



COLUMNISTS

*An Arbiter's Notebook*

Geurt Gijssen



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**Question** Respected Sir, FIDE is continuously reducing the rating floor in order to increase the popularity of chess. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the K-factor multiplier. Is it possible to add K-factors for different rating levels? If the rating floor becomes even lower than 1400, the low-rated player must always face a higher rated player, so some justice should be given to such lower rated player. Thank you. **Nitin Shenvi (India)**

**Answer** Let me begin by explaining the K-factor; please be advised that this is very technical. Say Player A is rated 2100 and Player B is 2250. To calculate the new ratings of these players we have to use the following formula. The rating difference is 150, so it is quite likely that Player A will lose the game. According to Professor Elo, if A and B play 100 games, the final standing in their match will be 70-30 in favour of Player B. If they play only one game, the theoretical result is of course 0.7-0.3. We call this the expected score. This means that we expect Player A, the weaker player, to score 0.3 and Player B, the stronger player, to score 0.7. In reality the only possible scores are 1-0, 1/2-1/2, or 0-1.

**Case 1** If the weaker player wins, it means he scored 0.7 more than expected (1 - 0.3), and the stronger player scored -0.7 less than expected (0 - 0.7). These figures, 0.7 for A and -0.7 for B, will be multiplied with the K-factor.

- K = 25 for a player new to the rating list until he has completed events with a total of at least thirty games.
- K = 15 as long as a player's rating remains under 2400.
- K = 10 once a player's published rating has reached 2400, and he has also completed events with a total of at least thirty games. Thereafter it remains permanently at 10.

Suppose that the K-factor is 25 for each player. Then to Player A's rating will be added  $25 \times 0.7 = 17.5$ , and to Player B's rating will be added  $25 \times -0.7 = -17.5$ . Player B loses 17.5 rating points.

**Case 2** If the game were drawn, Player A gains  $25 \times (0.5 - 0.2) = 5$  rating points and Player B loses 5.

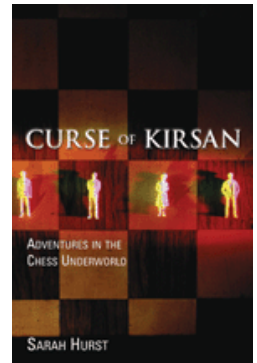
**Case 3** If Player A loses the game, he loses 7.5 rating points, and Player B gains 7.5 rating points.

Now to return to your question about introducing more K-factors, I assume that you would like to introduce higher factors, for instance, 40 or 50. I am not in favour of this, because the fluctuations would be too large. Thus, in Case 1 above, if  $K = 50$ , Player A would gain  $50 \times 0.7 = 35$  rating points based on the result of one game. In my opinion, the K-factors of 25, 15 and 10 are sufficient.

**Question** My question is in regards to Article 10.2.b, after the arbiter has postponed his decision.

Isn't it so, that if the arbiter is convinced that the opponent cannot win by normal means, he shall declare the game drawn either before or after the flag fall. And, if so, would you see any possibility for the opponent to win

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by “normal means” in a situation where the opponent is to be mated in one move?

Yet, if you agree with this opinion, this would mean that with a claim on 10.2, a player will almost lose every possibility to win except for some rare situations (i.e. flag fall of the opponent, etc). Or can a player withdraw his claim explicitly or even implicitly by playing to win? **Hans Juegen Alt (Germany)**

**Answer** Let me begin with your last question. A player cannot withdraw the claim. Trying to win the game is always possible, and there is no prescription as to how a player has to play.

Now let us refer to Article 9.1c of the Laws of Chess:

*A claim of a draw under 9.2, 9.3 or 10.2 shall be considered to be an offer of a draw.*

It seems that a claim for a draw according to Article 10.2 is only a matter between the claimant and the arbiter, but the opponent can also play a role. *At the moment a player claims a draw*, the opponent can accept the draw, even if the arbiter decides to postpone his decision. If the players continue the game, the opponent can no longer agree to the claim. Thus, if the opponent does not accept the draw offer (via the claim), he takes the risk that he may lose the game. Therefore, the arbiter should not declare the game drawn at the moment the player will checkmate the opponent’s king.

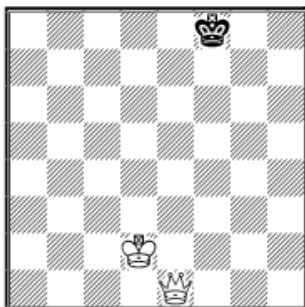
Here is the full text of Article 10.2a:

*If the arbiter agrees the opponent is making no effort to win the game by normal means, or that it is not possible to win by normal means, then he shall declare the game drawn. Otherwise he shall postpone his decision or reject the claim.*

This Article describes two different situations:

- the opponent is making no effort to win the game by normal means
- the opponent cannot win by normal means.

