

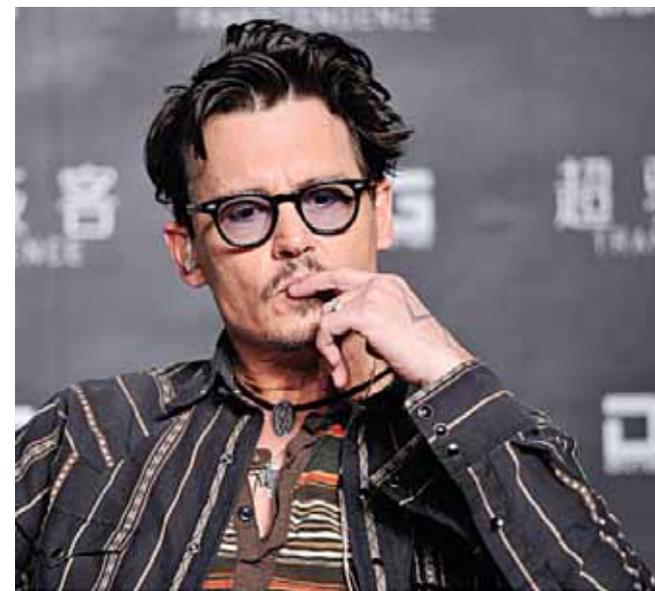
Depp lodges appeal over 'wife-beater' ruling in UK

Hollywood star Johnny Depp has applied to the Court of Appeal in London to try to overturn a ruling that he assaulted his ex-wife Amber Heard, court documents showed on Wednesday. The "Pirates of the Caribbean" actor lost a high-profile libel claim against the publishers of The Sun newspaper over a 2018 article that branded him a "wife beater". The 57-year-old actor was last month ordered to pay News Group Newspapers £628,000 (\$840,000, 705,000-euro) in legal costs from the High Court battle earlier this year.

Judge Andrew Nicol, who heard the case, refused him grounds to appeal but said he could apply directly to the Court of Appeal to overturn his judgment, and had until December 7 to do so. Depp's application is listed on a publicly available website of pending appeal cases. The exact grounds for appeal or when a decision will be made were not given. The actor took

action against NGN and the author of The Sun article for claiming he repeatedly assaulted the 34-year-old actress and model during their turbulent relationship.

He strenuously denied the allegations but judge Nicol ruled that 12 of the 14 claims of domestic violence relied upon by the tabloid did occur and he put Heard "in fear for her life". The case laid bare Depp's chaotic lifestyle and battles with alcohol and drug addiction in detail. After the ruling in November, he said he had been asked to step down from his role in the "Fantastic Beasts" film franchise based on the book by Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling. His lawyer called the High Court ruling "as perverse as it is bewildering" and that it would be "ridiculous" for him not to try to overturn it. Depp is also suing Heard in the United States over a 2018 Washington Post article in which she claimed to be a victim of domestic violence.—AFP



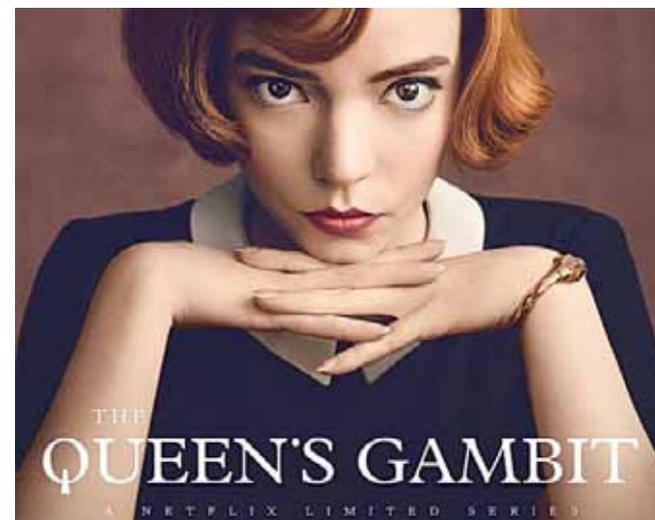
Hollywood star Johnny Depp



In this file photo Indian grandmaster Vishwanathan Anand plays during a FIDE World chess championship match in State Tretyakovskiy Gallery in Moscow. —AFP photos



In this file photo Indian grandmaster and World Chess Championship runner-up Vishwanathan Anand (right) receives a trophy from the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu J. Jayalithaa during an award ceremony in Chennai.



