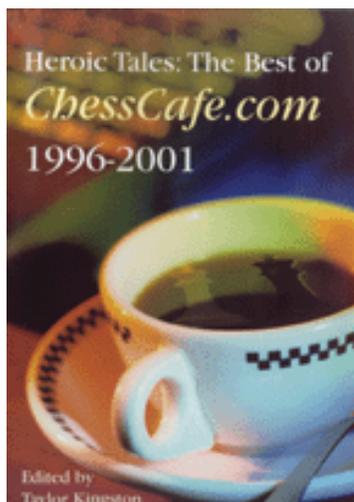




C O L U M N I S T S

## An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



## The 50-move Rule

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, Say each player has 5 minutes for the whole game, when Player A moves his king next to the king of Player B, who does not notice it and makes another move. What should be done if Player A then claims that his opponent made an illegal move, and how does the referee discern which player broke the rules? Furthermore, I would like to express my opinion that the 50-move rule should also involve, besides a pawn move and piece removal, mate on the 50th move; otherwise the rule is reduced to a 49-move rule. Thank you very much for your answer. Sincerely, **Jiri Bielavsky (Czech Republic)**

**Answer** First of all I refer to Article C3 of the Blitz rules:

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

One thing is very clear: If a player completed an illegal move and the opponent did not claim it, the opponent legitimized the illegal move. But, it is also clear that the position on the board is illegal. As far as I can see, the player who completed the first illegal move is now entitled to claim the illegality. I agree that it is not fair, but this is the consequence of Article C3. Personally, I prefer article B6 of the Rapid rules:

*An illegal move is completed once the opponent's clock has been started. The opponent is then entitled to claim that the player completed an illegal move before the claimant has made his move. Only after such a claim, shall the arbiter make a ruling. However, if both Kings are in check or the promotion of a pawn is not completed, the arbiter shall intervene, if possible.*

But Article B6 is not applicable in Blitz games.

Regarding your remark about the 50-move rule: only the player on move is entitled to claim a draw, but he is not forced to claim it. So if the 50<sup>th</sup> move produces checkmate – the checkmate stands.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, in a club blitz tournament (5 minutes per player) there was a dispute when Player A realized that his king was in check, only after he had touched his queen. Player B insisted that queen must be moved, as the piece was touched, and the king should be left in check. His argument was that taking the king in five minute blitz is not an illegal move, and the game is awarded to the person who captures the king. I was the arbiter, and I allowed Player A to move his king, but Player B still thinks that an injustice occurred. Please clarify. Thanks. **Nadeem Ahmad (Pakistan)**

**Answer** I have to refer to several Articles of the Laws of Chess, beginning with Article 1.2:

*The objective of each player is to place the opponent's king 'under attack' in such a way that the opponent has no legal move. The player who achieves this goal is said to have 'checkmated' the opponent's king and to have won the game. Leaving one's own king under attack, exposing one's own king to attack and also 'capturing' the opponent's king are not allowed. The opponent whose king has been checkmated has lost the game.*

The third sentence of this Article is very clear: capturing of the king is not allowed. And this Article applies to normal, rapid and blitz games. Now let's look at Article C3 of the Rules of Blitz Chess:

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

This Article is also very clear. A player may claim an illegal move after the opponent has completed the illegal move. So, after a player has made an illegal move and has stopped his own clock and started the opponent's. This means that Player A did not have to move his queen, unless there was a legal move with the queen that stopped the check.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, A boy, playing in the national championship, argued with me that the definition of castling is not clear. For example, the white king at e1 may go "towards" the white rook at h1 via Ke1-f1-g1 and Ke1-f2-g1. He argued that it might be possible to prevent White from castling

if the f2-square was under attack. He also commented that if the f1-square was unavailable for the king, he could travel via f2 and still castle! This was an interesting remark, as I've never heard nor read something similar before. What is your opinion? Best regards, **Jovan Petronic (Serbia and Montenegro)**

**Answer** First, let me refer to the definition of castling:

*This is a move of the king and either rook of the same colour on the same rank, counting as a single move of the king and executed as follows: the king is transferred from its original square two squares towards the rook, then that rook is transferred to the square the king has just crossed.*



Moreover, the diagrams in the Laws of Chess very clearly indicate that, after castling kingside, the white rook occupies the f1-square.



