



## C O L U M N I S T S

# An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



## "Normal Means"

**Question** Dear Sir, I am the chief arbiter of the Corsican Masters (Anand, Topalov, Polgar, Bacrot, Adams, Shirov) and the chief arbiter in school tournaments with 2000 children. I read your interesting proposal about flag falls in rapid games:

*B9. If after a claim, as mentioned in Article B8, the arbiter notices that both flags are down, he shall declare the game drawn.*

However, I prefer the current rule, which enables me to intervene to declare the game drawn. In tournaments in which there are many beginners, it is impossible to apply this proposal for two reasons:

- In popular tournaments, it is impossible to limit the access of spectators, who will intervene.
- Imagine the games of children, who continue until checkmate. They never give up and they do not look at the clock. Wait and see.

The rules must be applicable to the masses, and rapid chess is very popular. Besides, I think the arbiter should intervene as soon as the first flag falls. Isn't this what you did for the tie-break in the Las Vegas world championship?

Last month you wrote, regarding Article B:

*In Las Vegas (and all World Championships with tiebreak games) it was explicitly mentioned in the regulations that the arbiter should call a flag fall. We had one arbiter for every game, which is an ideal situation.*

How can I do likewise, without being outlawed? And why do you want to change the rules in this way, whereas you do the opposite? Furthermore, "to wait until after a claim" is impossible to apply with beginners, because they do not look at the clock. Yours truly, **Stephane Escafre, (Corsica)**

**Answer** I suspect that you misunderstood me. You should read Article B9 in the context of Article B7 and B8:

*B7. The flag is considered to have fallen when a player has made a valid claim to that effect. The arbiter shall refrain from signalling a flag fall.*

*B8. To claim a win on time, the claimant must stop both clocks and notify the arbiter. For the claim to be successful the claimant's flag must remain up and his opponent's flag down after the clocks have been stopped.*

*B9. If both flags have fallen, the game is drawn.*

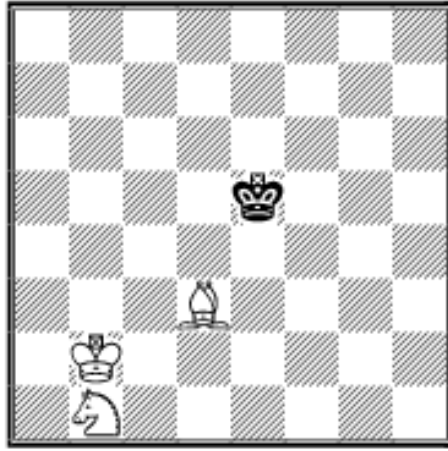
Article B7 very clearly states that the arbiter has to wait for a claim by the opponent; and Article B8 very clearly states how a player must act in case of a flag fall, and under which conditions the arbiter can award a win to the opponent. However, Article B8 does not describe what the arbiter's decision should be if all the requirements for the claim are not fulfilled; especially the situation when both flags are down. If you agree, then it is very logical to read Article B9 in connection with B8.

To be very precise, I do not propose changing the Laws for Rapid Chess. I am only trying to clarify the Laws as they are, in my opinion, written. In Las Vegas, I applied the rules established by the FIDE General Assembly, which said that the arbiter may call a flag fall.

Finally, as far as I know, the tournaments you arbitrate are not FIDE rated. In such cases, you can apply your own rules, provided they are announced beforehand. However, it can be awkward for the players to participate in tournaments that apply different rules.

**Question** Dear Geurt, Here is a game from *Revue Suisse des échecs*, in which the game would have finished on the 50th move if Black had not resigned. Do you think it should have been a draw?

**Alexandre Grillon (Echallens) – Roger Gloor (Schafstheim)**  
Swiss Championship Qualification Tournament, under 14, 2005



90...Kd4 91.Kc2 Ke3 92.Nd2 Kd4  
 93.Ne4 Kd5 94.Kc3 Ke5 95.Nd2 Kd5  
 96.Nf3 Kc5 97.Be4 Kd6 98.Kd4 Ke6  
 99.Nh4 Kf6 100.Bd5 Kg5 101.Ng2 Kf5  
 102.Ne3+ Kf6 103.Ke4 Kg5 104.Ke5  
 Kg6 105.Ng2 Kg5 106.Bf3 Kg6 107.Bg4  
 Kg5 108.Ne3 Kg6 109.Nd5 Kg5 110.Bf5  
 Kh4 111.Kf6 Kh5 112.Ne3 Kh6 113.Ng2  
 Kh5 114.Bh3 Kh6 115.Nf4 Kh7 116.Bg4  
 Kh6 117.Nh5 Kh7 118.Nf4 Kh6 119.Ne6  
 Kh7 120.Bf5+ Kh6 121.Ng5 Kh5  
 122.Ne4 Kh6 123.Nc5 Kh5 124.Nd7 Kh6

