The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Georgian Chess Champion's 'Queen's Gambit' Lawsuit Against Netflix Upheld in Court

January 28, 2022



A scene from "The Queen's Gambit" **Netflix**

Netflix is in legal hot water over a "sexist" reference to Georgian female chess champion Nona Gaprindashvili in its hugely popular miniseries "The Queen's Gambit."

Gaprindashvili filed the $5 million defamation lawsuit against the streaming giant in September 2021 over a line of dialogue that incorrectly states that she "never faced men." She says she had played 59 male competitors by 1968, the year in which "The Queen's Gambit" is set, and has called the line "grossly sexist and belittling."

A U.S. district judge has ruled against Netflix's appeal to dismiss the lawsuit, Variety reported Thursday.

"The fact that the Series was a fictional work does not insulate Netflix from liability for defamation if all the elements of defamation are otherwise present," Judge Virginia A. Phillips

wrote in her ruling. “At the very least, the line is dismissive of the accomplishments central to Plaintiff’s reputation.”

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In its appeal against the lawsuit, Netflix said the First Amendment and the show’s fictitious nature gave it broad artistic license.

Phillips’ ruling counters that Netflix’s disclaimer that “the characters and events depicted in this program are fictitious. No depiction of actual persons or events is intended,” was not enough to dispel the notion that the show was asserting a factual claim.

“The Queen’s Gambit,” which is based on the 1983 novel by Walter Tevis, follows fictional heroine Elizabeth (Beth) Harmon, played by Anya Taylor-Joy, on her journey to become an international chess champion in the male-dominated society of the 1950s and 60s.

In the show’s finale, Harmon travels to Moscow for a culminating chess tournament. After her defeat of a male opponent, a chess announcer explains: “Elizabeth Harmon’s not at all an important player by their standards. The only unusual thing about her, really, is her sex. And even that’s not unique in Russia. There’s Nona Gaprindashvili, but she’s the female world champion and has never faced men.”

Born in Soviet Georgia in 1941, Gaprindashvili held the title of women’s world chess champion for 16 years. Contrary to the show’s remark, Gaprindashvili faced plenty of male competitors, once playing 28 men at the same time. A 1968 New York Times headline states that “Gaprindashvili Beats 7 Men in a Strong Tourney.”

“Throughout her extraordinary career, she won many championships, beat some of the best male chess players in the world and was the first woman in history to achieve the status of international chess grandmaster among men,” her lawsuit reads.

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