



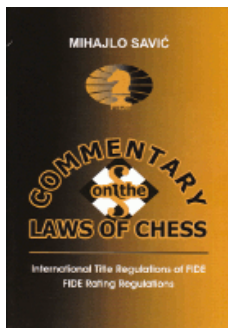
COLUMNISTS

An Arbiter's Notebook

Geurt Gijssen



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USCF vs. FIDE

Question Mr. Gijssen, Your [January 2013 column](#) provided another example where a player from the U.S. asks about USCF rules ... and you respond with a FIDE Law's of Chess answer (ignoring that the USCF rules are a fully accepted variant of FIDE's Laws – as they are). The question concerned having a TD/arbiter declare a game drawn by "insufficient material to continue" under the USCF rules – vs. the FIDE Laws of Chess version which requires that no mating position be possible by worst possible play.

By the FIDE Laws standard, the diagram position in the question is still "live" for the black side; i.e., the white king could march itself into the corner, entomb itself with its rook-pawn and then allow a mate by the black bishop. This would require extremely poor play.

By the USCF rules standard – the issue is not whether a mate is possible, but whether it can be forced. Thus, the arbiter is correct to declare the game drawn at flag fall, as Black cannot force a win. He can be the recipient of a poorly played win, but he cannot force it. (We ignore for a moment whether this "claim" should come from the arbiter or the player – my view is that such situations often require arbiter action to protect player rights under the rules).

Similarly, K+N+N vs. K is a draw under the USCF standard, as the 2N side cannot force a win (though the weaker side may well blunder and lose if this is played out). I give this example only as further proof that you surely need to mention the USCF variant status more often in your column. **Eric C. Johnson (USA)**

Answer You are correct that I should have referred to the USCF Rules in this case. In the future I will try to mention the USCF rules if the question comes from the U.S.A. Nevertheless, it is very strange that one federation has different rules on several issues. By the way, from a historical point of view I am very interested as to when there was an agreement between FIDE and USCF that the USCF rules are applicable for FIDE rated tournaments.

Question Dear Geurt, I would like to expand upon your answer to the question posed by Ms. Cecilia Garcia in the [January 2013 column](#). I am a "National Tournament Director," which is the highest arbiter certification level issued by the United States Chess Federation, and I am also a member of the USCF Rules Committee, which has direct oversight of the *USCF Official Rules of Chess*.

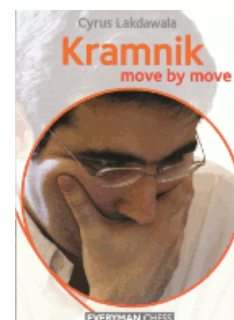
According to USCF rule 14E, the game is drawn even if one player runs out of time if the opponent has:

- a lone king; or
- only a king and bishop or king and knight; or
- only a king and two knights, and the player who ran out of time has no pawns.

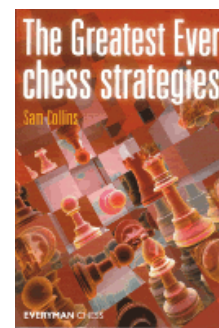
However, the game would be won by the opponent of the player who ran out of time if the position on the board were such that the opponent had a forced win (such as a checkmate on the next move). Under USCF rule 14E, it does not matter whether there is a helpmate possible in the position. Thank you for considering the clarification. **Ken Ballou (USA)**

Answer See my previous answer. Though I wonder if Mr. Ballou can answer my question regarding an agreement between FIDE and USCF. Another question is the definition of a forced win; is it that a checkmate can be

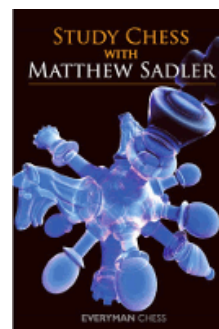
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Question In a [computer chess forum](#) someone noticed an oddity in the FIDE rules. There are most likely no practical consequences; however, it strikes me as an inconsistency in the rules principle. It can be found in article 5.2e and then repeated in 9.3:

Article 5.2e: "*The game may be drawn if each player has made at least the last 50 consecutive moves without the movement of any pawn and without any capture.* (See Article 9.3)"

For consistency with the article 5.2d and 9.2, should 5.2e include also castling moves as resetting the 50 moves counter? After all, the principle behind the rule seems that if enough moves have been played without any irreversible moves being played, it is concluded that no progress is made and the game is declared draw. Is there any intentional reason not to include castling moves in 5.2e?

