

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CHESS OLYMPIAD TRENDS

(Preliminary communication)

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### Abstract

*The Chess Olympiad is a biennial chess tournament and the most important team event on the world chess calendar in which teams from all over the world compete. It is organized by World Chess Federation (FIDE) and comprises an open and women's tournament. Each national federation seeks to present the strongest possible team so usually the top world players compete in this event. Undoubtedly they set modern trends in chess development therefore it is worth to do comparative analysis of some Olympic indicators.*

**Keywords:** *chess Olympiad Grandmasters, chess Olympiad Grandmasters, International Masters, FIDE, former World Champions, men, women, percentages, chess tournament*

### INTRODUCTION

The Chess Olympiad is the biggest chess event that exists, and is held every two years. There were 16 participating nations in the 1st Chess Olympiad in 1927 and their number grows to 172 participating nations in Tromso, 2014. Chess is recognized as a sport by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Since June 1999 World Chess Federation (FIDE) has been the recognized International Sports Federation. The prospects of chess becoming an Olympic sporting event at some future date remain unclear. The use of the name "Chess Olympiad" for FIDE's team championship is of historical origin and implies no connection with the Olympic Games. Olympic chess tournament is open to all member federations of the FIDE, who can enter teams with four players, one reserve player, and a team captain.

Our hypothesis: comparative analysis of some indicators of the last three Chess Olympiads will reveal important trends in contemporary chess development.

### RESULTS

First item to be considered is the number of players.

#### *Players number statistics*

It is evident that during the last years the number of active players has been increased worldwide. The prevalence of the game, its great accessibility to different age groups and social strata, its independence of ethnic, religious and government policies, as well as its good structuring in National federations indisputable are among leading reasons of that. This trend is very visible during the greatest chess forums – Olympiads. The

number of Olympic participants is constantly growing in the open section and in the women's event both.

*Table 1. Players number statistics*

<i>Players</i>	<i>Chess Olympiad</i>		
	<i>Khanty-Mansiysk 2010</i>	<i>Istanbul 2012</i>	<i>Tromso 2014</i>
Total	1305	1407	1555
Men	741	779	882
Women	564	628	673

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The open section of the 41st Chess Olympiad in Tromso was contested by a record number of 177 teams representing 172 nations. The women's event set a record also - it was contested by 136 teams representing 131 nations.

Each Olympiad has seen an increase not just in overall attendance and in numbers of countries represented but in their chess level too. And this is the next indicator studied by us.

**Title statistics - men**

Table 2. Title statistics Men

Title statistics	Chess Olympiad		
	Khanty-Mansiysk 2010	Istanbul 2012	Tromso 2014
GM	242	239	256
IM	123	128	140

We can see that the number of Grandmasters or GM (the highest title a chess player can attain, apart from World Champion) and International Masters or IM is growing slowly but surely. This trend reveals the importance of the Olympic tournament for the competing teams. More team managements seek to add in more titled players representing their countries. For example, players who participated at the Tromso Olympiad this year included the reigning World Champion and highest rated player in the world Magnus Carlsen, nine of the top ten players from the FIDE rating list published in July 2014, and four former World Champions.

The same situation we can observe among IM title holders – their number has been increased during last three Olympic games.

**Title statistics - women**

Table 3. Title statistics Women

Title statistics	Chess Olympiad		
	2010	2012	2014
GM	12	16	20
VGM	67	74	71
IM	129	133	151

In the Women section this trend is less pronounced mainly because of the fact that much less women compete on high level chess. Though other FIDE titles are not gender-segregated, titles WGM and WIM given by FIDE are exclusive to women. The requirements for these titles are about 200 ELO rating points lower than the requirements for the corresponding “open” titles. The purpose of women-only titles is to encourage female players, because there are few female players in the game. There are only a few women in the world holding a GM title and almost all of them compete in Olympiad tournament. There are far fewer female grandmasters than male grandmasters, but there are also far fewer women playing chess than men at any level. Since about 2000, most of the top 10 women have held the GM title.

