



COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



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Revisions to the Laws of Chess

As Chairman of the Rules and Tournament Regulations Committee (RTRC), I have received many proposals, suggestions and comments for revising the Laws of Chess during the FIDE Congress in Dresden in November 2008. I have distributed these to the members of the RTRC and other interested parties for further input, and I will keep you informed.

Question Dear Geurt, concerning your answer to Paul Linshits in [March 2008](#):

*Question: Imagine a scenario where an unrated player scores 8 out of 8 against opponents with an average ELO of 2000 in a big open tournament. For arguments sake, say in the last round he is paired against an opponent who has an ELO of 1400 and no other player has more than 6½ points, so the first player has already won the event. If the first player wins against the 1400 in the last round, his ELO would be smaller than if he didn't play! How is it possible that one loses rating points for winning? **Paul Linshits (Germany)***

Answer: An unrated player receives a rating after he has played at least nine games against rated players. This simply means that his rating will not be lower after nine games than after eight games, because after eight games he has no rating at all.

The reason the 350 point rule remains for calculating ratings is social, it now has no statistical validity. But it encourages higher rated players to play in open Swiss against much lower rated opponents.

Your answer is fair enough as far as it goes, but he would have a partial rating. What if a player had met nine opponents and made a reasonable score of 5/9 against a field of 2100 in a Swiss? Then his rating would come out as 2113½.

Now he plays a tenth game in the same event against an opponent rated 1500. The rating average of his opponents becomes 2040. He wins the game, thus scoring 6/10 and his rating becomes 2066 over ten games. His rating has gone down substantially despite winning the game.

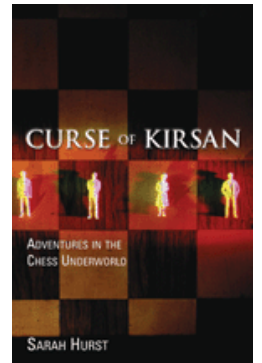
Similarly, if he played against a 2700 opponent and lost, he would have 5/10 against a field of 2160. His rating would become 2160, despite losing.

This anomaly does not exist in round robins with more than one unrated player, or in Swiss's where a player scores less than fifty percent.

A rule could be introduced where, if a player gains or loses, due to this anomaly, the final rating is calculated discarding this game, but including it in the number of games total. It would be extremely complex. **Stewart Reuben (United Kingdom)**

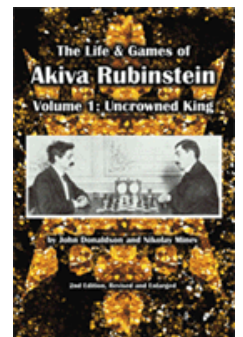
Answer I still think the 350 rule should be abolished. Nor do I see any reason to encourage high-rated players to play against low-rated players. The arbiter makes the pairings, albeit with the help of a computer, and that is it that.

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In the past, I often heard the complaint that a player lost rating points, even upon winning the game. But this is not the case anymore for a rated player. If a player wins a game, he cannot lose rating points, since the rating calculations are done game by game and are not based on the average rating of the opponents.

It is different for an unrated player, because the new rating is based on the average rating of his opponents. For title norms it is possible to discard one or more games, provided that the player won the games he wants to discard. Perhaps the Qualification Commission can apply this same system when calculating a new rating for a player. The old system can be applied for rating calculation. It is not very complex. I shall contact its Chairman.

Question Dear Sir, your last column raised some questions that were widely discussed at our online [forum](#). Could you comment on this quote?

Your question is in fact: Can one make a move before the opponent has stopped his clock and started the opponent's clock?

To answer this I refer to Article 6.8.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 Articles 5.1, and 5.2)

Although it is not articulated clearly, it is generally accepted that based on this Article the opponent has the right to make his move before the player has stopped his clock. However, the player still has the right to stop his own clock and to start the opponent's clock, even after the opponent has made his move.

In the Ukraine this is not generally accepted. The latest Ukrainian translation of the FIDE Rules literally makes no differences between “move hasn't been made” and “move hasn't been completed.” Thus, based on articles 1.1 and 6.8.a, such a rendition means that a player has the right to make his move only after the opponent has made his move (article 1.1), stopped his clock and started the opponent's clock (article 6.8.a). Do you consider this as a misinterpretation?

