

# COVER STORY

Danny Rosenbaum interviews GM Mikhail Golubev



The interview with GM Mikhail Golubev took place on 7 March. That very day [The Guardian had published an article](#) reporting that “Monday morning saw a renewed rocket barrage against the city, while warships have been moving ominously between the coast outside Odesa and the annexed region of Crimea.”

And yet, here we were on Zoom. Mikhail in Odesa in war-torn Ukraine and myself in the contrasting calm of Bedford speaking on the best internet connection I had all day. Better than the one with the US, better even than the one with Birmingham. Thanks to the marvels of Zoom, our different worlds collided for an hour as Mikhail gave me an insight into his life in Odesa.

“My wife Luda and I decided to stay in Odesa. Approximately half of my relatives left and half decided to stay. At the moment we have only been attacked by air, but in theory we could be attacked from all sides. As well as the army we have recently formed a territorial defence which is made up of civilians who are ready to fight for the country.”

Mikhail is one of them.

In 2019, he had a stroke. It finished his chess playing career, and now it has stopped him from joining the army. Always one to struggle for what he believes in, having been a political activist for many years, Mikhail is keen to do what he can and so he helps the Odesa territorial defence. He has also been playing online chess and appearing on streams raising money and awareness.

He has appeared alongside other strong players on the [regular stream run by Baadur Jobava and his brother Beglar](#) raising money for Ukraine. He also took part in a fundraising event organised by GM Hikaru Nakamura on Chess.com.

“I respect Nakamura and what he is doing very much. I am very grateful to all the people who are helping the Ukraine. When Hikaru Nakamura had his stream, I entered both Titled Tuesdays tournaments. I wanted to support his efforts at least morally.”

That event raised over US \$130,000 for CARE's Ukraine Crisis Fund.

Famously Ukraine has [many strong chess players](#), both men and women. Some of their images have become iconic, for example, those of GM Oleksandr Sulypa and GM Georgy Timoshenko below.





Odesa itself counts twice European Women's Champion Natalia Zhukova amongst its residents. Zhukova, who was married to Russian GM Alexander Grischuk, is a member of Odesa's local parliament.

According to Mikhail: "There is a lot of unity among Ukrainians not only in the chess world. Even those on different sides have come together. We are in such great danger; we have to unite as much as possible.

"Even people who were not dreaming of Ukraine as a separate country – they got used to it, and Putin underestimated how much Ukrainians love their country. He doesn't understand younger people. Generally, he doesn't understand many things, but one of the things he doesn't understand is younger people."

He was pleased to see that forty-four top Russian chess players including GM Ian Nepomniachtchi, GM Alexandra Kosteniuk and GM Peter Svidler [published an open letter to Vladimir Putin](#) voicing firm opposition to the war in Ukraine and expressing solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

He was not surprised.

"Over the years not many GMs have supported Putin except Karjakin and Shipov. I have tweeted that Karjakin will never be forgiven by the chess community. Most Russian chess players are not mad like Putin. So, I was not surprised that so many players signed the letter. They are not mad, but this war is completely mad."

It is no wonder that in war strong passions come to the fore. There is a steely determination, a stoic resilience, but also an intense gratitude. One of those GM Golubev is grateful to is GM Mihail Marin, who helped some of his family flee Ukraine.

"In Bucharest, grandmaster Mihail Marin and his wife Maria Yugina helped my sister-in-law and her two children, including my niece Kamila who is one and a half years old.

In Budapest, GM Judit Polgar and GM Csaba Horvath helped another sister-in-law with her three daughters."



Mikhail says he is not looking too much at the global picture.

"I am more focussed on my family, Odesa and what I can do to help defend the city. In these times, people must find the ways in which they are most effective and that is what I am doing.

"We don't know how long we will have electricity or the internet in Odesa. It is totally unclear. We have hopes we will win this war but there are variations like in chess and we will see. We don't know what

will happen, but we know what we are doing and what we need to do. This is important.”

Before leaving the call, I asked Mikhail if there was anything he wished to add, he answered simply, “I want to send my best wishes to British chess players. I want to thank everyone for all their support.”

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## ECF Charity Marathon for Ukraine

The English Chess Federation is holding a 24-hour chess marathon in support of the DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal via the British Red Cross. [Chess.com](https://www.chess.com) will host the online marathon from 5.00 pm on Saturday 2nd April to 5.00pm on Sunday 3rd April.

Entry is free, but only donors and fundraisers living in the UK will be eligible for prizes. Players will need to be a member of the [ECF Open Club on Chess.com](https://www.britchess.com). Join now to be kept posted on further tournament details and prizes. We plan a commentary team including a number of GMs, and other titled and untitled players who will provide a live stream to support the event.

You can enter for the marathon here – <https://britchess.wufoo.com/forms/ecf-charity-marathon-for-ukraine/> – and all donations will be paid direct to the British Red Cross appeal as part of the wider Disasters and Emergency Committee response to the crisis. Everyone can either donate with their entry or via the Red Cross JustGiving page here – <https://donate.redcross.org.uk/appeal/ukraine-crisis-appeal>



## The ECF Statements on Ukraine

### Statement on 28 February 2022

The English Chess Federation (ECF) agrees with FIDE Council’s recently announced decision that the 44th Chess Olympiad, including the competition for players with disabilities, as well as the FIDE Congress, will not take place in Russia (<https://www.fide.com/news/1598>). The ECF wishes FIDE well in its attempts to find another organizer for the Olympiad.

The ECF would like to add that in its view FIDE should hold no further events in Russia until Russia has fully withdrawn from Ukrainian sovereign territory and ends hostilities against the Ukrainian people.

It will not send teams, players or officials to any chess events held in Russia until Russia has fully withdrawn from Ukrainian sovereign territory and ends hostilities against the Ukrainian people.

In its view FIDE should terminate all agreements with Russian sponsors with immediate effect.

*Mike Truran, Chief Executive ECF | Malcolm Pein, FIDE Delegate and International Director ECF*

### Statement Update on 6 March 2-22

The ECF Board confirms that individual players and officials with a Russian or Belarusian FIDE registration will be excluded from all ECF-organised competitions until further notice. The ECF Board urges all organisers of events held in England to adopt the same approach. Please also see the European Chess Union’s statement following its meeting in extraordinary session on 3 March here – <https://www.europechess.org/ecu-suspends-the-russian-and-belarusian-chess-federations/>

Players registered to the Russian or Belarusian federations may play in all ECF-organised competitions if they change federation or change to the FIDE flag. FIDE have organised a fast-track procedure and applications can be made to FIDE via [federations@fide.com](mailto:federations@fide.com) The ECF office will also be able to assist.