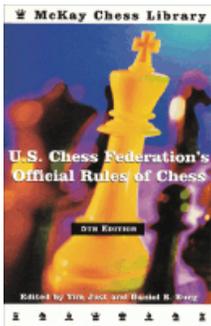




COLUMNISTS

*An Arbiter's Notebook*

Geurt Gijssen



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When is an Illegal Move Legal?

**Question** Dear, Mr. Gijssen. I have a question regarding the purpose of what is probably the most discussed article of the Laws of Chess:

*A player whose mobile phone rings during the game loses the game.*

The rationale of the rule is undoubtedly to avoid cheating via the use of electronic equipment connected to the players mobile phone. This is perfectly reasonable at the professional level.

But can you see any sense of it in amateur tournaments, where family concerns and ordinary problems may take precedence? How many "weekend warriors" will it take to quit chess before we amend this rule? Wouldn't it make more sense to distinguish between these groups, as was done with "zero tolerance"? Thank you for your answer. Yours sincerely, **Richard Dobias (Slovakia)**

**Answer** I refer to a part of the Preface of the Laws of Chess and the Rating Regulations:

*A member federation is free to introduce more detailed rules provided they:*

- a. do not conflict in any way with the official FIDE Laws of Chess, and*
- b. are limited to the territory of the federation concerned, and*
- c. are not valid for any FIDE match, championship or qualifying event, or for a FIDE title or rating tournament.*

The basic data for measurement of chess performances must be broad and ample. Play will be rated by FIDE when it takes place in a FIDE registered competition and meets all the following requirements.

In my opinion, this means that an organizer, or federation, or club has the right to organize an event with their own rules. They are even allowed to disregard some of the Articles of the Laws of Chess. The only consequence is that these events cannot be rated and title norms cannot be achieved in these events.

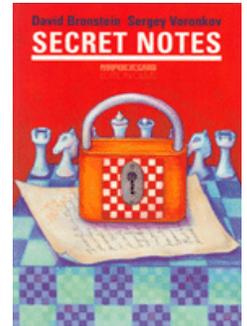
However, I am not in favour of having different laws for professionals and amateurs, as this would become to confusing for the players. Regarding "zero tolerance," let me quote Article 6.6.a of the laws of Chess:

*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.*

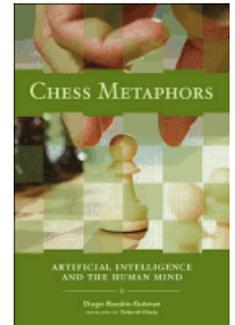
It is completely in accordance with the Laws of Chess that each event may change the "zero tolerance" rule. In the Aeroflot Festival in Moscow, each player may arrive at his board within thirty minutes after the start of the round.

**Question** Dear, Geurt. I have a question concerning Blitz games. In an unofficial tournament Black checkmated White. However, once the clocks were stopped for the last time, Black's flag was shown to have already fallen, even though White failed to claim the win on time before being checkmated. Nevertheless, White argued that it is the last clock stop after the checkmate which ends the game, not the move itself. Thus, White claimed a win on time

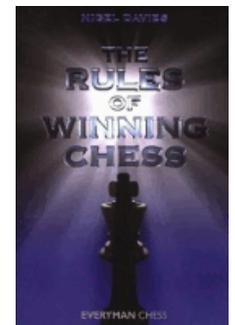
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anyway. It is obviously impossible to determine whether the checkmating move took place before or after the flag fall. So who wins? In particular, is stopping the clock after checkmate necessary at all? Best regards, **Lorenzo Torricelli (Italy)**

**Answer** I refer to Article 6.7.a:

*During the game each player, having made his move on the chessboard, shall stop his own clock and start his opponent's clock. A player must always be allowed to stop his clock. His move is not considered to have been completed until he has done so, unless the move that was made ends the game. (See the Articles 5.1.a, 5.2.a, 5.2.b, 5.2.c and 9.6)*

Let me begin with your last question. As you can see in Article 6.7.a, there is no need to stop the clocks in cases of checkmate (Article 5.1.a) and stalemate (Article 5.2.a), or when checkmate is possible (5.2.c and 9.6), or an agreement of a draw (Article 5.2c). To avoid any misunderstanding with the latter, in case of a flag fall **after** the agreement, the draw stands.

