



C O L U M N I S T S

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



Illegal Moves

I have much to report about the Turin Olympiad and the FIDE Congress. There were some incidents, the time control was not completely clear to me, and we had a meeting of the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee, but all this will have to wait for a future column.

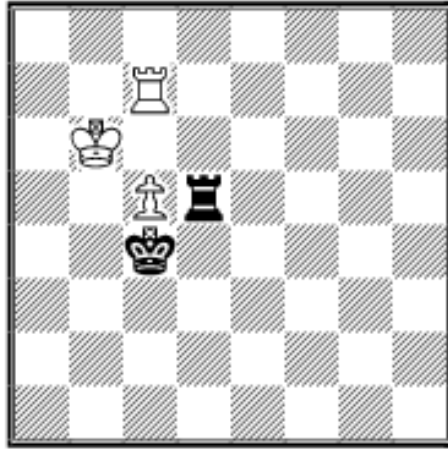
Question Geurt, I was recently reading the FIDE [regulations on adjournments](#) and I don't understand item (b) in Article A8:

Except in the cases mentioned in Article 6.10 and 9.6, the game is lost by a player whose recording of his sealed move

- (a) is ambiguous, or*
- (b) is recorded such that its true significance is impossible to establish, or*
- (c) is illegal.*

Parts (a) and (c) are obvious, but what does (b) mean? **Dave Richerby (Greece)**

Answer I understand the nature of your question because it is quite difficult to show examples not covered by (a) or (c). While adjournments are very rare in international tournaments, there are still many competitions on the club level with adjourned games. To illustrate Article A8, I would like to show an example from my own practice. In the game Ehlvest – Ljubojevic, Rotterdam 1989, White sealed Rf2-a2.



It was clear to me that White's intention was Rc7-h7. Ljubojevic agreed and then resigned immediately. Strangely enough, if Ehlvest had written only Ra2, it could have been considered under items (a), (b) or (c).

(a) It is ambiguous. Did he mean Ra7 or Rh7?

(b) The real significance is unclear.

(c) The move Rc7-a2 is illegal.

With regards to item (a), the best examples of an ambiguous move are the following situations: rooks on c1 and e1 and the player sealed Rd1; knights on g1 and e5 and the player sealed Nf3; a piece on e5 can be taken with a pawn on d4 or f4 and White seals xe5.

With regards to item (b), a situation could arise where it is impossible to decipher the "hieroglyphs" that indicate a player's sealed move. In my opinion, this is the only case not covered by items (a) or (c). However, such a situation has never occurred in my practice. GM Andrey Sokolov once wrote Ke5 as a sealed move in a position where both Ke5 and Ne5 were possible. After I opened the envelope, I played Ke5 and he corrected me by playing Ne5. The point is that in Russian notation knight-e5 is written as •e5 and king-e5 is written as ••e5. As the previous moves were also written in Cyrillic, I had no doubt that Ne5 was the sealed move.

Item (c) is the easiest case and does not require an explanation.

Question Hi Geurt, the following incident occurred at our club. The arbiter instructed the players' to start their opponent's clock if they were Black; and if White, they should make a move and then start the clock. One person, as White, simply started his opponent's clock without making a move. I was on the next board and told him to make a move. He then played 1 d4 and wrote this on his score sheet. Then, about 2-3 minutes later, he replaced the d-pawn on d2 and played 1 Nf3 instead. This was witnessed by several people. Well, his opponent duly arrived (8 minutes late) and the game simply continued. What *should* have happened? Thanks, **Chris Benson (New Zealand)**

Answer First, it is advisable for the arbiter himself to start the clocks of any white player whose opponent is absent. Then, after the clock has been started, the white player is entitled to make a move. Of course, it was incorrect for the white player to take back his move and, if the arbiter had seen it, he should force White to play 1 d4. Even if a witness informed the arbiter as to what

happened, his only recourse is to ask White about it, and if White denies any wrongdoing, then 1 Nf3 would stand.

Question 1 Dear Mr. Gijssen, in reference to the issue of castling via e1-f2-g1 in your May [column](#), I share the opinion that the rule's wording allows for it, in which case the rook would be moved to f2. I suggest the current wording be changed as follows: "This is a move of the king and either rook of the same colour along the player's first rank...etc."