What was noted in this forum is that apparently some chess programs (e.g., some version of Fritz) reset their 50 moves counter on castling, it does not follow the letter of the rules but somehow it makes sense.

Thanks for your very interesting [ChessCafe.com](#) column. **Paolo Casachi (Italy)**

Answer In my opinion it is in the triple-repetition rule that it is essential nothing has been changed in the position and the same possibilities remain, including *en passant* and castling. In the fifty-move rule it is essential that the material has not changed and the position has not changed irrevocably. A pawn move is irrevocable, but the position of the kings and rooks are not. If computer programs restart counting the moves in connection to the fifty-move rule after castling, then the computer programs have to be changed, not the Laws of Chess.

Question Mr. Gijssen, Thank you for your prompt reply to my query regarding Kotov's "Blumenfeld Rule" in the [January 2013 column](#). I never encountered nor heard of players abusing the practice until the publication of your answer. Your column continuously reminds me of the unscrupulous nature of chess competitors; the most noxious example I recall involved a player who frequently asked his opponent "are you offering a draw" (or words to that effect).

However, as both a copy-editor and chess instructor, I must take issue with the *faux* rhetorical question that became the pull quote for the column: "Is it possible to record something that has yet to happen?" From a chess perspective, your own words provide the answer – *yes, in certain cases* (when "the player is claiming a draw according to Article 9.2 or 9.3"). In this exceptional case, and in the case of good-faith application of the "Blumenfeld Rule," the player records his *intended* move. Further, the article you cite only mentions "in the course of play" and "move after move," phrases far too vague to infer "only after the move is played." From a linguistic perspective, I refer you to the definition of the verb "record" as provided by the authority on American English, [Merriam-Webster](#).

Although the examples provided all refer to events in the past or future past, sense 1a and 1b of the definition omits any connection to time, even going so far as to qualify the term "*as if for the record*" (emphasis mine). Finally, googling "record * intentions" returns 358 million hits. I am sure you agree intending to act and "actualizing" are far different beasts, but one can "record" both.

It is loopholes such as these that underlay my distaste for the rhetorical question in the wide arsenal of turns of phrase available to a writer. I am not so daft as to misunderstand the meaning of the last sentence of your response, I merely feel it was expressed badly and was perhaps best omitted altogether. It certainly strikes me as silly when I read it, though it gave me great confidence that you addressed my question.

I accept without citation that "writing the move in advance is illegal," given your illustration of bad-faith behavior. In my original query, I should have asked exactly when the rule change was made. I regret belaboring the fallacy of the rhetorical question, but felt it unacceptable to leave it be, particularly when it was used to billboard your fine article.

Thank you again for clarifying my understanding, and I look forward to further enlightenment regarding the Laws of Chess and their application for many more years. Kindest Regards, **Holland Mills (USA)**

Answer The rule change was approved during the FIDE Congress in 2004 and came into force on July 1, 2005. I do not always recall when a rule was changed, but in this case I remember very well. It happened during the Chess Olympiad in 2002 in Bled. A team captain requested that I observe the scoresheet of a player of the opposing team. I was astonished at how many times this player crossed out an intended move and had written another one. I understood the captain's complaint and discussed it with many players and arbiters. A majority agreed with me that the player could abuse his scoresheet and could be considered to have taken notes. Let me be clear that in this case I was sure that the player involved had no intention to take notes or to cheat in any way. Based on the talks I had with players and arbiters, I proposed to change the rule. And, as a matter of fact, there have been almost no problems with it.

