

What are the Preferred Tiebreak Criteria?

by Geurt Gijssen

Question Dear Geurt, In Blitz games without an increment, you often see players try to flag the opponent by aimlessly shuffling pieces around. I have often wondered why this way of winning games, without showing any plan, can be allowed. The old 10.2 (now G.5) was designed to avoid this in all types of positions, but is only available in Standard/Rapid games without increment, or if all the Blitz games are supervised by a dedicated arbiter. In the final Armageddon game [Socko-Foisor](#) of the 2008 World Women Chess Championship, N vs. N occurred on the board, and Foisor tried to appeal to the arbiters for a draw with hand gestures. The arbiters, after flag fall, declared the game a draw because "you cannot obtain a position where the defender cannot avoid mate in one". However, this was a very old rule that was no longer active. Instead an appeal by Monika Socko determined that indeed she should have won, and she was awarded the match against Foisor.

In Standard/Rapid/Blitz games with increment, the increment assures that winning attempts are possible. But it does not give a solution as to what happens if a player continues winning attempts beyond all reason, in a position that cannot be won, trying to avoid the inevitable draw. In this case all that can be done is for the player to claim a draw based on triple repetition (9.2) or the fifty-move rule (9.3) when these are possible. If the player is also not inclined to claim, the arbiter must claim a draw based on five-time repetition (9.6) or the seventy-five move rule. Even if a player cannot really hope to "flag" the opponent, there is also no solution until the above claims can be made. This might well disturb the schedule of a tournament, especially if the increment is thirty seconds and the player is very stubborn. It is also possible for the organizers via G.2 that Standard/Rapid games without increment are not allowed to apply Appendix G, so a draw cannot be claimed.

These considerations have inspired me to suggest the following new Article:

9.8 The game is drawn, upon a correct claim by a player having the move, if the opponent does not have a forced win, and

- (1) the opponent has a lone queen, and the claimant has at least a queen.
- (2) the opponent has a lone rook, and the claimant has at least a rook.
- (3) the opponent has two knights only, and the claimant has any material but pawns.
- (4) the opponent has a lone bishop or a lone knight, and the claimant has any material.
- (5) the opponent has an a- or h-pawn and bishop on the "wrong" diagonal, providing that the lone king of the claimant is controlling the promotion square.

The introduction note to the Article is:

5.2(f) The game may be drawn by the claim of a player if the material of the opponent is so reduced that a loss by the claimant is very unlikely (see Article 9.8).

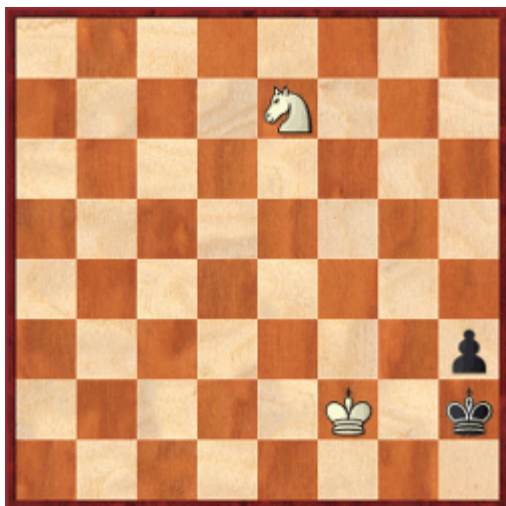
The idea is that it should be claimable in all modes (Standard/Rapid/Blitz) and whether increment is used or not. As you can see, the claimant may have more pieces, but the opponent has only a single piece, or in (5) a bishop and a rook pawn. It is easy for an arbiter to decide a 9.8 claim. The only possible complication is if there is a forced win. The opponent would probably claim that he has a forced win, if that were the case.

It should be noted that the opponent or the arbiter can object if there is a forced win for the opponent. The claim should be rejected if anything looking like a forced win is present on the board, and let the players play it out until there is no appearance of a forced win, when the claimant may claim a draw via 9.8 again. If the claim is rejected, the following applies:

- 9.5 If a player claims a draw under Article 9.2 or 9.3 or 9.8, he or the arbiter shall stop the chess clock (see Article 6.12a or 6.12b). He is not allowed to withdraw his claim.
- a. If the claim is found to be correct, the game is immediately drawn.

b. If the claim is found to be incorrect, the arbiter shall add two minutes to the opponent's remaining time. Then the game shall continue. If the claim was based on an intended move, this move must be made in accordance with Articles 3 and 4.