Question 2 In one game, in which I was the arbiter, a player claimed a triple repetition, but there was no extra board nearby to verify the claim and I felt fortunate that the players then agreed a draw. My questions are:

- If the arbiter is certain that the claim is correct by reviewing the score sheet, does he still need to demonstrate it on a chessboard?
- Can the arbiter use a laptop or a Pocket PC to verify the gamescore?

The advantage of the latter is that the computer automatically recognizes triple repetitions, etc. Yours sincerely, **Naji Alradhi (UAE)**

Answer 1 As I mentioned in May, I disagree with this interpretation of the castling rule, but I do agree that we should change the wording in 2008, although the current text in combination with the pictures is correct. By the way, Eddy Price of South Africa made an excellent proposal: that the Chairman of the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee should biannually publish the proposals for changing the Laws of Chess.

Answer 2 It is correct to demonstrate a triple repetition on the scoresheet. Nevertheless, I prefer to replay the game, especially when weaker players are involved. To use a laptop or a Pocket PC is permitted.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen: Regarding Jiri Bielavsky's question from your May [column](#):

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?

In my opinion, Player B did not make an illegal move, although it comes from "an illegal position." Moreover, the arbiter cannot decide against a player who didn't claim the illegal move.

Claiming an illegal move is not mandatory in Rapid or Blitz, so nothing prevents one from playing "illegal positions." The point we have to discuss is,

“what is an illegal move?”

- An illegal move is a move that doesn't comply with Article 3.
- An illegal move is a move that doesn't comply with Articles 3 and 4.
- An illegal move is a move that doesn't comply with the Laws of Chess.

Consider this situation: in a Blitz tournament, Player A touches his knight, releases it on its original square, and then moves a rook. Player B stops the clocks, summons the arbiter and claims that Player A has made an illegal move. What do you think? What is an illegal move? Best regards, **Mikel Larreategi (Spain)**

Answer Since we are talking about Blitz games, we have to apply Article C3 and the essential part of this Article is:

Once the opponent has made his own move, an illegal move cannot be corrected

As I wrote in the May [column](#), by not claiming an illegal move, Player A accepted the move and made it legal. As to the definition of an illegal move, Article 4 has nothing to do with it. (See my final remark.)

I agree with you, that an illegal move is a move that does not comply with one of the parts of Article 3: *The moves of the pieces*. Let me give some easy examples: Ra1-b7, Qd1-c3, d2-d5, castling with an attacked king and so on.

The only other article that deals with illegal moves is Article 1.2:

Leaving one's own king under attack, exposing one's own king to attack and also 'capturing' the opponent's king are not allowed.

Now, let's apply this to a situation in a Blitz game where White moves 1 Ke4-e5 and Black replies 1...Kd7-d6. If White does not claim that Black completed an illegal move, the move is considered to be legal, but the position is illegal. So if White makes any move that still leaves his king under attack by the black king, Black has the right to claim an illegal move, because the white king is under attack.

Finally, regarding your last question, touching one piece and playing another is not considered an illegal move. It is a violation of Article 4. If we look to the Rules for Rapid and Blitz Chess, we see that this situation is mentioned in Article B5:

The arbiter shall make a ruling according to Article 4 (The act of moving pieces), only if requested to do so by one or both players.

Question During the Blitz Championship of my club, with only 1½ minutes left on each clock, I promoted a pawn to a queen (my second one on the board). I was going to place one of the previously captured rooks upside-down on the board to signify the new queen, but my opponent was holding the rooks in his hand. Therefore, I placed a bishop on the promotion square and said that it was a queen. I played my queen from b8-c7-a5-b5 and my opponent did not protest. Then I moved the new queen to b4 to check his king on e4, but he left his king in check and played another move. I then claimed a win, because he made an illegal move. At that moment, my opponent claimed that my new queen was only a bishop, and he claimed a draw. However, the arbiter declared the game won for me. What is your opinion? **Peter Verbeeren (Belgium)**

Answer Many things went wrong in this game. First, if there is not an extra queen available after the promotion of a pawn, the player should stop the clocks, summon the arbiter and request a queen. Since July 1, 2005, an upside-down rook is not considered to be a queen. Therefore, I agree that your new queen was only a bishop. You were lucky that your opponent did not claim a win because of your illegal move, when your “bishop” moved like a rook. His draw claim was incorrect, as was the arbiter’s decision to declare the game won for you. The only correct decision was to continue the game with a bishop on b4.