You refer only to the second point. I would like to give an extreme example of the first point. See the following position, with White to move:



The game continues **1 Qf1+ Kg8 2 Qg2 + Kf8 3 Qf3+ Kg8 4 Qg4+ Kf8 5 Qf5+ Kg8 6 Qg6+ Kf8 7 Qf6+ Ke8 8 Qe6+ Kd8 9 Qd6+ Kc8 10 Qc6+ Kb8 11 Qb6 + Ka8 12 Qa6+ Kb8 13 Qb6+** and so on. Do you agree that the player of the white pieces, who has a winning position, did not make any effort to win the game by normal means; for instance, by checkmating the opponent’s king? If the player of the black pieces had

claimed a draw after 13 Qb6+, the arbiter should declare the game drawn.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, thanks for your [answer](#) regarding the problem of chess fraud with computers. I am happy that the topic will be discussed at the next FIDE congress. However, I think that for important tournaments and opens, such as Dubai, or Corus, etc., the arbiter should call the police whenever there is a strong suspicion that someone is cheating.

**I also propose that if a player refuses to “empty their pockets,” the arbiter should declare the game lost without calling the police.**

Arbiters should decide whether or not police intervention is warranted, but there should be no reason for a player to refuse to cooperate upon suspicion of cheating. Kind regards, **Alberto Miatello (Italy)**

**Answer** Your proposal seems reasonable, but I see several problems. If the arbiter has doubts that a player is still hiding something (doubts, not evidence), what can he do? A physical inspection? I do not think so. In Dresden we have to consider the many aspects of this problem, including ethical issues. In fact, I have doubts about finding a perfect solution to this problem.

**Question** Geurt, It seems slightly ill-mannered for a player to use a captured piece to press his clock. It can scratch the piece or damage its felt cushion. The laws of chess say the player must press his clock with the “same hand” that he used to move his piece. Does that phrase imply it is improper to press your clock with a “piece” instead of with your “hand”? Thanks. **Gene Milener (USA)**

**Answer** First of all, very seldom does a player press his clock using a captured piece. I can remember only one case where this was an issue. If it does occur, it is usually the result of time trouble, in a situation where the player has just captured an opponent’s piece. The reason a player presses the clock with a piece is to save time. If a player frequently presses the clock with a captured piece, his behaviour can be considered ill-mannered, but I have a different opinion if it only happens once.

**Question** Mr. Gijssen, although Article 12.5 of the Laws of Chess is clear, some arbiters try to prevent a player from walking in the playing area. Sometimes it happens that a player goes to the other side of the table and stands behind the opponent to get a different perspective on the position. What is your opinion about such behaviour? Thank you. **Carlos Calleros (Brazil)**

**Answer** You refer to the following Article of the Laws of Chess:

*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.*

As you can see, it is not forbidden for a player having the move to walk in the playing area. But standing behind your opponent is something else. This can be quite annoying for the opponent. In such cases the arbiter can apply Article 12.6 of the Laws of Chess:

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

**Question** Dear Geurt, While the player of the black pieces was away to drink water, the player of the white pieces played Bxh6, but then retracted the move and played Qd2. The arbiter noticed it from a distance and reported the matter to the chief arbiter. By that time, the player of the black pieces arrived at the board unaware of the incident. Before Black had moved, the chief arbiter reached the board and instructed White to play Bxh6, instead of Qd2, and issued a warning.

- If Black had played a move before the chief arbiter’s arrival, can the arbiter still insist White play Bxh6?
- What if the arbiter had not seen it himself, but it was reported to him by one or two of the players nearby?

Regards, **R. Anantharam (India)**

**Answer** The following Articles are relevant:

**4.3:** *Except as provided in Article 4.2, if the player having the move deliberately touches on the chessboard*

*a. one or more of his own pieces, he must move the first piece touched that can be moved, or*

*b. one or more of his opponent's pieces, he must capture the first piece touched, which can be captured, or*

*c. one piece of each colour, he must capture the opponent's piece with his piece or, if this is illegal, move or capture the first piece touched which can be moved or captured. If it is unclear, whether the player's own piece or his opponent's was touched first, the player's own piece shall be considered to have been touched before his opponent's.*

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

Article 4.3 states that a "touched" piece has to be played or captured. But White's actions were even more flagrant than that. His hand released the piece played and captured a piece. Thus, the move stands, provided it is legal. The witnessing arbiter must intervene, even if the player of the black pieces had made a move.

Regarding your second question, the nearby players must be considered as spectators in this case. They should inform the arbiter and he has to determine what really happened. If there is no clear evidence, then he cannot intervene.

**Question** Dear Mr. Gijssen, I have two questions.

**Q1** Article 6.5 does not mention who is responsible for starting the clock of the player of the white pieces.

*At the time determined for the start of the game the clock of the player who has the white pieces is started.*

Is it up to the player of the black pieces, the player of the white pieces, or the arbiter? If it is the latter, from where should he do it? Does he lean over in front of the players, perhaps disturbing their concentration, or does he do it from behind the clock?

