



COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen

The Time Limits They Are a-Changin' – Again

My second *Arbiter's Notebook* (April 1998) was entitled “The Time Limits They Are a-Changin'...” In that *Notebook* we take a look at what has happened with time limits during my career as a chess arbiter. And when you read that *Notebook* (it can be found in the [ChessCafe.com Archives](#)) you will discover that the changes were very drastic. But to be honest, everyone accepted the changes without any discussion. This is not the case with the new proposed time limit. I received two questions on this topic.

Question Dear Mister Gijssen, I am very worried about the intention of the Presidential Board of FIDE regarding the new time limit. The President and the Board have violated the FIDE Statutes. They took decisions they were not entitled to. Do you agree with me, that the Qualification Commission headed by Mister Markkula and the Rules Committee headed by you should urgently request the President to stop this business? You can be sure that I will support you and I am also sure that the other members shall do the same. Please inform us about your steps. **Rolf Maeser (Switzerland)**

Answer First of all I have to inform the readers that Mr. Maeser is a member of the Rules Committee and he was very active during our meetings in Istanbul. Regarding his questions, I would like to answer as follows: in principle the time limit is not the responsibility of the Rules Committee. The new time limit is not in conflict with the Laws of Chess. Therefore I did not protest against it. A second point is that on the electronic clocks we are using the new time limit can be implemented. By the way, during the meeting of the Presidential Board in New Delhi, the proposed time limit was: 40 moves in 90 minutes, then 20 minutes for the remaining moves with an additional 30 seconds per move in the second period. I explained to the Presidential Board that this time limit would cause several problems:

- (1) At the end of the first period we will have a lot of time-pressure problems; players will not write the moves when they have less than 5 minutes on the clock. Furthermore, in tournaments with many participants, many games will have to be reconstructed to find out what happened.
- (2) The electronic clocks we use at the moment do not have the proposed option. Clocks will have to have this new time limit and tournament organisers and federations will be forced to buy new ones.

The Presidential Board agreed and changed the time limit to 40 moves in 75 minutes, then 15 minutes for the remaining moves with 30 seconds per move added from move 1.

You can say that my actions were related to my position as Chairman of the Rules Committee. As an arbiter and a person who knows a little bit about what is going on in the chess world, I had some doubts. I was told that the new time limit was, in the opinion of a marketing company, more attractive for television. I have not seen any report that confirms this statement. I pointed out that I would have preferred studies to find out what is the better medium for chess, television or the internet. I did not make any investigation and I cannot prove that I am right, but I have the feeling that right now the internet is more important for chess than television. Furthermore, I am not sure that a 4-hour game is more attractive for television than a 7-hour one. Games of a maximum of 1 hour are attractive, as has been shown in several countries.

It is my opinion that the Qualification Commission must be involved. The Title Regulations of FIDE describe the requirements for an international title tournament. As far as I can see, the new time limit does not fit with these regulations. It is clear that either the time limit or the regulations must be changed.

Finally I would like to make the following remark: I have the impression that the general

dissatisfaction also has to do with the procedure. Many delegates are saying that only the General Assembly, and not the Presidential Board, may decide this question. But I understood that the General Assembly left the final decision to the Presidential Board.

Question Mr. Gijssen, I will just pose two questions of informational nature. First, when is the new time-control official. Is it 1.1.2001 or 1.7.2001. Second, what about tournaments with slower time-controls (e.g. 2h/40 + 1h). Will they be recognized and rated by FIDE? Is there an official statement with regards to this particular matter on behalf of FIDE? What is your personal opinion about the new time-control? **Dimitris Skyrianoglou (Greece)**

Answer To start with the second question, see my answer to Mr. Maeser. I saw on the internet a statement from the President of FIDE that the new time limit would be used in tournaments related to the World Championships (Zonal Tournaments, Continental Championships, World Championship K.O. Tournaments). I am not sure when they will take effect. According to the International Title Regulations of FIDE (Qualification Commission) Article 0.21, "such changes will come into effect on 1st July of the year following the decisions by the General Assembly. For tournaments, such changes will apply to those starting on or after that date."

In the current regulations it is written that "the speed of play must not exceed 46 moves in two hours at any stage of the game except that a sudden death (quickplay finish) final time control of at least 30 minutes may be used in a tournament with games lasting at least seven hours."

