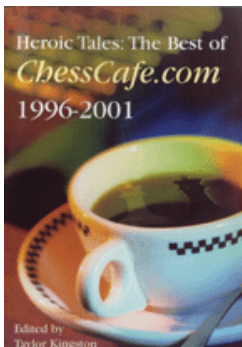




COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



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Article 6.6

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I have two questions about the new laws of chess that were discussed in your [March 2009](#) column:

Article 6.6a: *Any player who arrives at the chessboard after the start of the session shall lose the game. Thus the default time is 0 minutes. The rules of a competition may specify otherwise.*

Article 6.6b: *In case the rules of a competition specify otherwise, if neither player is present initially, the player who has the white pieces shall lose all the time that elapses until he arrives; unless the rules of the competition specify or the arbiter decides otherwise.*

Question 1 Why does 6.6a state “Thus the default time is 0 minutes”? It only makes me wonder what “default time” means. The rule might be just as clear without this sentence. What do you think?

Question 2 Why was rule 6.6b introduced at all? This rule assumes the rules of a specific competition differ from or add to the laws of chess. I would suggest that these specific competition rules can also define how time will be divided among two late players. One cannot foresee what tournament regulations will be invented and anticipate them. I would vote for removal of the 6.6b rule entirely.

Thank you for your interesting column. Sincerely, **Marcel van Oort (The Netherlands)**

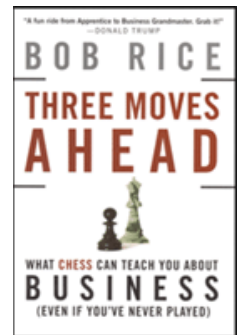
Answer 1 I agree with you. I also do not fully understand why this sentence was included. In my opinion, the only option is for the rule to state that zero seconds is the general recommendation and that it is possible to change it.

Answer 2 This is not a new rule. This Article is present in the current Laws of Chess and I am happy that it is. First, it allows for differences in the time that players can arrive after the start of the round. Second, the arbiter can take into consideration cases of force majeure. In a previous Notebook I gave an example of the time being split equally if both players arrive after the start of the round.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, thanks for your interesting column of March 2009. Could you elaborate on your understanding of “arriving at the chessboard?” Does this mean sitting in front of the board, being at a distance of one meter from the board, or ten meters, being present in the playing hall, being present in the building, or being in the city or the nation where the building is located? Could you also give a reason behind your explication? Thanks in advance. Kind regards, **Jan Blom (The Netherlands)**

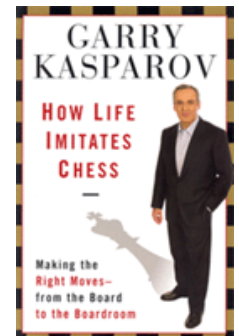
Answer If the Olympiad in Dresden is going to be the standard for future chess events, then the players have to sit in front of the board at which they are supposed to play. But I can understand if this differs from event to event. A match between two players is easier to oversee and control than a Swiss Tournament of 250 players, unless there is a sufficient number of arbiters. For instance, at the Dresden Olympiad there was one

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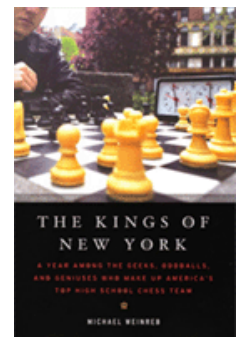
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arbiter for each match on four boards and there were very few problems with players arriving after the start of the round. Thus, after the tournament the organizers and arbiters could proudly announce that these measures worked; although, there was one situation where a player had his game declared lost when he left his chair to request a pen. I was present at the start of some of the rounds and I noticed that the chief arbiter always announced the start two minutes after the official starting time.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I have spoken with several players and arbiters, both in Italy and Switzerland, and all believe the new FIDE rule forfeiting a player for being late at the start of the game is “absurd, useless and bureaucratic.” The general consensus is that this is bad for chess and will deter tournament participation rather than encourage it. Many players have pointed out that it is normal for one player or another to be slightly late for a variety of uncontrollable factors, i.e., public transportation, traffic, etc. It is clearly unfair to default a player for a small delay that is out of his control. What if a player arrives on time, but happens to be in the bathroom when the game started? Should a player have to pee under the table for fear of losing the game? Frankly speaking, we do not need all this “creative” activity from FIDE and its arbiters. The old rule of one hour for default was just fine.