By the way, a former Soviet arbiter said that the old version of the FIDE Rules expressly prohibited making a move until the opponent stopped his clock. It's pity that I could not find a printed copy. Thanks. **Yuri Hnyp (Ukraine)**

Answer I have mentioned several times that the phrase “made a move” in Article 1.1 is confusing. It is possible to speak of “completing a move” only after the term “chess clock” is introduced, and this happens in Article 6. But this does not provide a sufficient answer to your question: *Do you consider the fact that a player may make a move only after the opponent has completed his move (meaning made his move and pressed the clock) as a misinterpretation?* My answer is: Yes. This is based on Article 6.8: A player must always be allowed to stop his clock.

In my opinion, this part of Article 6.8 only makes sense if a player makes a move before the opponent has pressed his clock. It means that even when a player is not on move, he is allowed to press the clock in the given situation. The following argument may not be very strong, but suppose a player can only move after the opponent has pressed the clock. Can you imagine how many quarrels we would have in Blitz and Rapid games? And in this case there is no difference between “normal,” Rapid and Blitz games.

Question Dear Geurt, the following situation occurred in a team match

here in Switzerland: both players were in heavy time-trouble. Player A had about six seconds and Player B about three seconds to make two moves in order to reach the forty-move limit. Player A made his move and knocked down about five pieces, including the one that he moved. Player B was too taken aback by the situation to react immediately and ran out of time. Therefore, Player A claimed the win. The two arbiters present then confirmed the result. I have the following questions:

- Was this decision correct?
- How should a player react in such a situation?
- Can an arbiter interfere without being asked by the player?

Thanks in advance for your answer. **Dominik Altmann (Switzerland)**

Answer To answer all your questions, I refer to Articles 7.3 and 13.1:

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

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

Some arbiters will disagree with the second reference, because they hold the opinion that the arbiter can only act after a claim from the opponent. But in my opinion the task of an arbiter is also to protect a player against an offending opponent. Therefore, the arbiter should interfere.

Question Dear Geurt, Article 12.2b reads: "If a player's mobile phone rings in the playing venue during play, that player shall lose the game." Yet Article 12.7 states that "Infraction of any part of the Articles 12.1 to 12.6 shall lead to penalties in accordance with Article 13.4" and Article 13.4 begins: "The arbiter can apply one or more of the following penalties..." I interpret this to mean that a mobile phone infraction falls under the jurisdiction of Article 13.4. However, 12.2b dictates the arbiter's decision.

I also draw your attention to the Preface of the rules: "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 believe 12.2b is indeed such a rule. **Geoff Marchant (United Kingdom)**

Answer You are correct about this being an inconsistency. I have received several proposals for revision of this Article, so we will see what happens during the FIDE Congress in Dresden. It will not surprise me if this Article is amended.

Question Hi Mr. Gijssen, if the two new proposals below are approved, it seems to me that two jokers could conspire to abuse this rule.

B7. The flag is considered to have fallen when a player has made a valid claim to that effect. The arbiter shall refrain from signaling a flag fall, even after both flags have fallen.

B8. To claim a win on time, the claimant must stop both clocks and notify the arbiter. For the claim to be successful the claimant's flag must remain up and his opponent's flag down after the clocks have been stopped. If after such a claim it is noticed, that both flags have fallen, the arbiter shall declare the game drawn.

Many thanks in advance. **Francesco De Sio (Italy)**

Answer As a matter of fact, these are not new Articles. In Rapid and in Blitz games it is already stated that an arbiter cannot interfere after a double flag fall. Also, it is unlikely that players will abuse this Article,

and if the arbiter determines that to be the case, he can apply Article 12.1:

The players shall take no action that will bring the game of chess into disrepute.

Furthermore, I would like to mention a proposal sent to me as an improvement:

The flag is considered to have fallen when a player has made a valid claim to that effect. The arbiter shall refrain from signaling a flag fall, even after both flags have fallen, providing this does not disrupt the tournament schedule.

Question Dear Gijssen, In blitz, if an arbiter is present, can a player correctly claim a draw based on triple repetition or the fifty-move rule? Thanks, **Bagher Ghorbani (Iran)**

Answer Theoretically the answer is: Yes. But in practice it is quite a difficult task for the arbiter. An uncomplicated triple repetition of position can be handled without too much difficulty, but the fifty-move rule poses some challenges. A position with K+R+B vs. K+R is an easy situation, but more pieces and pawns make it more challenging. After each pawn move or exchange, the arbiter has to start recounting the moves. Finally, I would like to mention that an arbiter cannot be forced to observe one game to count the moves.

Question Dear Geurt, under the current laws of chess it is my understanding that it is illegal to write your move down before playing it. While reading the recent article about claiming a draw by triple repetition, it is a requirement to write your move down before playing it. Isn't this a contradiction? **Gerard Smith (Ireland)**

Answer In the [February 2008](#) column, I advised the following order:

- he has to stop the clocks,
- he has to summon the arbiter,
- he has to write the intended move.

