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An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



Where was the Chief Arbiter?

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I read that a lot of problems have occurred because of the players and/or spectators mobile phones ringing. For about 2-3 years, during events supervised by the Lebanese Chess Federation, we use a small machine to stop all mobiles network signals in the playing hall. For example, I am now arbitrating a national tournament here in Beirut and its range is good enough for a square playing hall that can hold more than 120 players. When the spectator/player exits the playing hall, he will receive the signals again on his mobile. This makes switching off the mobiles unnecessary, which also results in some beeping on most mobiles. Unfortunately I couldn't find the machines manual to let you know its model number, but I will try to find out. Do you have any comments? Sincerely yours, **I.A. Charles Kayle, (Lebanon)**

Answer This is probably the solution for many problems. I would really like to know more details. For instance, what size it is and what is the price? Is it easy to carry and does it work only against mobiles and not for instance pacemakers? If you can inform me before the next FIDE Congress, I would be very happy.

Question What's the rule concerning listening to music during a tournament? Can a player have a headset on and listen to music during play? Couldn't someone cheat this way by having a CD or tape that goes over opening lines or something similar? **Patrick, (United States)**

Answer When an arbiter considers it disturbing, he has to forbid a player from having a headset and listening to music. It is possible that it contains some chess information and it is impossible for the arbiter to check it. In the event a player is using a CD player or tape recorder, I shall forbid it.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, at a local team championship in Mecklenburgh / Pomerania (Northern Germany) the following happened: At the very beginning of a round, two teams agreed to draw their match immediately. No single move was executed, the opponents just agreed to draw. There was no arbiter present; as the official substitutes, both team captains agreed with this procedure. Afterwards, the tournament director overruled this by the following decision:

"After reading the score sheets, it occurred to me that no single move happened in the drawn games. One of the team captains acknowledged this. According to 9.1.a of the FIDE rules a draw offer is only possible after making a move (after moving a piece and before pressing the clock). That means these games didn't happen and will be counted as 0:0."

Of course, those quick draws are bad sportsmanship, but this application of the rules seems strange to me and not appropriate to the purpose. By articles 9.1.a and 12.5, a draw offer without making a move is bad behaviour since it may disturb or annoy the opponent, but it *is still valid* and may be accepted by the opponent. Besides, strangely enough I didn't find a rule in the Fide laws that define when a game actually has begun. So when "does a game happen"? By

common sense, this should be the moment when both players are present, and the clock has been pressed by Black or the arbiter. If just one player is present and the clock has been pressed, this could still result in a forfeited point without playing a game. **Olaf Teschke, (Germany)**

Answer I agree with you that it is bad sportsmanship to “play” such games. I also agree that the application of Article 9.1a and 12.5 is not very strong. On the other hand I like the decision of the tournament director. He could very well apply Article 12.1 of the Laws of Chess:

The players shall take no action that will bring the game of chess into disrepute.

Recently more or less the same thing happened in the Dutch third league. If both teams scored 8 draws they were probably safe, and after a few minutes the match was over. The arbiter accepted the results, but a member of the board of the Dutch Chess Federation did not. He also declared the final result of the match 0-0. In his opinion the match was not finished in the spirit of the competition. I was informed that at least one team is going to appeal. I will keep you up to date.

Question Recently the following occurred in the competition of our club: Player A had a king, knight, and rook; Player B had only a king and knight. Player A overstepped the time and Player B claimed a win. I was the arbiter and I agreed, having in mind Article 6.10 of the Laws of Chess:

Except where Articles 5.1 or one of the Articles 5.2 (a), (b) and (c) apply, if a player does not complete the prescribed number of moves in the allotted time, the game is lost by the player. However, the game is drawn, if the position is such that the opponent cannot checkmate the player by any possible series of legal moves, even with the most unskilled counterplay.

It is possible that Player A's king could be checkmated, but a member of our club, who knows the rules quite well, told me that the penultimate move may not be a bad move; meaning “helpmate” is not allowed. I vaguely remember something about this, but I could not find it on the Internet. I have some questions regarding this matter:

- Was my decision correct?
- Is this rule also applicable in the event both players have a knight or a bishop? I am able to create mating positions with knight vs. knight and bishop vs. bishop.
- Article 5.2 speaks about dead positions. Are these positions only the following: king vs. king and knight, king vs. king and bishop, and king vs. king and two knights?

Bert-Jan Panjoel, (The Netherlands)

Answer Your decision was absolutely correct, because it is possible to checkmate Player A's king. In one of the previous Notebooks I published a list of possible dead positions. Regarding the positions you mentioned, the following are dead positions: K vs. K, K + N vs. K, K + B vs. K, K + B vs. K + B, provided the two bishops are on the same coloured diagonals. As you see, I did not mention K vs. K + 2 N, because the player with the two knights has

possibilities to win this game.

