books - on the Dragon, the Sozin Attack and the King's Indian. Authoring a book must be a time consuming job, you need to do a lot of games analysis. Can you say a few words about your book writing experience?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- These three opening topics are most known to me, it is logical that I wrote/was offered to write books about them and not about something else. Yes, it is anyway difficult to write opening books these days, as quantity of material grows all the time. More and more often authors came up with original solutions, not trying to cover everything. In any case I believe that professional players who employ a specific opening regularly are, normally, the most suitable authors for the opening books. Ideally it could be the world's top professionals.

Professional players who employ a specific opening are the most suitable authors ...

The book by Polugaevsky about his variation is my favourite chess book. Despite I never played the Polugaevsky Variation as Black up until now, perhaps, thanks to Polugaevsky, I understand this variation better than many of lines that I am playing myself. But the top stars usually do not reveal secrets of their preparation that easily. So, readers have to deal with books by the average GMs, what to do? Anyway, only those who are earning or losing money as a result of their opening choices, may know all sides of playing chess. This is my opinion.

Readers have to deal with books by the average GMs ...

LatestChess :- When and why did the transition from playing to writing occur?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- In my case, in the middle of the 1990s I was still trying hard to improve my play, but after becoming the Ukrainian champion in 1996 and making the final GM norm in the same event (the first two norms were in Lucerne 1994 and Biel 1995), I gradually started to feel that my peak is most likely behind. Actually, the peak was in 1993-1994.

I became ready to do something else than just to play, and opened a website about the Ukrainian chess in August 1998. Incidentally, shortly after playing two unsuccessful for me big opens in Hamburg and Bavaria in the end of 1999 (though I had a free accommodation and, as I remember, a little pocket money at both tournaments, and performed not far below my level), I was offered a work as a regional correspondent for Kasparovchess.com. It was a big and interesting project, particularly the world school championship on the internet. I was responsible for the participation of 18 (as many as I was able to find) school teams from my town Odessa, Ukraine - they played from the Internet cafe. Also, I prepared articles of various types. In 2000, I played only 11 games. After some 1,5 years of the activity Kasparov Chess collapsed. Probably they spent too much money in different directions. But I remained in journalism, and started to work for ChessToday in 2001.

In August 2003, for multiple reasons, I closed my Ukrainian Chess Online website (the archive is available in internet), which was a very hard decision indeed, and began to be involved in a work in Chess Today much deeper.

Kasparovchess.com was a big and interesting project...

closing the Ukrainian Chess Online website was a hard decision...

LatestChess :- How was your experience working with Karpov and now with Ponomariov?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- My co-operation with Karpov (for the opportunity of which I am grateful to Karpov's main assistant Mikhail Podgaets) was limited by two sessions in Montenegro in 1996 and in Moscow in 1997. It was an interesting experience. Karpov is a great player as we all know. He is very different to other giants like Tal, whose moves I understand better. Once a rare and atypical opening line was discussed, Karpov quickly proposed a novelty, still unplayed until now, which (what at my level only analysis may help to understand) improves upon the play of the elite grandmaster. It made quite an impression. Karpov just felt where to put a piece. The game Karpov-Yusupov (Open Ruy Lopez, 1-0), with notes by Yusupov from some of Dvoretzky books is ultimately best what I have read about Karpov's style.

Karpov is very different to other giants like Tal...

I should add that in 1996 I lost a fairly interesting game to Korchnoi, that was included by Korchnoi in the book of his best games with Black. Probably, contacts with Karpov, Korchnoi, Ponomariov helped me to make a right decision and become a more useful citizen. Speaking more seriously, it is crucial for the average grandmaster to have a playing possibilities in the place/country where he lives. In Ukraine, we basically have more grandmasters than our country needs. I speak about normal grandmasters, indeed. (We also have a several fake grandmasters but it is a separate problem). At least for certain period, my priority became rather to live in my country and in my town and to be able to make living without travelling abroad, than to continue playing chess professionally.

