



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding

FIDE, the World Championship and the Art of Boxing Promotion

BACK IN KIBITZER #40 (September 1999) I last discussed the contemporary chess scene in a column entitled "Is Khalifman the real World Champion?" Previously Kibitzer 23 had also discussed these issues as they seemed to me in early 1998. Since those times, a lot has happened and some controversial issues have arisen, about which I would want to have my say.

I shall deal with several interlocking issues in this article: the World Championship, the new time controls, FIDE's drugs policy and the question of who controls world chess - the players or a mysterious corporation called FIDE Commerce? So there are no games in this column, but next month The Kibitzer will return to opening theory.

As most readers probably know, the world governing body for chess is FIDE. Each member country elects the governing board of FIDE so that in theory the national federations should control FIDE policy in the interests of the game and players in general. There are now 159 member countries with, according to FIDE, about seven million active registered players. Additionally, there are probably millions more who follow chess and/or play on the Internet but are not registered with their national federations. (FIDE Commerce claim 60 million but I think that could be putting it a bit high.)

In the "good old days" when FIDE presidents such as Folke Rogard, Fridrik Olafsson and Max Euwe were widely respected gentlemen, the FIDE family was somewhat smaller. The number of countries participating in international chess was far smaller than today. Despite the tensions between West and East during the Cold War, FIDE ran relatively smoothly and its decisions were generally accepted without controversy.

Then came the era of Florencio Campomanes, the colourful Filipino who was President of FIDE from 1982 until he was ousted in the mid-1990s. As is well known, he was an ally of President Marcos who was later revealed to be extremely corrupt and was kicked out of office in his country, but not before the Philippines had staged numerous chess events including the 1978 Karpov v Korchnoi world championship match. On one famous occasion, Campomanes remarked (this may not be the verbatim quote) "If I tell President Marcos that I need a million dollars to stage a chess event, he only asks me will a cheque do, or should I send the money around at once in a taxi".

It wasn't so much the fall of Marcos as the events that occurred in Moscow at the end of the first world championship match between Karpov and Kasparov that convinced many people that Campomanes wasn't the right man to be running world chess. However, by this stage the membership of FIDE had greatly expanded (largely due to the promotional activities of Campo in Third world countries) so that the traditional European vote was no longer the clear majority. FIDE elections work on the principal of one country one vote. It was now possible for an astute chess politician to cultivate wide support in Asia and Africa and thereby get FIDE to adopt policies which were unpopular in the countries representing the majority of active chess players.

The break-up of the former Soviet bloc brought FIDE even more members, although this time the new countries did represent large numbers of active players and this helped to restore the balance in favour of Europe. Where formerly there had just been the USSR with one vote, now there are about 15 FIDE member states, and Yugoslavia has become five separate nations.

Perhaps it's not surprising therefore when the Campomanes era finally came to an end, his successor came from this part of the world. The current FIDE president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov comes from Kalmykia, an autonomous region of Russia that was virtually unknown to anyone outside Russia until the 1990's. Ilyumzhinov is rather a mystery man - some say he is a hero who is bringing his people (the only Buddhist nation in Europe) into a new era of prosperity, and who is also sponsoring major chess developments with his own money. Already Elista, the capital of Kalmykia, has hosted a world championship match (Karpov-Kamsky 1996) and a FIDE Olympiad.

On the other hand, there are those who ask whether the money that Ilyumzhinov is spending on chess is really his own. There is also the question of the unsolved murder in 1998 of a journalist Larissa Yudina who was investigating claims of corruption in Kalmykia. It's virtually impossible for an ordinary chess player in the West to know whether Kirsan is really a "good guy" or not.

If you want to investigate his character, and the circumstances in which he supplanted Campomanes, you might care to read the article of complaint by Ignatius Leong from Singapore who in 1998 resigned his job as Administrative Manager for FIDE (<http://www.anusha.com/leong.htm>) and a recent (February 3) short Associated Press report about Kalmyk politics and allegations about Ilyumzhinov can be read at <http://www.russiajournal.com/news/index.shtml?nd=4679#n4679> Make of it all what you will.

Certainly there has been a big split in the United States over this question of what line the US should take about FIDE. Grandmaster Yasser Seirawan, one of America's strongest players and active journalist and politician, has been very critical on his *Inside Chess* website of the direction FIDE is taking and of what he sees as the US backing the wrong horse.