As you can see, it is stated that "faster games" are forbidden for achieving a title norm. I am sure that this will not be changed. It means "slower games" are allowed.

Question Dear Geurt, I have two questions regarding the new Laws of Chess coming into force July 1, 2001. Article 5.1.a says: *The game is won by the player who has checkmated his opponent's king. This immediately ends the game, provided that the move producing the checkmate position was a legal move.* I think I understand this Article perfectly, especially that the checkmate must be produced with a legal move. Well-known was the trick 1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 Bc5 3. Qf7# but not with a legal move. Now my question: Suppose in a normal game the position is as follows: White: Kh6, Rb7, Black Kf8, Ra5, all other pieces are not relevant. It is Black's move. Black has the intention to play Kg8, but, unfortunately for him, he played the illegal move Kf8-h8. The arbiter sees this, wants to interfere, but before he is able to do so, White plays Rb8, checkmating his opponent's king. White claims that with this legal move the game is over as described in Article 5.1a. What is your opinion? **Dr. H.Elgandy (Egypt)**

Answer It is helpful to recall the discussions in the Rules Committee during the Congress in Istanbul. I suggested that Article 5.1a should be: "The game is won by the player who has checkmated his opponent's king. This immediately ends the game, provided that **all moves** are legal." This proposal was rejected and as a good democrat I accepted the decision of the majority of the Rules Committee and the General Assembly. Before answering to your question, I give another example: 1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 Bc5 3 Qh5 f6 (illegal move!) Qf7 # (legal move!?!). Now let us refer to Article 7.4.a. It says: "If during a game it is found that an illegal move has been made, the position immediately before the irregularity shall be reinstated."

In the case you mention above, if the arbiter saw the illegal move during the game, I think he should place the king back on f8 and invite the black player to make a legal move with the king.

More difficult is the situation if the arbiter had not seen the illegal move, but Black claimed or discovered, after his king was checkmated, that his king was illegally moved to h8. If we look to the letter of this Article, the arbiter would decide that the game is lost. But what will be the decision if we look to the spirit of this Article or the spirit of the Laws of Chess generally? For this I like to refer again to the Preface of the Laws of Chess:

1. The Laws of Chess cannot cover all possible situations that may arise in a game. 2. The arbiter has necessary competence and sound judgment. 3. 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.

I would never blame an arbiter who accepted the checkmate move and as a consequence of this the end of the game, but I am sure that in some cases another decision is a better one.

Finally, it is much easier to follow the Laws of Chess strictly, but there are cases that an arbiter should try to find another solution for the problem.

Question My second question is related to Article 7.4.b. It says: "After the action taken under Article 7.4.a, for the first two illegal moves by a player the arbiter shall give two minutes extra time to his opponent in each instance; for a third illegal move by the same player, the arbiter shall declare the game lost by this player. My question is: suppose the opponent has a bare king, is the result still 1-0 or 0-1? Or are there other possibilities?"

Answer Let me start with a general remark: If a game is lost for one player, it does not always mean always, that the game is won for his opponent. Let me give you an example. White has a king and rook and Black only a king. White refuses persistently to comply with the Laws of Chess. According to Article 12.7 the arbiter has the option of declaring the game lost by White. In the same Article 12.7 it is also written that the arbiter shall decide the score of the opponent. Well, in my opinion we have here such a case. White made for the third time an illegal move. It can be considered as persistent refusal to comply with the Laws of Chess.

I would not be surprised if some readers disagreed with me. They would probably refer to Article 6.10. In Article 6.10 it is written that a player will lose the game when he oversteps the time. However, the game is drawn, if the position is such that the opponent (in our case Black) cannot checkmate the player's king by any possible series of legal moves, even with the most unskilled counterplay. And I understand that these readers would say that this case is analogous to the case mentioned in Dr. Elgendy's question, but I think there is one important difference. A player who makes an illegal move for the third time is penalised and overstepping the time is not an action that is penalised, although the result is generally the same. Conclusion: If a player makes an illegal move for a third time, the game is lost for him, but the opponent, who cannot checkmate him, even with the most unskilled counterplay, receives half a point.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I am an arbiter in the Dutch competition, KNSB as well as locally. I have a question regarding the penalty for mobile phone/beeper etc. Before each match, I announce that I will penalise the failure to turn off the cell/mobile phone by loss of the game for the party involved. A fellow arbiter thought this a very severe penalty; he always gave a warning. Now I know it is up to the arbiter to decide what penalty to give in such situations. I think by always giving the same penalty I'm being consistent. My fellow arbiter however thought the decision was against the "spirit" of the chess rules, although in some situations, he would also apply this penalty. What is your view in this matter? **Maurice Janssen (The Netherlands)**

