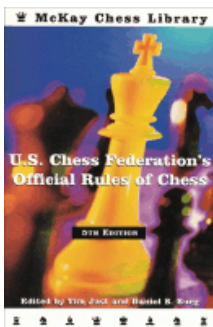




COLUMNISTS

An Arbitrator's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



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What is the result after a flag fall?

**Question** Dear, Geurt. I observed a strange incident at the German Amateur Chess Championship Final.

Player A was to move and could capture a piece with several of his own pieces. After thinking for a while, Player A removed the opponent's piece from the board and once again thought for a long time. To make things clear, Player A did not complete his move by placing a piece of his own on the abandoned square; neither did he press his clock. Thus, Player B claimed that this behavior was distracting. An intense debate followed and it was obvious that Player A succeeded in disturbing Player B.

I have been thinking about the right way to handle this situation:

1. I would not do anything if Player B was fine with this behavior.
2. If Player B claimed to be distracted, as in the situation described above, I would insist that Player A has to return the piece to its square until he exchanges it with a piece of his own in a timely manner. This is based on Article 12.6, because I do not see any explicit rule allowing this unusual behavior.

Moreover, I would consider granting Player B a time bonus of two minutes and giving a warning to Player A. Please let me know your opinion. Best regards, **Markus Wilke (Germany)**

**Answer** I agree that Player A's behavior is incorrect, although it is not explicitly written in the Laws of Chess. However, in this situation, we can 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.*

I also agree with the penalty you propose. Yet, I disagree with your first scenario. I know that many arbiters disagree with me, but in my opinion if an arbiter observes a situation such as you describe, he should interfere. I refer to Article 13.1:

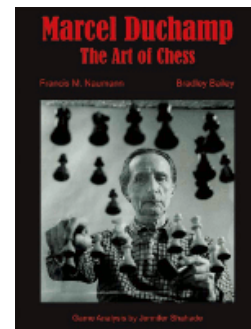
*The arbiter shall see that the Laws of Chess are strictly observed.*

I would also like to add that a player can be disturbed by an opponent's behavior and still not protest. Some people are shy or afraid to protest. Secondly, if an arbiter accepts Player A's behavior, it could give Player A the impression that it is acceptable, and he will then repeat it in future games. Even worse, if the player acts this way frequently, without an arbiter interfering, then the player will protest vehemently when an arbiter does censure this behavior.

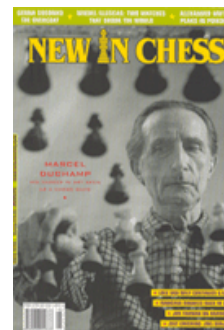
**Question** Dear, Mr. Gijssen. The following occurred in a five-minute blitz tournament. Player A played a move and before he pressed the clock, Player B noticed that Player A's flag had fallen, and claimed a win. However, Player B's flag had already fallen too. Therefore, Player A claimed a draw because both flags were down. What is the correct decision? Sincerely, **Pedro Ferreira (Brazil)**

**Answer** I suppose that there was inadequate supervision in this blitz

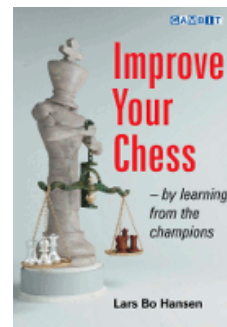
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tournament. I refer to some Articles of Blitz and Rapid games:

B.3 .a of the Blitz rules

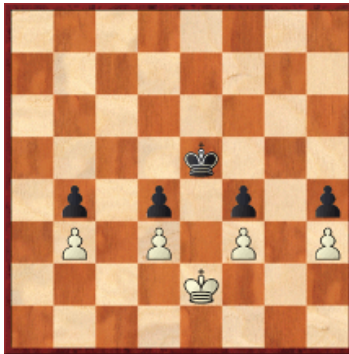
*Where supervision is inadequate the following shall apply:  
a. Play shall be governed by the Rapidplay Laws as in Appendix A  
except where they are overridden by the following Laws of Blitz.*

A4.d of the Rapid rules:

*If both flags have fallen as described in (1) and (2), the arbiter shall  
declare the game drawn.*

It is clear: Draw.

**Question** Hi, Mr. Gijssen. I have a question about blitz games. Imagine that the following position arises in a blitz tournament:



The white player has 15 seconds and the black player has 25 seconds. The white player claims a draw, but the black player wants to continue the game because he has more time. What can the arbiter do? Is this draw? In which positions (in blitz games) can a player claim a draw? Please answer my question as completely as you can. Thank you very much. **Mohammad (Iran)**

**Answer** I do not see any article stating that Article 9.6 does not apply to Blitz games:

*The game is drawn when a position is reached from which a checkmate cannot occur by any possible series of legal moves. This immediately ends the game, provided that the move producing this position was legal.*

You ask in which situations a player can claim a draw in Blitz games. In principle a player can claim a draw just as in normal chess, except for a claim based on Article 10.2 (Quick Play Finish). This is excluded in the Blitz rules, in case of inadequate supervision. This means a claim is possible based on Article 9 (triple repetition or the fifty-move rule). The only problem is that in many situations it is almost impossible to check the correctness of such a claim, because scoresheets are not available. In fact only a claim based on Article 9.6 is reasonably clear. Furthermore, if we examine the text of Article 9.6 carefully, then a claim is not even necessary. When a position similar to the one above arises, the arbiter should declare the game drawn. If there is inadequate supervision (i.e., too few arbiters), then the arbiter should be summoned and asked to declare the draw.

