

🇸🇩 Seirawan, Yasser (born 24.03.1960)



Yasser Seirawan in 2003. Photo: James F. Perry (Wikipedia)

Young Yasser Seirawan won as an IM (!) at Wijk aan Zee (Hoogovens) in 1980 together with Walter Browne (Korchnoi as clear third, 4.-6. Biyiasas, Timman and Albur, 7.-8. Ree and Robert Byrne, etc., 14 players, the tournament was boycotted by the Soviet Union). Seirawan then made his final GM norm, immediately becoming a Grandmaster. Seirawan also won his game at Wijk against Viktor Korchnoi, who then invited Seirawan to Switzerland, where Korchnoi was training for the Candidate's campaigning, Seirawan acted as his second.

For the 1985 Interzonal in Biel, Seirawan had arrived in Switzerland a week before the tournament to work 8-10 hours a day with Viktor Korchnoi as his coach. Yasser Seirawan played well, was always among the leading group, finished as sole runner-up (Vaganian won) and became the first USA player to advance from an Interzonal to the Candidate's since Robert Byrne in 1973.

Seirawan took part in the Candidate's tournament at Montpellier in 1985, missing the final four play-off spots. He qualified again in the next cycle at the Interzonal in Zagreb 1987 (won by Korchnoi), but lost the following Candidate's match to Jonathan Speelman at Saint John, Canada in 1988.

**Yasser Seirawan** was born in 1960 in Damascus, Syria. His father was Syrian and his mother an English nurse from Nottingham, where he spent some time in his early childhood. When he was seven, his family emigrated to Seattle (United States):

He came to America when his Syrian father won an engineering job with Boeing in Seattle. After his parents divorced, Seirawan and his mother roamed the United States before eventually settling in Virginia Beach, where young Yasser revealed in sun and surfing. Had the family not moved back to the overcast skies of **Seattle**, he might never have discovered chess. But there, one rainy day when Yasser was 12, a neighbour introduced him to the game which would change - would become - his life. Supported by **Arnie Garcia**, young Yasser made good and rapid progress, becoming soon the **Washington State Junior Champion**. **Victor Pupols** was Yasser's chess coach back when the lad was just starting to learn chess.

At 19, Yasser Seirawan won the World Junior Chess Championship in 1979. Over his whole career he won four National US Championships, competing for ten US Olympiad teams and twice becoming a FIDE World Chess Championship Candidate. In detail:

Seirawan won as mentioned the traditional **Wijk aan Zee (Hoogovens) in 1980** (together with Walter Browne, ahead of Korchnoi), and in the same year, he won at **Torremolinos the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of the Costa del Sol invitation series**. His possibly finest win in terms of Elo performance came when he took the third and last Invitational in **Haninge (Sweden) 1990** outright, a full point ahead of joint 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Karpov and Ehlvest, followed by Polugaevsky, Andersson, Sax, etc. (twelve players). After his comeback, he joint first with Ivan Salgado Lopez, with a narrow tie-break advantage to the Spaniard, ahead of Spraggett in the closed international invitation **Magistral Casino, Ciutat de Barcelona, 16<sup>th</sup> edition in 2011**.

Seirawan also triumphed at the strongest Open tournament series of the 1980s: twice as clear first at the **Lugano Open in 1983 and 1987**, and at the **New York Open in 1985 (joint, there was no play-off) and 1987** (beating Adorjan in speed play-off: rapid, then blitz), and winning several **further Open events in the USA**. Peak ranking: clear no. ten of the world (July list 1990), and a regular top twenty player in the 1980s. During his chess career, Seirawan beat the former World Champions Smyslov, Tal, Spassky, Karpov, Kasparov, and Anand in rapid.

Serving **10 times as a member of the U.S. team** at the Olympiad, **Seirawan beat reigning World Champion Garry Kasparov on board one at the Chess Olympiad in Dubai 1986**.

"Syrian-born, but quintessentially Yank," *Los Angeles Times* writer Dick Roraback described Yasser Seirawan in 1987. No American since Bobby Fischer in 1972 has won the world championship, but it is a title Seirawan aspired to in the 1980s. "Soviet masters are supported with trainers, coaches, and all kinds of perks; Western grandmasters have to fend for ourselves. We have to make a living," Seirawan told *Saudi Aramco World*. "You can't forget, when you're off competing, that the rent meter is ticking away at home."

