

Challenging the odds

by Murray Chandler

IT SOMETIMES puzzles outsiders that a non-physical sport such as chess should have separate women's Olympiads, world championships and tournaments. Even though women are free to compete in open competitions as well, this apparently arbitrary segregation does not always please feminists. But the statistics are clear: abolish the women's international rating list and there would be just 27 left on the harder open list — compared with 4177 men. One of the few woman players capable of challenging such odds is the American No 1 Diane Savereide, currently living in Wellington after her marriage last year to New Zealand championship player Philip Clemance. These two can easily claim the "strongest Kiwi chess-playing couple" title for 1986.

Savereide, now 31, was a late starter at 17 but she rose quickly to US women's team standards and has played every Olympiad since Haifa 1976. In Wellington she is computer-programming until she and Philip head back to California in October, primarily for Diane to compete for her sixth US women's title — out of seven attempts since 1975. Before my Canon Challenge Match with Australian Ian Rogers, I spoke briefly with Diane about both her career and women's chess in America.

MC: There were hopes that you might play in the New Zealand Congress in Christchurch last Christmas — the first woman in the championship group. This could have been very interesting for New Zealanders to watch!

DS: Yes, I was entered but withdrew. I was very depressed after my result in the Cuba [world championship] Interzonal beforehand. I arrived late due to travel problems, I lost my first three games and finished well down the field. I just didn't feel like playing anything ever again! But now I'm looking forward to the coming US championship.

MC: Here in New Zealand chess is still very much an amateur sport. How do you manage financially for such events as the US championship?

DS: The US Chess Federation gives all expenses plus pocket money. In 1984 I won \$US1300 for first prize. In the Olympiads the team members get all expenses paid, plus we get paid a fee too.

MC: Can you play all year round back home?

DS: I tried playing chess solely for a couple of summers, but in California it's impossible for the rest of the year. There are only tournaments in the summer, which is also when they hold the national championships. One trouble is that competitions in the States are so far apart.

MC: Unlike Europe of course. No chance



JANE USSHER

Diane Savereide: "... ideally the goal is eventual equality. It's hard when we are so outnumbered ..."

of you turning professional then?

DS: None. Only if you win everything like Kamran Shirazi [the former Iranian who now plays the US circuit]. Even he gambles to support himself in between tournaments, playing blitz chess in clubs at odds of one minute to five against all-comers. He's crazy!

MC: Women's chess still lags far behind men's, both in popularity and strength. What is your feeling on full integration?

DS: In the USA this would all but eliminate women's chess. Of course, ideally the goal is eventual equality. It's hard when we are so outnumbered at tournaments.

MC: Does the US Chess Federation do much for women's chess?

DS: They don't try too hard ... one problem is the attitude of some officials. A group of us turned up at a committee meeting once to protest on certain issues, but the committee just agreed with everything we said in a most condescending fashion. It was obvious nothing would change after we left. How can you argue with people who just say yes?

MC: How do you study to improve — working with Philip for example?

DS: I read books of course. Also I look over my own recent games for problems, and I look over recent games of my prospective opponents. Philip and I do a little bit together, but we probably have different openings and styles. He plays moves sometimes and I think they are completely arbitrary!

MC: Have you met each other in a serious tournament game?

DS: We played in the Santa Monica Club championship soon after we were married. I blundered a pawn and he finished me off ...

MC: Ruthlessly?

DS: Yeah, but you said it, not me! ■