



COLUMNISTS

## An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen

### Promotion Problems

**Comment** Dear Mr. Gijssen, Re. my question in your previous column where I gave a situation and then eventually you asked: "Is my question a hoax or a trap". In all honesty – *It really happened. It is not a lie!* I could not believe this myself. As I was a player (I am a qualified national arbiter) I had no right to interfere in the situation. At the start of the next round, I eventually went to the arbiter and told him exactly what you said - the appeals committee had nothing to do with entertaining the case (it was a worthless waste of effort). As the arbiter was quite young and inexperienced, he accepted the appeals committee's decision. As a hobby, I document all funny and most incredible situations I encounter and this one must surely top them all. It bothered me quite a bit afterwards and the only possible explanation I could find is that: for some reason Black thought White had resigned and thus thought that the moves they were playing were actually analysis, therefore he did not press his clock. **Guenther van den Bergh (South Africa)**

**My comment** It is still unbelievable. Regarding your last sentence, it is for all parties involved, players and arbiter, very important to know whether a game has been finished. At the moment a player resigns, the opponent and, if he is present, the arbiter, should ask the opponent immediately to confirm the result by writing the result on the scoresheet and signing it. It is my habit to do so. Even in Rapid tournaments. This is a good way to avoid misunderstandings as you described.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, In a Rapid tournament game (60 minutes finish) player A had Rook and Knight and more than 5 minutes on his clock; Player B has Rook and less than 15 seconds there are no pawns and no special position involving mate. Player B stops his clock and claims a draw to the arbiter. The arbiter gives him a draw. Player A protested citing games like Kramnik vs. Kasparov which had continued 13 moves with the same material and Shirov vs. Karpov Linares continuing for 27 moves, and both finishing drawn. Which was the correct decision? And if player A was correct, how should the game have been continued? **Jorge Laplaza (Argentina)**

**Answer** Since July 1, 2001, the new Laws of Chess have been in effect. Some articles were changed a bit, some were deleted and some added. One of the added articles is Article 10.2.d:

*"The decision of the arbiter shall be final relating to Article 10.2.a,b,c."*

Article 10.2.d is part of Article 10: Quickplay Finish. Article 10.2 describes the claims for a draw in the last phase of a game. And the cited article says that it is impossible to change the arbiter's decision in case of a claim. You will understand, that under these circumstances it is not correct to give any comment about the arbiter's decision, because the decision is final.

*Mr. Laplaza then noted:* But Geurt! The three possible answers we expected, were: 1) The decision to give a draw is correct because the position was drawn. 2) The decision was incorrect as player A had the legal right to continue the game as Kramnik - Kasparov and others. 3) In any case, the arbiter (who had never previously directed any tournament) had the right to make his own interpretation of the facts. If you can make a choice, we are satisfied! Thank you! Jorge Laplaza

I replied: Dear Jorge, If you force me to make a choice, it is clear it cannot be #1 and #2, leaving #3. The problem is that according to the new Law (Article 10.2.d) the arbiter's decision is final, even if the decision is completely wrong. Compare it with soccer. If a referee decides that the ball crossed the goal line and he decides that the goal is valid, his decision is final, even if the ball did not cross the line. Geurt Gijssen

Dear Geurt: Thank you! I understand what you mean. We will try to choose better prepared arbiters. Player A was a strong master beating an Argentine champion. The arbiter was very inexperienced. But in my opinion the new Article 10.2.d should not remain Chess is not soccer and chessplayers are different – I think! Jorge Laplaza, Rawson (Chubut) Arg, IM (ICCF)

*I received three letters in reaction to my answer to Joshua Green:*

**Letter 1** My name is Joshua Green and you responded to one my questions last month. Your method of resolving this situation is probably the one I would choose, although I wasn't sure. According to the United States Chess Federation's Rules of Chess, a player with little time on his clock in a sudden-death time control may claim a draw by "insufficient losing chances." The draw should be awarded if it is believed that a class C player (1400-1599 USCF) would have a less than 10% chance of losing to a master (2200 USCF). Admittedly, that is a rather contrived rule, but it is essentially the USCF's version of Article 10.2 in the FIDE Laws of Chess. Thanks for answering my question. **Joshua Green (USA)**

**Letter 2** In your recent column on [Chesssafe.com](http://Chesssafe.com) you answered to a question from Joshua Green. Allow me to clarify what "insufficient losing chances" means. It is a rule added by the USCF to address a series of player complaints arising out of sudden death time controls. It is not, to my knowledge, in the FIDE rule set.

