



COLUMNISTS

## An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen

### A Pressing Matter

In my previous column I told you something about the world championships for students in Varna (Bulgaria). After Varna I went to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. In this city the world championships for juniors and girls under 20 were organised. I admit that the playing hall was not ideal. The games were played on three floors and from the basement to the stage on the third floor I had to climb 69 steps. A good physical exercise. Many players (including this writer) had problems with the food. I lost about 10 kilos. The tournament was very strong; 17 norms were achieved. And one of the Chinese girls won. With a score of 11 out of 13, Xu Yuan Yuan became world champion and earned a (women's) grandmaster title. In the junior competition, Lazaro Bruzon from Cuba played with great concentration and won the tournament with 10/13, 1½ points ahead of the second-place finisher.

In the meantime, I continue to prepare many things for the Istanbul Olympiad. Arbiters must be selected, instructions for them, captains and players must be written. There is a congress and during this congress the draft of the Laws of Chess must be discussed. To be honest, the Laws of Chess is like an obsession. But, I am also a little bit disappointed. In the first half of September, FIDE sent to all federations by e-mail a draft of the Laws of Chess. They are also published on the Internet ([www.worldfide.com](http://www.worldfide.com)). Unfortunately, I found out that several federations, after they received this draft, did nothing. They did not inform arbiters, players or anyone else who might be interested in these revisions. It happens too often that documents sent to a federation disappear on someone's desk – or worse. And really I am very disappointed about this. Fortunately, this column at **The Chess Cafe** is able to inform everyone around the world.

Now, this month's questions...

**Question** In recent magazine articles, I have seen two assertions by GMs concerning what they consider improper draw offers. The first: that it is unethical for a player in a "lost position" or an "inferior position" to offer a draw. The second: that it is improper for a player to offer a draw when the opponent is in time trouble. Are these assertions correct? **M.J. Holmes (Canada)**

**Answer** There are several provisions regarding draw offers.

**Article 9.1:** *A player can propose a draw after making a move on the chessboard. He must do so before stopping his own clock and starting the opponent's clock. An offer at any other time during play is still valid, but Article 12.5 must be considered. No conditions can be attached to the offer. In both cases the offer cannot be withdrawn and remains valid until the opponent accepts it, rejects it orally, rejects it by making a move, or the game is concluded in some other way.*

**Article 12.5:** *It is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever; this includes the persistent offer of a draw.*

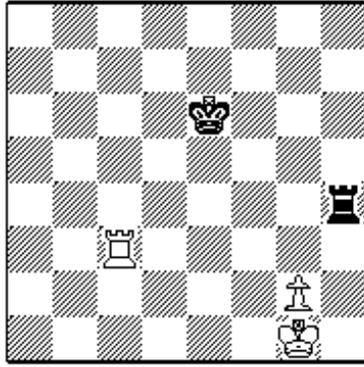
The proper procedure to offer a draw is clearly stated in Article 9.1: (1) Make a move; (2) Offer a draw; (3) Press your clock. And if the offer is not made in this way, the offer is still valid, but the arbiter has the possibility of penalising the player who offered the draw.

Article 12.5 seems to add that apparently it is possible to annoy the opponent by offering a draw in a correct way if the offer is made frequently. And again the arbiter has the possibility of imposing a penalty.

This is very clearly written in the Laws of Chess. But there is something more. It is customary in professional chess that the player who has an inferior position shall not offer a draw.

Recently there have been cases where a player did not follow this unwritten Law of Chess. In the third game of the current match Kasparov – Kramnik in London the following position was on the

board (*See Diagram*):



In this very drawish position, Kramnik offered a draw and, if the journalists are to be believed, Kasparov was quite irritated and rejected this offer. Three moves later he himself offered a draw.