Why does FIDE continuously change the rules? Two years ago there was the new (useless) rule compelling players to shake hands, and before that there was the new (useless) rule compelling players not to write the move before moving the piece. Aren't anti-cheating and anti-doping measures more important issues? These “creative” new rules are not helping chess tournaments, they are slowly killing them. Regards, **Alberto Miatello (Italy)**

Answer I am always very surprised when arbiters and players only complain after a specific Article of the Laws of Chess has been approved. Therefore, let me reiterate the procedure for making a change to the Laws of Chess.

As Chairman of the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee (RTRC), I receive many proposals for revising the Laws of Chess. You may have noticed that several proposals came from ChessCafe.com readers. I collect all these proposals and then invite the members of this Committee to form a sub-committee in order to prepare a draft for revising. If the sub-committee approves of the proposal, I include it in the draft. If there is no clear majority, I also include any and all alternatives. I do not take part in the voting.

The draft proposal then gets sent to all federations two months before the General Assembly of FIDE. It is up to each federation to review the proposals; some leave this task to an Arbiters Committee, if they take any action at all.

Next, the proposals are discussed in three meetings during the FIDE Congress (in this order):

1. RTRC
2. Executive Board
3. General Assembly

Thus, the General Assembly makes the final decision. The members of the General Assembly are the delegates of the federations. Regarding Article 6.6, the General Assembly left the decision to the next Presidential Board, and I reported on the Board's decision in last month's column.

I hope that this clarifies the “creative” process. If you wish to undo all the changes you mentioned in your letter, you are welcome to submit your proposals to the RTRC for the 2012 revisions to the Laws of Chess. By the way, in 2010 it is possible to revise the Tournament Regulations.

Suggestions are welcome.

Question Dear Geurt, there was an incident during the Radjabov-Smeets game in round ten of the Corus Grandmaster Group A, in which both players were in serious time trouble approaching their fortieth move. What happened in short was this:

1. Radjabov played 39.Re7, but knocked down a bishop in his haste, and pressed the clock without restoring the bishop's proper position.
2. Smeets, without making a move, presses the clock in turn because the bishop is still toppled over and speaks to his opponent about it.
3. Radjabov presses the clock back immediately, but his flag had fallen.
4. The arbiter stops the clocks.

In fact, the first three events are all illegal. Whether you approve the final decision of the arbiter (a draw) or not does not really matter, but I think trouble can be avoided in the future if we legalize Smeets's action in the rules. This means that a player in this situation can choose to stop the clock as in the rules now, or to press the clock in turn and forfeit the right to a claim.

We have to realize that what happened in this game is one of the most common time trouble situations that lead to controversies and angry players; therefore, a new rule that leads to less discussion would be welcome. In my view, in certain situations the present rule might favor the offender, giving him the opportunity to abuse the rule. For example, when in time trouble the player could knock down a piece on purpose, and, while the arbiter adjusts the clocks giving extra time to the victim, the offending player has time to study the position, locate a missing piece on the ground, or even take an identical piece in his hand.

Another rule that might need some adaption is the following: a player with more than five minutes to reach the time control has to write his moves, but he does not do this with the intention of giving his opponent less time to think about his moves. In this situation an arbiter might hesitate to intervene if he thinks he might disturb the victim more than the offender. The offender could abuse this and challenge the arbiter, who often would only give a warning. It would be better if the rule was stricter (as with an illegal move: two minutes penalty) to avoid challenging the arbiter. The quickest and most practical punishment is to put the clock on the other side of the table so White continues with Black's time and Black with White's. This might seem a silly solution, but I am sure that a punishment like this might work preventively, so that in practice the rule to write your moves until you have five minutes left will no longer be infringed. **Alex Roose (Curaçao)**

Answer First, thank you for your report on the incident in the game Radjabov – Smeets. It was quite complicated, as can be seen in the [ChessCafe.com Video Spotlight](#) segments.

In my opinion Article 7.3 covers this situation:

If a player displaces one or more pieces, he shall re-establish the correct position in his own time. If necessary, either the player or his opponent shall stop clocks and ask for the arbiter's assistance. The arbiter may penalise the player who displaced the pieces.

This Article is very clear. Radjabov made a mistake by stopping his clock, and Smeets' reaction to restart Radjabov's clock was correct. In my opinion, there was no need for Smeets to ask for the arbiter's assistance, because the case was clear.