From the USCF web site: 14 H1. In a sudden death time control, a player with less than five minutes of remaining time may stop the clock and ask the director to declare the game a draw on the grounds that the player has insufficient losing chances.

The draw shall be awarded if the director believes that a Class C player would have little chance to lose the position against a Master with both having ample time. The exact losing chances of any position cannot be calculated, but a director wishing a more precise standard may consider "little" to mean less than 10 percent.

Note that under the "insufficient losing chances" rule, the players' actual ratings are irrelevant, as is the amount of time remaining on the players' clocks. However, the player making the claim must have less than five minutes remaining - otherwise the game continues. Also, there is a subtle but distinct difference between insufficient losing chances and actual winning chances. A player may be winning the game but still have significant chances of losing.

Directors have several choices under the insufficient losing chances rule.

The director may decide: The claim is clearly correct, and award a draw.

The claim is clearly incorrect, and deny the claim and subtract one minute from the claimant's remaining time.

The claim is too close to call, and ask the players to resume the game. Under this option, the director may watch the game with the intent of upholding the claim if the opponent is making no progress. A director who is watching a game after an insufficient losing chance claim may declare the game drawn even if the original claimant's flag falls.

The claim is too close to call, and instruct the claimant to make a later re-claim if the opponent is making no progress.

It seems to me that the correct answer to the question is that the arbiter should exercise the second option declared under the USCF rule. Penalize the time and force the pawn move. After all, the claim when made, is clearly incorrect as the forced pawn move does make the game winnable by black. **David Wagle (USA)**

**Letter 3** Mr. Gijssen, First I'd like to say how much I enjoy your column. Now, I am puzzled by an answer you provided to Mr. Joshua Green in your recent column. His question centered on the USCF rule of "insufficient losing chances". Your reply seemed to say you had not heard of this rule and that it was certainly not in the rules of chess. OK, you may be absolutely correct about this rule not existing anywhere but the US, but it does exist per the USCF for all games played under their sanction - certainly you are aware of this. What am I not understanding? **Bob Haskell (USA)**

**Answer** Thank you for your comments. I was afraid that the "insufficient losing chances" rule was part of the USCF Rules of Chess. I have mentioned many times before that it is incorrect to have a set of rules that is in conflict with the Laws of Chess. A problem is also that, in my opinion, tournaments played according to the USCF rules cannot be FIDE-rated. Also note that some foreign players have problems playing according to the USCF rules.

I understand that the USCF rules allow a player to claim a draw when he has less than 5 minutes left on his clock. In the FIDE Laws of Chess, it is less than 2 minutes left on the clock. I am still

of the opinion that an arbiter should never judge the position. I repeat myself: The only important thing is how the game is going: did the opponent fail to make any effort to win the game by normal means?

Finally let me quote from the Preface of the Laws of Chess:

*“FIDE appeals to all chess players and federations to accept this view. A member federation is free to introduce more detailed rules provided they: (a) do not conflict in any way with the official FIDE Laws of Chess; (b) are limited to the territory in question; and (c) are not valid for any FIDE match, championship or qualifying event, or for a FIDE title or rating tournament.”*

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I visited Germany lately and was told the following horrifying story by my friend Kudoke from Hamburg: Kudoke played in the recent German championship for seniors (+60). He had a position with a Bishop on d6 and a Queen on e5. The opponent's threat was Nxc6, but he could not do that as Qxg3 and mate would follow. Kudoke went to say farewell to his wife when he came back the opponent had moved Nxc6 and Kudoke immediately played Qxg3. The opponent took the Queen and to his horror Kudoke discovered that the opponent had moved his, Kudoke's, Bishop to c5! When Kudoke protested to the arbiter, the arbiter ruled that Kudoke should have protested before his move (Qxg3) and therefore ruled that the result, loss for Kudoke should stand. Is this a correct ruling by the arbiter? Note that was regular games with scoresheets. GM Uhlmann won the tournament! **Rolf Lundquist (Sweden)**

**Answer** This is again an unbelievable story. First of all that a player moved an opponent's piece to another square I have never seen or heard before. White's action, if this really happened, to move Black's Bishop from c5 to d6, is not only one that brings the game of chess in disrepute, but deserves to be punished. It is up to the arbiter to decide the penalty. Furthermore, and I repeat, if this really happened, the arbiter's ruling in this game is nonsense. If, during the game, it is discovered that a player committed an illegal action, such action must be corrected. Still I cannot believe that this happened in an official national championship, even in a senior tournament.

