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COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



Did a Player Touch a Piece Deliberately?

Introduction I am presently the arbiter of a match between the two young stars David Baramidze (Germany) and Daniel Stellwagen (The Netherlands). They're playing a four game match of "Complete Chess," which is the same as Advanced Chess, but instead of a Rapid time control, it is played with the so-called Classic time limit of 40 moves in 2 hours, then 20 moves in 1 hour, and finally 15 minutes for the remaining moves with an increment of 30 seconds per move. Both players may consult three different chess programs, Hiarcs 9, Fritz 8 and Shredder 9 along with the Chessbase Mega database. The level of the games is very high and it is very interesting to see how the players use the computers and especially the database. I shall divulge more in my next column.

Next week the Aeroflot Festival in Moscow will start with more than 600 players participating. I will be using a Windows version of Swissmaster 4.8 for the first time and will notify you about its merits.

Finally I would like to draw your attention to the FIDE website: www.fide.com. The decisions made during the meeting of the Executive Board in Kallithea have been published and there are many interesting documents for arbiters and players alike. I recommend reading the minutes of the Arbiters' Council, Pairing Committee, Technical Commission and Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee.

Question I have a suggestion for revising the Laws of Chess. In my experience Articles 7.3 and 8.1 are often broken by one, or both, players when getting short of time.

Article 7.3 states that if a player knocks over a piece, he must replace it on his own time. Meaning that if a player topples a piece as he is moving, but then presses his clock before replacing the piece, his opponent may immediately restart his clock until the piece is replaced. This is a good rule because the game can continue without intervention by the arbiter.

Article 8.1 says that a player must keep his scoresheet up-to-date unless Article 8.5 applies. Yet it does not say how to deal with an infringement, so the only remedy a player has is to stop the clocks and call the arbiter. This is insufficient because calling the arbiter can have a significant effect on the

game. The offending player gets free thinking time and the other player may have to leave the board to get the arbiter and lose his concentration. I would like to see Article 8.1 amended to say that if a player fails to keep his scoresheet up-to-date then he may not stop his clock until he has done so. This would allow his opponent to restart his clock without intervention from the arbiter. **Ian Thompson, (UK)**

Answer In principle you are right, but there is one problem. If the game is played in Fischer mode, time is added every time the clock is pressed. A possible solution is that we have different rules for games played with or without Fischer mode. In fact we already do. When playing in Fischer mode; and the increment is 30 seconds per move or more, a player has to record his moves throughout the whole game. I think your suggestion is worth consideration.

Question Hello Mr Gijssen, I am the arbiter at our local club. Yesterday the following situation occurred: Player A has less than a minute of time and is not writing down his moves. Player B still has thirty minutes but is not writing his moves and hasn't been for some time. Also it was obvious that over three repetitions of the position were made before they finally agreed on a draw.

Later Player A complained and I told him that unless he makes a request I cannot interfere in their game. I would have told Player B that he had to write down his moves and I would have added an extra two minutes to the clock of Player A.

As for the repetition, again, unless an appeal is made I cannot declare the game drawn. Was I right in both cases? Thanks, **Jean-Pierre Grenier, (Sherbrooke)**

Answer In the event a player has more than five minutes remaining on his clock, he has the obligation to record his moves. It is the task of the arbiter to enforce the rules. So the arbiter must interfere when a player, with over five minutes on his clock, stops recording moves. The arbiter does not have to wait for a claim by the opponent. You are correct in regards to the repetition of position; this has to be claimed by the player.

Question 1 During a blitz tournament, the following situation arose: With only a few seconds left, I completed my move and then realised that it was illegal. My opponent did not see it and began to think. Suddenly he made to capture my king, but before he could his flag fell. I immediately stopped the clock and claimed a win while he captured my king. I believe I stopped the clock before he touched my king.

Now both of us claimed a win and to my astonishment the arbiter awarded my opponent the full point. I thought that I had won because my opponent did not complete his move or, at least, that the point should be split. The arbiter argued that my opponent didn't need to stop the clock in such a case.

- (a) How would you decide?
- (b) Is it necessary to complete ones move in order to have a valid claim?
- (c) I can't find any rule in the FIDE laws of chess that is applicable to this situation. In my opinion, the player who first makes a valid claim should win the game, and if the claims are made simultaneously the game should be drawn. Is this correct?

Question 2 Recently I was the team captain at the national team-championship for boys under 16. The games were played at a time control of 2 hours for 40 moves, followed by 30 minutes for all remaining moves, with two games per day. As digital clocks were not used, the clocks had to be adjusted manually at the start of the second time control, by setting them 30 minutes forward.