Question Recently, in the last round of the Burgdorf Open in Switzerland, my opponent left the playing hall and was observed reading or looking at his phone. The observer “grabbed” the phone, brought it to me, and explained the situation. I then claimed that my opponent should be punished for using an electronic device.

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.

The arbiter asked whether the telephone rang. And the answer was no. The arbiter then stated that a loss can only be adjudicated if the telephone rang. My objections were ignored and the arbiter advised that we should continue the game. Is it the “ringing” of the phone that is punished or the fact that the phone is switched on? Did the arbiter make the correct decision? I look forward to your answer, **Alexander Belezky (Ukraine)**

Answer One thing is very clear. If a player’s phone rings in the playing venue during play, that player will lose the game. Everything else is open to interpretation, and I believe many of these issues need to be re-examined. I always inform the players before each round to switch off their phone, which

implicitly allows them to bring phones to the playing venue. However, using the mobile during a game is never allowed. I would issue a warning for the first offence and tell the player that a loss will be declared upon a second offence.

Question Dear Geurt, In a game with 10 seconds added per move, White has 2 minutes and Black has 4 minutes remaining. White is not recording the game, but Black is and so has a record of the moves played. Both players are blitzing out moves, and Black plays a recently promoted queen from a1 to f1, incorrectly announces “check” to the white king on b6, and drops the queen off the board.

As Black withdraws his arm, he also knocks all of his queenside pieces from the board and then presses his clock. White restarts Black’s clock, but the players’ disagree as to the placement of the pieces. Soon White asks Black to stop the clocks and call the arbiter. At this point, Black checks his scoresheet and agrees to the position, but places his queen on d4, announces check and presses his clock. White played on with the queen in the new position, but what should have happened? Regards, **Anthony Pickering (Australia)**

Answer I will assume that this was a “normal” game. First, it is clear that Black displaced the pieces, in which case Article 7.3 should be applied:

If a player displaces one or more pieces, he shall re-establish the correct position on his own time. If necessary, either the player or his opponent shall stop the clocks and ask for the arbiter’s assistance. The arbiter may penalise the player who displaced the pieces

It seems that everything was done correctly, except that it is better to call the arbiter immediately, because with each press of the clock time was added.

Secondly, both players agreed to the position on the board, so play should be continued from that position, even if White was unaware that his opponent cheated him by placing the queen on d4 instead of f1. It is also unlikely that the arbiter was aware of this. Lastly, the arbiter should have punished Black for the displacement. For instance, White could have received 2 extra minutes and 2 minutes could have been subtracted from Black’s time.

Question Dear Mr Gijssen, the following incident occurred in a recent club league match, between two teams with mostly inexperienced players. The time control was 60 minutes for 30 moves, and after almost 20 moves both players had about 2 minutes left, with neither making much effort to reach the time control. In a lost position, Black left his king in check and pressed his clock. My team-mate then captured the king and pressed his clock. Then almost immediately, the opponent’s flag fell! As team captain, I agreed with the opposing captain that the score should be 1-0, since the first illegal move

was made by Black, and his flag fell anyway. Was this the correct decision? Luckily, we had already won the match anyway! Thanks, **Marcus Evans (UK)**

Answer I am afraid that I disagree with your ruling. Given that this was a normal game, we have to apply Article 7.3:

a. 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. Article 4.3 applies to the move replacing the illegal move. The game shall then continue from this reinstated position.

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.

Even though Black's flag fell, the game was still in progress, which means that the illegal moves were found during the game. Therefore, we have to go back to the position before the first illegal move and then decide which player should be punished. Do we punish both of them or just the one who made the first illegal? In my opinion, both should be punished, so each would receive 2 extra minutes, even though this does not look like a punishment.

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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