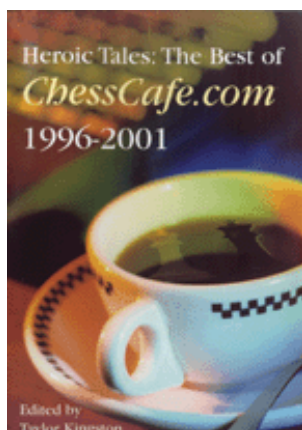




## COLUMNISTS

## An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



### Is Fischer Random the Solution?

**Question** Dear Geurt, I arbitrated my first tournament and had to make a particularly difficult ruling. I did not witness the incident, but both players agreed upon the facts: Player A picked up a piece to move it, when player B offered him a draw. Player A did not hear Player B and asked him to repeat himself. Player B repeated his offer, and Player A completed his move, upon which he noticed that he had put his piece *en prise*. He then claimed that Player B had distracted him with his draw offer, and I was called to make a decision.

As a draw offer can be made at any time, and the offer was reasonable (the position looked drawn) and did not appear to be made with the intention to distract (even though it had that effect), I ruled that the game should continue and Player A quickly lost.

While I think that Player B's behaviour was unsportsmanlike – I would have liked him to still agree to a draw despite being up a piece – I think that it was permissible. What do you think? Regards, **Jamie Roberts (Australia)**

**Answer** First, let's review the procedure for offering a draw from Article 9.1 of the Laws of Chess:

*A player wishing to offer a draw shall do so after having made a move on the chessboard and before stopping his clock and starting the opponent's clock. An offer at any other time during play is still valid, but Article 12.6 must be considered. No conditions can be attached to the offer. In both cases the offer cannot be withdrawn and remains valid until the opponent accepts it, rejects it orally, rejects it by touching a piece with the intention of moving or capturing it, or the game is concluded in some other way.*

And Article 12.6:

*It is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever. This includes unreasonable claims or unreasonable offers of a draw.*

I assume that Player B made his move and pressed his clock. Then Player A thought about his move, picked up a piece, and with the piece still in his hand, was offered a draw by Player B. Given this:

- The offer was not made according to Article 9.1, and
- The offer is still valid.

Still, the situation you described is quite exceptional. If Player A completed his move and pressed his clock, then by completing the move he would have rejected the draw offer. If he put the piece on the board, but did not press the clock, then he could still have accepted the draw offer.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I'd like clarification about a hypothetical case of cheating. Say my opponent is wearing a Polar watch that is designed to receive information about the wearer's heartbeat. Who is to guarantee that the receiver has not been manipulated to receive chess moves? Is there any difference between "just wearing the watch" and "using the watch as a receiver," i.e. using an electronic device? In other sports (such as running) these types of devices are allowed. But perhaps someone could use the device to control their reactions at the board. This all seems a bit much, but wasn't there just a discussion about how much coffee one is allowed during a game? Best regards, **Jürgen Feiler (Germany)**

**Answer** Article 12.2.b states:

*It is strictly forbidden to bring mobile phones or other electronic means of communication, not authorised by the arbiter, into the playing venue.*

I do not see any reason to forbid such a device as you describe, even though it is an electronic device, it is not

the means of communication as meant in Article 12.2. Certainly it might be possible to modify a watch to become a receiver, but at the moment banning watches is going too far. Still, I will not be surprised if it comes to that in the future. By the way, none of these measures will help to make the game of chess more popular.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I am the arbiter at our chess club's annual championship, in which the following situation arose during the first round: upon arriving at the board of the last game in progress, I noticed that both flags had fallen. Both players had completed their fortieth move and White was contemplating his forty-first. It was thus obvious that Black had not completed the prescribed forty moves in time and I declared the game won for White. Neither player had noticed anything.