In the last Dutch championship there was a similar case. Tiviakov was playing against the computer Fritz 6 and had a winning position. But it was clear that he would lose the game as a result of a shortage of time. The game was in the quickplay finish stage. If Tiviakov had claimed a draw, I am not sure that the arbiter would have declared the game drawn, because the position was quite complicated. The operator of the computer did not like that the computer might win on time

in an inferior, probably even lost position. He decided to offer a draw when Tiviakov's clock was running. Tiviakov rejected it, but after a couple of moves he offered a draw and Frans Morsch, the operator, accepted immediately. After the game Tiviakov protested vehemently and claimed that the operator had an obligation to resign on behalf of the computer when the computer was losing.

In short, it is not correct to offer a draw in a lost position, although the Laws of Chess do not expressly forbid this.

**Question** Here is a situation that I witnessed in a Rapid-chess tournament and I would like to hear your opinion about it: The position was a queen-and-pawns endgame, and both players were very short on time. Player A made a move which allowed his Queen to be captured, and indeed player B quickly played QxQ. Player A made a frustrated expression and left the table (he did not explicitly resign though). Just several seconds later, A's clock showed 0:00, and B walked over to the Referee and reported a win. So far, everything is normal, right? Well, a minute later, A returns to the table with his friend to show him how he "stupidly blundered a Queen" (the position was still undisturbed) and the friend said: "So you drew, yes?" "Well I'll be darned," says A. It turns out that after the move QxQ the position was a stalemate! And both players (one IM, one FM) did not notice it at the time. Player A appealed his loss to the Head Referee of the tournament, claiming he never explicitly resigned and since the position was a stalemate, the game should be drawn. B on the other hand claimed that (1) the game was already reported; and (2) player A did not notice the stalemate without external help.

The Referee ruled the game drawn based on the fact that a position of stalemate ends the game immediately. In fact, he said that even if A had *explicitly resigned*, the resignation would not stand, since QxQ ended the game right there.

Then, some people claimed that A made a gesture of "implicit resignation" before the QxQ move was completed (as B was holding the Queen in his hand), but the referee did not accept this and the draw stood. What do you think of this? In particular, how "explicit" does a player's resignation has to be? **Alex Shternshain (Israel)**

**Answer** In my opinion the arbiter was completely right. A stalemate immediately ends the game and every chess player knows the result of this situation: Draw. There is another interesting point in your letter. You wrote that player B made a gesture of resigning, but it was not completely clear whether he resigned or not. In some very old interpretations of the Laws of Chess it was written that even shaking hands with the opponent is not considered a sign of resignation. The only proper way to resign is to inform the opponent verbally, to write the result on the scoresheet and to sign the scoresheet.

**Question** I was playing white with an arrogant player. He had just captured one of my pawns and I was going to reply by taking back with one of the four possible ways that was possible. So I picked up his black pawn and put it down on the table and while I was taking too long to make up my mind as to which way I am going to recapture (I was dwelling on it for about 15 seconds) he picked his pawn up from the table and placed it back where it was originally on the board. I did not say anything after deciding which way to recapture. I completed my move. Should I have moved faster and should he have done what he did? **Zoltan Daku (Canada)**

**Answer** I fully understand your opponent and he was really right to do what he did. He also could

have informed the arbiter. In my opinion you disturbed him. Even when it is your move, he has the right to look at the actual position. And the actual position was not on the board. It has happened several times in my practice as an arbiter that occasionally some players have acted in a way that has disturbed an opponent. And very often when I have told a player not to disturb the opponent, the player has responded, "But my clock is running, I am doing this on my own time." And my reaction is always that a player's "own time" does not exist. A player may never disturb his opponent

**Question** Last July 1999, I joined an 11-leg monthly active chess tournament. The tournament had 2 sections: the Premiere section for players with ratings of 2100 and above and the Crown section for players with ratings of 2099 and below. I have a Philippine Chess Federation rating of 2065.