After stopping the clocks, it is probably advisable for the player to inform the opponent that he wants to claim a draw.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, In a recent standard time control tournament, my opponent's son, who was perhaps ten-years-old, would often come to his father's side during the game (often while my clock was ticking) and would begin a conversation that was quite distracting for me. The conversations were about his homework and things totally unrelated to the game. This occurred eight to ten times during the game. My opponent would also call out to his son in a loud voice to "stop doing" certain things and sit down.

I had a winning position, but the constant distractions led to a mistake on my part and I lost. My opponent previously had a complaint made against him by another player for the same reason, and nothing was done by the TD.

My question is: considering the rule that states *it is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever*, could I have claimed a win based upon repeated distractions by my opponent during the game? The TD saw what was happening and said nothing. As a result of these frequent distractions, I lost the game, a chance to secure second place, and a lot of rating points. I have never experienced such actions by an opponent during a game.

Also, is there any recourse if a TD clearly sees such actions and knows of previous complaints, but does nothing about it? Your thoughts would be most appreciated. Sincerely, **Tim Harris (USA)**

Answer I refer to Article 13.2:

The arbiter shall act in the best interest of the competition. He should ensure that a good playing environment is maintained and that the players are not disturbed. He shall supervise the progress of the competition.

The last part of the second sentence is very important: **He should ensure that the players are not disturbed**. In this case, the arbiter had to act, even if it meant removing the child from the playing area. It is likely the father had to take care of his son, but in this instance he should have assumed this responsibility outside of the playing hall, even if it meant resigning the game.

In my opinion, you could not claim a win, as it is up to the arbiter to decide how to compensate you. Finally, if the arbiter does not act when a player is disturbed, the player must go to the arbiter and request that he do something.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I recently attended a youth state championship where I witnessed a long series of mistakes by the arbiter. For starters the players made bad use of the clock: stopping the clock without making a move, or stopping the opponent's clock if he had forgotten. All this before the arbiter's eyes! At some point, Player A stopped the clocks, took Player B's scoresheet and was trying to correct a mistake! The arbiter, who was present, simply looked at the players and took no action.

I am an arbiter as well, and I complained to the arbiter. He just started the clock again, but said nothing. Later on, Player B made an illegal move (by moving his king into check) and stopped his clock. Player A protested and the arbiter advised Player B to take his move back and play another. That's all! No clock adjustment! Player B did not even play his king afterwards. At the end of the game Player A incorrectly announced a checkmate, and the arbiter agreed!

This is a clear example of an incompetent arbiter. What can players (or spectators) do when the arbiter seems to ignore FIDE rules and displays a complete lack of knowledge about chess itself? Thank you, **Stavros Lyrakis (Greece)**

Answer In principle, a spectator cannot interfere directly, but he can always speak to the chief arbiter or the organizer of the event and report what he has seen.

Question Dear Sir, in my opinion there are some cases in the Laws of Chess when there needs to be a better definition for the time period a player has to make a claim.

- What if there was a stalemate that went unnoticed and the game ended with one of the players winning. Does it influence the outcome of the game when they determine there was a stalemate (a day later, or even after the tournament ended)?
- What if a player made a correct claim about Article 9.2 or 9.3, but the arbiter makes a mistake and decides to continue the game. The player can decline to continue and protest the arbiter's decision, but does he have the right to complain if he proceeds with the game and loses in the end? If so, can his opponent complain if he loses the game?
- If a player claims a draw by Article 10.2, and the arbiter postpones the decision, may his opponent ask for a draw later on (even a move before being mated)?
- When can a player claim that his opponent's phone rang (in the arbiter's absence)? May he claim it the moment it happens, or may he do it later on in the game?

I'm sure there are more cases in which the Laws do not specifically determine the rights of a player. Thank you for your time. Sincerely,
Branislav Suhartovic (Serbia)

Answer You make some very good points and your remarks are correct. Therefore, I sent your letter to the members of the RTCR for discussion during the FIDE Congress in Dresden.

I agree that there are several cases which are not very well defined in the regulations. Let me discuss the three examples you mentioned.