Seirawan went on to shape the American chess scene, **winning the U.S. Championship title in 1981 (shared), 1986, 1989 (shared) and 2000 (shared)** and continued to play in major world-class events, until he announced his (first) retirement in 2003.

"Yaz," as he is commonly known, **was lured out of retirement in 2011** with a stunning performance at the 2011 World Team Chess Championship taking place at Ningbo in China, where he earned an individual silver medal for his performance on board four, defeating some of the best players in the world along the way, including Judit Polgar.

Seirawan is a respected teacher, prolific commentator and widely published chess author:

In Seattle in 1988, he founded International Chess Enterprises and published together with his brother Daniel the magazine *Inside Chess* for twelve years. He has written several books including *Five Crowns* and *No Regrets*, both won critical reviews as two of the finest match books ever written as well as **"Chess Duels"**, the **2010 Chessscafe.com's book of the year**. Seirawan is widely known for his expert commentary in live broadcasts on the Internet during important events. He has been named by the chess historian Edward Winter as one of the top five Internet broadcasters.

In 2001 he released a plan to reunite the chess world; [Ruslan Ponomariov](#) had gained the FIDE championship in 2003, while [Vladimir Kramnik](#) had beaten [Garry Kasparov](#) for the Braingames title. Seirawan's plan called for one match between [Ruslan Ponomariov](#) and [Garry Kasparov](#), and another between [Vladimir Kramnik](#) and the winner of the 2002 Einstein tournament in Dortmund, [Peter Leko](#). The winners of these matches would then play each other to become undisputed World Champion. This plan became the **< Prague Agreement >** in 2003 and was signed by all parties in question. Four years later the unification process of the World Championship was completed, although not under the exact terms dictated by the agreement. (Source of this paragraph: Chessgames)



*Yasser Seirawan in 1980 (Picture from Wikipedia)*

Famous games:

**Seirawan vs. Korchnoi 1-0** (Hoogovens, Wijk aan Zee 1980)

<http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1082613>

**Seirawan vs. Karpov 1-0** (Phillips & Drew Kings, London 1982)

<http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1068297>

**Seirawan vs. Kasparov 1-0** (Chess Olympiad in Dubai 1986)

<http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1070204>

**Seirawan vs. Karpov 1-0** (Haninge International, Sweden 1990)

<http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1068799>

**Topalov vs. Seirawan 0-1** (Interzonal (swiss system) in Biel 1993)

<http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1359940>

**(quote)** In 1979, Seirawan won the World Junior Chess Championship in Norway, beating the best under-21 players from 56 countries, and automatically became an international master, which gave him an entree to grandmaster tournaments. It was the most important victory in his career to that point. "From there on, everything else was gravy," Seirawan says. "Now I was invited to premier tournaments because I had this title and it's prestigious for organizers to say that they had the world junior champ in their tournament."

It helped get him to Wijk aan Zee, Holland the following January, where he gained his greatest triumph to that date. The place crawled with grandmasters. Seirawan won his first game, and in his second faced none other than Korchnoi. Less than two years before, Korchnoi had failed by a single point, 6-5, to beat Karpov for the world title, in Baguio City, the Philippines. It had been less than three years since Seirawan had been playing first board for Garfield High.

Seirawan often begins telling a story by saying, "Dig this scenario...." So dig this one. Korchnoi shows up late for the game. Sitting down, he says to Seirawan, "Excuse me, I'm late, I'm sorry." Seirawan says it's O.K., but he's a bit awed. "This was like the rookie coming into the NFL," he recalls. "People were licking their chops when they saw me coming. I was 19." Then they begin play.

"Luck, luck, luck," Seirawan now says of that match. "You can be lucky. I'm unknown to the guy. So he decides to play a second-rate defense to improve his offensive chances. Heh! This defense is the one and only thing I know like the back of my hand. He falls right into it. Like into all my preparation, all my traps! I knew it from a lot of blitz games. I spring an opening novelty; I sacrifice two pawns; I whip out a kingside attack and make a space." Voilà!

Korchnoi resigned on the 39th move. A bit stunned, he offered his hand.

"Congratulations," he said. "Good game." No doubt the last thing Korchnoi wanted to do was sit and gab with this child from Seattle. Seirawan suspected that Korchnoi really wanted to go back to his room and chew up his sofa. But Seirawan offered him some popcorn anyway. "Gee, Viktor, you want to go over the game?" How could Korchnoi refuse? They repaired to an analysis room and went over it, move by move.

