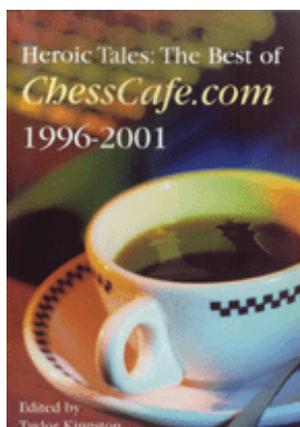




## COLUMNISTS

## An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



## What are the Correct Laws of Chess?

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, During the second round of a recent tournament the arbiter gave a verbal warning to my adversary for leaving the playing venue without permission, because my opponent retired to his hotel room for quite some time shortly after the start of the game. Unfortunately, in this case Articles 12.5 and 13.4.a of the Laws of Chess only provides for a simple “warning.”

It is illogical to forbid “mobile phones or other electronic means of communications,” but then allow one to visit their hotel room. Shouldn’t the laws be changed so that the game is declared lost for the player leaving the playing venue in such a manner? Thank you for your kind attention. Yours faithfully, **Sergio Faccia (Italy)**

**Answer** It is correct to refer to Articles 12.5 and 13.4 of the Laws of Chess. Article 12.5 states:

*Players are not allowed to leave the ‘playing venue’ without permission from the arbiter. The playing venue is defined as the playing area, rest rooms, refreshment area, area set aside for smoking and other places as designated by the arbiter.*

*The player having the move is not allowed to leave the playing area without permission of the arbiter.*

Article 13.3 states that the arbiter can impose a penalty and Article 13.4 outlines his choices:

*13.3 The arbiter shall observe the games, especially when the players are short of time, enforce decisions he has made and impose penalties on players where appropriate.*

*13.4 The arbiter can apply one or more of the following penalties:*

- a. warning,
- b. increasing the remaining time of the opponent,
- c. reducing the remaining time of the offending player,
- d. declaring the game to be lost,
- e. reducing the points scored in a game by the offending party,
- f. increasing the points scored in a game by the opponent to the maximum available for that game,
- g. expulsion from the event.

Since no penalty is specified, it is at the discretion of the arbiter to impose one. Therefore, it is not necessary to change the Laws of Chess on this matter.

**Question** A tournament was being played with a time limit of 1 hour and 20 minutes with a 30 second increment. Before the games began, the tournament director explained that with this time limit, players must record every move no matter how short of time they become.

I observed one game where a player had stopped recording his moves, and his opponent either hadn’t noticed or was too polite to point it out. The tournament director was not around. What should an observer do in this situation? Remind the player to record his moves or keep quiet? **Geoff Davies (New Zealand)**

**Answer** First of all, spectators should not interfere with the game. I refer to Article 13.7a:

*Spectators and players in other games are not to speak about or otherwise interfere in a game. If necessary, the arbiter may expel offenders from the playing venue.*

However, an observer is allowed to inform the arbiter of his observation, and he should do it discretely. It is then up to the arbiter to take action.

**Question** In the last round of a recent tournament my friend was scheduled to play against the tournament leader. The start time for the round was posted as ASAP (as soon as possible), so my friend left the tournament hall to eat lunch. He returned at 3:30 (the same time that the game began the previous day), only to discover that he had lost on time because one hour had passed since the clocks were started. It seems to me that "ASAP" is unreasonably vague and that a clear start time should be posted, but this was not done. Is there a FIDE rule that covers this issue? Thank you, **Anthony Hann (USA)**

**Answer** Article 3.c. (3) of the Tournament Regulations states:

*The invitation should be as complete as possible, at the earliest opportunity, stating clearly the expected conditions and giving all details, which may be of use to the player. The following should be included in the invitation letter and/or brochure which should also be posted on the FIDE website:*

*The tournament schedule: dates, times of play and places of: arrival, the opening ceremony, drawing of lots, play, special events, the closing ceremony, departure.*

