



COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook
Geurt Gijssen



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Revising the Laws of Chess

Unfortunately, I had an accident during the Tal Memorial in Moscow and ended up being hospitalized for about two weeks, both there and back home in Nijmegen. Following an operation, I am recovering and I hope to arbitrate the Aeroflot Open in Moscow from February 13-23, 2008. I received many get well wishes from players, journalists, organizers and arbiters, and it was very encouraging. I would like to thank everyone for their support.

In the meantime there was a meeting of the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee in Turkey. I will report on it in an upcoming column, although I was not present. The meeting initiated the process for revising the Laws of Chess during the FIDE Congress in Dresden, November 2008. I have already prepared a list of proposed changes and I sincerely hope that [ChessCafe.com](#) readers will support these revisions to the same extent as they have in the past. As a matter of fact, the majority of the proposed changes came from [ChessCafe.com](#) readers.

Question Dear Geurt, I was one of the arbiters at a Rapid tournament where the following incident occurred. I was away, but another arbiter handled the situation, since he was present at that particular game. Player A had 1 minute and 28 seconds and Player B had 1 minute and 48 seconds. Player A touched a piece, but moved another one and started his opponent's clock. Player B then made a claim based on Article 4.3, and Player A denied that he had touched the piece. The arbiter penalized Player A by reducing his time to 44 seconds and Player A later lost the game. I told my colleague that he made a mistake, because he should reduce half of the time unless a player has less than 2 minutes, as he can't adjust the clock to less than one minute. If his decision was to reduce Player A's time, then the final adjust of the clock needed to be 1 minute not 44 seconds. And if Player A had less than 1 minute, then he can't reduce his time, but needs to add time to Player B's clock. Is this correct? Would you add time to Player B or reduce time from Player A in this situation? Best Regards,
Edgar Murray Ortiz (Puerto Rico)

Answer Unfortunately, you and your colleague were both wrong. You mixed up two Articles of the Laws of Chess:

7.4.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.*

and

9.5 If a player claims a draw as in Article 9.2 or 9.3, he shall immediately stop both clocks. He is not allowed to withdraw his claim.

a. If the claim is found to be correct the game is immediately drawn.

b. If the claim is found to be incorrect, the arbiter shall add three minutes to the opponent's remaining time. Additionally, if the claimant has more than two minutes on his clock the arbiter shall deduct half of the claimant's remaining time up to a maximum of three minutes. If the claimant has more than one minute, but less than two minutes, his remaining time shall be one minute. If the claimant has less than one minute, the arbiter shall make no adjustment to the claimant's clock. Then the game shall continue and the intended move must be made.

Your colleague applied Article 9.5, in an incorrect manner as you pointed out, but he should have applied Article 7.4b.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I have two questions for you.

1) In a 5-minute game, Player A made his move, but did not even have time to press his clock before Player B delivered a checkmate. Thereafter, Player A realized that Player B had overstepped the time limit at least one move before the checkmate. Player A claimed a win on time, while Player B claimed a win on checkmate. Who is correct in your opinion?

2) In the final phase of a rated game without time-increment per move, Player A had only 3 minutes left, while Player B had more than an hour. On the board, the ending R vs. RB had arisen, where Player B was trying to win with his extra bishop. The whole situation was closely followed by the arbiter. Some thirty (rather quick) moves later, Player A was down to 30 seconds and claimed a draw based on Article 10.2. The arbiter decided they should play on, but after some ten further moves, he declared the game drawn, as Player B was not improving his position.

This decision seems to be a correct, especially upon reading your answer to Deborah Richards in [AN #113](#). However, Player B and those spectators who had better chess skills than the arbiter, felt that Player B was clearly winning in the final position. Indeed, he was.

