



COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



IA Willi Knebel (1936 - 2007)

International Arbiter Willi Knebel, from Germany, passed away on July 29, 2007. I first met him in 1992, when we worked at the Youth World Championships in Duisburg, Germany. I was impressed by his knowledge of the Laws of Chess, and he had a weekly newspaper chess column for a very long time. He later had an Internet column in which he discussed many items of the Laws of Chess, and in Germany he was called “der Regelpabst” (The Pope of the Laws). He was always very enthusiastic when we met at seminars, but more important for me was his friendship and his friendly demeanor. I was not surprised that many chess players attended his memorial service. May he rest in peace.

Question Dear Geurt, you are wrong to [write](#), “If the phone is off, then it should not make a sound.” My phone was completely switched off and had been for some days. I was in bed, but not yet quite asleep, when the phone suddenly made a sound and the light came on. After a few moments it had switched itself off, but then it did this again. Obviously, it is a warning that the battery is nearly run down.

Thus, the Law actually states that the player loses if the phone *rings*. In events with which I am associated, there is a statement that the player will lose if the phone makes a sound. I note you had a similar rule for the 2006 Olympiads. But this is an interpretation, not the Law as stated. That is why I asked the question. **Stewart Reuben (UK)**

Question Regarding Mr. Reuben’s mobile phone [question](#), you are wrong! The built-in alarm (e.g. for a wake-up call, etc.) does work regardless of whether the phone is switched on or not. Best regards, **Sotiris Logothetis (Greece)**

Answer Apparently, I was misinformed. Mobiles can make some sound when switched off, although my own mobile did not when I tested it. Nevertheless, let me refer to Article 12.2 b:

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.

I would also like to mention that only mobiles authorized by the arbiter are allowed in the playing hall. When I announced in Turin that the built-in alarm must also be switched off, it was not an interpretation of this Article. I simply applied the first sentence of this Article. It meant I was not allowing mobiles in the playing hall that could not be completely turned off.

Yet, more and more, I am inclined to forbid all mobiles in the playing hall. There are too many ways for players to use their mobiles surreptitiously. By the way, it is odd that all the discussions regarding Article 12.2.b are about mobile phones, because the Article also refers to other electronic means of communication.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, what is the best method for seeding players in a junior tournament when there is no ranking system available? Can the arbiters seed the players according to what they know about them? Or suppose the players are from different parts of the country, and some areas are known to be better than others, can the arbiters seed the players according to their vicinities. **Mano (Sri Lanka)**

Answer Any kind of seeding can be used, so long as it is announced in advance. But it can be risky, as each arbiter probably has his own opinion about the strength of certain players. To seed the players according to residency is quite uncommon. My preferred system, in tournaments where the strength of the players is unknown, is to assign the pairing numbers at random. The criterion for the pairings is Buchholz or Sonneborn-Berger points. This system is very objective.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, suppose there is a flag fall and no one notices it for a prolonged time. Then if the player whose flag is down claims that his opponent completed an illegal move, as you explained in a previous

notebook, the claimant receives two extra minutes and the game continues.

But what happens if those two extra minutes do not compensate for the time elapsed by that player since the flag fall? Could the spirit of Article 7.4.b be interpreted in the sense that the claimant should be able to continue the game with at least two minutes of time? Thanks in advance. **Daniel Sottile (Argentina)**

Answer Whether my answer was unclear or whether you misunderstood me, let refer to Articles 7.4.b and 6.14:

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.

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.

As you can see, the opponent of the player who made an illegal move not only receives additional thinking time, but the clocks must also be adjusted. This means that the arbiter has to use his best judgment when changing the clock times. In this case, it is reasonable that the remaining time of the opponent is at least two minutes.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, The following incident occurred at the 2007 Thailand Open Chess Championship. The chief arbiter announced before the tournament started that if a player's mobile phone rings, he would lose the game. While I was in the playing hall, I heard a ringing sound. I was not sure at first if the sound was from a spectator's or a player's mobile. No one summoned the arbiter, but Player A stood up, so I approached. He complained about turning off his phone and made his resignation. I then asked both players to tell me what the final position was before the phone rang. I found the position favored Player A. However, our chief arbiter decided to give one point to Player B. After the game, we discussed the final sentence of Article 12.2 b:

The score of the opponent shall be determined by the arbiter.