Answer I agree with you that ringing mobile phones is an increasing problem. It seems that at the moment everybody has one and forgets to switch off it. In New Delhi, during the World Chess Championships, it was posted that spectators would be fined 500 rupias. I heard many ringing mobiles, but I did not see anybody fined. The same problem occurred during the Olympiad in Istanbul. In one case I took the badge of the person whose phone was ringing and had this person removed from the playing hall. Later I was told that people received a badge when they gave their credit card. I do not know what happened with the credit card.

About a year ago there was a serious incident in the Belgian League. The mobile of one of the players was ringing and, following the instructions of the federation, the arbiter declared the game lost.

This matter has never been discussed in the Rules Committee. I had in mind to discuss it in Istanbul, but it was impossible to do so due to a lack of time.

In my opinion, to declare the game lost is too severe. I recommend the following procedure:

1. Before the start of every round I announce that all mobile phones must be shut off. 2. I also inform the players that I will give an official warning when the mobile rings for the first time but declare the game lost when it happens the second time.

Question Dear Mr Gijssen I hope that this subject will not be tiresome to readers but I wish to take the argument further with Mr Richard Haddrell on the use of sum of progressive scores (PS) as a tiebreaker. To recapitulate, I gave the example of two players, A and B with the following results in a 6-round tournament: A scored 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0; B scored 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1. I must concede that I could be somewhat hasty in saying that B performed better against stronger opposition but let us examine this issue a little more closely. The table below has the round-by-round results of

the two players, assuming that the opponents of A and B were not floaters:

Round	Player A			Player B		
	Opponent	Points	Result	Opponent	Points	Result
1	A1	0	W	B1	0	L
2	A2	1	W	B2	0	W
3	A3	2	W	B3	1	W
4	A4	3	W	B4	2	W
5	A5	4	W	B5	3	W
6	A6	5	L	B6	4	W

It is now quite clear that the wins of both A and B were scored against opponents with the same "points" (highlighted in the table). The only difference is the losses: A lost to A6, a "5-pointer" while B lost to B1, a "0-pointer". However, consider the possibility that B1 was the same player as A6, that is, after beating B, B1 went on to win another 4 games to meet A in the final round. Should this happen, then both A and B lost to the same player, besides beating players with identical points. Yet, based on PS, A had 20 tiebreak points whereas B had only 15.

Even if B1 was not A6, B1 might not necessarily be a weak player. Therefore, whatever tiebreak system is used, we should not expect such a big difference in the tiebreak points. Buchholz points may be a better reflection of the relative rankings in such a situation. Mr. Haddrell questions why wins against strong opposition should outweigh losses against weak ones. Again, note that B1 might not be a weak player. If this was indeed the case, why should B be penalised for a bad start, due to an unintended bias in the pairing?

One more point I like to raise is regarding the so-called "Swiss Gambit". I think we can all agree that the main purpose of any tiebreak system is to ensure as fair a ranking as possible, and not so much to prevent people from taking advantage of its weaknesses. The latter goal could be futile because, as we all noted, whatever system is used, is not perfect. A tiebreak system should be acceptable so long as its advantages, on balance, are greater than its weaknesses. I am not sure whether the PS system fits the bill. **Chan Tat Wong (Singapore)**

Comment I agree completely with you.

P.S. Tomorrow is the start of the Dubai Open Tournament. The rounds start at 17.00. At about 18.45 hrs the most important part of the day for Moslems starts: praying time. Part of the regulations is that the games will be interrupted for about 10 minutes, everybody has to leave the playing hall, may go outside, to the cafeteria of the chess club and after an announcement, return to the playing hall. I must admit that such a rule is new for me, but the organisers assured me that in the previous Open Tournaments in Dubai this rule did not cause any problem. I will keep the readers of **Chesscafe.com** informed.

[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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