My main question is: Suppose Player B offered to delay pressing his own clock after each move for one minute in order to give Player A more time. Would this unusual proposal influence the decision of the arbiter so that the game could continue? Regards, **Walter Schmidt (Germany)**

Answer 1) I refer to Article B7 of the Rapid Rules, which also apply for Blitz games:

The flag is considered to have fallen when a player has made a valid claim to that effect. The arbiter shall refrain from signalling a flag fall.

The question is: is the claim valid after the flag has fallen? The answer is: No. As you can see, the arbiter should not intervene when a player oversteps the time. This means that the game continues, even after a flag fall. Therefore, the game finished the moment Player B checkmated Player A's king.

2) We agree that the arbiter had the option of declaring the game drawn. Therefore, we do not need to discuss this item. In such cases the arbiter is always right! Your suggestion that Player B "donate" some of his time is interesting, but he does not even have to propose it, he can simply act accordingly. Nevertheless, there is no reason to change the arbiter's decision. If, in his opinion, Player B was not trying to win the game by normal means, then he should stick to his decision. The claim of Player A conforms to the Laws of Chess.

Question Dear Geurt, regarding your answer to Wojciech Pietrzak's question in the [October 2007](#) column, you wrote:

Still, there is also another option. Why not declare the game lost for any player that is absent at the start of the round? I do not know of any other sport that tolerates a competitor being absent at the start of the competition.

I totally agree with you. I have done some research and could not find a single sport where a competitor is allowed to arrive late. Article 6.7 of the Laws of Chess allows organizers to add something like the following to the tournament rules: "Any player who is not present at the board at the scheduled starting time for the round will lose the game." Some tournaments in South Africa only allow a player to be thirty minutes late, while I know of tournaments elsewhere that only allow players ten minutes. Best regards, **Günther van den Bergh (South Africa)**

Answer As a matter of fact, **Dr. Bernd Broeckmann** from **Germany** has some personal experience in such matters. He writes:

You said that you do not know of other sports where a late arrival by one hour is tolerated. This might be true on a professional level, but during my years as a basketball referee in lower German leagues we had a similar rule. I am pretty sure it is valid in other amateur sports as well. Please show some generosity. In our chess club we find that teams who are unfamiliar with our location often wind up on

the wrong side of the railway station, and it takes about thirty minutes to find your way to the other side.

In that column I also wrote (emphasis added):

*Moreover, it is disrespectful to the opponent, the organizer and the sponsor. **Certainly there may be cases of “force majeure,” but here the arbiter could have the right to decide otherwise.** This subject should be discussed in further detail.*

It is clear that this mainly applies to professional chess. It may be too radical to declare the game lost for a player that is only a minute or two late, but one hour is too much. Therefore, I suggest the following change to Article 6.7:

*Any player who arrives at the chessboard more than **15 minutes** after the scheduled start of the session shall lose the game unless the rules of the competition specify or the arbiter decides otherwise.*

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, In reference to your discussion about ending the game by mate: Recently two friends of mine played a blitz game in our local chess club. They ended up with K vs. K + Q and the one with the king only tried to get stalemated. In the end he succeeded, but he did not realize it and moved his king into check. His opponent claimed an illegal move and won – which was absolutely correct according to your explanation! Thank you very much for your excellent comments. **Dr. Bernd Broeckmann (Germany)**

Answer The question remains whether the arbiter should intervene when he observes a checkmated king or a stalemate. I suggest we add either of the following declarations as an Article for Rapid and/or Blitz Chess:

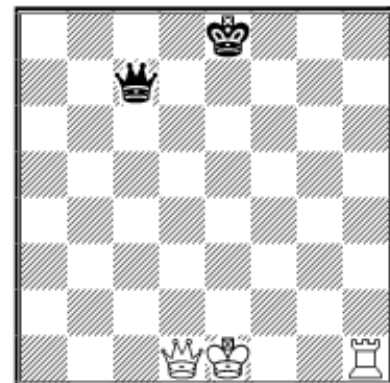
a. The arbiter should intervene, when he observes a checkmated king or a stalemate.

b. The arbiter should not intervene, when he observes a checkmated king or a stalemate.