**Question** Dear, Mr. Gijssen. I would like to ask about a couple of situations that occurred in my games.

**Question 1** In a tournament in Edmonton, my opponent and I were in the last few minutes of the game. I made an illegal move, and neither I nor my opponent noticed. A spectator pointed out the illegal move and the arbiter was called. The arbiter deducted two minutes from my time and made me move the piece that I had touched. I tried to convince the arbiter that my opponent had not even noticed, and it was only the spectator's prompting that brought the illegal move to light, but the arbiter ruled against me. So, I had to lose an equal game. Was the arbiter correct in his ruling?

**Question 2** In a tournament in Calgary, my opponent didn't know how to claim a draw. So, she asked the arbiter. The arbiter stopped the clocks and explained the fifty-move rule draw to her. After the game, I confronted the arbiter and told him that he was not supposed to help the participant. The arbiter claimed that he had observed an infraction in that the moves had not been properly written and an infraction allows him to stop the clocks. But there were other games going on and I am pretty sure somebody might have missed some moves; the arbiter didn't feel it necessary to interfere in those games. Was the arbiter correct? Regards, **Shankar Raman (Canada)**

**Answer 1** I assume you are asking about a normal game. I refer to Article 7.4. a of the Laws of Chess:

*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. (...)*

This Article does not mention who discovers the mistake, how it was discovered, or that the opponent has to claim that the player made an illegal move. It is not mentioned that the arbiter has to discover it; none of all these things are stated. It is very simple: if during the game it is found that a player has completed an illegal move, then the move must be corrected. So, the arbiter acted properly.

The arbiter was absolutely wrong when he deducted two minutes from your time. I refer to Article 7.4.b of the Laws of Chess:

*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. 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.*

One question remains: Did the spectator act correctly? If the spectator approached the players directly to indicate an illegal move was played, the arbiter must expel this player from the tournament hall. See article 13.7.a of the Laws of Chess:

*Spectators and players in other games are not to speak about or otherwise interfere in a game. If necessary, the arbiter may expel offenders from the playing venue. If someone observes an irregularity, he may inform only the arbiter.*

But even if the spectator did not inform the arbiter, and the arbiter observed what was going on, he must apply Article 7.4, even after he has applied Article 13.7.a (expelling the spectator).

**Answer 2** The players participating in a tournament are supposed to know the rules. Nevertheless, I can understand that there are situations in which a player is unsure about some details of an Article of the Laws of Chess. Personally, I do not see any reason why a rule should not be explained to a player who asks for it. I do not know who had the move in the game to which you refer, but in general I would not have stopped the clocks. Furthermore, it is better, probably even required, to not address questions to the arbiter in front of the opponent. A player should go to the arbiter and ask his questions in such a way that the opponent is not disturbed. As to the excuses the arbiter used to explain why he stopped the clocks, I consider them irrelevant.

**Question** Dear, Mr. Gijssen. I would like to revisit a controversial issue that was discussed in your [August 2009](#) column.



It is White's move and he just touched his knight, while Black has overstepped time. Your judgment that the game result is a draw is based on a broad definition of "legal move." It is a "quasi-legal move" in that it doesn't contradict any article of the FIDE Laws of Chess. Therefore, you consider only the series of moves that begin with the move of the piece touched. However, there is only one definition of "legal move" in Chess Rules.

*The move is called legal when all the relevant requirements of Article 3 have been fulfilled.*

From this point of view it would be correct to consider the series of moves that don't contradict Article 3, regardless of the piece touched, clocks switched, hands used for clocks switching, etc. In this case the result would be 1-0. What do you think? Thanks in advance for your answer. Sincerely Yours,  
**Yuri Hnip**

**Answer** Yes, you are right. Our starting point is different. I started with the touched piece and the consequences of this, and you began with the position on the board at the moment of the flag fall of the black player. You do not consider the circumstance that a player touched the piece. I understand your view, although it does not change my opinion. If the player of the white pieces had not touched the knight, the result is of course different.