**Question** Geurt let me start by congratulating you on a great column. I think it is both very enjoyable and a great resource to people who try to apply the FIDE rules to chess tournaments. My question is regarding the situation in Quickplay Finish where both flags have fallen. Article 10.3 implies that if the clock identifies which flag fell first (, as is the case in most modern digital clocks) the game is lost by that player. Appendix B8 (which applies to Rapid play and Blitz games) states that if both flags have fallen, the game is drawn. Firstly please confirm that I have interpreted the rules correctly and secondly please explain why the rules are different for chess games with time limits greater than 60 minutes to those with limits of 60 minutes or less. **John Mazzieri (Australia)**

**Answer** Your interpretation of the Laws of Chess is completely correct. In a normal game, including Quickplay Finish, the game is lost for the player whose flag falls first, provided the prescribed number of moves has not been completed. Even in cases where both flags are down but it is clear which one was first, the game is lost. There are different ways to find it out: 1. The clock – for instance the DGT clock – has this option, showing a '-' sign in the display of the player whose flag first falls. 2. The arbiter takes notice and decides accordingly. Notice that in Rapid and Blitz games the arbiter may not react when a flag falls. The player has to claim a win (or a draw).

Why this difference between normal and Rapid and Blitz games? The only reason I can imagine is that in Rapid and Blitz tournaments there are always a lot of players and only few arbiters. In fact the arbiters are not able to manage all games.

Recently I was the chief arbiter in the intercontinental match Europe vs. Asia in Batumi (Georgia). This was a Rapid Scheveningen Tournament. Each player received 25 minutes for the whole game. 4 or 6 games would take place simultaneously. For each game there was an arbiter. This game arbiter also wrote down the moves. I ruled that in this tournament the arbiter must call a flag fall. Of course, I passed this special rule to all players before the tournament started.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I have read your excellent column at [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) since it started and it has given me plenty of pleasure. I am myself a president and webmaster of the LASK Chess Club <http://lask.schacknyheter.com>. I am also a tournament director and an arbiter (union arbiter of the Sweden Chess Federation). Some days ago we had our club rapid championship. I played myself and in one game my opponent stopped the clock and went to another board to get an extra

queen. When he came back, he started the clock but observed that he would be mated in one move if he promoted his pawn. Therefore he made another move and eventually won our game. I did not do anything, as he won the game by fine play, but after the game we discussed the situation. How should the arbiter have acted if I had stopped the clocks, called the arbiter and asked him to judge the case?

Some of my friends said that my opponent should lose, as he stopped the clock wrongly. Another friend said that it is "piece touché" as his intention was to promote. Personally I think I should have used the "rules paragraph zero", i.e., to use my common sense as said in the preface of the rules. By doing this I think that either a loss or demanding piece touché is a too hard punishment. I think I had chosen to warn the player or given his opponent extra time (perhaps also reducing the time for the player who made the error). It would be very interesting to know your opinion. I think I have read similar cases before in your column, but I don't remember if they were exactly the same. **Calle Erlandsson (Sweden)**

**Answer** To be honest, I have long expected the following question: A player intends to promote a pawn, but the desired piece is not available. The player stops his clock, all as per the rules, and summons the arbiter for assistance. He asks the arbiter for a Queen, which is not readily available. The arbiter brings a Queen and restarts the clock. The player starts thinking and after one minute he takes a Rook, which was available when he summoned the arbiter. The following questions are relevant:

Did the player act correctly or not? Was stopping the clocks a justified action, because the desired piece was available? And if the arbiter thinks that the conduct of the player was incorrect, how should the arbiter handle it?

The answer to the first question is essential. I think it is very difficult to give a general answer and sound judgment by the arbiter is very important. I am inclined to say that the behavior of the player may be considered in some cases as unacceptable. But there are also cases (see, e.g., Stewart Reuben's question below) that are acceptable. I repeat that the judgment and probably also the intuition of the arbiter are very important. One thing is clear: The opponent is disturbed by the action of the player and should be compensated for this. I would give him some extra time, even when I think that the other player acted correctly. I do not consider this compensation a penalty. When I am of the firm opinion that the player acted to mislead his opponent, I shall act accordingly. I shall subtract some amount from his time (as in the case of an incorrect draw claim) and add three minutes to the opponent's time.