After Radjabov's clock was restarted, his flag fell and the arbiter stopped both clocks. Since the flag fall occurred before the fortieth move, the

game should be declared won for Smeets. The situation is also quite straightforward because there was no time increment at this stage of the game. Had there been an increment, there would have been no flag fall after Radjabov's last pressing of the clock.

Also, as can be seen in the videos, Radjabov claimed that he was disturbed by the fact that Smeets spoke to him. Radjabov was right to make a claim, but, in my opinion, the fact that he did not reinstate the position in his own time is more severe than Smeets's violation.

I disagree with your proposal on how to punish a player who does not write the moves with more than five minutes left on his clock. An arbiter has many possibilities to punish this player, beginning with a warning and then with giving extra time to the opponent if the player still refuses to write the moves.

Question Last week I played in a rapid play tourney in Manchester, UK. The time control was 15 minutes per side for the whole game. Two of my opponents, when things were going badly for them, swore quite audibly. I found this slightly intimidating. Is there any redress against this behavior? This was the first time I had played in the UK since the early 1980s, and standards appear to have slipped. Yours sincerely, **Tim Gluckman (Germany)**

Answer The first sentence of Article 12.6 is applicable here:

It is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever.

When the arbiter observes such behavior, he has several possibilities to punish a player, even if the opponent makes no claim.

Question Dear IA Gijssen, Let me begin with a little background information. We have an up and coming chess community. In 2005 we organized the Canadian Open, which included players such as Ivanchuk, Shirov, etc. This year we will be repeating that event. In addition, I organize annual international norm tournaments, and we now have our first ever IM and very soon we will have another. One problem we face is that we do not have any IAs or FAs in our province. In fact, the closest titled Arbiters that I know of live 1000 km away in Vancouver!

Last year I applied for an FA title. I thought I would be approved in December and my plan was to apply for an IA title immediately afterwards, as I had already accumulated enough norms for that as well. Unfortunately, my December application was rejected because one of the FA title tournaments did not have ten participants. As far as I am aware that rule was not posted on the FIDE website at the time, or else I would have definitely directed another event before applying. In December I directed another event and immediately asked the Canadian Chess Federation to apply for my title, as I now knew that I had enough norms. However, I later learned that the federation missed the deadline because they thought it was the same as for the rating list.

Now the new regulations create new problems for me. First, I don't know how I can attend a FIDE Arbiter's Seminar, since as far as I know it is not offered in Canada, let alone Alberta. Also, it seems that all the IA norms that I have collected over the years will be lost because of the fact that I would only be able to use norms that occurred after receiving the FA title.

I am interested in any advice that you may have in terms of dealing with this situation. Sincerely, **Vlad Rekhson (Canada)**

Answer The only thing that you can do is to approach the Arbiters' Council directly. You can find contact information in the FIDE Directory on the FIDE website. I have already sent your letter to its chairman and he replied as follows:

Regarding Mr. Rekhson, please inform him that the new regulations will be valid from 1 July 2009. Probably it will be another FIDE Presidential Board before that date, where he can apply for his FA title (if his federation will be on time this time). Regarding FIDE Arbiters' Seminars in Canada, please inform him that FIDE Arbiters' Commission together with its member IA Hal Bond who is from Canada, are planning to organize a FIDE Arbiters' Seminar in Canada, during the Canadian Open tournament.

Question Hello! In regards to Dan DeLuca's question from last month's column, I understand your point of view about pressing the clock without making a move, but it still looks dubious to me. Some games, such as Go, allow pass (or "null") moves, chess does not. Is simply pressing the clock an attempt to make a null move or is it not? What is your decision if a player presses the clock *and* says "pass"? What if he takes his rook, places it immediately where it stood and presses the clock? Of course I admit this may be considered *one illegal action* and, at the same time, *zero illegal moves*. But what if I, having the right to castle, move my king from e1 to g1 and press the clock without moving the rook? The logical conclusion seems to be the following: I've performed *one illegal action* and *half of an illegal move*.

From a practical point of view I'd like to mention that the real reason a player presses the clock without moving is often the same as why they move illegally. It is simply an oversight be it from Zeitnot, etc. Best regards, **Wojciech Pietrzak (Poland)**

Answer In my opinion there is a difference between an illegal move and an illegal action. An illegal move is one that is not in accordance with Article 3: The moves of the pieces.

I have to admit that the concept of *zero illegal moves* (a player presses the clock without making a move) is completely new for me. Nevertheless, the penalty is not too difficult. I refer again to Article 12.6, which states that annoying the opponent is forbidden and I am quite sure that you will agree with me that pressing the clock, making no move, and informing the opponent "pass" is really annoying.