Seirawan's views can be read online at <http://www.insidechess.com/pubmessage/pubmessage9.html> and (last August, dealing with FIDE's effect on US chess politics)

<http://www.insidechess.com/pubmessage/pubmessage7.html>; it's also worth re-reading his March 2000 message which summarises and criticises FIDE's original set of commercialisation plans -

<http://www.insidechess.com/pubmessage/pubmessage1.html>

On the whole, I am in agreement with Seirawan but not in every detail. He's very critical that last year's FIDE Congress decided to recognise a new chess federation in the Philippines, because he claimed this was letting Campomanes in by the back door. However, my sources in the Philippines tell me that's not the issue at all and that the new National Chess Federation of the Philippines (NCFP), has widespread support among players in that country. The Executive Director of the new federation, Roberto Pe Ang, wrote to me

"Easy for Yasser to write about Philippine chess - he doesn't know what the players here had to endure under the former Philippine Chess Federation (PCF). The Zonal President, Ignatius Leong, came to the Philippines on the invitation of the NCFP and was shocked at the conditions here (remember, Leong used to be terribly anti-Campomanes). The new Federation asked Campomanes to help in getting FIDE recognition - Campo was not the one who organized NCFP - it was GM Torre, GM Antonio and GM Villamayor and myself who did it acting on public clamor."

The main issue about FIDE seems to me to be whether it is genuinely acting in the interests of the game and the players, or whether it is being hijacked by a few get quick merchants. The main changes that Ilyumzhinov and co. are bringing about in the chess world may be beneficial to relatively small number of professional grandmasters but will they benefit Joe Soap rated 1900? (Of course in the 1980's the feeling was that FIDE was neglecting the interests of the professionals and that is why the short-lived GMA was set up in those days.)

The main changes FIDE is bringing about can be summarised as follows: (a) The knock-out World Championship; (b) The acceleration of play; (c) The setting up of FIDE Commerce; and (d) Drug testing and the Olympics issue.

Some of these have already happened while others are pending and yet to make their impact. Nevertheless, the far-reaching decisions taken at last year's FIDE Congress are almost certainly irreversible even if, (as some allege) under FIDE statutes it was acting illegally. The fact remains the majority of delegates in Istanbul voted for the Ilyumzhinov package and it's probably too late to cry "foul" now! It would have taken much greater organisation and determination among the countries who are now complaining to stop the momentum of the new FIDE plan before it was too late. Let's look at the changes in turn.

World Championship

The knock-out world championship tournament was a reaction by FIDE to the fact Kasparov had walked away with the "official" title when he split from the organisation to play Nigel Short for much more money than FIDE had been able to raise. So for a few years we had the unsatisfactory situation, like the world of boxing promotion, where there were several people claiming

to be world champion on perfectly sound grounds.

FIDE probably made the right choice in abandoning the old model of long Candidates' matches and title matches in favour of a more exciting Wimbledon style tournament capable of producing a winner within a few weeks. Anyway, for years, some people had been saying that we should have separate tournament and match world champions. Most sports are able to decide a new world champion every other year, if not annually, so why not chess? The problem with the old model is that it takes so long to play the old series of qualifying matches and then the final, and often then the final match has been a disappointment. Getting the money to pay for it has often been the serious problem too, as sponsors have sometimes been lacking for unpromising pairings. Grandmaster Shirov can testify to that.

The first two knockout series did not command unanimous support. The first time it was because Karpov was seeded through to the final and did not have to take part in the hurly-burly of the qualifying matches. Also it was a new concept, especially the rapid play-offs when the original two games didn't produce a clear winner. People are getting more used to this now including the players involved, although the feeling that it's something of a lottery still persists.

The second knockout world championship series (Las Vegas) produced an unexpected winner, Khalifman, because the format suited his style very well whereas several grandmasters rated higher than him either boycotted the event or were surprise losers in the preliminary stages. Of course it didn't help FIDE's credibility that several prize cheques from Vegas bounced or were delayed in payment.

Last year's championship however produced, in Vishy Anand, one of the accepted top three in the world, so that the main reservation about the event now is that the final was too short. The other two players in the top three, Kasparov and Kramnik, were of course busy elsewhere settling their own little world championship debate.

So now we have two world champions: Anand (FIDE, "official" or "tournament" champion) and Kramnik (Brain Games, unofficial or "match" champion). To my mind, Kramnik is the one who has the better grounds for claiming to be the heir of Steinitz, the first 19th Century world champion from whom the "apostolic succession" of world champions is traced. However, I prefer to say that the throne of Steinitz is currently unoccupied and I think most chess players would like to see a unification match between Anand and Kramnik to decide the undisputed world champion.