Regarding the rhetorical question, I would like to mention the following: As you may see, it was the last sentence of my answer. And if you read the whole paragraph it was a digression prefaced with "by the way." That it was used as a pull quote for the column is the publisher's responsibility. As you probably know, the headings of articles in newspapers and magazines are made by the editor and not by the journalists themselves. I know that many journalists are not happy with these headings. Nevertheless, I did not see a reason to suggest to change it. In my opinion it underlines the importance of your question according to the publisher.

I would also like to discuss your remark about the writing of the intended move in case of a draw claim. First of all it is not written that the player has to record his intended move, but that he has to write the move. Furthermore, by writing the move and claiming a draw, the written move stands and cannot be changed, unless it is illegal. In case of an illegality the player should be penalised. In fact, by writing the move, the move has been made, but not executed on the board. Compare the situation with the sealed move in case of an adjournment. After the move has been written and the clock has been stopped, the move has been completed.

Question Dear Geurt, I have three questions:

Question One Can a person offer a draw only if it is his move? Or can a person offer a draw even if it is not his move? Is it true that the correct procedure to offer a draw is:

1. make your move on the chess board
2. ask your opponent for the draw.
3. if he accepts, stop the clocks and write your move on your score sheet.
4. if he declines, press the clock and write your move on your score sheet and continue the game.

Question Two Can a person claim a draw by means of the fifty-move rule even if fifty-six moves have elapsed without a pawn being moved or a piece captured? In fact, I am asking if the fifty-move rule is applied in multiples of fifty?

Question Three Can you claim a draw on the fourth repetition? Or does it have to be a multiple of three? **Loyd Wellen, Provincial Arbiter (South Africa)**

Answer One The order mentioned by you is correct. There are players who assume that the player has to write his move first. This is only the case if a player **claims** a draw. For offering a draw I refer to one sentence of Article

9.1 of the Laws of Chess:

An offer at any other time during play is still valid but Article 12.6 must be considered.

As you may see, it is possible to offer a draw when the opponent has the move, but it can be considered as a disturbance of the opponent with the consequence that the player who offered the draw can be penalised.

Answer Two If the last fifty-six moves are played without a pawn move and without any capture, then it follows that the last fifty moves were played under the same conditions. This means the claim is also correct after fifty-six moves.

Answer Three Similar to the previous answer, Yes, it is legal to claim a draw if the same position appears for the fourth time.

Question Dear Mr. Gijssen, With reference to the question proposed by Mr. Forlano in the [January 2013 column](#), I have some doubts. In the FIDE Handbook (C.06. FIDE Tournament Rules), updated after the 2011 Executive Board, reads in Annex 3 (Tie-Break Regulations):

F. Handling Unplayed Games for Calculation of Buchholz (Congress 2009)

(a) For tie-break purposes, the result of an unplayed game shall be counted as a draw against the player himself. (This system shall not apply from July 1, 2012.)

From July 1, 2012 the following system only applies:

(b) For tie-break purposes all unplayed games in which players are indirectly involved (results by forfeit of opponents) are considered to have been draw. For tie-break purposes a player who has no opponent will be considered as having played against a virtual opponent [cut]

What I understand is that when dealing with unplayed games, in order to calculate the tie-break of the player involved, the concept of draw against the player himself is abolished and replaced by the notion of virtual opponent.

In the same Annex a previous paragraph says:

D. Tie-Break Systems using the Opponent's Results

Note that these scores are determined in each case after the application of the rule concerning unplayed games.

(a) Buchholz System [cut]

(b) Sonneborn-Berger System [cut]

As for the Buchholz system, also the Sonneborn system can be used in Swiss system tournaments, of course, and I understand that we should apply the notion of virtual opponent for unplayed games for any player who has no opponent, because players are paired with the same score. Can you confirm this?