Furthermore, it is written in Article 11 of the same regulations:

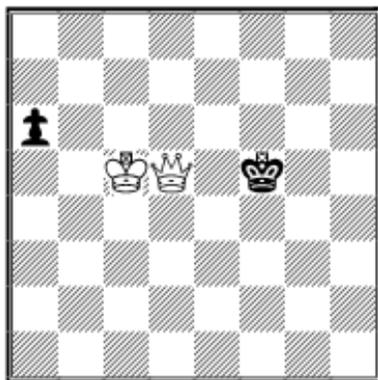
*(a) All games must be played in the playing area at the times specified in advance by the organizers, unless otherwise decided by the chief arbiter.*

*(c) The chief arbiter shall announce the time for starting and for adjourning games.*

It seems clear that the starting times have to be announced in advance, as do any changes made by the chief arbiter. Nevertheless, there are situations where the exact starting time of the round cannot be announced, and most often this has to do with the last round of a tournament. For instance, when there are more rounds on one day and it is not clear as to when a previous round will be finished.

As an arbiter, I have encountered this situation several times. I would announce that while I do not know the exact starting time of the round, it would not start before a certain hour. This way everyone had some frame of reference to go by. The organizers of your tournament may have handled the situation poorly, but they did not do anything wrong. Everyone was given notice that the round would begin as soon as possible. So the penalty is correct in my opinion.

**Question** Geurt, A question regarding the application of rule 10.2.



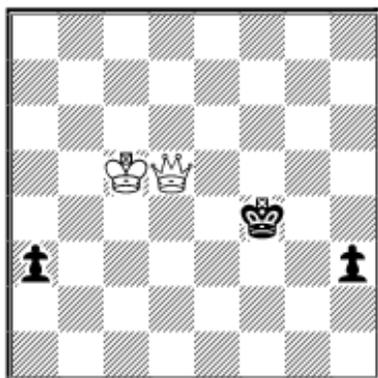
This position is winning for White. With 3 seconds left White calls the arbiter and claims a draw on the grounds that he does not have time to checkmate Black. How would you decide? **Wim Slabbert, (South Africa)**

**Answer** I would have to refuse the claim, because only the player who has the move can claim a draw based on Article 10.2.

But let's modify the position somewhat: put the black king on f6, with white to move. With 3 seconds on the clock, White can simply make a draw by playing Kb6 and capturing the black pawn on the next move. I think 3 seconds is sufficient for this action. And once the black pawn is captured, it is a draw, even if White's flag falls, because Black has no

mating material.

Still, let's make the position a bit more complicated:



White to move, with 3 seconds left claims a draw. White is completely winning, but there is no time to take two pawns within 3 seconds. Some arbiters would agree to the draw and others would prefer to wait before making a decision. I would wait for White's next move, and if he played Qa2, Kb4, Qh1 or something similar, I would agree.

**Question** Dear Mr Gijssen, In your column [Unobserved Illegal Moves](#), you wrote:

*As you can see, an arbiter can intervene in some specific situations. If the arbiter does not intervene, then White's king cannot be checkmated*



and he can only lose by overstepping the time limit.

How can White lose on time? Black's inability to mate the white king also prevents him from winning on time. Thank you, **Radboud de Roos (The Netherlands)**

**Answer** Here was the situation: in a Blitz game, Black had captured the white king, and an absent king cannot be checkmated. So when White runs out of time, Black claims a win.

However, upon reflection, I came to the conclusion that you are right. I refer to Article C3 of the Blitz rules:

*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.*

Because of the fact that the (absent) king cannot be checkmated by any series of legal moves, the game is a draw. By the way, it is also a draw by applying 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.*

**Question** I observed a game where the losing player had less than five minutes and wasn't recording his moves. The other player also stopped recording their moves. After about seven moves, the losing player correctly informed his opponent that he needed to record the moves and reconstruct his scoresheet. The opponent couldn't remember the moves, so the first player offered a draw. The winning player then stood up and forfeited the game. What should have happened? What is the penalty for not being able to record the moves? Thanks.