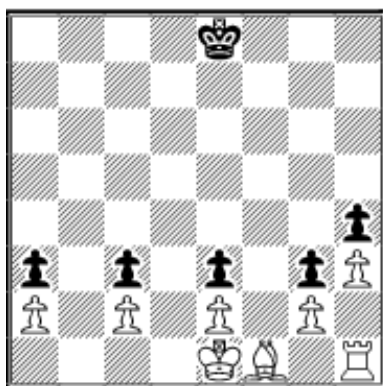
I have no preference, but we need such an Article. We could also add the first version to the Rapid Chess rules and the second to the Blitz rules. I will keep you informed.

Question In your [September 2005](#) column, you reported that it would be incorrect to claim a draw by repetition after 1...Qg3+ 2. Kf1 Qf4+ 3.Ke1 Qg3+ 4.Kf1 Qf4+ 5.Ke1, when 5...Qg3 repeats the position for a third time with the same player on move, “because when the position was first on the board, White had not lost the right to castle. He lost this right not by 1...Qg3+, but by 2 Kf1, when he moved his king.”

Yet castling is out of question anyway, which means that the position is no richer in possibilities than after 2.Kf1 Qf4 3.Ke1 4.Qg3. So from a logical point of view it is the same position and the right of castling has nothing to do it.



Have a look at the following position:



White has not made any move with his king or rook. White has the right to castle, but he will never have the option to do so. If the pieces later occupy the same squares, there would be no difference, except for the fact that either side may have the right to claim a draw, which in itself could be considered a change in possibilities. Yours sincerely, **Robert Andersson Bohus (Sweden)**

Answer Regarding the first position, I agree that after 1...Qg3+, White has no possibilities to castle at the moment or in the future. Nevertheless, the Rules Committee proposed and the Presidential Board decided to establish a uniform rule that “a player loses his right to castle with his own move and not by an opponent’s move.”

Let me give you another example to clarify the reason for this decision. If we replace the white queen in the first diagram with a white knight, bishop or rook, and play

continues 1...Qe5+ 2.Kf1 Qf4+ 3.Ke1 Qe5+ 4.Kf1 Qf4+ 5.Ke1 and Black then informs the arbiter that his next move will be 5...Qe5, we have the same position for the third time. But the decisions should be different. With a knight or a bishop on d1, it is not the same position, because Be2 or Ne3 is possible. With a rook on d1, it is the same position, because White immediately loses his castling rights. For many arbiters, as well as many players, it is probably too complicated to apply these subtle differences, which is why it was decided that White loses his right to castle with 2.Kf1.

I agree that castling is never possible in the second position; however, it is interesting for other reasons. It is clear that the only move White should not play is Rh2. In all other cases neither player has the possibility to win the game by "normal means." What should the arbiter do, when White informs him that he will never play Rh2 and claims a draw? I do not see any reason to refuse this claim, but I can understand why another arbiter would refuse it and prefer to wait until one of the players has less than two minutes and makes a claim based on Article 10.2.

Question Hello Mr. Gijssen, Your [October 2007](#) column refers to "temporary castling rights" and Article 9.2 states:

Positions are not the same if a pawn that could have been captured en passant can no longer in this manner be captured or if the right to castle has been changed temporarily or permanently.

I am having difficulty grasping this concept! To my mind, temporarily means that the right is lost and then regained. Can you give me an example where the right to castle has been changed "temporarily"? Why is the wording so inadequate and ambiguous? As you point out, it's more important to mention whose move it is, or with which move the right of castling has been lost. Thanks in advance for your reply, Regards, **Alfredo Lorenzo (Paris)**

Answer Every four years the Rules Committee discusses this very Article, and every time we intend to change it. I made a proposal in this regard, but I was overruled. Many members are afraid to remove the word "temporarily" in case something was overlooked. Still, your observations are completely correct. Let us wait for Dresden 2008. Finally, in answer to your request for an example, I have to admit that I am unable to give one.