Korchnoi grew curious. "What would you have done if I'd taken your knight here?" he asked.

"You know, Viktor, I expected that," said Seirawan. They played variations, and each time Seirawan exposed the weakness in Korchnoi's idea. Seirawan was lucky. However Korchnoi figured it, Seirawan knew the moves. The grandmaster had fallen into Seirawan's pet line.

The tournament at Wijk aan Zee became Seirawan's advertisement for himself. He beat not only Korchnoi, but also the grandmasters Jan Timman and Lev Alburt. Throughout the competition, Seirawan found Korchnoi approaching him and asking him about the positions in other games. "What do you think of the Timman game?" Korchnoi asked him once. Seirawan looked at the board. "Boy, it sure looks like he could move his knight to king-bishop six." To which Korchnoi replied, "Hmm, that's what I was thinking."

... Winning the tournament (shared with Browne – the ed.) was the least of the honors that came to him. Not only had Seirawan also made himself a grandmaster, but he had landed a job to boot. Korchnoi seemed as charmed as Garcia had been. He approached Seirawan after the tournament. "Would you like to work with me?" he asked. Seirawan was stunned. "I would have paid for that experience," he says. Korchnoi asked him if he could come to Switzerland to help him prepare for another drive to win the world title.

"I'll pay your air fare," Korchnoi said to Seirawan. "And would five thousand Swiss francs [about \$2,750 then] a month be acceptable?"

"Huh?" Seirawan said. He was thinking: You're gonna pay me? "Yeah," he finally thought to say. "I think I'll be available for you." Two months later he flew to Switzerland and joined two other seconds, Michael Stean and Lev Gutman, as they began the job of assisting Korchnoi in analyzing moves and mapping strategy for what would be 18 months of chess—from Korchnoi's string of victories in the Candidates' matches (versus Petrosian, Polugaevsky, and Hübner) through the final struggle against Karpov in Merano.

For the first time in his life, Seirawan was required to immerse himself in a study of chess theory. In Merano, on days when no game was scheduled, Seirawan and the other seconds met with Korchnoi for five or more hours at the challenger's villa, working over two large chess sets, setting up positions and playing the pieces through the endless variations to which this opening or that defense might lead. They analyzed adjourned positions and all completed games—whether won, lost or drawn. **(unquote) – By William Nack in „Sports Illustrated“ (1981)**



The photo in black and white is from 1973: Mechanics' Institute, Library and Chess Room, Newsletter 604, [chess.milibrary.org](http://chess.milibrary.org), the photo in colour is from 2008 at Bonn, Wikipedia.

Today, Seirawan is regularly featured as the **Resident Grandmaster for the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis**. Yasser Seirawan is married to Yvette Nagel, a Dutch chess player, and living in Amsterdam.

Sources and further readings:

[http://www.chessgames.com/player/yasser\\_seirawan.html](http://www.chessgames.com/player/yasser_seirawan.html) (Chessgames)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasser\\_Seirawan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasser_Seirawan) (Wikipedia)

<http://www.seirawanchess.com/> (He is inventor of the Seirawan chess)

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVWaFpMwtaGiVZ77NhhvGGGzvF7oFSWcA>  
(Lectures with Yasser Seirawan)

<https://saintlouischessclub.org/blog/our-resident-grandmaster-yasser-seirawan-0>  
(Seirawan is Resident Grandmaster in Join the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis, Missouri)

<http://www.si.com/vault/1981/12/21/826244/yasser-thats-my-baby-so-viktor-korchnoi-indicated-in-picking-yasser-seirawan-of-the-us-as-his-second-now-yasser-wants-to-be-second-to-none#>  
(This 1981 article by William Nack in “Sports Illustrated” gives information of Yasser’s youth years and on the deep working relationship between Yaz and Korchnoi)

<http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/199002/the.right.moves.htm>  
(Aramco World, Portrait by William Tracy)

<http://doc.rero.ch/record/196777/files/1985-07-17.pdf>  
(‘Beau comme Dieu’, 1985 Interzonal Biel / Bienne, *Nouvelliste et Feuille d’Avis du Valais*, 17 July 1985, p. 2, a Swiss French daily newspaper)

<http://www.gmsquare.com/interviews/seirawan2.html>  
(Interview by GM Mikhail Golubev)

<http://en.chessbase.com/post/seirawan-s-comeback-his-views-on-the-che-world-today>  
(Interview in 2011 by IM Anna Matnadze)