Well, if it were possible for the king to travel via e1-f2-g1, then the rook would occupy the f2-square, which would be the square crossed by the king. But, as you can see, the rook occupies f1, so this is apparently the square crossed by the king.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I am working on effective algorithms for creating 7-man endgame tablebases. Of course, you already know that many 5-6 man endings require more than 50 moves to produce a win. However, in 7-man endings, there are many endings that require 200 moves, and even 2 endings needing 300 moves. This seems to cast doubt on the 50-move rule, and because of this rule many interesting endings are “drawn.” What is your opinion? With best regards, **Yakov Konoval (Russia)**

**Answer** I had a discussion with John Roycroft when the 50-move rule was instituted, for he was quite annoyed by it. I tried to explain to him that it was only valid for over-the-board games and that it was not a problem if endgame studies applied different rules. Unfortunately, I could not convince Mr. Roycroft. I believe your investigations are worthwhile and help give us a clear insight into the material of endgames, but I also believe the 50-move rule should remain in effect in over-the-board play.

**Question** Dear Geurt, in a recent junior rapid tournament (15 minutes), a boy

promoted a pawn and picked up a queen, but then he saw that promoting to a queen would lose, so he chose a knight instead. His opponent objected and the arbiters agreed that the touch-move rule applied. Is this interpretation correct? Thank you in advance, **Pietro Rotelli (Italy)**

**Answer** If I understand you correctly, the boy picked up a queen from the table, kept it in his hand, and before he placed it on the promotion square, he changed his mind. If the queen did not touch the promotion square, then the boy had the right to promote to another piece. I refer to Article 4.4.d of the Laws of Chess:

*If a player promotes a pawn, the choice of the piece is finalised, when the piece has touched the square of promotion.*

**Question** Hi Geurt, I'm wondering about Article 12.2b:

*It is strictly forbidden to bring mobile phones or other electronic means of communication, not authorized by the arbiter, into the playing venue. If a player's mobile phone rings in the playing venue during play, that player shall lose the game. The score of the opponent shall be determined by the arbiter.*

Most arbiters I talk with are of the opinion that such an incident should be treated similar to Article 6.10 (loss on time); some will even go so far as to always give the opponent 1 point. My interpretation is that, before deciding the result, the arbiter should consider:

- The player who hasn't done anything wrong should not be punished,
- The arbiter should always have as little influence on the result as possible, and in this case the arbiter could end up deciding a tournament by blindly awarding 1 point.

This interpretation demands that the arbiter makes some rough evaluations. If we approach the problem from a statistical point of view, then a 5 % chance is often used as a level of significance. Using this as a guide:

- If Black's probability to win (given the position, material, time and rating) is more than 5 %, then I would give him the point.
- If Black has less than a 5 % chance of winning, but more than a 5 % chance of either drawing or winning, I would give him half a point, and
- If Black has less than 5 % chance of either winning or drawing I would give him zero.

When measuring the likelihood of the different results, it is obvious that playing strength will be an influence. This means that the same position could

be judged 0-0, if it was between masters, but 0-1 if between novices. It also means that if a much stronger player has the “lost” side when his opponent’s phone rings, then the game could be judged 0-1, in situations where it would be judged 0-½ or 0-0 between equal players. Time is also a resource that should be taken into consideration. If White is in serious time trouble and Black is not, then the possibility for Black to win or draw increases.