Some days later it was brought to my attention that my decision was wrong, because it was unclear whose flag had fallen first. It was suggested that I should have let the game continue. I then checked the FIDE rules of chess and read Article 6.12:

*If both flags have fallen and it is impossible to establish which flag fell first then*

*a. the game shall continue if it happens in any period of the game except the last period.*

*b. the game is drawn if it happens in the period of a game, in which all the remaining moves must be completed.*

Here are my questions:

1. As both players had completed their fortieth move, the game was in the last period when I spotted the fallen flags. Thus, according to Article 6.12a, the game should have been declared drawn. However, rational thinking suggests that "part a" of the Article should refer to all but the last time scramble, when the game is not yet over and can still be decided by "chess means," while "part b" should refer to the very end of the last period and not the beginning of it. Am I being nit-picky, or is the Article ambiguously worded? How should I have decided?

2. Who is a potential source for establishing which flag fell first? Spectators, team-mates?

3. If I understand correctly, I have to intervene if I see that a flag has fallen. What is the reasoning behind this? If both players are happy to play on, why not let them? Many thanks, **Christof Kögler (Germany)**

**Answer** 1. I think we agree that the flag fall(s) took place at the end of the first period and that it is impossible to establish which flag fell first. In that case, you have to apply Article 6.12.a and continue the game.

Apparently a mechanical clock was being used, because it is easy to establish which flag fell first with digital clocks.

2. The most important source is the clock itself, as it is easy to check which flag fell first with electronic clocks. According 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.*

As you see, only the arbiter and the claimant are reliable witnesses, but if one player admits that his flag fell first, then the arbiter would award the point to the opponent. However, I believe it is incorrect to look for eyewitnesses.

3. There are arbiters who hold the opinion that they only have to act after a player requests it. But I disagree, so long as we have Article 13.1:

*The arbiter shall see that the Laws of Chess are strictly observed.*

The arbiter is obligated to act whenever a rule is violated, as is the situation with a flag fall.

**Question** Dear Mr Gijssen, I was an early proponent of "Fischer Random" chess, but I have had second thoughts since learning that certain positions can lead to a "forced" loss at the very outset; for example, one of the Svidler – Aronian games if I am not mistaken. If this variant is ever officially sanctioned, then it would be best to use only a few initial positions and not all 960. Another suggestion that could lead to new opening strategies is to allow a king to castle when it is in check? After all, if a rook is under attack it can still castle. I believe this could "revolutionize" the game. Why not give it a try? All the best, **Joselito P. Marcos (Philippines)**

**Answer** It is not up to me to decide about changing the rules for how the pieces move. Yet, there was a time when games were played with mechanical clocks, adjournments were common, time increments were unheard

of, and the initial positions were all the same.

Bronstein, Fischer and others before them have had new ideas, but it took a long time for them to be accepted. For instance, I remember that the players in the 1987 World Blitz Championship in Brussels did not want to use electronic clocks. Yet, in 1992 Fischer and Spassky played a match with electronic clocks, as did Karpov and Kamsky in 1996. It wasn't until 1997 that adjournments were discontinued during the FIDE world championships.

I suppose it is only a matter of time until FIDE officially sanctions new initial positions. Recently I read an interesting article by Eric van Reem in the *ICGA Journal*. I quote:

*Disappointingly, modern chess has turned out to be a boring game due to the simple fact that the player would win, not because he is the stronger or more talented player, but because he has prepared more or, in a more accurate sense, and he has memorized more than his opponent. This is also often the case in computer-chess tournaments: the best book wins the prize, not the best program*

**Question** Hello, In a normal time control game one player made an illegal move with his king during time trouble. The opponent made a claim and the arbiter reset the game to the position prior to this move. The player then moved a different piece, but no one noticed this until many moves later. The opponent then made another claim, saying that the king had to be moved (which would have lead to a loss), but the arbiter refused and the game ended in a draw. Best Regards, **Gerd Lorscheid (Germany)**

**Answer** For my answer I refer to Article 4.7:

*A player forfeits his right to a claim against his opponent's violation of Article 4.3 or 4.4 once he deliberately touches a piece.*

Such is the case here. This means that the arbiter made the correct decision not to reset the position on the second claim; however, he made a mistake in letting the player move a piece other than the king after the first claim.

