



COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen

Falling Flags

I am afraid that this will be a very long Notebook. There are so many subjects: the World Chess Championships in New Delhi and Tehran, the decisions taken by the Presidential Board of FIDE in New Delhi and Tehran and many questions from readers.

First of all I would like to mention that some corrections were made to the FIDE Laws of Chess as they were published on Internet. The corrections have already been sent to FIDE and everybody may download them from the Internet. Go to www.fide.com and then to Press Releases. This is where you will soon find the corrected Laws of Chess. Be careful: the Laws of Chess published on 11 December 2000 are not the correct ones.

Some impressions about the World Chess Championships in New Delhi and Tehran: Let me start with one correction. I was not the Chief Arbiter, but a member of the Appeals Committee. Mr. Abundo from the Philippines was the Chief Arbiter.

To be honest, I do not like being a member of the AC very much because, as a matter of fact, the members of this committee do not have much to do. A tournament that lasts more than one month is then quite boring. I was not unhappy when the organisers requested me to be responsible for the payments and cheques to the players.

As an Appeals Committee we had some cases, but they were not so interesting and had nothing to do with the Laws of Chess, but with matters of organisation.

On the other hand, it is still quite interesting to attend a tournament as a spectator and not as an arbiter. And again I have to say that we, the organisers, arbiters and players, do not have that much respect for spectators. Especially in New Delhi, only a small group of spectators could really see what happened. Many could not be seen at all by the spectators. Only a few games were shown on monitors and many times even these monitors were hidden from "regular" spectators, because TV-crews, photographers and VIP's were sitting or standing in front of them. In Tehran it was better, but also much easier, because there was only one game.

By the way, I was very happy to meet many **Chess Café** readers in New Delhi and Tehran. I did not know that so many chessplayers read our columns.

Regarding the tournament itself, there were no incidents, although I saw a terrible thing in one of the tiebreak games. A player made a move, the hand of the player released the piece very clearly, and the player saw that it was a blunder, made another move and pressed the clock. The opponent was completely confused, raised her arms but did not protest. And the arbiter, who was present at the board, did not react in any way. I was not the only witness; another member of the Appeals Committee saw it as well as some arbiters who had already finished their work in this round. When I asked the arbiter after the game why he did not interfere, he told me that he did not see it. The opponent lost the game and was eliminated from the tournament. She lost a lot of money, but told me that there are more important things in life than chess (See also the last question).

By the way, I was of the opinion that as a member of the Appeals Committee I was not able to interfere. First of all, I was a spectator and secondly, how could I take part in a discussion about any decision if one of the players decided to appeal?

The Presidential Board of FIDE made some decisions about the future World Chess Championships. You can read these decisions on the FIDE website (see above). But one decision I have to explain. It is the time limit in all FIDE tournaments.

In New Delhi it was decided that the time limit in FIDE tournaments should be 40 moves in 90 minutes without any additional time added and then 20 minutes for the remaining moves with 30 seconds per move then added.

I pointed out, after I was informed about this decision, that this time limit is not possible with the DGT clocks we have now. And without the addition of at least 30 seconds per move in the first control, I expect a lot of problems at the end of this period. Therefore the time limit was changed in Tehran to 40 moves in 75 minutes and 15 minutes for the remainder of the game, with an increment of 30 seconds from move 1. There should not be a problem if a tournament committee wants to use another, slower time limit. Games would still be rated and norms made in these tournaments would be recognised.

The Qualification Commission has to change the regulations as soon as possible. I understand that the General Assembly in Istanbul agreed to a faster time limit. There are, as far as I can see, no problems introducing this new time limit beginning 1 July 2001. The period from January 1 until July 1, 2001 can be used to organise some tournaments as an experiment with the new time limit. By the way, the overwhelming majority of the players present in New Delhi were in favour of shortening the time of chess games. I have to admit that the new time limit was not explicitly mentioned in the enquiry.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I became a regional arbiter (first step in the ladder in my country) in October and was immediately thrown to the wolves. Here is what happened the first time I had to witness a quick-play finish (in Turin, at the end of November). Black had seemingly very little time on the clock. White was with about five minutes. They played a few moves, then White, who was clearly winning but was starting to run short of time, made the mistake of taking Black's last rook, not realizing there was a stalemate.