The Time Limits

The acceleration of play is the next item on FIDE's agenda. The rate of play that was traditional in master chess was 40 moves in 2½ hours per player, after which the game continued (with or without an adjournment) at the rate of 16 moves per hour. This leisurely pace gave ample time for deep thinkers to probe very deeply into the secrets of the positions they were playing. It put a premium on youth and the ability to maintain a high level of concentration for long periods and even so players got into time trouble so that they could

enjoy the adrenaline rush of having to make the last 12 moves in two minutes at the end of a five hour session.

However, with adjournments being phased out to prevent analysis by computer, the duration required to complete a long game within one playing session has just become too much. Moreover, at the traditional rate of play there is very little prospect of attracting spectator interest or new sponsorship in this era of rapid response.

Something had to be done about this of course, in practice in most events in recent years had been played at faster rates with or without a "quick-play" finish where the final phase of the game is played more rapidly than the earlier moves. The introduction of the "Fischer" clock, where a few seconds are added on for each move made, makes this kind of finish more acceptable than the old style "allegro" where a player has a finite amount of time to complete the game.

So clearly the new rapid time limits proposed by FIDE (which will be enforced for their own events) are a step in the right direction but - and it's a big but - perhaps they have gone too far as the new rates do look extremely fast if you have been used to forty moves in 2½ hours.

The rates announced by the FIDE Board to apply from now on in official FIDE events are as follows: 40 moves in 75 minutes, rest of the moves in 15 minutes, each move additional 30 seconds. According to this decision, the time for a player will be:

- for a game of 40 moves, 1 hour 35 minutes
- for a game of 50 moves, 1 hour 55 minutes
- for a game of 60 moves, 2 hours
- for a game of 80 moves, 2 hour 10 minutes
- for a game of 100 moves, 2 hour 20 minutes

If you want to sign the online petition against the FIDE time control changes here is the address:

<http://www.chesslines.com/petition/petitioninternational.html>

Personally, for selfish reasons, I favour the changes. As an old-stager who would probably find sessions of five hours or more very hard to take nowadays, I have to welcome the speed-up. In fact, with my aggressive (and, let's face it, probably shallow) style of play, I think I would have done much better in my main over-the-board playing years had these new FIDE time controls been in effect then. Probably, or maybe I am deceiving myself, I could have reached 2450 standard and International Master Title if it had not been possible for my opponents to consume large quantities of time finding the hidden flaw in my inspired but slightly incorrect attacks.

So here's the rub. As faster time limits we can expect different types of player to prosper. Chess, a game of thought, will become more "sporty". Gambits and other sharp openings, until now relegated to blitz tournaments, will become viable in master play again. It's not all bad news though; rapid time limits also favour the player with superior endgame technique and I am all in

favour of that.

What surprises me is how much amateur chess is still played at slow time limits although master chess is speeding up. In the Leinster leagues, here in Ireland, we play a session of three and a half hours (at the rate of 35 moves in 1 hour 45 minutes) and then adjourn; is this the last form of chess where adjournments survive? You may have to give up a whole second evening to complete a game. It's crazy!

In weekend tournaments, which often involve two and sometimes three games in a day, it must be right to reduce the length of playing sessions. As things stand, you might have to play 12 hours or more in one day. GM Baburin tells me he is thinking of refusing to play any event where one might be required to play for more than eight hours in the day; that seems very reasonable.

Younger professionals trying to make their living from playing may support FIDE. For example, GM Alexander Grischuk (interviewed by Baburin last October), said "I believe that we need rapid chess and use the same system as in tennis - one match a day, perhaps the whole match should take up to 4 hours... FIDE is on the way up, particularly with organising tournaments..."

However, a key motive in FIDE's move to cut playing times is most probably not the comfort and wallets of the grandmasters, but the limited patience and attention threshold of a potential Internet audience for chess events.

Not everyone is happy, though. Many of them don't like decisions taken by the FIDE Board in Teheran a few weeks after Istanbul, but they should have considered the implications sooner. GM Hans Ree, in his November **Chess Café** column ("The End Of Chess?") last year, made the point that Ilyumzhinov adopted a shrewd strategy. He threatened the federations with some really drastic proposals and then watering them down so that what they were actually asked to vote on (which is what he really wanted) seemed to them to be a concession. One of the abandoned proposals mooted earlier last year would have given FIDE greater control over its constituent federations and the tournaments they organised. After that, the time control changes might seem rather mild. It seems to me that a certain A. Hitler in the last century was accustomed to hoodwink his opponents in similar fashion. Most federations don't have a professional organisation and secretariat, while others are divided politically; thus they are easily manipulated.