125.Be4 Kh5 Be4 Kh5 126.Ne5 Kh6 White has not made progress and the tension heightened, but from here White understood how to manage the situation. 127.Ng4+ Kh5 128.Kf5 Kh4 129.Kf4 Kh5 130.Bf5 Kh4 131.Bg6 Kh3 132.Ne3 Kh4 133.Ng2+ Kh3 134.Kf3 Kh2 135.Bf5 Kg1 136.Ne3 Kh2 137.Kf2 Kh1 138.Bg4 Kh2 139.Nf1+ 1-0 because of 139...Kh1 140.Bf3 mate.

Thank you in advance for your response. **Jean-Luc Grillon (Switzerland)**

**Answer** I assume that you are the proud father of the white player. First, let us review the 50 move rule (Article 9.3):

*The game is drawn, upon a correct claim by the player having the move, if*

*a. he writes his move on his scoresheet, and declares to the arbiter his intention to make this move which shall result in the last 50 moves having been made by each player without the movement of any pawn and without any capture, or*

*b. the last 50 consecutive moves have been made by each player without the movement of any pawn and without any capture.*

We have to consider Black's 90<sup>th</sup> move as the first move, when we apply Article 9.3, so 139...Kh1 is Black's 50<sup>th</sup> move. But Black cannot claim a draw because Article 9.3 says that *each player* has to make 50 moves without a pawn move or a capture. And White has only played 49 moves. If, on move 140, White plays any move other than Bf3, then Black can claim a draw based on Article 9.3b. Notice, that Black does not have to write his intended move, as in Article 9.3a. Even some professional players are not familiar with Article 9.3b. By the way, the [Online Endgame Database](#) shows the initial position as a loss for Black in 30 moves.

**Question** Dear Geurt, Can a player claim a win when he is not recording his

moves and his opponent resigns? Or can a player claim a win or a draw with an incomplete scoresheet? Are the players allowed to roam around the playing hall during a tournament and look at other games, since they don't have clocks or the clocks are setup on the top boards? Is this a violation of the player's conduct during a game? Can they be penalized by eviction, or loss of the game, or reduction of time when the chess clocks become available?

**James Neo (Philippines)**

**Answer** I'm not sure I fully understand your questions. Nevertheless, I will try to answer them as well as possible.

If a player has resigned and the scoresheets are signed, then there is no need to claim a win. The only occasion to claim a win is when the opponent has overstepped the time or has completed an illegal move for the third time in the same game. In these cases, it must be checked by the arbiter, and this is only possible when an updated scoresheet is available. The scoresheet can be updated after the player has claimed a win.

I understand that, when there are an insufficient number of clocks, the available clocks are given to the top boards. In the meantime, the other players watch the games in progress, while waiting for the clocks to become available. There is nothing wrong with this, except that the organizer has failed to fulfill his responsibilities. Unfortunately, it is impossible to penalize the organizer.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I would like your advice on a particular incident. The arbiter forgot to check that the clocks were properly set on Fischer mode, with 30 seconds increment per move. This caused some players to lose on time in winning positions; while in other games, players who were losing, refused to continue playing, claiming that the clock error caused them to blunder in time trouble, and asked to replay the game. In my opinion, since both players played under the same conditions, there are no grounds for a replay. The only rule that seems to address this situation is 6.11, but the players contend this only applies to a defective clock and not the arbiter's error in setting the clocks. I await your reply. Best Regards, **Patrick Li Ying (Mauritius)**

**Answer** The players are correct that an improper clock setting cannot be considered as a defect. There is only one Article that deals with incorrect clock settings, Article B4 of the Rules of Rapidplay:

*Once each player has completed three moves, no claim can be made regarding incorrect piece placement, orientation of the chessboard or clock setting.*

*In case of reverse king and queen placement castling with this king is not allowed.*

If a read this Article in combination with Article B2 of the Rules of Rapidplay, then it is clear that an incorrect clock setting, in normal games, can be claimed while the game is in progress:

*Play shall be governed by the FIDE Laws of Chess, except where they are overridden by the following Laws of Rapidplay,*

We probably have to add something about wrong clock settings to the Laws of Chess. In which case, Article 7 would be the appropriate place to do so.

