



COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook  
Geurt Gijssen



Intervention

Several months ago I received the following letter, and the writer requested an official reply from FIDE. The Presidential Board agreed that it should be discussed in the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee, and you will find the result of this discussion below.

**Question** Dear Mr. Geurt Gijssen, after reading the *Chess Organisers Handbook*, especially Article 14.1: "Member federations may ask FIDE to give an official decision about problems relating to the Laws of Chess," I need to ask you about the following problem.

During a game, the player with black moved his knight, pressed the clock, recorded the move, stood up, left the board and went to the bathroom. While he was absent the opponent captured a pawn on c4 with his queen; he completed the move by pressing the clock and recorded the move. I was sitting in front of the table, at three meters distance. I was the Tournament Director and I was watching the different games. The Arbiter was talking with other players in the smoking area, so he did not see what happened. Suddenly, the opponent changed his move. He reinstated the position before Qxc4 and restarted his clock. Two minutes later, when he heard something at the door, he quickly moved his rook to a1 and changed the move on his scoresheet. Two minutes later, the player returned to the table and the game continued. I contacted the Arbiter and informed him about what happened. When we investigated the position, we discovered that the queen move would lose immediately, and that White's thirty-first move was corrected on the scoresheet. The game continued and about 90 minutes later the players agreed to a draw.

My question is, whether I, as Director, should or could intervene in this game. How should I act in situation? Best regards, **Hernán Cereijo (Argentina)**

**Answer** It was agreed by the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee that the Chief Organizer has no right to interfere in a game where he believes that he has observed an irregularity. But he does have the right to alert the arbiter, who can then decide whether to pursue the matter. The particular incident under discussion was that the Organizer had seen a move being played, the clock being pressed, and then the move being retracted and another move played. The arbiter should have tried to verify this. As it was, as observed by the organizer, the player had crossed out a move that would have led to an immediate loss and substituted a superior move that was completely different in notation. Also, the cumulative mode was being used on the clock, so there might have been some evidence in that regard, perhaps an extra minute of elapsed time or the move counter being off by a move. Since the player had violated the Laws, by writing down his move first, the arbiter should have intervened and then determined whether there had been a serious transgression of the Laws.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I am rather confused about your answer to Joshua Marquez in your [September](#) column. In my opinion, the mate does *not* stand. I have the impression you have mixed up the termination of "the choice of the piece" – Article 4.4d – with the completion of the move – Article 4.6c, not mentioned by you. In the situation in question – White picks up a queen, touches it to the square, but before he releases the queen, White's flag falls – "the choice of the piece is finalized," okay.

But is the move itself completed as well? The choice of the piece (or: the promotion) is just a part of the move, Article 3.7e. "Move" and "Promotion" are not the same.

According to Article 4.6c, in the case of pawn promotion, the move is considered to have been made when "the player's hand has released the new piece after placing it on the promotion square." As that did not happen before the flag fall, there is no "Matt vor Klappe." White has overstepped the time.

Point two: on the other hand, as White has no other choice than playing 1.e8Q mate, Black should not be declared the winner and the game is drawn according to Article 6.10, Sentence 2, if you accept that the word "position" in this rule relates to all circumstances including pieces and squares having been touched. If you do not accept this interpretation, White has lost on time. Sincerely, **Peter Anderberg Harmstorf (Germany)**

**Answer** I have to admit that you scored a point. I was probably too focused on the fact that the move was

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irrevocable, provided it was legal, and therefore stands, even when the player's hand had not released this piece. I agree with you that the move has not been made. Your suggestion in point two is probably correct.

**Question** Dear Geurt, I think you misunderstood my question in the [December](#) column. The player in question didn't make an illegal move, he just touched one piece and then made a legal move with another piece. This situation relates to Article 6.14, but if the player has less than two minutes remaining, you cannot adjust the clock to less than a minute, so the remaining time should be one minute. Best regards, **Edgar Murray Ortiz (Puerto Rico)**

**Answer** Let me apologize, because my answer was wrong. I treated an illegal action as an illegal move. I looked more carefully into the Laws as to how the arbiter should act in the event of touching a piece and playing another one. You are correct to refer to Article 6.14 if the arbiter has to change the times on the clocks:

*If an irregularity occurs and/or the pieces have to be restored to a previous position, the arbiter shall use his best judgement to determine the times to be shown on the clocks. He shall also, if necessary, adjust the clock's move counter.*

The next question is how the clocks should be adjusted in this situation. I understand from your letter, that you used Article 9.5.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.*

But this Article applies only in the case of a wrong claim for a draw. Article 9 itself only applies to the drawn game and this is not the case in the game you described in your letter.

The offending player should be penalized based on Article 13.3 and the penalties are described in 13.4:

*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.*

A combination of "b" and "c" is a possible or only "c."

**Question** Two TDs separately announced that there would be no time delay for the first time control of 40 moves in 2 hours. The second time control would be Game/55 minutes with a 5 second delay. Player A noticed Player B had set his clock for a 5 second delay on the first time control. Player B was up a rook in a clearly won position. According to the TD, just when Player B's time delay had counted down to one second and he probably would have lost on time, Player A stopped the clocks and said: "There is not supposed to be a delay in the first time control."