Regarding Blitz and rapid games without adequate supervision, checkmate and stalemate trumps the flag fall.

**Question** Hello, Mr. Gijssen. In [Secret Notes](#), by David Bronstein and Sergey Voronkov, Mr. Bronstein relates that during a tournament in Denmark in 1990, the arbiter phoned him about half an hour after the start of the round to know if he was intending to play that round. (Bronstein's clock was slow and he was late for the last round.) Is it legal for an arbiter to do something like that? Thank you. **Guy Brunet (Canada)**

**Answer** This is an interesting question. My personal opinion is that one is allowed to warn a player that the round has already begun, provided that the arbiter applies this "rule" to all players. For me, it is obvious that forfeits in a tournament should be limited as much as possible. This is in the interest of all players. For instance, forfeited games are not valid for norms, which means that both players can suffer if the opponent does not show up. There were many times that I called the players in their room to inform them that the round had begun, or when I asked the organizer to call them. Normally, I always have a room list of all the players.

**Question** In the blitz world championship games Svidler vs. Carlsen and Mamedyarov vs. Ivanchuk, white played his pawn to the eighth rank and pressed the clock, without replacing the pawn with a new piece. Is it possible to leave the pawn on the eighth rank and press the clock? Thanks, **Renan Brandao (Brazil)**

**Answer** I refer to Article 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.*

It is clear that leaving the pawn on the last rank and pressing the clock is considered to be an illegal move. I refer to Article A.4.c of the Rules for Rapid 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.***

In Blitz games, this rule does not apply. This means that in a Blitz game if a player presses the clock after he has played the pawn to the eighth rank, he completed an illegal move and the opponent can claim a win. If the opponent

does not claim the win, the game continues and the pawn stays on the eighth rank as "dead wood."

**Question** I have a question regarding a match of the German second division. The line-up of each team has to be given to the arbiter fifteen minutes in advance. So each player can learn who his opponent will be at the arbiter's table. Normally the arbiter reads the line-up of both teams aloud. Then he starts the match.

In this case the arbiter just declared the match started. On seven boards, the first moves were made. The arbiter started the clock on the fourth board, where the player of the foreign team was missing. The player of the home team made his first move. The third board player of the foreign team came five minutes late (a delay of thirty minutes is allowed), and to his astonishment his board was already occupied by the fourth board player.

The arbiter suggested that the game of the third board should begin from the starting position and that the fourth board player should simply make his move on the fourth board. The two players from the home team didn't object. So the match continued as if nothing had happened.

Was the arbiter correct in suggesting starting new games on board three and four? Could or should the home team have demanded wins for board three and four? If so, did the home team lose the right to protest after the new games had started? **Joachim Wintzer (Germany)**

**Answer** As far as I know, the players of each team in the German League play the entire competition in a fixed order, which is delivered to the director of the League. This means that the player, who was supposed to play on board three, can never play on a lower board during the competition. I understand from your question that the player accidentally sat at the wrong board. Therefore, I consider the measure taken by the arbiter very reasonable and in accordance with the Preface of the Laws of Chess:

*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.*

**Question** Dear, Mr Gijssen. In the following position of a Rapid game White played **1.Bg2** and Black answered **1...Ka8**:



White, without realising the illegality (since both players were very young), played **2.a7**. Now Black to play, claimed a stalemate since he has no legal move and the last move played was not a check. But the white player claimed a win by checkmate.

What is your opinion of this peculiar situation. The rules only deal with the last move if it is legal. How about the position preceding the last move, since the king cannot move into check? Is this position stalemate or checkmate? Since this game was played by youngsters, the mere application of the rule does not justify the resultant position.