Among the players who played in the women’s section in Tromso 2014 were the reigning Women’s World Champion Hou Yifan, seven of the top ten

players from the FIDE rating list published in July 2014 (excluding Judit Polgar who plays in the open section), and three former Women’s World Champions.

It is understandable that the number of games is directly related to number of teams. In Khanty-Mansiysk 2010 there were played 5748 games total. Two years later, in Istanbul, total number of games increased to 6148, while in Tromso in August 2014 the record 6704 games were played. As usual, White’s winning percentage is higher than Black’s.

There has been a debate among chess players since at least 1846 about whether playing first gives White a significant advantage. Players and theorists generally agree that White begins the game with some advantage. Since 1988, chess theorists have challenged previously well-established views about White’s advantage, arguing that they are founded more in psychology than reality. Modern writers also argue that Black has certain countervailing advantages. The prevalent style of play for Black today is to seek dynamic, unbalanced positions with active counter play, rather than merely trying to equalize.

**Game statistics**

Table 4. Game statistics - total (in percentages)

Title statistics	Chess Olympiad		
	Khanty-Mansiysk 2010	Istanbul 2012	Tromso 2014
White wins	39	40	41
Draws	29	26	23
Black wins	31	34	37

For our study more interesting indicator is percentage of drawn games. Draws on high level chess are much more common than on lower levels. (For example, the highest percentage of draws in a tournament was registered in 1999, when at the Petrosian Memorial tournament, 42 of the 45 games (93.3%) were drawn. Five of the ten players drew all nine of their games. According to survey exploring a data set of over 650,000 chess tournament games ranging back to the 15th century (Olson, (2014) only 1 in 10 games ended in a draw in 1850, whereas 1 in 3 games ended in a draw in 2013. Today some of the sharpest opening variations have been analyzed so deeply that they are often used as drawing weapons. For example, at the highest levels, Black often uses the Marshall Attack in the Ruy Lopez, a line where Black sacrifices a pawn for strong attacking chances, to obtain an endgame where Black is still a pawn down but is able to draw with correct play.

In the Olympic tournament draws are not so common because of the decisive character of most of the games. So, there is a constant trend concerning draw percentage – it has been going down during last years. The significant decrease of draws by 6% during observed period can be seen in both sections.

Table 5. Game statistics: Men and Women - Tromso, 2014  
(in percentages)

Game statistics - Men	Percent	Game statistics - Women	Percent
White wins	34	White wins	38
Draws	26	Draws	20
Black wins	40	Black wins	42

Draw percentage in open section is higher, which may be attributed to several reasons. As chess is rich in theory, the pre-game stage is often as important as the game itself. Usually men pay more attention to their opening preparation than women. Their knowledge in chess theory is deeper and surprises are less likely. Computers make opening preparation an extremely powerful weapon. That's why professional players usually spend from 2 to 6 hours on their pre-game preparation. When both opponents are well-prepared the draw is much common result. In the Olympic tournament that means more draws on top boards where the strongest chess masters are playing.

These statistics show the percentages of games won by White and Black and the amount of games drawn in the Women section of the 2014 Tromso Olympiad. It seems that female players almost always show lots of fighting spirit - perhaps even more than their male colleagues. Generally women don't like defensive style, so their games rarely end with draw. Women chess is more fighting, and they probably surpass men in willingness to play for a win. Among other things this leads to more blunders, and, therefore, to more decisive games.

## CONCLUSIONS

- During the last three chess Olympiads the number of participating players has been increased significantly.

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- Parallel with the number of participants their chess level increases too. More GMs and IMs take part in both sections of the Olympic tournament.

- Draw percentage has gone down during observed period. This trend is more visible in Women events.

- Women chess is much more unpredictable than men's. Women chess is also uncompromised and very entertaining. Men chess is more solid, pragmatic and conservative, and women game, on the contrary, is brighter, more emotional.

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