**Mark Newman (United Kingdom)**

**Answer** When a player observes that his opponent has violated a rule, he should go to the arbiter and not approach the opponent directly. Certainly the player who has more than 5 minutes left on his clock has to record the moves. So let me try to answer your questions.

First, the opponent had to do his utmost to find the missing moves. In my opinion he can even use another board to do so, but his clock should be running. If it is impossible to reconstruct the game, then I would deduct 1 or 2 minutes from the offending opponent's time and compensate the player with the same amount. I understand that in this situation it is almost impossible to determine whether one of the players overstepped the time, but then Article 8.6 of the Laws of Chess becomes applicable:

*If the scoresheets cannot be brought up to date showing that a player has overstepped the allotted time, the next move made shall be considered as the first of the following time period, unless there is evidence that more moves have been made.*

By the way, the opponent can also utilize a little trick. He attempts to reconstruct his scoresheet until he also has less than 5 minutes left on the clock, at which point he is no longer obligated to record the moves.

Personally, I think that having a situation where the players are playing under different conditions is ridiculous. Either they should both have to record all the moves until the very end or, at the moment when one player has less than 5 minutes, neither player has to record the moves. I have proposed this many times, but the majority of the Rules Committee disagreed with me.

**Question** My mobile phone makes a sound and lights up when the battery is low. Does this mean a player loses if it happens during play? The phone is not ringing. **Stewart Reuben (England)**

**Answer** Let me refer to Article 12.2b:

*It is strictly forbidden to bring mobile phones or other electronic means of communication, not authorised 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.*

In my opinion, only mobiles that are switched off are allowed in the playing hall. So the arbiter should announce at the start of the round to switch off the mobile phones. During the 2006 Turin Olympiad, I also

added: "and the built in alarm." If the phone is off, then it should not make a sound.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, while browsing the FIDE website I noticed that many articles of the Laws of Chess have been altered. Specifically:

- Article 1.3 now reads as article 1.2 used to.
- In Article 3.7d there is new text stating that *this move must be made in the event that no other legal move is possible.* (This seems obvious.)
- Articles 4.6 and 4.7 have been exchanged.  
Article 4.7.1 should be Article 4.7, because there is no Article 4.7.
- There is new wording in Article 4.3d: *If a player touched more than one piece simultaneously without a note for J'adoube, and it wasn't known what piece he touched first, then he must move one of these touched pieces. I.e. he is given the choice to choose which of them he wants to move.*  
There is new wording in Article 7.1a: *If during a game it is found by the arbiter or one of the players that the initial position of the pieces was incorrect, the game shall be cancelled and a new game played.*
- There is new wording in Article 7.4a: *If during a game it is found by the arbiter or one of the players that an illegal move, including not exchanging a pawn who reached the last rank for a queen rook, bishop or knight and capturing the opponent's king, has been completed, the position immediately before the irregularity shall be reinstated.* This is to be compared to *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.*
- Finally, we have a new Article 7.4b: *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. **If the opponent cannot checkmate the player by any possible series of legal moves even with the most unskilled counterplay, the arbiter shall decide the result of the game.***

There are many changes, and the Laws of Chess are not supposed to be modified until July 1, 2009. Except for Article 7, the changes are minor, but I would like to know if these changes are official and if the versions of the Laws of Chess published in other languages need to be adjusted. **Pierre Dénommée (Canada)**

**Answer** It is unclear who is responsible for the changes, which were not decided during the 2004 Congress in Calvia or the Presidential Board meeting in 2005. I found that there is more than one version of the Laws of Chess posted on the FIDE website, so I have sent them the version I have, which I am absolutely certain is correct. I was recently told that some federations have already published incorrect versions.

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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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