Game over? Well... In a matter of very few seconds (no more than five) I realized that Black has overstepped his time (his clock indicated 6.01), but due to a mechanical fault, his flag was still "up" (and, by the way, there was no way to make it fall no matter how hard we tried - apart from "opening" the clock, of course). What to do? I had no idea, so I reported the whole matter to my chief arbiter and he made the final decision: White wins.

Was it the right decision? After the fact I talked with other arbiters but we didn't come to an agreement. The majority says that stalemate means draw no matter the surroundings. My opinion, though, is different and agrees with the decision taken by my chief arbiter. Obviously nobody can't tell what would have happened if the flag had fallen as it should have, but as White was paying attention at Black's clock and I was at the table, I can easily figure out that either of us would have noticed a fallen flag. If my more experienced colleagues are right, the game should have been a draw. I am perplexed, though.

Please, let me allow muddling the picture a little bit. Forget the stalemate. Let's suppose that White's flag has fallen and the same sequence of event follows; that is the arbiter realizes in a matter of five seconds that Black's time expired about one minute before, but, because of a mechanical fault, his flag didn't fall. Should Black be declared a winner? My colleagues say so, but I don't feel this can be a right decision. Of course, if I had realized earlier that there was a mechanical fault, things would have been a lot smoother. But it was difficult anyway and, as I said above, it was my first tournament and I didn't imagine that a flag "up" couldn't always be trusted.

Roberto Ricca (Italy)

Answer Article 6.10 talks about a defective chess clock: *Every indication given by the clocks is considered to be conclusive in the absence of any evident defect. A chess clock with an evident defect shall be replaced. The arbiter shall use his best judgement when determining the times to be shown on the replacement chess clock.*

Article 6.9 says that if a player does not complete the prescribed number of moves in the allotted time, the game is lost by the player.

And finally Article 6.8 says: *A flag is considered to have fallen when the arbiter observes the fact or when a valid claim to that effect has been made by either player.*

It is clear there was a mechanical defect. The clock therefore should be replaced, but in this case there is no need to replace the clock because the game was over. I understand that you are very sure that at the very moment the stalemate appeared on the board, White had already overstepped the time limit. There is therefore no doubt that the game is lost by White according to Article 6.9.

But what about Article 6.8? In my opinion Article 6.8 is pre-empted by Article 6.10.

Question Dear Geurt, in your July column you say something about tiebreak systems in Swiss tournaments. I have to disagree with you on the merits of progressive scores. Contrary to what you say when players finish on equal points the player who had a good tournament start will have the better progressive score. In a nine round tournament, a win in round 1 will add 9 points to the progressive score and a win in round 9 only 1 point.

Because players who score well early in the tournament have to fight on the top boards, using progressive scores usually results in a fair ranking. TPR and Buchholz are much more arbitrary with marginal differences between players. A win against a single weak opponent in round 1 can ruin a TPR and an opponent who collapses after playing you will ruin your Buchholz. Both have little to do with your performance in the tournament.

Moreover the fact that a ranking system is used for pairings doesn't necessarily mean that this is the only fair system to use for tie breaking in the final rankings. The observation that the several Swiss pairing systems are designed to "even out" opposition based on the tiebreak system used is only a rough estimation. Another problem are the impurities in the Buchholz system, e.g., when players withdraw. The opponents of a player who withdraws during the course of a tournament get awarded 0.5 Buchholz for each game that a player didn't play. In reality however withdrawing players are likely to score well below 50%. Similar problems are connected with the TPR as a tiebreak criterion: Ignoring a win against a low rated player may actually increase one's TPR! Therefore in tournaments where the prize money is not shared between players with equal points, usually progressive score is preferred to determine the final tiebreak. **Eric van der Schilden (Netherlands)**

Answer Dear Erik, I am afraid that discussions about tiebreaks will never finish. Let me start with the beginning of your last sentence: it is my opinion that the prize money must be shared always. Qualification for another tournament is something else. I think it is almost impossible to find the best tiebreak for the final ranking of a tournament. In a youth tournament TPR is really unreliable, because the ratings of young players are not very reliable.