The problem with the virtual opponent arises only for round robin tournaments, where games are played between players who do not have the same score. In this case – Sonneborn in round robin – applying the virtual opponent does not give rise to suitable results. For example, if two players have the same opponent in the first and the last round, and both games are unplayed, and that opponent has very few points, the tie-break for the two players will be very different, in favor of player in the first round.

While Mr. Van Beersum suggests to count the unplayed game as a draw, which in my opinion is correct, rule F(b) states that the rule itself applies to

games where players are indirectly involved, but not to the calculation of their tie-break.

Perhaps, for the Sonneborn used in round robin only (not in Swiss tournaments), it would be better to reintroduce in Annex 3 the (abolished) concept of a draw against the player himself as the result of an unplayed game. What do you think? Best regards. **Francesco De Sio (Italy)**

Answer I repeat Mr. Van Beersum's suggestion in the previous column:

"Mr. Van Beersum, whom I consulted, suggests the results of unplayed games to consider as normal results in Round Robin tournaments or not to apply the Buchholz score. Better is to apply the Sonneborn-Berger scores. In this case, D shall get the highest score by applying Sonneborn-Berger and to count the unplayed game as a draw."

As you may see, his suggestion is to count the unplayed games in a Round Robin tournament as a normal result. It means 0 for the absent player and 1 for the present player.

Yes, I confirm that the system of the virtual player is applicable for Swiss tournaments.

Question Dear Mr Gijssen, Once again I want to raise a question about good refereeing in chess tournaments:

Last week our youth teams took part in a tournament (six boards, fifteen minute Rapid). Our A-Team, which was one of the tournament's favourites, won in the first round with 4-2. The result was correctly recorded on the team match sheet and signed by both captains. Unfortunately, the officials made an error when entering the result in the computer program. So it was entered as a 2-4 loss. It was obviously the fault of the officials, which they admitted later.

The error was discovered immediately after the pairings for round two were posted in the tournament room. I immediately addressed the referees to correct the result and the pairings. At this moment round two had not started yet. In fact the teams were still seeking their places. Round two started about five minutes later.

The head arbiter (a FIDE-arbiter) stated that the result would be corrected (which in fact was done), but the pairings could not be changed. Of course the wrong pairing had influence on the progress of the tournament and at least on the Buchholz-Rating. Fortunately, this turned out not to be crucial later.

My questions are as follows:

Question One Is there any rule or custom that a published pairing cannot be changed, even when it is obviously wrong?

Question Two How much inconvenience, delay, or additional effort would you accept to correct a wrong pairing prior to starting the next round?

Question Three Would it be of importance for you if the error is caused by the referees' fault or by the players or teams?

Best regards, **Thomas Binder (Germany)**

Answer One In principle a published pairing shall not be changed. However, there are two exceptions:

1. A player or a team is paired against a player of team and they played already in a previous round against each other.
2. A player plays for the third time in a row with the same colour or his colour balance is +3 or -3. This also applies also for a team competition.

Nevertheless, there are other possibilities. Here is an example: After the pairings of a round were published a player came to me and said that it was

impossible for him to play the intended opponent for political reasons. I tried to change some pairings, but, in my opinion, I needed the permission of all the players who would get a new opponent. In general only four players or teams are involved in such a change. I never had any problems with the players arranging such changes. It is an absolute condition that all players involved in the changed pairings are informed and have to agree.

Answer Two If I have to change the pairings because they were wrong (see point one and two in Answer One), I have to inform all the players about the changes as soon as possible. If this is not possible, I am ready to postpone the round to give the players the opportunity to prepare for the new opponent.

Answer Three It depends on the mistake. If there was a wrong result, and it does not matter whether it was a player or arbiter mistake, then the pairings stand, provided they were published. I can imagine that the last round pairings, especially in the top, will be changed, but provided that everyone is informed in time.

Fortunately, point two of my first answer does not apply. Three times with the same colour in three consecutive rounds is permitted for the last round.

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