**Question** Dear Geurt, in a recent tournament game, after the first dozen or so moves, my opponent and I noticed that his clock was running, even though it was my move. The clock button was up on his side, but he had clearly punched his clock after each move. At first we thought the clock was malfunctioning, but after turning our attention to the clock we noticed that the player to my right was actually punching my clock after making his move. I decided to let my opponent equalize his time with mine, since we had taken approximately equal times thinking. He agreed, and we continued playing. Was this correct, and what should the players to my right have done, since their times weren't correct either? Sincerely, **Marc Steinhebel (USA)**

**Answer** In such cases, you should always call the arbiter, who then will take appropriate measures. Nevertheless, you and your opponent acted correctly by splitting the clock times. However, the clock of the neighboring player also needed to be adjusted, as it was almost always running. If you had warned the arbiter, he would have had the opportunity to correct both clocks, as well as move your clock out of reach of your neighbor, or relocate you to another table.

**Question** Hi Geurt, we are about to host our seventh annual Malahide Millennium Tournament in Dublin and are going to use Fischer mode for the very first time in one of our sections. What happens if a player makes an illegal move and presses the clock, thus adding on time, and then his/her opponent realizes the mistake and requests him/her to take back the move? Does the clock need to be adjusted? Regards, **John Shearan (Ireland)**

**Answer** Let me refer to Article 7.4a:

*If during a game it is found that an illegal move, including failing to meet the requirements of the promotion of a pawn or capturing the opponent's king, has been completed, 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.*

I refer also to Article 6.14:

*If an irregularity occurs and/or the pieces have to be restored to a previous position, the arbiter shall use his best judgment to determine the times to be shown on the clocks. He shall also, if necessary, adjust the clock's move counter.*

These two Articles are very clear; the clock must be adjusted and this means that the increment must be deducted.

**Question** Dear Geurt, in reply to a reader's question about 10.2, with reference to cases where the arbiter postpones his decision, you wrote:

*Moreover, the position on the board is irrelevant. The only thing the arbiter has to do is observe whether the non-claiming player is trying to make progress.*

Whether or not this was true before the 2005 laws, it is certainly not the case now. The new Article 10.2b states:

*The arbiter shall declare the final result later in the game or after a flag has fallen. He shall declare the game drawn if he agrees that the final position cannot be won by normal means, or that the opponent was not making sufficient attempts to win by normal means.*

Whether the arbiter thinks the final position can or cannot be won by normal means is something to which the position on the board is clearly relevant. Furthermore, because the arbiter can declare the final result before a flag has fallen, the position on the board is always relevant once a claim has been made. As soon as the arbiter is sure the game cannot be won by normal means, the arbiter can stop it and declare a draw.

I was the person who proposed the change in wording that was accepted in the 2005 Laws, and the reason I did so was that if you only care whether the opponent is making progress or not, then the claimant might need to make repeat claims as the position changes (in a case where the opponent is trying very hard to win but has no real hope of doing so). I get the impression that few international arbiters have much experience using this rule, and they are unaware of how much trouble and confusion it causes beginning club-level arbiters trying to interpret it. There is a need for "normal means" to be better defined in the Laws. **Kevin Bonham (Australia)**

**Answer** You are completely correct that arbiters, who are involved in international tournaments, have little experience regarding Article 10. I myself have never had such a claim, simply because, in almost all international tournaments, Fischer mode is applied during the last period of a game. I also agree that the term "normal means" is quite unclear. Or perhaps referring to Article 9.6 is sufficient:

*The game is drawn when a position is reached from which a checkmate cannot occur by any possible series of legal moves, even with the most unskilled play. This immediately ends the game, provided that the move producing this position was legal.*

Finally, to be honest, I had the impression that the most important change in 2005 was that the arbiter does not have to wait for a flag fall to take action, which allows him to observe other games that are still in progress and need his attention.

**Useful tip:** Hello! This is not a question for your column, but a suggestion in regards to last month's [column](#). I always try to explain the correct procedure for the recording of moves like this: A player may *never at any point* have two of his own moves *unwritten* on his scoresheet. I think it is the easiest way to explain the rule. Best wishes, **Torbjörn Engström (Sweden)**

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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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