In a tournament with only rated players and no withdrawals, TPR can be a good way to determine the winner of a tournament, although the ratings can be unreliable as well. I will give you an example: In December 1990, there was a Swiss tournament in Moscow, the Final Qualification Tournament of the GMA. There was a young player with a rating of 2560, but I already knew that his new rating was 2625, but we still had to make calculations with the old ratings. The name of this young player was Alexander Khalifman. I agree with you that a win in round 1 has a bigger impact than a win in round 9 using progressive score.

The example of a player who collapses after having played with a certain opponent and shall ruin the Buchholz of the player involved is not a good example. We have to consider the whole tournament and collapsing in a tournament happens. I agree with you that withdrawals have negative effects on calculations of different tiebreaks.

Probably the best system is that the organisers of Swiss tournaments, where qualification for another (more important) event depends on the final results, reserve an extra day for tiebreak games. I know that this is also not an ideal system, but the decision is in this case based on games played between the players involved.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I hope I may trouble you with the following question on rules: Suppose that a player removes an opponent's piece and places his own piece in that place and lets it go and the situation then is legally checkmate. In my opinion this ends the game. However if he has not stopped his clock then the move could be said not to be completed and if his flag has fallen then the opponent might claim the game by time. Would you be kind enough to give your valued opinion on the situation? **Finn S. Nielsen (Denmark)**

Answer Article 5.1 says: *The game is won by the player who has checkmated his opponent's king with a legal move. This immediately ends the game.*

This means that everything that happens afterwards is not relevant, even a flag fall. Even if the flag falls at the very same moment the player checkmates his opponent's king, the game is won for the player who has mated his opponent.

Question Would the following be an allowable reason for stopping the clocks of a game and changing the players' colours? Recently, at my club, a player came to the game 30 minutes late

and demanded that the colours be reversed even though white had made the first move and did so because of the posted pairings. Black claimed he had been black in the prior round. The arbiter changed colours. The time on the clock was not changed. The whole affair seemed somewhat feeble to me. **Alvin Setzepfandt (USA)**

Answer Article 7.2 says: *If a game has begun with colours reversed, the game shall continue, unless the arbiter rules otherwise.*

I can guess your next question: when can the arbiter rule otherwise? If the tournament is a round robin tournament, a tournament in which every player meets all the other players, the arbiter must certainly alternate the colours. In a Swiss tournament, especially in the first rounds of the tournament, it is generally not a big problem to continue the game with the reversed colours, because it is not so difficult to restore the colour balance for the players.

Another point is of course the moment the mistake was discovered. If this happened at the end of the round and it is impossible to arrange another game in time, the arbiter will not rule to play another game. Regarding the example you mentioned, I think it is possible to start another game deducting 30 minutes from the time of the player who came late.

Question Dear Mr Gijssen, Do the new FIDE time controls of 40/75 15/rem with 30 seconds added after every move from the first move now mean that there is no time in a game when a player may stop recording moves? I am of the understanding that the 30-second increment overrides the "less than 5 minutes on clock" rule but I stand to be corrected. **Mark McKenzie (Australia)**

Answer Yes, Mr. Mackenzie, you understand perfectly that the players of games with an increment of 30 seconds per move have to write the moves during the whole game, as Article 8.4 says: *If a player has less than 5 minutes left on his clock and does not have additional time of 30 seconds or more added with each move, then he is not required to meet the requirements of Article 8.1.* (Article 8.1 says that the players have to write the moves.)