Upon further checking, I found out that the organizers had their own rating list wherein I was rated in the 1800s based on a couple of their active tournaments that I had joined previously. It was not specified which rating they would use. Before joining, I called the organizer to verify which section I would be placed if I joined. He told me that I would be placed in the Crown section. In the first leg, I scored 4.5 out of a possible 5 points after escaping with a draw in the last round in a game where I was lost. I tied for first place with another player in our section but won the championship trophy for the Crown section after the tiebreaks were applied.

In the second leg a month later, I was again able to score 4.5 out of 5 (including a lucky win in the third round when my opponent blundered in a won position in my time-pressure!) and tied for first place with a different player. Fortunately, I again won the trophy by the slimmest of tiebreaks.

Before the third leg, the organizer told me that he would place me in the Premiere section starting from this leg. When I asked him what the basis was for this action, he told me that he thinks that I have an "overwhelming advantage" in strength over the other players in the Crown section. He added that if I continued to be in the Crown section, he thinks that the number of players joining that section would lessen. I would have accepted this action had he told me that my rating exceeded 2099 after two legs (it did not) or if there was a stipulated rule that compels a Crown section player to move up to the Premiere section after winning 2 legs, but there wasn't. So, since I was not satisfied with his logic and also did not agree that I had an "overwhelming advantage" in strength (I was not even the top seed in both legs that I joined) because of the difficulties I experienced in my games in these two legs and also the results (tied for first with different players; never a clear winner), I decided not to join the third and succeeding legs. In your opinion, do you think that the organizer made a decision or was I the victim of an unjust manipulation.

**(Alwin Sopungco (Philippines))**

**Answer** Although this has little to do with the Laws of Chess, I will try to answer to your question, but let me tell you first about something that recently happened. As you could read in the preface of this column, I was the chief arbiter in the world championships for juniors and girls under 20 in Yerevan (Armenia). In the girls section, a girl from Ukraine, Anna Ushenina, played very well, although she was one of five girls, in a field of 32, without a rating. After four rounds she had a score of three points. I reviewed the entire FIDE rating list, starting with the Ukrainian players, then all players with the first name 'Anna', and finally I tried to find all players with the same date of birth as she. I found one: a boy from Tunisia. Finally I was sure she had no rating. By the way she made a WIM norm in this tournament.

Back to your question. As you have already mentioned, the organisers did not apply your correct rating. Instead of 2065, they used 1800. And seeing your results, it was clear that 2065 was probably the correct rating. Furthermore, I am convinced that your rating after 9 out of 10 is over 2100. This means that you should play in the Premiere section. And this is what the organisers decided. To be honest, I have the feeling that there is some obstinacy on both sides. The organisers do not want to admit that your rating of 1800 was wrong and as long as they refuse to admit this, you refuse to play in the Premiere section.

Dear Mr. Gijssen, Thank you very much for your previous answers and for incorporating some of my proposals in the revised draft. You wrote: "Do not hesitate to inform me when you are not happy with it. Everybody still has a chance to propose some changes before and during the FIDE Congress in Istanbul." I have a few remarks:

**Question 1** First is Article 1.1: *A player is said to 'have the move', when his opponent's move has*

*been made.*

In the previous version of the Laws of Chess, this occurred was when his opponent's move had been completed; this is a huge difference. I do not see the usefulness of the change. This will not help with the problem of players who forgot to press their clock. It could only make for a bad situation. (I have had at least one 'bad presser' in almost every major tournament using digital clocks in which I have worked and without a digital move-counting clock the 'non-presser' can never be detected.) Moreover, if a player is able to reply to a move before the opponent has pressed his clock, the normal reflex of the opponent will be to reply to such a fast move without pressing his clock. In situations in which neither player is required to keep score, player A may play and before he can press his clock player B's fast hands have already made a move on player A's time (this is now possible because player B has the move as soon as player A has made his move on the board).