It's obvious that if Player B's position was better or approximately equal, we would give him a full one point without hesitation. However, my question is when to award a half point? What would you decide in the following situations?

- If Player B was in a slightly worse position.
- If Player B was in a bad position. Let's say one piece down.
- If Player B was in a horrible situation, say, two rooks or a queen down without compensation.
- If Player B was going to be checkmated in one or two moves.
- Would your decision be different in a beginners' tournament?

In our case, Player A apparently didn't clearly understand Article 12.2 b, and he resigned immediately after his phone rang. Was his resignation valid? Though it's not mentioned in the FIDE laws of chess, in my opinion, a player who loses his game by the laws loses the right to resign as well. The game ended by Article 12.2 b, before his resignation, and it was up to the arbiters to determine the score for Player B. Do you agree? Best regards, **Teerapong Tovirat (Bangkok Thailand)**

Answer 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.

The second sentence is essential. Article 6.10 refers to overstepping the time limit. In case of a ringing mobile the arbiter should act correspondingly and give Player B a full point, but if Player B only had a king, he should only receive half a point. It means the score ½-0 or 0-½ is possible. As matter of fact, I recently received questions about such results, because one must know a particular trick to implement them in Swissmaster 5. In my opinion these results need to be available as options in the Swiss pairing programs.

In my opinion, the procedure regarding ringing mobiles is well-known in the chess world. Therefore, there is no reason to act differently at a beginners' tournament. Nevertheless, at the start of each round, it is advisable for the arbiter to inform the players about the consequences of a ringing phone.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, The following incident recently occurred in a tournament in Russia. Player A proposed a draw according to the Laws of Chess, after which Player B's mobile phone rang. The arbiter gave zero points to Player B and a half point to Player A. But this seems wrong, because the draw offer was not accepted. So in this situation the game ended "in another way." In a similar situation: if Player A proposed a draw, pressed the clock, and then Player B's flag fell, I would give the result as 1-0. What is your opinion? Best regards, **Igor Vereshchagin (Russia)**

Answer I refer to Article 9.1a:

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.

You are correct. The game to which you refer has ended "in some other way." Therefore, the player whose phone rang should receive zero points and his opponent one point, unless it is the same situation as mentioned in Mr. Teerapong Tovirat's question.

Question Dear Geurt, in the regulations: C.04.1. Swiss System Based on Rating, Article A2 of the FIDE Handbook, as published on the FIDE website, it is written:

For pairing purposes only, the players are ranked in order of, respectively
a. score
b. rating
c. FIDE-title (IGM-WGM-IM-WIM-FM-WFM-no title)
d. alphabetically (unless it has been previously stated that this criterion has been replaced by another one)

What is the correct order using Article A.2.c? Best regards, **Viron Tsorbatzoglou (Greece)**

Answer The correct order is GM – IM – WGM – WIM – FM – CM – WFM – WCM. These are the possible titles.

For the titles GM, IM, WGM and WIM, a player must achieve certain Tournament Performance Ratings (TPR). These are: GM: 2601, IM: 2451, WGM: 2401, WIM: 2251.

For the titles FM, CM, WFM and WCM a player has to achieve a certain FIDE rating based on at least thirty games. These are: FM: 2300, CM: 2200, WFM: 2100 and WCM: 2000. The last two titles are relatively new and mean Candidate Master and Woman Candidate Master.

Apparently, FIDE considers tournament achievements as more important than an achieved rating. In my opinion, this is correct.

Question Dear Geurt, What would be the outcome of the following scenario? It is a normal FIDE rated tournament. Player A (as white) starts his clock at the appointed time and makes his first move. Then his mobile phone rings, which is heard by the arbiter. However, his opponent (Player B) has not yet appeared at the board. Which of these three possibilities is correct?

- Player A automatically loses the game irrespective of whether his opponent turns up before the designated default time.
- Player A only loses the game if Player B arrives before the designated default time.
- Player A suffers no penalty, since Player B has not yet appeared for the start of the game.

Charles Kennaugh England (UK)

Answer The first question is: Did the game start? The answer is: Yes. Then it is clear that Player A receives zero points. The only question is whether the game will be rated. If his opponent shows up before the

designated default time, the game is treated as a normal game. Player B receives one point, the result is 0-1, and the game will be rated. If Player B shows up after the designated default time, he loses by forfeit and the result of the game will be “- -” and the game will not be rated.