Let me return to your question. To stop the clocks without summoning the arbiter is clearly wrong. He should call the arbiter to make clear his intention. The case you describe can be explained as a case where he had no intention to mislead you. This means, that I had not punished your opponent, but had compensated you.

**Question** Which is the right way to promote? Keep in hand the Queen then put it on the eighth rank, then remove the pawn from seventh rank and push the clock? **Gozzi Giorgio (Italy)**

**Answer** The correct procedure is: 1. Move the pawn from the seventh to the eighth rank; 2. Remove the pawn from the board; 3. Place a piece on the square from which the pawn was removed; and 4. Press the clock. Note: If the piece you want is not available, you may stop the clock and ask for the arbiter's assistance.

**Question** Dear Geurt, I was at a children's event last week and these questions were posed to me: A player pushes his pawn to the eighth rank and it must be promoted to a new piece. He picks up that piece. When is he deemed to have touched it? I have always ruled that he has not done so until the piece touches the board as in Article 4.3. Thus, Black king f3, pawn f2. White king h2. Black puts his pawn on f1. He now picks up a queen. He lets go of it and replaces the pawn with a rook. This is permissible. Another reason, apart from 4.3, that refers only to touching a piece on the chessboard, is that he may rummage through a box seeking the piece he wanted. He could not be penalised for touching the first one he came on. In such events it is common practice to have many queens on the board. It is also common to use an upside down rook as a queen. I am told they even have so many queens they run out of rooks and then use two pawns on the same square to represent a queen. Personally I have never seen this done. What is the status of such pieces when the arbiter is called in? Presumably it is most unlikely he can oversee all the games and many conclude after 5 minutes. These are not the types of events you and I are used to. Do you

think we should adjust the Laws of Chess in 2005 to provide for such eventualities? **Stewart Reuben (England)**

**Answer** It is my opinion that we should try to have proper games without any misunderstanding. If a player likes to promote to any piece, he always has the possibility to ask the arbiter for the piece he needs. And why should we not teach our youngsters from the very beginning about this? It has always taken some time to introduce a new rule, for instance the method of castling, but you are also quite aware that we won this case. Everybody castles now in a correct way. If we accept all kind of "queens" on the chessboard, we shall face a mess. Therefore I do not think we need to change or to add any article in 2005 for these cases.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I've seen many arbiters acting in different tournaments and I've reached the conclusion that their points of view are not unified. Especially when players are not recording the moves or when a flag falls. So, I've some questions for you: In "normal chess", when must the arbiter signal the flag fall? I've seen arbiters who only signal it when both players are not recording the moves, and others who always signal it. Must the arbiter signal a flag fall in a "Quickplay finish"? Must the arbiter record the moves in a "Quickplay finish" when players have less than 5 minutes on the clocks?

I also think that the FIDE Laws of Chess are too ambiguous about the arbiter's job. I think they should be more detailed (keeping in mind the Preface of the Laws), regarding signaling the flag fall or intervening when there is an illegal move. **Juan Lopez (Spain)**

**Answer** The rules for "normal chess" and Quickplay finish are the same. Only the draw claim in Quickplay finish differs. You ask two questions about the role of the arbiter: 1. What is his duty in case of a flag fall? 2. What is his duty in case of an illegal move?

At the moment a flag falls, the arbiter must check whether the required number of moves has been completed. He has to do it in all circumstances, even when both players have written all their moves. In these cases it is normally sufficient to compare both scoresheets. When they show the same number of moves, I generally accept both scoresheets as correct. By the way, during the round I check all scoresheets several times. If there is any difference in the number of written moves, I try to find out who is wrong and I inform the player who missed a move, or wrote the same move twice or did not write the moves on his scoresheet properly. My feeling is that chessplayers appreciate this, as long the arbiter does not interfere in Zeitnot. It is my habit to check them about two hours after the start of the round and again after three hours.

The second case concerns a player who has written all the moves, but his opponent has not. Immediately after a flag fall the opponent fills in the missing moves on his scoresheet. After he has done so, I again check both scoresheets. If there is a possibility that one of the players had overstepped the time limit, I stop the clocks and check the number of moves.

The third case is when neither player has recorded the moves. Then the arbiter or an assistant should try to be present to record the moves. After a flag fall, the arbiter must stop the clocks. The players must record the moves, and again, after both players have written the moves, the arbiter checks both scoresheets. If necessary, he declares the game lost for one of the players or he summons them, after he has started the clocks, to resume the game.

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

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