Lockdown, Queen's Gambit 'spectacular' for chess, says Indian grandmaster

Mass lockdowns and "The Queen's Gambit" have brought unexpected gains for chess during the coronavirus, Indian grandmaster Vishwanathan Anand told AFP, praising the hit TV show's "accurate portrayal" of the game. Anand, who spent three months stranded in Germany waiting for a flight back to India, said chess has enjoyed a surprise boom during the pandemic, with millions more people playing and following games online. It has been helped by the runaway success of "The Queen's Gambit", which follows the rise of a troubled chess genius-based on America's Bobby Fischer—and has set new viewing records for Netflix.

"People sitting at home seem to have discovered the game of chess," Anand, a five-time world champion, said in a phone interview from his home in Chennai. "There are now 13 million people playing online. And then during the pandemic there was also a Netflix show about chess, 'The Queen's Gambit', and that is also a bit spectacular." While many sports have suffered during the pandemic, chess has thrived. Online platform Chess.com last month said it had added 2.5 million new members since the release of "The Queen's Gambit". "Just like other sports have TV audiences, our audiences are principally online. So all that happened was that the chess players moved online to join the spectators," said Anand, 50. "That's not to say there were no adjustments to be made. It was quite complicated and there was a learning curve, but yes chess has done very well."

'Federer, Maradona in your room'

Anand, acclaimed as the greatest player India has produced, said technology had brought about deep changes for chess, with the internet now providing the platform to take it to a mass audience. "Almost anyone, even someone who doesn't know the rules of chess can follow online," said Anand. "A spectator-friendly experience is being created." Anand won his first world title aged 30 in 2000, three years after super-computer Deep Blue's epochal defeat of Russian world champion Garry Kasparov. "I was the crossover generation. I was 17 when the first chess database came along. I have pretty much worked with computers from that time onwards till today," said Anand.

"I think computers have changed the way you study the game. Every person no matter how weak, how isolated, has the world's strongest chess player sitting in the room with them always willing to answer any question. 'Think of it, you have a Roger Federer and Diego Maradona in your room and saying, 'Ask and I will give you any answer'. That's been the impact of chess computers." Anand enjoyed great rivalries with the likes of Kasparov, Russian grandmaster Vladimir Kramnik and Soviet-born Israeli Boris Gelfand. He said there are still muscular showdowns such as Magnus Carlsen against Fabiano Caruana—the current leading players—and tipped teenage sensation Alireza Firouzja, who was

born in Iran but plays for France, for future stardom.

'You need that tension'

He said Russian domination is increasingly being challenged, with Ding Liren and Wang Hao leading a wave of Chinese players and Caruana at the forefront of a growing US onslaught. "China may have peaked recently in terms of having two really strong players stand out but they have had considerable depth for a while," said Anand. "And the other thing is that they are very good in chess Olympiads, so they play well as a team. So we aren't surprised by good Chinese results any more." Anand, who became a grandmaster at 18 and remains in the world top 20, was playing in a chess league in Germany when most international travel came to a halt in February.

He kept himself busy following his favorite football team Real Madrid, doing commentaries and leading India in the Online Nations Cup before finally returning home in May. But despite the advances in technology, he said it was impossible to replicate the tension and atmosphere of a live game. "If you want to play, you need that sense of being sitting there in the hall feeling that tension," he said. "All those things, I think I need to remember again. It has been a very, very long break. "We never had the world grind to a halt like this. —AFP