I recommend that you re-read Ree's lucid exposition of the issues as they stood a few months ago by going to <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/hans53.pdf> since subsequent events are proving him right.

The Dutch and German Chess Federations have now entered a protest against the new time control, which they say (exaggerating) will make "rapid chess the official form of chess" and they also complain about the undermining of FIDE's zonal structure.

Egon Ditt, President of the German Chess Federation, issued a press release last January 21 stating that his federation supports the objection already

lodged by The Chess Federation of the Netherlands. They claim that the FIDE Board is not authorized to take a decision about time controls, saying "that only the General Assembly of FIDE, that will meet in autumn 2002 in Bled / Slovenia, after a thorough discussion concerning the future of chess can take a decision reaching that far and touching the core and the level of chess. The federation asks the President of FIDE to cancel the decision and to put the issue on the agenda of General Assembly in Bled 2002... It is the position of the German Chess Federation that the decision of the FIDE Board is not valid, because the Statutes of FIDE do not cover it. The time control as defined in the FIDE handbook still has to be applied.

You can read more documents in the discussion of whether the FIDE Board exceeded its powers (including FIDE's reply) on a special page at the TWIC website, <http://www.chesscenter.com/twic/timerate.html>, and FIDE's own press releases can be read at <http://www.fide.com/release/> if you have the stomach for it. Now let's move on to the next topic.

FIDE Commerce

This is the development in FIDE that gives me the greatest cause for concern. Essentially, at the 2000 FIDE Congress in Istanbul, delegates of the world's chess nations, voted to hand over financial control of the game (or sport) to a company called FIDE Commerce plc.

FIDE Commerce, based in London, was set up in 1999 is run by Artium Tarasov, a Russian associate of Ilyumzhinov, who has the right to live and work in Britain. I know nothing of his background, except the April 1999 FIDE release which described him as "A prominent Russian businessman... the first legal millionaire in Russia and a former deputy of the State Duma for Moscow Central".

Some critics of FIDE argue that the President has subsidised chess in the short run but expects to make a lot of money out of it in the long run. FIDE Commerce is to be the means by which he will do so. As Ree pointed out, the privatisation move means that even if Ilyumzhinov were to be deposed as FIDE President, or just decide he did not want to do the job any more, he could still retain control and a financial interest through FIDE Commerce which has the rights to exploit the FIDE chess world championship etc. until 2017 with an option for a further ten years!

Personally, I find it hard to see how anybody is going to make a fortune out of chess but in this "dotcom" era maybe it's possible. The webcasts from recent events such as Kasparov v Kramnik show that chess on the Internet can be made interesting with advertising revenue possibly to be generated from the websites. Nevertheless, it is hard to see chess catching on with a mass audience since it requires a fair level of intelligence and understanding to know what is going on.

On January 30, a press release reached me from London. It began "Octagon Marketing has won exclusive rights from FIDE Commerce (the commercial and marketing arm of the Federation Internationale Des Echecs - FIDE), to capitalise on the commercial potential of chess worldwide over the next three years... Octagon Marketing will focus on developing the widespread

opportunities that exist, from both a commercial and structural perspective.

"A new tournament structure will establish an annual World Chess Championship of 128 players in December with a series of Grand Prix events for the top 32 world players being played throughout the year, delivering a clearly identifiable and undisputed Grand Prix and World Champion for Chess." Artiom Tarasov, president of FIDE Commerce Ltd stated, "We are delighted to confirm this partnership with Octagon Marketing. We are confident that Octagon's expertise in developing and managing sporting properties and players through their worldwide network, will ensure the enhanced structural, operational and financial position of our sport."

According to the release, "Although, the new alliance will develop the role of the existing sports men and women via this new tournament structure, Octagon Marketing and FIDE Commerce will also target the Internet to attract, reach and unite the millions of chess players around the world." Next they quoted the President of FIDE, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, whom they described as the elected president of the Republic of Kalmykia. Kirsan said, "I am pleased that world chess has found a partner to work alongside FIDE to develop the enormous potential that the sport of chess possesses. Our game is one of the oldest in the world, and we look forward to nurturing and building it into a truly modern sport in the new millennium." Octagon Marketing has already worked with FIDE in organising the Sydney Olympic Athletes' Chess Exhibition. The event took place last September, following the IOC's official recognition of FIDE as the supreme body responsible for the game of chess. Octagon is the sports marketing and entertainment division of The Interpublic Group (NYSE:IPG), one of the world's largest advertising and marketing communications groups. Octagon says it employs over 1,400 people in 19 countries on all major continents.