In Ukraine, we basically have more grandmasters than our country needs ...

I know Ruslan Ponomarev since 1995 when he was 11 years old, and he already could win a blitz match against me. In 1996 we played a more serious training match and we are keeping contacts since then. At my old site there was a Ruslan Ponomarev's page that was a bit helpful for Ruslan and his team at the early stages of his career to be contacted by organisers and get invitations. We worked on the chess openings also. Several times I travelled with him to the tournaments, including Russia versus the World match in 2002. In terms of rating (2743) and achievements, 2002 was a peak of Ruslan's career. His coach and, practically, second father in whose house Ruslan lived for many years, Mikhail Ponomarev, died in the Autumn of 2002. Before that, and even more afterwards there was a permanent scandal, with public opinion generally demanding from Ponomarev to play the match versus Kasparov on the Ilyumzhinov's & Kasparov's conditions. Ruslan recently said in an interview that possibly he became the world champion too early. Maybe! I believe that FIDE would never even try to treat Anand, Kramnik or Ivanchuk in a way that they treated Ruslan from the very beginning after he took a title. I am happy that Ruslan was able to survive psychologically all the surroundings. Even if the rating shows that until now he did not manage to recover fully as a player. What, in particular, I personally learned from all this is that everything, including public sentiments (and especially public sentiments) can go in a completely wrong direction sometimes.

FIDE would never even try to treat Anand, Kramnik or Ivanchuk in a way they treated Ruslan...

LatestChess :- Can you tell us about your new column on KID section with ChessPublishing.com?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- The King's Indian is a complex opening, which requires a permanent work from the black player, especially in modern chess, when you should constantly prepare something new. In 2006 I authored the book UNDERSTANDING THE KING'S INDIAN, and I worked really much on it in 2005. But unless you keep working, then instead of learning you begin to forget things, sometimes even lines from your own book. Meanwhile people are usually prepared against lines that you have played in the past. (Thus, my readers may benefit from my book more than I, even if I remember everything from there).

By the beginning of 2009 the King's Indian, where White has a really wide choice, is probably the most vulnerable part of my repertoire, and, as I am still playing in tournaments sometimes, I do not like to lose games because I forgot or did not see something important. At least, the opponent should show something new to get the advantage. So I hope that my monthly contributions for ChessPublishing would help to me and to subscribers to remain up-to-date with a main developments in this opening. (Indeed, in Chess Today the King's Indian games are analysed as well, but usually it is around 2 games per month, Chess Today is the daily electronic newspaper, while ChessPublishing is a specific opening project, unique in its own way).

I do not like to lose games because I forgot or did not see something important ...

LatestChess :- Today, chess is one of the world's most popular games, played by millions of people. Chess player can earn good money with tournament prize money, coaching, organizing, writing etc. Do you see children taking break in the education and concentrating fully on chess?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- The question is too general. Well, I would say that after one reaches ELO 2650 the decision to take break in the education is more than understandable. When the junior reaches 2600, concentrating on chess should be a right decision in most cases. Otherwise, one should ask himself/herself whether he or she really, really wants to sacrifice his or her life for chess

- and never to complain later. The professional chess player does not have a right to complain. It is not self-evident that society will forever need results of the chess-player's work.

after one reaches ELO 2650 the decision to take break in the education is more than understandable...

LatestChess :- You were a member of the Board of the Association of Chess Professionals (ACP), what role should this type of bodies play? Do you plan to take lead role in any of these organizations in future?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- My involvement in the work of the ACP board was mainly related with a preparation of the first ACP Cup which took place in Odessa, Ukraine in January 2007. I hope that it was useful for the organisation of the event, as I was the ACP guy and Odessa guy in the organising team at the same time. After the event was successfully held (Peter Leko outplayed Vasyl Ivanchuk on the tiebreak in the final), I voluntarily resigned, because, first of all, I am busy with my regular journalistic work. And also, being a member of the ACP board, I would inevitably feel myself less free to express my opinions as a journalist. I remain to be an ordinary member of the Association of Chess Professionals, and still have enthusiasm about the bright future of the ACP.

being a member of the ACP board, I would inevitably feel myself less free to express my opinions as a journalist...