At the team captain's meeting, before the first round, it was mentioned that only the arbiter or a deputy shall adjust the clocks after the flag has fallen for the first time control. During the last round one of our opponents' reached the time control and stopped the clock to summon the arbiter to adjust it. The chief arbiter was busy with a claim and requested a third party team captain to act as a deputy. Somehow, under unclear circumstances, it took about five minutes for the clock to be adjusted and restarted. Most of this time was used by the opponent to think about his next move. During this delay my player tried to talk to the arbiter, but was prevented by our opponents' team captain! When I heard about this, about ten minutes later, I asked the arbiter to either deduct time from the opponents' clock or increase the time of my player to compensate for those extra minutes. The arbiter decided upon this and our player eventually won the game.

- (a) Do you think readjusting the clock was correct, and if so, to which player?
- (b) Also it was not necessary to stop the clocks to adjust for the last time control. This can be done on another clock and then the clocks can be exchanged. Do you agree? **Leo Evers, (Germany)**

Answer 1 Article C3 states:

An illegal move is completed once the opponent's clock has been started. However, the opponent is entitled to claim a win before making his own move. If the opponent cannot checkmate the player by any possible series of legal moves with the most unskilled counterplay, then he is entitled to claim a draw before making his own move. Once the opponent has made his own move, an illegal move cannot be corrected.

I agree with the arbiter's decision. Although the Laws of Chess do not adequately describe what to do in such cases of two competing claims, it is generally accepted that what happens on the board, in this case the completion of an illegal move, has preference above what happens next to the board (the flag fall).

Answer 2 The chief arbiter acted correctly when he appointed a deputy arbiter. Although it was a minor mistake that he was not very experienced. To compensate one player for an arbiter's failing is not very appropriate. There are, however, two things I do not understand. How is it possible that the opponent's team captain could prevent your player from talking to the chief arbiter? And how is it that you, as a captain, were not present in the playing hall during this critical phase of the game? Your suggestion to have a spare clock to replace the actual clock is very useful.

Question During the time scramble of a USCF Quick rated event I, more than once, started to move a piece that had no legal moves, returned it to its original square, and then made a legal move. Should I have incurred a penalty and at what point would doing that qualify as distracting the opponent. **Steven Winer (USA)**

Answer It is very hard to say. The arbiter must decide whether or not your actions are distracting. Had I made such a decision, even in a Rapid or Blitz game, I would have awarded some time compensation to your opponent, with or without a claim from the opponent.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, a player in our local league wanted to move his dark-squared bishop from f4 to e3, but he placed his light-squared bishop on e3 by mistake, which was an illegal move. His opponent immediately claimed that, since he had touched the light-squared bishop, he should move it. The arbiter decided that since the player had no intention of moving that piece, the game should continue with Be3.

His opponent petitioned the Appeals Committee who eventually decided that the first player should move the piece he touched and the game should be resumed from that moment.

Which decision was correct? According to FIDE Handbook:

4.2 Provided that he first expresses his intention (e.g. by saying "j'adoube" or "I adjust"), the player having the move may adjust one or more pieces on their squares.

4.3 Except as provided in Article 4.2, if the player having the move deliberately touches on the chessboard one or more of his own pieces, he must move the first piece touched that can be moved.

But in this case the player did not want to adjust the piece nor did he "deliberately" touch the bishop. I remember a similar case when a player mistakenly placed his king on b4, instead of his bishop. The arbiter was summoned and the player was obliged to move his king. He was very upset and decided to resign. Regards, **Patricia Llana, (Spain)**

Answer I am curious to know which square the light-squared bishop was located upon. I suppose it was in the neighbourhood of f4. The problem in

such cases is, as always, did he touch this piece deliberately or not? It is almost impossible for an arbiter to make a decision that satisfies everyone. I support the decision of the Appeals Committee in the first instance. In the second, the player had no intention to move his king, so I would never force him to do so.

Question Dear Geurt, I have a question about the "touch move" rule. In a scholastic tournament game, between two players with ratings of approximately 1400, Black played f7-f6, attacking a white knight on e5. Swiftly and without any hesitation White grabbed his pawn on f4 and moved it back to f3. Clearly White had intended to move the knight to f3, but for some reason his fingers had latched onto the adjacent pawn instead. The fact that the pawn was moved backwards; and that this was done quickly and confidently suggests that the "touching" of the pawn was not intentional. Does the touch move rule nonetheless apply, and should White be forced to move the f-pawn? The f5-square was available, so White could play a legal pawn move if forced to do so. **Jim Roberts, (USA)**

Answer In this case I would accept the move Nf3 and take into account that it was a game between young, apparently inexperienced players.