Regarding your question about the move Ke1-g1, I refer to Article 4.6.b:

When, as a legal move or part of a legal move, a piece has been released on a square, it cannot then be moved to another square. The move is considered to have been made when all the relevant requirements of Article 3 have been fulfilled, in the case of castling, when the player's hand has released the rook on the square previously crossed by the king. When the player has released the king from his hand, the move is not yet made, but the player no longer has the right to make any move other than castling on that side, if this is legal.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I am trying to clarify a situation that has generated some discussion over here in Cataluña. There have been cases of strong players asking for, and receiving, three or four byes in a single tournament. Thus, they are paired with much weaker players in the latter rounds of the competition. Some of us feel this is totally unfair for the weaker players, who usually lose a game they might have otherwise won or drawn. I wondered, therefore, whether you could help me understand the situation. What is the maximum number of byes permitted in a tournament? Does this depend on each federation or has FIDE set down rules about it? Are there any other sports that allow a competitor to proceed to the next round without playing (and getting half a point in the process!)? I should be very grateful for your help and look forward to your answer. Yours faithfully, **Joe Rahal (Barcelona)**

Answer There is nothing in the FIDE rules or regulations that a player has the right to ask for a bye and receive a half point. It is my opinion it

should be forbidden for rated tournaments, because it has an enormous influence on the pairings in Swiss tournaments.

In The Netherlands some tournament committees allow only *one* request for a bye; most often in weekend tournaments that are not rated. The reason is to give some players the possibility to church on Sunday morning. I do not know whether any committee of a FIDE rated tournament admits these byes. It should be discussed in the RTRC to forbid them.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, With regard to the rule on how to consider unplayed games (UG) for tie-break purposes: “the result shall be counted as a draw against the player himself. This has no effect on the Sum of Progressive Score or Koya System. In such systems only the result counts.”

Let us share some considerations and doubts. In particular, we wonder how this can be applied in case of the tie-break rule “The greater number of games played with the black pieces.” In fact during the pairing of a Swiss tournament the unplayed games are considered as “no color.” Based on the sentence above, it is not clear if it should be considered in such a way, or as played by White and Black at the same time!

Even in case of the ARO tie-break rule (Average Rating Opponent) the UG rule seems unfair, as it favors the player with the greatest rating. In fact, it is his rating used to calculate the ARO in the unplayed games. We would suggest in this case, since the ARO is already an average, to calculate it only over the played games and disregard the UG rule.

In our experience we have noticed that the UG rule tends to favor the player with the greatest rating in case of Buchholz tie-break. Perhaps a more fair treatment is an average point opponent made over the played games and disregarding the UG rule.

In general, we think it could be useful and fair to consider the average (instead of the sum, as for ARO and Buchholz) or percentage (instead of the number, as for won games or games played with the black pieces) values only on the played games for tie-break purposes. Thank you for your attention, **Francesco De Sio, Christian De Vivo, Luigi Forlano & Sergio Pagano (Italy)**

Answer For unplayed games different scores are possible. A “normal” bye is always awarded with a win. A normal bye means that the number of players of a tournament is uneven (odd) and there is no opponent available for one player of this tournament. Also one point is awarded in case the opponent of a player did not show up. There are tournament committees who give half a point for an “agreed bye.” See the question of Mr. Rahal above.

The term “a draw against the player himself” is mentioned only in connection with criteria for pairings and tiebreaks not for the scored points in the tournament.

An unplayed game has no color. Suppose one of the criteria of the final standings is the highest number of games played with black. The tournament has nine rounds. A player played five times with the white pieces, three times with the black pieces, and one game was not played. In this case the figure “three” will be applied for tiebreak calculations. By the way, I am not so happy with this criterion.

If for the final standings the criterion is the Average Rating of the Opponents, I think it is better to use the Average Rating of the Opponents minus the highest and the lowest rating. In this case the lowest rating should be 0, being the rating of the non-opponent.

For Swiss Tournaments it is very difficult to find a solution that satisfies

everyone. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the considering unplayed games as draws against the player himself is the lesser evil.

In my opinion there is no good criterion for calculating the final standings of a tournament, with one exception: if in a team tournament the first criterion is the number of match points, then game points is an excellent second criterion. And vice versa, if game points are the first criterion, then match points is a very good second criterion.

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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