Question Dear Sir, upon flag fall, usually two knights against lone king is a draw. If the opponents have only "opposite" colour bishops (one each) how can it be treated? For instance, it is possible to mate, and also with rook against knight. Are such cases treated as a win or draw? If it is a win can we declare the win if the opposite colour bishops are anywhere on the board or just in a particular position. Or should one give two minutes of extra time and observe the games progress. Thank you. **Pranesh Yadav, (India)**

Answer Adding time, in order to give a player the possibility to prove that his position is winning, is not appropriate. A flag fall in the last time control of a game is the finish of the game. See the answer of the previous question for positions that are not winning. The positions you mentioned are winning for either player, except K + 2 N vs. K. This ending is only winning for the player with the two knights.

Question 1 Dear Mr Gijssen, forgive me for such a long e-mail, but I cannot make it shorter. My questions concern a Blitz game, where players reach a position like K+B vs. K+B of opposite colours, or any other drawn position (K+P vs. K in opposition).

First please look at your comments from earlier articles:

July 2003: "To be honest I do not see too many possibilities for a player or arbiter to act in situations in which an ending like the one you describe is on the board. Theoretically the 50-move rule or triple-repetition can be applied, but how to prove it? The player has to show a scoresheet and in a Blitz game this is almost impossible. I am afraid we have to live (and play) with players, who demonstrate this unfair behaviour."

September 2003: "In "normal" over-the-board Blitz chess time is a very important factor, even more important than in normal and Rapid Chess. Therefore the Quickplay finish rules do not apply in Blitz. Claims of winning positions or the opponent is only playing because the player has not enough time available are not allowed."

February 2004: "I completely agree with you that it is ridiculous and even unfair to continue the game in the position described by you. In principle a player has the possibility to apply the 50-move rule, but even this is against the spirit of the Laws of Chess. Were I the arbiter in that tournament, I would watch the continuation of the game and declare a draw if play continued with just bishop moves. Your opponent's behaviour brings the game of chess into disrepute."

Such cases as the ones above are often "very emotional" and probably depend on a few factors concerning human emotions rather than chess rules and regulations!

There are two kinds of players.

- 1) Playing to win in a fair fight, struggling with opponents, and with one's own weaknesses – yet keeping the spirit of the game.
- 2) Playing to win by whatever means available.

I face both kinds very often and while the majority plays fair, these few unfair players can spoil a whole tournament. It is particularly bad when the second kind of player has rules to back-up his/her methods. The rules in Blitz state that time is more important than playing chess, and this should not be. This leads us to absurd situations, such as playing K+B vs. K+B.

I started a discussion within the Polish Chess Federation, and of course many people have different opinions. In fact, the chess regulations state that such positions can be played and, as you wrote, "...we have to live (and play) with players, who demonstrate this unfair behaviour." I ask: Why? Why not change the rules? You must be close to agreement when you say: "I would watch the continuation of the game and declare a draw if play continued with just bishop moves. Your opponent's behaviour brings the game of chess into disrepute."

There is an arbiter in Poland who expels players from the tournament based on the same regulation about disrepute. Yet most arbiters do not do this, and allow such "unfair" practices. One point of view is: "why is this 'unfair' when it is accordance with the rules?" I can see the difference, but it is impossible to explain this to such players. Therefore we could:

- Change the rules, which would be difficult to apply as it is unclear which positions are drawn and which are not. Or we could consider how often the appealing side must make a claim to have a draw.
- Add a footnote to the existing rules saying that arbiters are obliged to follow the spirit of the chess game, and in obvious situations (in Blitz) they *may* announce a draw. For example, an arbiter could judge a game to be drawn in an equal position when neither side makes any effort to win the game. In other positions, the weaker side has the right to play on; hoping that the opponent will run out of time, but this should be done as an official statement of FIDE. We could keep the rules and the spirit of the game with little effort.

Question 2 What penalty would you enforce for not recording moves on a scoresheet? Such situations are commonplace with me, as I usually have problems managing time. When I have 2-3 minutes left, and have to play as fast as possible, my opponent will follow suit and stop recording his/her moves. Often this is done on purpose, just to limit the time that I could use for analysis. Thank you for answering my questions about the laws of chess. Best regards,
Marek Czerwinski, (Poland)

Answer 1 With the current rules there are no possible solutions to this problem. The only solution I see for the moment is to apply an adapted Article 10.2 also for Blitz games. In this case the arbiter has the authority to act, but there is another practical problem. In many Blitz tournaments there are only a few arbiters and a lot of players. In a very short period these few arbiters have to solve too many such problems. I would like to discuss this in the next meeting of the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee.

Answer 2 The arbiter has an extensive list of penalties. The first time it happened I would give a warning; if it happened a second time in the same game I would give the opponent time compensation and depending on the situation, reduce the player's time; if it happened for the third time in the same game, I would declare the game lost for the offending player.