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I was present in Istanbul during the "controversial" second round of the Olympiad when all players were ordered to stop playing 10 minutes into the game, the arbiters instructed to reset the clocks and, after 30 minutes waiting time, the players were then ordered to start the game again and play the same moves as originally. There are some interesting questions here:

1. Apparently it was discovered that the computers of FIDE Commerce did not work properly at the start of the game. Was this a good reason for stopping play? One would think that computers are supposed to aid chess, not to impose an additional problem.
2. I noticed that when the games were restarted there was a commotion in one of the boards of the women's event, when one of the players was claiming that her opponent's original move was c4, but the other player insisted that her move was d4. Their score sheets showed c4 for the first player, and d4 for the second. They could not come to an agreement, and the Assistant Arbiter then called for you, the Chief Arbiter. I very much wanted to hang around to see how the problem was resolved, but had to leave then to attend to a problem concerning one of my own players. Do you remember this incident? **Bobby Ang (Philippines)**

Answer First of all I would like to make some corrections. I started the second round of the Chess Olympiad in Istanbul at 15.09 o'clock. I am very sure about this, because a very big clock was hanging in front of me and made me quite nervous, because I wanted to start on time. Immediately after I had started the round, the Chief of the FIDE Commerce crew came to me and informed me that the system was not ready. Almost immediately after receiving this information, I decided to stop the games. At that moment, and again I am sure about it, no more than 2 minutes were played. I know that many journalists wrote that I stopped the clocks when the games had been in progress for 10 minutes, but this is not true. FIDE Commerce had the system ready to start after about 13 minutes. 14 minutes after I had stopped the round I gave the sign to restart the games, and not after half an hour. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to give the correct figures.

Now, regarding your two questions. I can understand that some arbiters would not have stopped the clocks in the same situation. However, let me explain a little more about what was going on.

The fact that the system was not ready had two consequences: (1) No games could be published

on Internet; and (2) All 380(!) games had to be manually entered into the computer. Had the games not been interrupted, no one would have been able to follow the games on the internet; and we already knew that many of the first round games had not been saved in the computer. I already knew what a problem it would be and did not want to have to go through that for the second or any other round. The problem was that no people were available to do this job. As you probably know, the same problem occurred after I restarted the round. It took about 5 days before we could finish the bulletin of round 2.

The case you mentioned in your second point was easy to solve. It was clear for me that one of the players had made a mistake on the scoresheet. More difficult for me was another problem: two players (Portisch and Huebner) refused to replay the moves. I explained them the situation. Portisch then agreed to replay the moves; Huebner still refused to do so and I accepted this.

Question A few months ago, I was playing a tournament game against a local IM whom I had played many times before. I found a nice Rook sacrifice that gave me good winning chances, but no clear win against the best defence. The IM had three possible defences: Kg2-f1, Kg2-h2, and Kg2-h1. He played Kf1, released his hand from the King, and then realizing he had blundered into a forced mate, retracted his move and placed the King on h2, again completing the "move" by releasing the piece. I stopped the clocks and sought the tournament director. When we returned, the white King had mysteriously returned to its original square, g2. The IM claimed that he had never released the King. As no witnesses came forward to corroborate my story, the game continued. The tournament director started White's clock, and White played Kg2-h1!! Ironically, the best defence was Kh2, and I won in a few moves.

The following week, I was paired with the same IM. I notified the TD that I would not be shaking hands with my opponent. After a brief exchange of heated words, the game proceeded without incident. The TD paid particular attention to our board. I resigned by writing "0-1" and signing both scoresheets. It's reasonable to expect that I will again face this player in the future. Heated words aside, was my conduct in the second game correct? What general advice do you have for dealing with opponents who are "beyond the law"? (**Name withheld by request**)

Answer Well, I cannot say that your behaviour was incorrect. But still there is something I do not like. First of all, chess is a game and not the end of the world. To be angry for a long time because of what happened in a game is not to be recommended. I think you have to find a way to normalise the relationships with the opponent who acting wrongly in the first game. Probably the TD of your club can act as an intermediary.

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

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