**Question** Dear Geurt, I have two questions regarding Appendix D of the Laws of Chess, since such claims are fairly common in amateur leagues:

(a) It is not stated that the claimant must be on move when making a claim, unlike Article 10.2. Given this omission, would you accept a claim if the claimant had just completed his move? (If so, a claim must also state which player is to move.)

(b) The claimant is not required to note the clock times in the claim: this suggests that clock times are immaterial in deciding a claim? Many thanks for your excellent column. Regards, **Trevor Davies (Scotland)**

**Answer** Appendix D states:

*Where games are played as in Article 10, a player may claim a draw when he has less than two minutes left on his clock and before his flag falls. This concludes the game.*

Article 10 states:

*If the player, having the move, has less than two minutes left on his clock, he may claim a draw before his flag falls. He shall stop the clocks and summon the arbiter.*

In my opinion, it is clear that the requirements of Article 10 must be fulfilled. This means that the claimant must be on move and have less than two minutes remaining.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, At a recent tournament a player (as black) was forfeited for a ringing mobile phone. He readily accepted the decision, but the strange thing is that his opponent (as white) was not yet in the playing hall when the incident occurred, because the game had only just begun. So should the game be FIDE-rated or not? Best regards, **Björn Thorfinnsson (Iceland)**

**Answer** This topic came up for discussion in a meeting of the Rules Committee a few years ago in which FIDE Honorary President Mr. Campomanes was present. He voiced the opinion that it was a useless discussion and we went on to the next point of the agenda.

Still, let's try to find an answer. The Rating Regulations state:

## 5.0 Unplayed games

### 5.1 Whether these occur because of forfeiture or any other reason, they are not counted.

Unfortunately, the definition of an “unplayed game” is unclear. One of the questions we briefly discussed in that meeting was: when does a game start? Several answers are possible:

- the game starts when the arbiter starts the clock or gives the order to start it.
- the game starts when both players are present at the chess board.
- the game starts when white has made or completed his first move.

The next question is: which games will be rated?

In my opinion the game begins when the arbiter starts the clock or gives the order to start it, but this does not mean that the game will be rated. A game is forfeited when at least one player is not present within one hour after the start of the game and such games are not rated.

If both players are present, it is irrelevant whether White makes a move or not. If White thought about his first move until his flag fell, then the game should be rated in my opinion. But I am not sure that the Rating Commission would agree.

To be honest, I am uncertain as to what the correct answer to your question is. I was inclined to say that the game should be rated because both players were present. It does not matter that a move was not made, nor is it relevant that White was absent when the phone rang. By the way, if White had shown up after one hour had elapsed, the result would be 0-0. The most puzzling aspect is the definition of “unplayed game” and the meaning of “any other reason.”

**Question** Dear Mr Gijssen, When promoting, can I place a queen on the last rank, release it and then remove the pawn from the seventh rank? Is this considered illegal? When capturing, is there a penalty for removing the opponent's piece with one hand while replacing it with your own piece with the other hand? Best regards,  
**Rosario Aráoz (Uruguay)**

**Answer** 1. The correct way to promote a pawn is:

- to move the pawn to the last rank.
- to remove the pawn from the square.
- to place the new piece on that square.

But I do not think that anyone would protest if someone removed the pawn from the seventh rank and placed a new piece on the last rank. In fact, that is how electronic boards are programmed.

2. One would expect that the answer to your question could be found in Article 4 of the Laws of Chess: “The act of moving the pieces,” but this is not the case. So for this I refer to Article 6.8.b:

*A player must stop his clock with the same hand as that with which he made his move.*

Therefore, a player may use only one hand to move the pieces. However, if I saw a player act as you described, I would not penalize him, but just discretely inform him he must use one hand.

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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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