Here is a case where White allowed the black king to come into check, and,

without getting the position corrected with the help of the arbiter, proceeded to play a move that produced a stalemate position, according to 5.2a of Laws of Chess, even though the king was already in check prior to the last move. In this case, the arbiter reset the position before the illegality and allowed the children to continue the game. Ironically, even after getting a new queen, the white player produced a stalemate! But this time by proper legal moves. Please comment, thank you. Yours, **K. R. Seshadri (India)**

**Answer** You mentioned that it was a Rapid game. First of all, let us investigate the consequence of an illegal move in a Rapid game. I refer to Article A4.c:

*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.*

In the case under discussion, there was no claim. The illegal move was therefore "accepted." White played 2.a7 and this is a legal move. Furthermore, I refer to Article 1.2 of the Laws of Chess:

*The objective of each player is to place the opponent's king 'under attack' in such a way that the opponent has no legal move. The player who achieves this goal is said to have 'checkmated' the opponent's king.*

I refer also to Article 5.1.a:

*The game is won by the player who has checkmated his opponent's king. This immediately ends the game, provided that the move producing the checkmate position was a legal move.*

In my opinion, all the requirements of Articles 1.2 and 5.1.a are fulfilled in the given position.

**Question** In a Blitz tournament, Player A did not notice the opponent's flag fall and continued playing. The arbiter, who was observing the game, did not indicate the flag fall, as per the rules. Suddenly, the clock went blank. The arbiter now mentioned the flag fall, but the opponent demanded more playing time. What is the verdict? Thanks and regards, **Rajarithnam (India)**

**Answer** It is always unfortunate when a clock stops running, especially in a situation as you describe. If the arbiter knows the times indicated by the clocks at the moment the clock stopped working, he can take a new clock and reinstate the remaining times. But in the event that one player has no time left, I see only one solution: to continue the game and give both players some extra time. Something such as five seconds. To start a new game is not an option in Blitz tournaments, because generally there are only very short breaks between rounds.

**Question** I have a question regarding the following scenario in a Blitz game: My opponent creates an illegal position by making an illegal move. I do not notice the illegal position because of extreme time pressure and make a move. Can my opponent stop the clocks and claim a win on the basis of me making an illegal move?

In other words, is a move that I make from a position that arose after an illegal move by my opponent deemed to be an illegal move, regardless of whether it would be a legal move under normal circumstances? Warm regards, **Michael Freylink (South Africa)**

**Answer** In my opinion, there are only two illegal positions:

- A pawn that reached the last rank is not replaced by a piece.
- Both kings are attacked, even if by each other.

The first case is easy. The pawn remains on the board as a "non-entity," as I mentioned above, and has no consequences for you.

The second case is interesting. If both kings are attacked, the player who has the move may claim a win. Even if the last move produces a checkmate, the move is still illegal. I have to admit that the whole thing is a little bit crazy. Fortunately, the players can use their sound judgment and apply the last sentence of Article B.3.c:

*Once the opponent has made his own move, an illegal move cannot be corrected unless mutually agreed without intervention of an arbiter.*

**Question** Hi, the dispute is as follows: I was playing white in the following position when my time expired.



Your Secretary Mr. Stewart Reuben explained to me that Rule 6.9 determines that I lost the game, but he either ignored my point or did not understand it. I accept that my time expired, but my opponent does not have enough material to checkmate me. Rule 6.9 states,

*However the game is drawn, if the position is such that the opponent cannot checkmate the player's king by any series of legal moves.*

Rule 6.9 says that the opponent (the one that has still time) can make any series of legal moves until he checkmates me.

Article 3.1 says that both players must make alternate moves until the game is completed. Therefore, Rule 6.9, allowing the opponent to make any series of legal moves, is in conflict with Rule 3.1. I appreciate your comments. Thank you and regards, **Alessandro Gallenda, (England)**

**Answer** Let me try to explain what it means. In the diagram position, the player of the white pieces overstepped the time limit. Normally it means that he loses the game. But suppose, that in this case the player of the black pieces has no way to win the game by any series of legal moves. In this case, he does not deserve to win the game and the arbiter shall declare the game drawn. This means that the arbiter must always check the final position of a game after a player has overstepped the time limit.

He has to investigate whether there is a series of legal moves that is winning for the player of the black pieces. And there are many as you can find out yourself. Therefore, the game is really lost for you (the white player).

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