LatestChess :- What future lies ahead for the chess world? What is required from the FIDE administration to deliver results to its members?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- The picture is contradictory: chess is in rather decent shape worldwide, but about Europe, which remains to be the main driving force, it is hard to say the same with confidence. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov does not have a good reputation on the West. Sponsors too often escape from FIDE even after they already confirmed interest in sponsoring a specific event. Ilyumzhinov does not have enough free time for chess, while people who are also involved in the decision-making inside FIDE, have their own bizarre ideas.

Ilyumzhinov does not have enough free time for chess...

Finally, Ilyumzhinov is simply a strange man who claims that he was kidnapped by UFO guys and he is, generally, not known to tell the truth all the time. Because of all this, the FIDE politics is terribly inconsistent and chaotic. I do not expect anything special from the current FIDE administration. Their Grand Prix turned into a complete PR catastrophe, and their new women's Grand Prix inevitably started with a scandal because the event overlaps with the European Women's Championship.

FIDE politics is terribly inconsistent and chaotic ...

I do not expect anything special from the current FIDE administration ...

LatestChess :- How is the chess scenario in Ukraine? What do you think to be done to make Chess more popular?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- Well, I think that in this case the economy goes first. Ukraine is a developing country. Not only chess, but all sports with a possible exception of football (soccer) experience inadequate sponsorship. But the situation in our economy and in chess is better than it

was ten years ago. I think that the financial crisis, consequences of which are terribly hard in Ukraine, would not undermine all what was achieved. Because the mentality of Ukrainians who are still mainly post-Soviet people gradually adopts to the modern conditions. Unfortunately it cannot work faster because the capitalism was firmly forgotten in the USSR, several generations have changed during the USSR era.

the mentality of Ukrainians gradually adopts to the modern conditions...

LatestChess :- What are your future plans? What would you like to achieve in near future?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- Well, in the near future I would like to reach a higher level of harmony in my professional life. I am doing various things in chess, and in the past I had experiences with almost any kind of the chess work (in the 1980s I worked as arbiter of several hundreds postal tournaments, just for example), but at some point I will have to concentrate on the fewer number of directions.

I would like to reach a higher level of harmony in my professional life...

Sometimes there are things that you think someone else should do, but you see that no one is doing it, or not enough is done, and then you do it by yourself because you think that it is important. I practically never saw nice websites for those who may wish to learn how to play chess from the complete zero level. Sites, I underline that, which are designed primarily for the modern young people. With jumping "Gorillaz" on the every page, I do not know. There are enough or more than enough sites for those who are playing chess already. But is not the future the most important? Perhaps, I should investigate the matter deeper.

I practically never saw nice websites for those who may wish to learn how to play chess from the complete zero level...

Personally, I prefer, for example, to analyse some Fischer Attack game with a novelty around the move 20. I like to annotate games. Also to annotate them in the "Informator style", without any words - in such way I annotated games for Informator and New in Chess in the pre-computer era. With some ideas and, not too often, decent quality. But I am afraid that nowadays it is possible to teach monkey how to push a few buttons inside the Rybka or Fritz interface, and the result will be of the better quality than these old notes of mine... I see that explaining computer's variations becomes a larger and larger part of the annotator's work. This trend is not new, but it started to really disturb me only recently, right now I am still not sure what to do about that. Nothing dramatic, in any case.

I see that explaining computer's variations becomes a larger and larger part of the annotator's work...

LatestChess :- Thanks Mikhail. It's been good talking to you. Could you share your blog url or email address with our readers?

GM Mikhail Golubev :- Thank you for your questions. My personal web page is http://www.geocities.com/mikhail_golubev/ and the email address is placed there on the top of the page.