Question Dear Geurt, in a recent local tournament my opponent blatantly violated the touch-move rule. Since he refused to cooperate, I reported the incident to the arbiter. She asked for a witness and the player sitting next to our table confirmed my version. What “status” do witnesses have in a situation like this? Incidentally, the arbiter ruled to just play on with the “illegal” move. Why she asked for a witness in the first place is beyond me.
Gernot Isola (Austria)

Answer Your question is very interesting and the answer is unclear at the moment. There is nothing written in the Laws of Chess about witnesses. In such cases I apply the Preface of the Laws of Chess:

The Laws of Chess cannot cover all possible situations that may arise during a game, nor can they regulate all administrative questions. Where cases are not precisely regulated by an Article of the Laws, it should be possible to reach a correct decision by studying analogous situations, which are discussed in the Laws. The Laws assume that arbiters have the necessary competence, sound judgment and absolute objectivity. Too detailed a rule might deprive the arbiter of his freedom of judgment and thus prevent him from finding the solution to a problem dictated by fairness, logic and special factors.

Another player recently directed the same question to FIDE. As Chairman of the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee, I sent the question to the FIDE office and I requested them to forward it to the members of the Committee. As I am waiting for the opinion of my colleagues, I hope you will understand that it is inappropriate to publish my opinion on that matter at this point.

Question Dear Sir, a threefold repetition occurred in one of my last games. I told my opponent that the game was drawn, but he refused it. Then I summoned the arbiter, who said that he did not know the threefold repetition rule well enough, and he summoned a second arbiter. She told me she was not sure if it was a draw and asked me to continue the game. I then lost my temper and the game. At home later, I entered the game in Fritz 10, which confirmed the repetition. I returned to the tournament to see the chief arbiter and he told me that I was correct, but that he could not do anything because I had signed the scoresheet. What is your opinion? With regards,
Giannopoulos John (Greece)

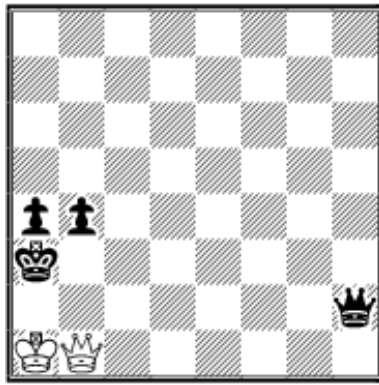
Answer To begin with, you did not follow the proper procedure. When your next move is about to produce a threefold repetition, you must act as follows:

- 1. write down the intended move,
- 2. stop the clocks,
- 3. summon the arbiter.

If it was your opponent’s move that produced the threefold repetition, then begin with point two.

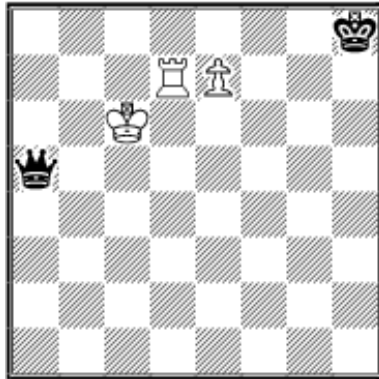
When you summoned the arbiter, you could have demonstrated the repetition by playing over the game. Why didn’t you? Instead, you continued the game and lost. By signing the scoresheets, you lost the right to appeal. Nevertheless, if it was just a game in your club, and not a FIDE rated game, you should speak with the arbiters and your opponent. After all, it was their lack of knowledge about the Laws that more or less forced you to continue the game. Speak with them and show them my answer, and perhaps a reasonable solution is possible.

I received two letters regarding my [answer](#) about **Matt vor Klappe**:



Black plays 1...Qa2ch and White's flag falls.

It is, of course, a draw, as White's only legal move is 2 Qxa2++, which renders him incapable of losing.



White to move. White plays 1 e8, picks up a queen, touches it to the square, but before he releases the queen, White's flag falls. Is it mate or did White lose on time? The move 1 e8Q cannot be changed.

I refer to Article 4.4d:

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

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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