The TD did not know what to do. Without the delay, Player B would have to make three moves in one second. Whatever the TD decided it would probably affect the outcome. Another TD saved the situation by offering both players a draw. Both players agreed since they both had lost positions, Player A on the board and Player B on the clock. Player B felt cheated, but if Player A had waited one more second or insisted on his rights to continue the game without time delay, he would have won on time. The discussion was handled in a cordial and friendly atmosphere. What would you have decided? **Brian Wall (USA)**

**Answer** This case was extensively discussed on American websites. Nothing is written in the FIDE Laws of Chess about what to do if a wrong time setting is fixed on the clock in a normal game. For Rapid and Blitz

Chess it states:

*B4. Once each player has completed three moves, no claim can be made regarding incorrect piece placement, orientation of the chessboard or clock setting.*

*In case of reverse king and queen placement castling with this king is not allowed.*

In my opinion, the fact that this rule mentions that no claims can be made after three completed moves means that apparently claims are possible in “normal” chess. But so far nothing has been written about it. In such a case, I would refer to 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 judgement and absolute objectivity. Too detailed a rule might deprive the arbiter of his freedom of judgement and thus prevent him from finding the solution to a problem dictated by fairness, logic and special factors.*

I especially like the last part of the last sentence: a solution should be “dictated by fairness, logic and special factors.” With this in mind, I think it is quite unfair to change the time modulus at the moment a player only has one second on his clock in such a way that he only has this one second left. Therefore, I see two possible solutions:

- Change the time mode after the first period
- Change the time mode at the moment of the claim, but the player should be given a reasonable amount of time (at least one minute) for the remaining moves.

I prefer the second option.

**Question** Dear sir, during a recent national under 9 boys chess championship, two players kept repeating the same moves: Qc4-Rc1, Qb4-Rb1. One of the players asked the arbiter how long they could continue like that, and the arbiter suggested they continue for few more moves. They did so and the player repeated the question. The arbiter then informed the player about threefold repetition, the fifty-move rule and perpetual check. The Chief Arbiter of the tournament was not very happy about this interference. What is your opinion? Thank you,  
**Pranesh Yadav (India)**

**Answer** As a matter of fact, the player asked how the game could be finished in a proper way. In my opinion, there is nothing wrong with explaining how he could claim a draw, or showing him what is written in Article 9 of the Laws of Chess. My only remark is that there is nothing written in the Laws of Chess regarding perpetual check.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I have three questions:

1) Player A and B were playing blitz and Player B was in time trouble. Player A made an illegal move, but it went unnoticed. Player B suddenly claimed a flag-fall, but in fact it was his own flag that was down. Player A then claimed the flag-fall, but Player B noticed the illegal move and claimed a win. What is your judgment?

2) In a blitz game when a player makes an illegal move and releases the piece, but has not yet stopped the clock, does the player lose the game?

3) I was the arbiter at a zonal festival and in a normal game (90 min. + 30 sec. per move) Player A was on move with 6 seconds on his clock. At this moment his opponent summoned me and said that Player A's scoresheet was not clear. I explained to him that the scoresheet must be clear for the arbiter not for him. Player A then stopped the clocks and objected that his opponent should not talk to the arbiter when he is not on move! However, I think Player A stopped the clocks to have more thinking time. So I restarted the clock and ordered them to continue the game. What is your opinion and would you have penalized any of the players?  
Thanks in advance, **Bakhshayesh Hadi (Iran)**

**Answer** 1) I assume that when Player A noticed that Player B's flag had fallen, Player A then stopped the clocks, called the arbiter and claimed a win. If it was after this took place that Player B claimed an illegal move, then he was too late. The flag fall stands.

2) I refer to Article C3 of the Blitz rules:

*An illegal move is completed once the opponent's clock has been started. The opponent is entitled to claim a win before he has made his own move. 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. Once the opponent has made his own move, an illegal move cannot be corrected.*

An illegal move can be claimed by a player after the opponent has made the move, has stopped his own clock, has started the opponent's clock and before the player has made his next move. It means, as long the opponent has not pressed his clock, he still has the possibility of correcting his illegal move.

3) I understand Player A's point of view. It is very disturbing, with only 6 seconds left, for the opponent to begin a discussion with the arbiter. Therefore, you have to act accordingly; for instance, by giving Player A some extra seconds.

**Question** Dear Sir, It was reported that during your speech prior to the blitz tournament in Salekhard, Russia you said that "moving a pawn to last rank and switching the opponent's clock (unlike another illegal moves) deprives your opponent's of right to claim a win before he makes his own move." Is this a misinterpretation? If not, could you explain your opinion? Thanks, **Yuri Hnip (Ukraine)**

**Answer** I spoke in English and I am afraid that the translator mixed something up. I was likely referring to Article B6 of the Laws of Rapid Chess, which are also applicable for Blitz games:

*An illegal move is completed once the opponent's clock has been started. The opponent is then entitled to claim that the player completed an illegal move before the claimant has made his move. Only after such a claim, shall the arbiter make a ruling. However, if both Kings are in check or the promotion of a pawn is not completed, the arbiter shall intervene, if possible.*

**Question** Dear sir: in regards to your answer to Dr. Bernd Broeckmann in last month's [column](#), regarding whether an arbiter should intervene if he observes a stalemate, does stalemate not immediately end the game? How then is it possible for anything the stalemated player does after that to be an illegal move – since the game is over? Respectfully, **Chris Turnbow (United States)**

**Answer** In a normal game, when the players do not notice a stalemate or a checkmate, the arbiter must intervene. But in a Rapid or a Blitz game, there are several Articles that describe when the arbiter should intervene:

*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.*

*B6. An illegal move is completed once the opponent's clock has been started. The opponent is then entitled to claim that the player completed an illegal move before the claimant has made his move. Only after such a claim, shall the arbiter make a ruling. However, if both Kings are in check or the promotion of a pawn is not completed, the arbiter shall intervene, if possible.*

*B7. 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.*

There is nothing written about stalemate or checkmate, and I prefer that it be made very clear as to when the arbiter must intervene in such cases.

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***Have a question for Geurt Gijssen? Perhaps he will respond to it in a future column. Send it to [geurtgijssen@chesssafe.com](mailto:geurtgijssen@chesssafe.com). Please include your name and country of residence.***

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