Question Mr. Gijssen, [ChessCafe.com](#) published Emanuel Lasker's version of the clock incident from the New York 1924 tournament in which Mr. Lederer's rebuttal was given (see the [ChessCafe.com Archives](#)):

The clock in question was in perfect order and what actually occurred was the Mr. Lasker did not properly push the lever of his clock with the result that for about eight minutes both his and his opponent's clock were running simultaneously.

In my judgment, any clock that allows both sides to tick is flawed. If Lasker saw his opponent's clock was ticking, he had the right to conclude his own clock was not. Do you side with Lederer or Lasker on this? Thank you, **Gene Milener (USA)**

Answer I will comment on the essential quotes made by Lasker and Lederer:

1. Reacting to an article in the *New York Times* of January 16, 1927, in which Mr. Lederer told why Lasker will not play in the New York 1927 tournament, Lasker wrote:

Concerning the clock incident, Mr. Lederer explained, "What happened is that Lasker forgot to stop his clock after one of his moves. The time was running against it and he did not notice it. I reached over and stopped his clock."

Under the current rules it is the responsibility of the players to stop the clocks. I myself had this situation arise in the second game of the 1987 Kasparov-Karpov match in Seville. Kasparov did not stop his clock and did not start his opponent's clock. I noticed this, but pursuant to the Laws of Chess, I was forbidden to notify Kasparov. After about three minutes Kasparov discovered that his clock was still running and pressed his clock.

2. Later Lederer wrote, according to Lasker:

The clock in question was in perfect order and what actually occurred was that Mr. Lasker did not

properly push the lever of his clock with the result that for about eight minutes both, his and his opponent's, clock were running simultaneously. Although it is a well established rule in Tournament play that every player has to watch his own clock Mr. Lasker not only failed to push his lever but did not even notice that his clock had not stopped running.

Contrary to his statement the incident was noticed not by Lasker but by an onlooker who drew the writer's attention to the clock. The writer then pushed the lever for Mr. Lasker thereby protecting his interests.

If Lasker is quoting Lederer correctly, I do not understand Lederer's actions. First he states that the player himself had to watch his clock, meaning that it is the player's responsibility and then he says that he, Lederer, after a remark by one of the spectators, pushed the lever. This is very strange behavior.

3. Lasker, again quoting Lederer:

At adjournment time Mr. Lasker and the writer by adding the time registered on both clocks found that Mr. Lasker had lost about eight minutes of his time.

It is clear that two clocks were running simultaneously, a clear defect of the clock and that it happened for about eight minutes. It is common practice today for the arbiter to make a correction. These eight minutes would be given back to the player, when it was clear that his clock was still running after he had pressed the lever.

4. Finally Dr. Lasker wrote:

Since my opponent's clock ran, I did push the lever properly; a chess clock, the two sides of which can run simultaneously, is defective. A chess clock must be so constructed that only one of its sides runs, else it is no good. What happened was that I noticed after my 30th move, when according to our time piece the total time consumed was nearly four hours (the time limit was 30 moves in 2 hours – G.G.) that the expected signal for adjournment was not given; I looked round, saw all the masters in deep thought and discovered that we had played only about three hours and three quarters (probably according to the wall clock or his watch – G.G.).

Hence I concluded that one of the two sides (or both sides – G.G.) of the timing piece was too quick and after having made my 31st move, at adjournment time, asked Mr. Lederer to test the two sides. We tested and found that each side of the clock ran right; and he informed me that he thought that the two sides had run simultaneously.

Onlookers thought so too, who informed me that they have noticed the defect of the clock, but had been unable to interfere because they looked for Mr. Lederer in vain.

I think it is very clear: **Dr. Lasker was right.** A chess clock, with both sides running simultaneously, is simply defective.

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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