- Article 5 mentions that stalemate and checkmate finishes the game immediately. But what if it is not noticed? There is a proposal to add to Article 5 that the game is finished **if the checkmate or stalemate is noticed**. I am not sure whether this is the solution for this problem, but I hope that we can tackle this issue in Dresden where many wise and clever people will be present.
- My personal opinion is that if the player is completely sure about his claim, he should not continue the game. On the other hand, I can imagine that a player would be hesitant to act in this way. In such a case the player depends on the Appeals Committee, and he cannot be certain that the Committee would make the correct decision?
- According to the current Laws of Chess the opponent may accept the draw on the move the draw was claimed. Recently I spoke with GM John Nunn about draw offers in general. He had a very interesting idea: if a player offers a draw, the opponent has the right to accept this offer for a limited amount of moves after the offer was made, say, for five moves.

I agree that there are more examples; however, in many cases the Appeals Committee or a higher authority than the arbiter should have the final decision. The question is always: can a player take this risk, because it is possible that the higher authority may even declare the game lost for the claimant.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, I was recently watching a blitz game when the following situation occurred: Player A, in a lost position, incorrectly announced checkmate. Player B saw that there was no checkmate, stopped the clocks, and requested an increase of two minutes in time, so he would win the game. Is he correct? Thank you in advance. **Jovany Medeiros (Brazil)**

Answer The opponent was correct to stop the chess clocks and summon the arbiter. Then it is up to the arbiter to punish the player if he believes that the opponent was disturbed. Article 13.4 gives the arbiter the possibility to apply a penalty. However, the opponent cannot claim which penalty the arbiter should apply.

Question In the match Russia vs. The Rest of the World, Moscow 2002, you and your colleagues were unable to create a modern variation of the Scheveningen system for teams consisting of ten players. The conditions were:

- that every team has five white and five black boards in every round,
- every player has five white and five black games,
- nobody has the same color three times in a row.

As I am a mathematician, chess player and arbiter, I found this problem very interesting. I managed to create such system, and I am sending it on to you. (Click [here](#) for table.)

This system meets all the requirements, but offers some additional properties. For example, if you sort the rosters of teams by Elo in order from A1 to A0 and from B1 to B0, then the players with the same starting

number have very similar schedules and they will not face many strong or weak opponents in a row. All the best, **Vladica Andrejic (Serbia)**

Answer Although there are few Scheveningen tournaments, this [table](#) is very useful and I am sure it will find its way into the Rule books. As for Moscow 2002, I had prepared a table so that each player had five whites and five blacks, even alternating white and black for all players. It was ideal for the individual player. There was only one disadvantage: in each round all the players on the same team played the same color. Thus, the players were concerned about the possibility of trying to play to win in the last round with black. I puzzled the whole night to make another table, but I was not able to do so. Therefore, I am very happy with this schedule. Congratulations.

Have a question for eurt 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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Scheveningen system for teams consisting of ten players

Bd	Rd 1	Rd 2	Rd 3	Rd 4	Rd 5	Rd 6	Rd 7	Rd 8	Rd 9	Rd 10
1	A1-B3	B0-A1	A1-B7	B2-A1	A1-B5	B8-A1	A1-B1	B4-A1	A1-B9	B6-A1
2	B5-A2	A2-B8	B6-A2	A2-B1	B9-A2	A2-B4	A2-B2	B3-A2	A2-B7	B0-A2
3	B1-A3	A3-B4	B9-A3	B7-A3	A3-B0	B6-A3	A3-B3	A3-B2	B8-A3	A3-B5
4	A4-B7	B3-A4	A4-B0	B5-A4	A4-B8	B2-A4	B4-A4	A4-B9	B6-A4	A4-B1
5	A5-B8	B6-A5	A5-B2	A5-B4	B1-A5	A5-B9	B5-A5	B7-A5	A5-B0	B3-A5
6	B2-A6	A6-B5	B8-A6	A6-B3	B7-A6	A6-B0	A6-B6	B1-A6	A6-B4	B9-A6
7	B4-A7	A7-B9	B1-A7	B0-A7	A7-B6	B3-A7	A7-B7	A7-B5	B2-A7	A7-B8
8	A8-B6	B2-A8	A8-B5	A8-B9	B4-A8	A8-B1	B8-A8	B0-A8	A8-B3	B7-A8
9	A9-B0	B7-A9	A9-B3	B8-A9	A9-B2	B5-A9	B9-A9	A9-B6	B1-A9	A9-B4
10	B9-A0	A0-B1	B4-A0	A0-B6	B3-A0	A0-B7	B0-A0	A0-B8	B5-A0	A0-B2

This system meets all the requirements, but offers some additional properties. For example, if you sort the rosters of teams by Elo in order from A1 to A0 and from B1 to B0, then the players with the same starting number have very similar schedules and they will not face many strong or weak opponents in a row.