**Q2** Article 12.2.a states

*During play, the players are forbidden to make use of any notes, sources of information, advice, or analyze on another chessboard.*

Well, on page 49 of the 2008/4 *NIC* magazine, Grischuk can be seen looking at the tournament bulletin before his game with Inarkiev. I have noticed that most organizers allow the distribution of the bulletins during play, and having an opponent look at it might disturb a player's concentration. Is there any rule to prevent this?

Thank you in advance, **Charles Kayle (Lebanon)**

**Answer 1** The Committee responsible for the Laws of Chess was very clever not to mention who has to start the clock of the player of the white pieces. There are too many different situations to cover: open tournaments with 500 players and few arbiters, round robin tournaments with a limited number of players, matches with only two players, and so on.

It is very important that all games start at the same time, although a variance of a few seconds or even one minute is acceptable.

The normal procedure in open tournaments is for the chief arbiter to announce at the beginning of the round that the players of the black pieces

start the clock of the player of the white pieces. Immediately afterward, the arbiters check whether the clocks have been started or not. If, for instance, the player of the black pieces is absent, the arbiters start the clock themselves.

When the arbiter starts the clock it is very important to check that the clock is running. Therefore, the arbiter must be able to see the clock face. I have never heard any complaint about a player's concentration being broken by the arbiter leaning over the table to start the clock.

In the recent FIDE Grand Prix Tournament in Sochi, I tried starting the clocks from behind and discovered that the arbiter can still check if the clock is running from this position, although it is somewhat more difficult. So perhaps this way is preferable.

**Answer 2** You are completely correct. I only deliver the bulletins to the players after they have finished their games. I do this so that a player cannot see what his opponent played in the previous rounds and also because it is bad for the image of chess to have pictures published that show players with reading material during the game.

**Question** Dear Mr Gijssen, I have four questions and will be grateful for your answers.

**Q1** In team tournaments a player can consult his captain about accepting or offering a draw. Can the captain look at the position to analyse it for himself? In my country when a player summons his captain for consultation, the captain says "Let me look at the position!!"

**Q2** When the player has little time, say, thirty seconds or so, can he stop the clocks and summon the captain for consultation about a draw? If so, he could use this diversion to gain more reflection time.

**Q3** Suppose that in a Blitz game one player stops the clocks and claims checkmate or stalemate, when it is in fact not a checkmate or stalemate. The opponent summons the arbiter and makes a complaint. What should the arbiter decide?

**Q4** Do you let the players bring food or beverages to the table for consumption during the game?

Thanks in advance. **Hadi Bakhshayesh (Iran)**

**Answer 1** I refer to Article 12.1a:

*During play the players are forbidden to make use of any notes, sources of information, advice, or analyse on another chessboard.*

If a captain acted as you describe, it is a clear violation of Article 12.1a. He implicitly advises the player about the position. I refer also to the Tournament Regulations:

*A captain is entitled to advise the players of his team to make or accept an offer of a draw or to resign a game, unless the regulations of the event stipulate otherwise. He must confine himself to give only brief information, based solely on the circumstances pertaining to the match. He may say to a player, "offer a draw, "accept the draw, or "resign the game. For example, if asked by a player whether he should accept an offer of a draw, the captain should answer "yes, "no, or delegate the decision to the player himself.*

*The captain shall abstain from any intervention during play. He shall give no information to a player.*

If I see a player ask the captain about a draw offer, I forbid the captain from going to the board to observe the position. His advice may solely be

based on the actual standing of the match and not on the position of this board.

**Answer 2** He may never stop the clocks for consulting any person other than the arbiter, and even then he must keep in mind that the arbiter can apply Article 6.13d of the Laws of Chess:

*If a player stops the clocks in order to seek the arbiter's assistance, the arbiter shall determine if the player had any valid reason for doing so. If it is obvious that the player has no valid reason for stopping the clocks, the player shall be penalised according to Article 13.4.*

**Answer 3** It is very difficult to give a general guideline when a player stops the clock without a valid reason. In my opinion Article 6.13d could be used as a guideline. I like to apply this Article for all types of chess, not just for Blitz games. The only difference could be that the penalties for Blitz are different.

**Answer 4** Yes, I allow the players to eat or drink at the table, as long as it does not disturb the opponent or any other player in the tournament hall. If I believe that the opponent is being disturbed, I instruct the player to eat or drink somewhere else. By the way, drinking at the table has never been a problem, but eating sometimes is.

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Have a question for Geurt Gijssen? Perhaps he will reply in his next [ChessCafe.com](#) column. Please include your name and country of residence.

*[Yes, I have a question for Geurt!](#)*

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