So, like it or not, the ball is rolling now. Many will welcome this as a long-overdue professionalisation of chess organisation after some of the mistakes of the past (like the much-touted FIDE move to Greece which never happened), but sceptics will see it as the thin end of the wedge. As an Oxford philosophy graduate, I am always inclined to scepticism.

There is one aspect about the time controls and FIDE commerce that in particular makes me a bit suspicious. Administering the new time controls properly will really require all these events to be played with digital clocks in order to add on the time increments correctly every time the clock is pressed in the rapid finish. It's very hard, but perhaps not impossible to construct a mechanical clock to do this.

At present most people are still using mechanical clocks. In fact in four decades of playing chess, I have never once played a game with a digital clock. Clearly this is something I am going to have to get used to and so are a lot of other players. Clubs and tournaments organisers in the next few years will be purchasing digital clocks in large numbers and makers of mechanical chess clocks will be going out of business.

So if you are wondering where the big payoff is coming for FIDE, maybe you should not be asking which companies are going to sponsor chess events now

that they will be played more quickly, instead you should be wondering what backhanders are coming FIDE's way from the inventors and makers of digital clocks?

Drugs in Chess

The final element of the new FIDE agenda is Ilyumzhinov's attempt to bring chess into the Olympic movement. Apparently he has already had discussions with Juan Antonio Samaranch and is confident that sooner or later chess will become part of the programme for the Winter Olympics.

Chess hasn't been in the Olympics since the 1920's and getting it back there has long been a dream of chess administrators in many countries. Especially so, because Olympic recognition for your sport is in many countries very important (if not absolutely essential) for obtaining State funds. So another piece of the jigsaw falls into place. National federations which might see very little to gain from other FIDE proposals which largely affect professional players, because they may not have any in their country, are probably precisely those which are desperately in need of the flow of funds which Olympic recognition would bring. I think this must be the explanation why so many countries have backed Ilyumzhinov, even if they have reservations about him, his colleagues and his other policies. If he can deliver the Olympics he is a hero.

However there is a snag. The obstacle to getting chess into the Olympics used to be professionalism. Even Joe Soap with his 1900 rating might win a cash prize in the intermediate section of his local weekend chess congress. This would have disqualified him in the old days from taking part in amateur sport (if chess were regarded as a sport).

In the 1980's this all changed. The old amateur ethos was done away with in athletics, which has always been the sport of the Olympic programme. Since then, other professional sports like tennis and baseball have got into the Olympics. Nowadays the Olympic movement doesn't exactly have an untarnished reputation, what with the bribery scandal over the awarding of next year's winter olympics and revelations about positive drugs tests being suppressed at some previous Olympic Games.

Of course these are all physical sports and chess isn't, strictly speaking, although it is very hard for physically unfit people to do well in master tournaments. However, Samaranch apparently doesn't see this as a problem; in many countries chess is seen as a sport. The price however is that any Olympic sport must have a drugs testing policy, even if nobody yet has invented any drug (other than caffeine) which is any benefit to chess players. The first drugs testing at a chess event apparently was done on the winners of an Italian tournament in 1999 and it is going to be a regular occurrence at international chess events soon.

For example, a Dutch master who tried beta blockers to reduce tension in time trouble reported that they made him play worse. "I could see my position was deteriorating but it wasn't a problem". Survival in a crisis requires the adrenaline that the drug prevents. Likewise, alcohol, cannabis etc. are known to impair chess performance while other drugs that are tested for in other

sports (steroids and so on) are hardly relevant to chess since they only affect musculature and the ability to train more intensively.

The main concern seems to be about drugs like ephedrine which may be in over-the-counter medicines and could cause a player to fail a test even if they don't help chess performance. So if you are going to a FIDE event, make sure you don't buy such medicines and bring a doctor's certificate for whatever prescription medicines you are taking, and give this to the tournament organisation at the start of the event.

Some players and chess writers have just seen the drugs issue as a bit of a joke. However, the British Chess Federation is taking it seriously and devotes a page to the matter in the latest issue of its publication Chess Notes. They point out that at present there is to be no out-of-competition testing. I think we shall just have to see how this one evolves, and maybe get back to it later.

Conclusion

Having thought extensively about, and now aired, what seem to be the main issues about FIDE's changes to chess, I find myself in an unclear position: I am in favour of some changes and suspicious of, or dead against, others. However, that is what chess mastery is about, isn't it - carrying on regardless in an unclear position!

Copyright 2001 Tim Harding. All rights reserved.



[\[The Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Reviews\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)

[\[Endgame Studies\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)

[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2001 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.