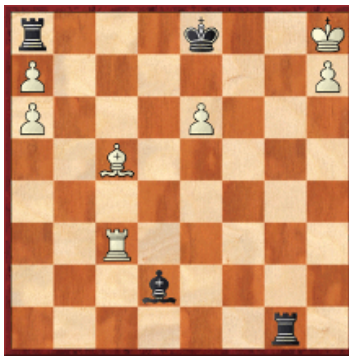
**Question** Dear, Mr. Gijssen. I cannot agree with your interpretation of the meaning of touching a piece as put forth in your August 2009 column. Let us go step by step. There are three sorts of positions that end the game: mate, stalemate, and drawn position (let us call them dead-drawn positions). You choose only two of them, while expanding the meaning of touching a piece.

**Position one**



You wrote: after touching knight on h8 it is stalemate. But we do not know the move leading to the stalemate.

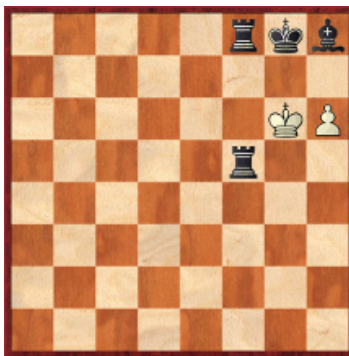
**Position two**



Castling is still possible in this position. Suppose that Black moves his king to c8. His hand releases the king. At this moment Black's flag falls. After extending this philosophy to mate, it should be winning for Black. What is your decision?

And lastly our famous position:

### Position three



Position three is drawn according to the current Laws of Chess, if the flag of the white player falls. The same is said in one of your previous column. But if White managed to touch the h6-pawn before his flag fell, is it winning? Yet, in this position White wins even without touching a piece. Why don't you like the current situation?

1. In order not to lose on time a player should complete a move (making a move plus pressing the button).
2. A player has the right not to complete a move, but only to make a move (releasing hand from a piece) if it ends the game or leads to one-side drawing the position.

But in all cases a player should finish making the move using his own time.

### Igor Vereshagin (Russia)

**Answer** Key is Article 6.9 of the Laws of Chess, and especially the last sentence:

*Except where one of the Articles: 5.1.a, 5.1.b, 5.2.a, 5.2.b, 5.2.c applies, 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.*

In other words, if a player oversteps the time limit he loses the game. But if the opponent (suppose the game could be continued) cannot win the game, independent of what both sides have played, the game should be declared a draw. Of course, all moves must be legal. Let us consider the three positions.

**Position one** After the player of the white pieces has touched the knight, the flag falls. We have to investigate whether there is a possibility that the player of the black pieces can win the game. White has only two **legal moves**: Nf7 and Ng6. I assume you agree that in both cases it is stalemate. We have in this

case two series of legal moves and each series consists of one move. Black cannot win. Therefore, it is a draw. Notice that it is won for Black if White had not touched the knight on h8, because there is a series of legal moves beginning with Ke1 or Ke2 that is winning for Black.

**Position two** During the FIDE Congress in Kallithea, we discussed this position extensively.

Let us consider the position. The only possible move Black has is completing castling on the queenside. The continuation is forced. 2.Bf8+ Bxc3 checkmate. This is a forced series of legal moves. Black overstepped the time limit and White cannot win by any series of legal moves. Therefore, it is a draw. I understand that you prefer that the checkmate should be applied, but we still have Article 6.9, which mentions that it is a draw.

Yet, there is another aspect to position two. Suppose that Black had played 1...Kc8 and his hand had not released the king and the flag falls at that moment. What is the result in this case? In my opinion White wins, because it is still possible to play another legal move with the king: 1...Kd8. And in this case, it is easy to find many series of legal moves that are winning for White.

**Position three** I agree again with you that the game is a draw if the flag of the white player falls in this position. The only legal white move is 1.h7 checkmate.

**Conclusion** Never declare a game won for a player who has overstepped the time limit. Check the position as to whether the opponent can possibly win the game if it were to be continued. If he cannot win, declare the game drawn. If it is completely certain that the player touched a piece just before the flag fall, take this into consideration. As a matter of fact, the last sentence is my personal opinion, although many persons present in Kallithea, after some explanation, shared my opinion. I understand fully that some people do not share my opinion. They consider the whole matter too complicated and too detailed.

**Question** Hi, Geurt. I truly enjoy your column. In the process of making a move, what constitutes releasing a piece to a square? I recently heard of a player who would pick up a piece, set it down on a square while continuing to hold it, analyze the position while holding it there, then perhaps place it on another legal square or two while still holding it, continuing to analyze, and then finally let go of the piece when he was finished with his analysis. I would have thought that touching a square with a piece would commit the player to moving it to that square, but the rules do not seem to be clear on this. Thanks,  
**Dan Raats (Canada)**

**Answer** As long a player does not release the piece from his hand, he still has the possibility of moving this piece to another square. Nevertheless, the behavior of the player you mention is absolutely forbidden. He is in fact disturbing his opponent. During the game, the opponent always has the right to have complete sight of the actual position on the board. In the situation you describe, it is clear that this is not possible. There is no rule that states that a piece cannot be moved to another square after it has touched a square. However, there is a slight exception. After the promotion of a pawn, the new piece cannot be changed after it has touched the promotion square.

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