Can player A still press his clock? Yes, because he has the absolute right to press it, but quite obviously player B's fast hands will press it immediately after. Consequently player A's clock will be running more than 90% of the time during the time pressure phase of the game. This does not look right to me. The fact that a player must move his pieces on his own time is an important principle of fair play. If an increment is used the problem is much less dramatic because the players are guaranteed 30 seconds per moves and there will be no race to deliver 10 moves in 5 seconds. Another problem with the same article is that most claims require that a player have the move. In this case player B could use his fast hands, stop the clock after Player A's move has been made and before he stops his clock, thus claiming on his opponent's time.

**Answer** The Laws of Chess are divided in two parts: 1. Rules of Play: Articles 1–5; and 2. Tournament Rules: Articles 6 – 14.

I have often suggested at seminars for chess arbiters that the text of Articles 1-5 should be included in the box with every chess set that is sold. It is a kind of manual. In the Tournament Rules the player can find how to act in a chess tournament. In chess tournaments, chess clocks are used and it is therefore very logical that the first article of the Tournament Rules is concerned with chess clocks.

I deliberately suggested the change from "completed" to "made". The reason is very simple. A move is completed when a player, after he has made his move, has stopped his own clock and has started his opponent's clock. Although everything you mention is completely correct, it does not belong to the Rules of Play, but to the Tournament Rules. For the same reason there is no mention in Article 5 that a player loses the game when he oversteps the time control.

**Question 2** It is still annoying to see that nothing has been written about games that continue while neither player has noticed a single flag fall. A lot could occur while a game that should have been stopped continues. Exceeding the time limit does not immediately end the game (it would be very bad for both rapid play and blitz if this were the case). Especially important is the fact that the player whose flag is down might mate his opponent or the latter might resign without seeing the flag down (in both cases the player out of time wins but this is not clearly stated anywhere). The player whose flag has not fallen might accept a draw without seeing the flag fall, play a move that is the 50th without movement of pawn or the capture of any piece (and the player out of time will claim and be declared lost by the arbiter before he even checks the validity of the claim), claim a triple repetition (since it is now considered to be an offer of draw, the player without time will wisely accept without calling the arbiter) or be stalemated by the player without time.

And, more importantly, there is still nothing clear on the validity of the extra moves played after a flag falls. With no arbiter looking, a flag can fall on move 38 but the players may only realize it on move 41. (In Quebec, such games are always continued). A flag may fall on move 35 with nobody realizing it and after move 37, when a player finally sees the flag down, there is no longer any mating potential on the board. Article 6.3 is quite clear: *Each time display has a 'flag'. Immediately after a flag falls, the requirements of Article 6.2(a) must be checked.* What is not clear is what to do if the players do violate this article and continue to play despite the flag down. The only clear thing is that a flag-fall does not immediately end the game until it is claimed by a player or seen by an arbiter. **Pierre Dénomée (Canada)**

**Answer** Let me refer to the Preface of the Laws of Chess:

1. *The Laws of Chess cannot cover all possible situations that may arise during the game.*
2. *Where cases are not precisely regulated by an Article of the Laws, it should be possible to reach a correct decision by studying analogous situations which are discussed in the Laws of Chess.*
3. *The Laws assume that arbiters have the necessary competence, sound judgment...*
4. *Too detailed a rule might deprive the arbiter of his freedom of judgment and thus prevent him from finding the solution to a problem dictated by fairness, logic and special factors.*

You are probably completely right that it is possible that, from time to time, something improper happens in a game. But it is first of all the responsibility of the players themselves to realize what is happening in the game. When we discussed the Laws of Chess in Yerevan in 1996, there were several arbiters who wanted to decrease the "power" of the arbiter. They proposed for instance that claiming a flag down is the responsibility of a player and not of the arbiter. For all type of games, they wanted the same Laws as in Blitz chess. I fought mightily to keep the Law on this point as it is now.

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*Have a question for Geurt Gijssen? Perhaps he will respond to it in a future column. Send it to [hwr@chesscafe.com](mailto:hwr@chesscafe.com). Please include your name and country of residence.*

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