

Going balipstick

Mark Rivlin interviews IM, WGM Anna Rudolf

In her own words Hungarian IM and WGM Anna Rudolf is a 'lipstick maniac' and content creator. A well-known personality on the chess circuit, Anna has commentated and presented a raft of Super GM tournaments and she is also one of the most active content providers on social media, Her @Anna_chess handle YouTube channel boasts more than 66k subscribers and she has 40k followers on Twitter and 39k on Instagram.

But Anna's main social media achievement is her Twitch channel (Anna_Chess) where she streams full time, 5-6 days a week to nearly 79k followers - GM Hikaru Nakamura has set her a deadline to hit 100k by 1.1.21.

Anna, thanks for this e-interview for the English Chess Federation e-Newsletter. Let's start with a chess puzzle that needs solving. You say 'I ain't the real Beth Harmon but Instagram has you as *IRL Beth Harmon*, so please elucidate!

Yes, both the media and fans have started calling me the IRL Beth Harmon. I find it flattering but I obviously haven't become as strong at chess as Beth in *The Queen's Gambit!*

Covid-19 has been a very challenging time for millions of people around the world but chess has benefited with a captive audience stuck in lockdown and seemingly a tournament every week involving the world's top 20. How have you coped with the social distancing and other restrictions and have you been busy over the past ten months?

It's a really challenging year for everyone, and I hope all the readers are coping with it as well as possible. I would have never thought that the pandemic will end up creating a positive boom for chess. And thanks to that boom the top players and ourselves in the broadcasting / streaming world could 'keep their jobs'. We are truly privileged. To me what has been the most difficult to cope with is not being able to see my family and friends in person. I live abroad and I would normally take a flight a couple of times a year to see my parents and sister. Since the pandemic broke out I haven't been able to travel to Hungary and I won't be able to see my family for Christmas either, unfortunately.

In England, we are witnessing a resurgence of chess due to lockdown and The Queen's Gambit Netflix series. How do you think the chess community can and should react to this interest?

With arms wide open! Chess is a game for everyone, and it's time for us to show, as a community, that we welcome and appreciate everybody - from experts to complete beginners - just as much.

In an interview with *Metro* in November you said that one of your biggest joys in lockdown was coaching a woman to win a major contest, and that she'd never had a lesson, she just knew how pieces moved. What is the secret of your coaching strategy?

Firstly I would like to add that the interview in Metro missed a lot of details I told the reporter about. That coaching story, for instance, was about a Hearthstone streamer, Hafu, who only knew how the chess pieces moved when she was invited to compete at PogChamps 2: an event by Chess.com and Twitch where top gamers compete against each other at chess.

As part of the event we also coach the participants, live on air, to help them get better at the game. Hafu's dedication and hard work was incredible to witness: she studied chess on her streams 8 to 10 hours a day, for a month. And she ended up winning the tournament ahead of players who had a lot more chess background and experience. It truly showed how hard work and effort pay off - and very unique how her progress is fully documented through her live streams.

As for my coaching, I think most of my students (the streamers and viewers I coach through my streams and courses) describe it as an 'enthusiastic and encouraging' style. And I prefer to ask plenty of questions than tell them the explanation or answers to a problem. I find that one can learn a lot more if they figure out the details on their own, with the right questions, instead of being taught the solution.

Along with your broadcasting work, you are also providing coaching content under your Miss Strategy persona on Chessable with Anna's anatomy of the Attack and The Anna Rudolf Method - Smash the Barriers to your Chess Success! The reviews are excellent so what makes your courses so popular?

I think it's what I mentioned above. In my video courses too, I try to motivate the viewers just as much and help them understand chess on a more profound level. Even the most complex positions can be broken down to smaller factors that are a lot easier to comprehend.

For club players like myself, the rapidplay tournaments like the Magnus Carlsen Chess Tour with a raft of Super GMs and pundits like Garry Kasparov, Judit Polgar, Peter Svidler and Vladimir Kramnik (to name but a few) are real treats. It's like having free coaching from the greats. Some purists think this rapidplay format might be entertaining for the fans but it is not the cut and thrust of standard play. What are your views?

I think rapid chess is great, and is possibly the future of chess. It doesn't mean of course that classical chess will die out - that will always be the time control that allows a much higher quality of play. But I agree with the World Champion [Magnus Carlsen] that combining time controls like in the Magnus Tour and Champions Tour, leads to a very exciting format that is just as challenging as a competitive event, and at the same time can make chess broadcasts accessible for a wider audience, too.

For me, the best part of the Queen's Gambit was the portrayal of a woman becoming a success in a male-dominated world. With yourself, Tania Sachdev, Judit Polgar, Jennifer Shahade, Fiona Steil-Antoni and Sopiko Guramishvili as chess pundits, are we witnessing a new era in chess in which the male dominance is finally challenged?

I would love to see more girls and women picking up chess, yes, and have a higher percentage of female players competing. I fell in love with the game at the age of four and later during my early competitive years I certainly didn't understand why there were so few girls at my chess club and at the tournaments I played. Chess is such a beautiful game, and can appeal to girls and boys equally - I hope the chess community too will soon reflect that.

Which people have been the biggest influence on your chess career, in playing, teaching and commentating?

There have been many, but if I need to pick one person I would say Judit Polgar. She is an inspiration on and off the chess board, and I'm lucky to be able to call her my friend.

The vast majority of chess fans and players are never going to make the dizzy heights of titled players like yourself. What advice can you offer a patzer like myself?

Dizzy Heights is how I feel about my gaming skills now that I play variety games on my Twitch channel, too! But honestly, I think everyone can enjoy chess, regardless of their level. And if you want to improve your chess, set smaller goals that are above your skills but not too far out of reach. I have viewers that want to increase their online rating from 500 to 700, others set to achieve a better Puzzle Rush score. Some want to speed up in their blitz games to not lose on time regularly. Or simply blunder less often. There's always a goal you can set for yourself and work toward - and it's always great to experience the learning process and growth, regardless of what number or title stands next to your name.

We are delighted that chess is becoming cool with millenials. But please explain the term 'lipstick maniac'!

It started with the lip balm that supposedly had a super computer in it, in the story of the three men who accused me of cheating back in 2007. Now it mainly refers to my make-up choice of wearing bold lipstick constantly. Legend has it I wear lipsticks 24/7, even when asleep!

What is your favourite chess-related video, and why?

Uhh, I have many, but one that always comes to my mind vividly is a Pixar short I saw as a kid, called Geri's game. It's such a funny and touching animation!

Which commentators do you particularly enjoy working with?

Am I being put on the spot here? :) Joking aside, I have been lucky to work with some of the best of the best in the world, and it would be unfair of me to compare them. They all have their own strengths and styles, and I feel like most commentators I have been paired with we made a good team - that's the most important for making the broadcast enjoyable!

What are your chess plans for the future?

I don't compete anymore but my goals and plans will always be chess-related. I want to help others learn the game and improve their skills, through my streams and courses, and to hopefully have a positive impact on people's lives in general. I would like to make the world a kinder place.