Question Dear Geurt, This is a question regarding Swiss pairings. We just completed one of our main tournaments on the local calendar. It was a 7-round Swiss with 31 players. Up to and including round 6, the top seeded player and the third seeded player had not yet played each other. They were the only players on 5/6. Their colour histories were exactly the same (WBWBWW). My question is, how does one pair round 7?

- Should these two players be paired against each other, because they are the only two players on a score of 5 and have not yet played each other?

- Or, pair them normally using the standard Swiss pairing rules?

I've used three different pairing programs to test the pairings for round 7, and none of them paired the two players together, due to the fact that both had played two consecutive white's. I ended up pairing these players together in the hope of producing a single winner, however; they drew their game. Regards, **Günther van den Bergh, (South Africa)**

Answer You were 100% right to pair the players with a colour balance of +2 against each other. You acted according to the regulations of the Swiss System based on Ratings and in these Regulations there is a chapter named Colour Preferences:

An absolute colour preference occurs when a player's colour difference is greater than 1 or less than -1, or when a player played with the same colour in the two latest rounds. The preference is white when the colour difference is < 0 or when the last two games were played with black, otherwise black. In this case the (obligatory) colour is already written down on the score card. (This rule is not in effect when pairing players with a score of over 50% in the last round).

In a Swiss tournament the arbiter should always try to keep the number of games played with white equal or almost equal to the numbers of games with black for every player. Yet unfortunately it is not always possible to fulfil this requirement. So if a player has white in round one, the arbiter tries to do his best to give that player black in the second round, white in the third round, and so on. Still it is almost impossible to achieve it. There is a rule that says a colour difference of two is permitted, but a colour difference of three is forbidden. It means for instance that four whites and two blacks are OK, but five whites and two blacks is forbidden.

Therefore, in a tournament of 7 rounds, where there are two leaders who did not play before and both players had four whites and two blacks in the previous rounds; the above mentioned rule (in italics) makes an exception and permits the arbiter to pair these two players against each other. This is the only way to establish the real winner of the tournament.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, in a 10-minute tournament game, my opponent and I each had less than 15 seconds left, using a time delay clock and both of us had pawns poised to queen. I picked up a second queen and started to put it on the promotion square before I realized it was a horrible move. I did not touch my pawn, but the new queen did touch the promotion square. Should the touch move rules have applied? If yes, would it have made a difference if the new queen had not touched the promotion square? The arbiter ruled in my favour, but I'm not sure that's right. I do know that the few minutes spent fetching the arbiter helped! **Michael A. Mulford, (USA)**

Answer As long as the queen does not touch the promotion square, there are no consequences. Article 3.7e says:

When a pawn reaches the rank furthest from its starting position it must be exchanged as part of the same move for a queen, rook, bishop or knight of the same colour. The player's choice is not restricted to pieces that have been captured previously. This exchange of a pawn for another piece is called 'promotion' and the effect of the new piece is immediate.

When I read this Article very carefully, it is my opinion that the player has to play the pawn to the promotion square first, then remove the pawn from the board, and finally to replace it with another piece. Furthermore there is the general opinion that this piece cannot be replaced by another piece from the moment it has touched the promotion square.

Your sequence was a little bit different:

- You placed the new piece on the promotion square
- You removed the pawn from the board.

This is also generally accepted and the consequence of it is that you had to keep the chosen piece on the board and the arbiter ruled wrongly.

Question Dear Sir, in an international tournament an international arbiter misunderstood a certain problem and punished the wrong player for the wrong reasons, which caused further objections and problems. Of course he took a lot of grief for it and afterwards I advised him that in such cases it is better to call the chief arbiter and let him make the decisions. Two rounds later, the same arbiter was searching everywhere for the chief arbiter because a mobile phone rang and a player was to be forfeited.

My question is, what is the rule or guide that governs the relationship of the arbiter with the chief arbiter in international events? When is it appropriate to make a decision by yourself? Yours, **IA Naji Alradhi (UAE)**

Answer In several tournament regulations of the FIDE Handbook, the role of the chief arbiter is discussed. In the event that a deputy chief arbiter is mentioned, the regulations always say that the chief arbiter or the deputy chief arbiter has to be present in the playing hall. It is very clear, that the chief arbiter has to inform the arbiters where they can find him when there is no deputy arbiter appointed.

The relationship regarding the responsibilities between the chief arbiter and the other arbiters is not defined in the tournament regulations. In big tournaments it is my habit that if an arbiter observes a game, then it is "his" game. So long as the arbiter does not make a mistake, I shall naturally not interfere. Yet in the arbiters' meeting before the tournament, I always inform the arbiters that if a player acts in such a way that the only penalty would be to declare the game lost; it is only the chief arbiter who shall execute this penalty.

Have a question for Geurt Gijssen? Perhaps he will respond to it in a future column. Send it to geurtgijssen@chesscafe.com. Please include your name and country of residence.

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