This interpretation of the rule demands stern judging from the arbiter, but with this approach the arbiter will not end up giving a tournament victory to someone just because his opponent’s phone rang during the game. What do you think? Yours sincerely, **Jacob Kaaber (Denmark)**

**Answer** I think the matter is simpler than you suggest. And, for this, I refer to Article 6.10:

*Except where Articles 5.1 or one of the Articles 5.2 (a), (b) and (c) apply, if a player does not complete the prescribed number of moves in the allotted time, the game is lost by the player. However, the game is drawn, if the position is such that the opponent cannot checkmate the player’s king by any possible series of legal moves, even with the most unskilled counterplay.*

This means that the opponent of the player whose mobile rang would normally receive 1 point, except when the position is such that the opponent cannot checkmate the player’s king by any possible series of legal moves, even with the most unskilled counterplay, in which case they would receive a half-point. An example of such a position is if the opponent only has a king.

Your remarks are useful, but not practical. It would be almost impossible for the arbiters to judge positions as you propose. Even if the arbiter could do so, I think it is quite unfair to decide the result of a game based on the probability of the outcome. A game can finish in many different ways, and different outcomes are always possible, even when one player appears to be winning.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I recently attended the US National High School Chess Championship, and my opponent used the MonRoi Personal Chess Manager System for recording games. It is my understanding that, according to the USCF’s rules, a player, when using the MonRoi, would be penalized for recording a move prior to its execution, because they can view the position on a separate board, with the candidate move having been played, and that they will be forced to use pen and paper notation if the offence is repeated. What do the Laws of Chess say regarding the use of these devices and are they allowed in FIDE events? Thanks, **Thomas Rehmeier (USA)**

**Answer** Let me refer to Article 8.1 of the Laws of Chess:

*In the course of play each player is required to record his own moves*

*and those of his opponent in the correct manner, move after move, as clearly and legibly as possible, in the algebraic notation (Appendix E), on the 'scoresheet' prescribed for the competition. It is forbidden to write the moves in advance, unless the player is claiming a draw according to Article 9.2 or 9.3.*

The MonRoi device has been approved by FIDE. I actually attended a tournament in which it was used, and it worked perfectly. A player first makes his move and then records it on the MonRoi "scoresheet." This scoresheet also has a board, and the actual position appears on this board. An operator then checks both scoresheets, and if they are identical, he accepts the move. The operator cannot check whether the move indicated on the scoresheet was the same as the move made on the board. Nevertheless, the fact that a player can write his move before making it on the chess board is a real danger and probably a weak point in the system. Another weak point is that the arbiter is unable to check all the scoresheets.

**Question** Hello Geurt, In a 5 minute blitz game, the player with white was moving his queen to checkmate his opponent, when White's flag fell, which was immediately claimed by his opponent. I was watching another game and did not see it, but both players agreed on what happened. Therefore, I decided that the black player had won, because White's flag had fallen before he completed his move. Later, someone suggested that the mating move should have taken precedence. What is the correct decision? Greetings, **Jan Krabbenbos (The Netherlands)**

**Answer** Congratulations, your decision was 100% correct. I refer to Article 6.8:

*During the game each player, having made his move on the chessboard, shall stop his own clock and start his opponent's clock. A player must always be allowed to stop his clock. His move is not considered to have been completed until he has done so, unless the move that was made ends the game. (See Articles 5.1, and 5.2)*

And Article 5.1:

*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.*

As you can see in Article 6.8, the move must be **made**. This means that the piece must be placed on the square and the hand must have released the piece on that square.

In general, what happens on the board should take precedence over what

happens off the board. But in the situation you described, there was not yet a checkmate. So, the flag fall stands.

Additionally, referring to Article 6.9:

*A flag is considered to have fallen when the arbiter observes the fact or when either player has made a valid claim to that effect.*

This is a rule for normal games. For rapid and blitz games we have the general rule:

*A flag is considered to have fallen when either player has made a valid claim to that effect.*

It often happens that a player checkmates his opponent's king, and the opponent then claims a flag fall. In such a case, the checkmate stands because the player's flag fell at the moment of the claim, and at that moment the game had already concluded by checkmate.

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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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