Question Dear Mr Gijssen, According to rule 7.4 when a player makes an illegal move, he is penalized. However, in a blitz game, according to C3, when a player makes an illegal move, there is no penalty; he loses the game only if he starts the opponent's clock. Am I correct? Why is there such a difference? Best regards, **Christian Sánchez, (Argentina)**

Answer Let us see what the Laws say:

Article 7.4 (a): If during a game it is found that an illegal move has been made, the position immediately before the irregularity shall be reinstated. If the position immediately before the irregularity cannot be determined the game shall continue from the last identifiable position prior to the irregularity. The clocks shall be adjusted according to Article 6.14. Article 4.3 applies to the move replacing the illegal move. The game shall then continue from this reinstated position.

Article 7.4(b): 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.

Article C3: An illegal move is completed once the opponent's clock has been started. However, the opponent is entitled to claim a win before making his own move. If the opponent cannot checkmate the player by any possible series of legal moves with the most unskilled counterplay, then he is entitled to claim

a draw before making his own move. Once the opponent has made his own move, an illegal move cannot be corrected.

You have a point. There is something wrong with Article 7.4. It would be preferable to begin Article 7.4(a) as follows: If during a game it is found that an illegal move has been **completed...** The consequence is that there is no penalty as long as the player did not press his clock. Let me tell you, one of the proposals I received to revise the Laws of Chess, is exactly this suggestion.

Question Hi, I understand the rules concerning the offer of a draw. However I don't quite see the reason for the draw offer only being valid until the opponent completes his move. I think it would be better if, once a draw offer has been made it stands for the entirety of the game. Thus the opponent may claim the offered draw even on the point of being checkmated. Hence the offer of a draw forfeits that player's right to win the game. This would greatly reduce the number of short draws, encourage aggressive play, and stop annoying repeated draw offers. **Richard Evans, (UK)**

Answer Well, your proposal is very interesting and original. I believe the majority of draw offers are correct, and I base this on more than thirty years of experience as an arbiter. There is presently a lot of fuss about grandmaster draws, but in modern chess there are relatively few draws like this. The only events with a greater than usual amount of short draws are team competitions, especially the Olympiads. And even then mostly in cases in which everything regarding the final standings has been decided. Many players don't like to take risks in team events because they are afraid to lose rating points. There was once a proposal not to rate team events and I support it. In tournaments, for instance, the colours are more or less in balance. In team competitions such is not the case. There are always players who play more with one colour than another. Also in individual tournaments it is impossible to escape playing against a specific opponent. In team competitions it is quite easy to do so. In my opinion it is unrealistic to adopt your proposal.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I witnessed the following incident. During a quick play finish, Black moved his king into check and pressed the clock. As there was no arbiter nearby White told his opponent he made an illegal move, added two minutes to his own clock, and demanded Black play a legal move. In the meantime Black had replaced his king and made a rook move, whereupon one of the bystanders loudly pointed out that this was illegal as it was possible for the king to make a legal move.

In reaction to this intervention Black replaced his rook and moved his king, after which the game continued normally without White adding another two minutes to his clock.

After the game someone stated that White had been entitled to two extra

minutes after the illegal rook move as well. I did not agree, as the illegal king and illegal rook move should be considered as one, for which a player should not be punished twice. I would be interested in reading your opinion in this matter. **Theo Heukels, (The Netherlands)**

Answer First I would like to mention that the offended player should call the arbiter. The *arbiter* has to add two minutes extra to the offended player's time. See Article 7.4(b) above. Secondly, the move that replaced the illegal move was, as far I understand, a legal move, but to play with this piece was not according to the Laws of Chess. I would not punish the player for this infringement.

Question Mr. Geurt Gijssen, I would like to ask you about a blitz game. Both sides have only a king and opposite colour bishop with four minutes on the clocks. While it is possible to imagine a mate with these pieces, is it fair to continue this game? I offered a draw and my opponent refused, moving only his bishop and waiting for a flag fall! I asked a Brazilian arbiter and he said that this kind of draw does not exist in a blitz game. Even if I got a perpetual check, it does not mean that the game is drawn. I would have to play until the time expired. What is your opinion? Thanks a lot. **Adyr Garcia Ferreira Netto, (Brazil)**

Answer I completely agree with you that it is ridiculous and even unfair to continue the game in the position described by you. In principle a player has the possibility to apply the 50 move rule, but even this is against the spirit of the Laws of Chess. Were I the arbiter in that tournament, I would watch the continuation of the game and declare a draw if play continued with just bishop moves. Your opponent's behaviour brings the game of chess into disrepute.

Have a question for Geurt Gijssen? Perhaps he will respond to it in a future column. Send it to geurtgijssen@chesscafe.com. Please include your name and country of residence.

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