So the incorrect claim means two minutes is added to the opponent's clock (one minute in Blitz). There are three examples with a forced win that often occur with the mentioned material. The following is an example of an incorrect draw claim in P vs. N:



[FEN "8/4N3/8/8/8/7p/5K1k/8"]

Black is on move. Black claims a draw under 9.8(4), however this would be incorrect, because white has a forced checkmate: **1...Kh1 2.Nf5! Kh2** (2...h2 3.Ng3# doesn't work) **3.Ne3 Kh1 4.Nf1 h2** (forced) **5.Ng3#** (checkmate)

You may ask why a draw claim against a knight is not dependant on whether the opponent has pawn(s), while against two knights there may not be any pawns. The reason is that the only pawn that allows for a single knight to checkmate is a rook pawn, and only if the king is entrapped behind it. Thus, it is better to just specify that there is no a forced win and not outlaw any pawn. In N+N vs. P there is always a possibility to try to mate based on a blocked pawn, so capturing the remaining pieces of that player will allow a forced win (even if it may be in sixty-eight moves). These possibilities are simply eliminated from 9.8(3) by not allowing pawns, so the arbiter does not have to evaluate if a forced win is present.

Here is another example of an incorrect draw claim in Q vs. Q:

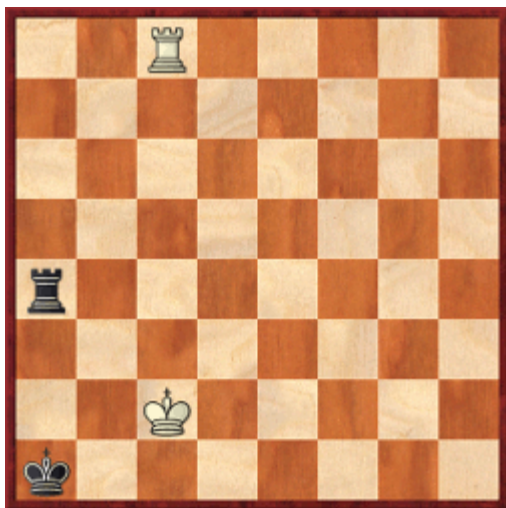


[FEN "1Q6/8/8/8/6K1/8/8/6kq"]

Black has just played **1...h2-h1Q** and hopes to claim a draw on the next move. White plays **2.Qb6+**. Black now claims a

draw under 9.8(1). The material is correct, but the draw claim is not because White has a forced checkmate: **2...Kg2 3.Qb2+ Kf1 4.Qc1+ Kg2 5.Qd2+ Kf1 6.Qd1+** (6.Kg3? would be a mistake as it allows 6...Qg1+ with a draw) **6...Kg2 7.Qe2+ Kg1** (7...Kf1 is no longer possible) **8.Kg3 Qf3+** (Black is hoping for 9.Qxf3?? stalemate. Other moves are equally hopeless) **9.Kxf3** and mate in next move with **10.Qg2#**

The Saavedra study is an example of an incorrect draw claim in R vs. R:



[FEN "2R5/8/8/8/r7/8/2K5/k7"]

Black on move may claim a draw based on 9.8(2), but it would be incorrect. White is threatening Ra8+ with mate, and 1...Ra4 2.Kb3 assures White a forced win because of the threats Kxa4 and Rc1#.

I believe a draw is a fair result in the five types of positions in the Article 9.8, if there is no forced win, whether it is a correspondence game or a bullet game and anything in between. **Jesper Nørgaard Welen (Mexico)**

Answer It is very difficult to answer this question. For the information of the readers I would like to mention that I received other letters from Mr. Norgaard and I have to admit that they are very interesting and will probably be very useful to discuss when there is again a possibility to revise some Articles of the Laws of Chess.

Regarding the game Socko-Foisor I would like to make a remark, although it probably has nothing to do with the matter discussed by Mr. Nogaard. This game was, as mentioned by you an Armageddon game. This a game in which White has five minutes and Black four minutes. In case of a draw Black is considered to have won the game. FIDE will delete this tiebreak because players are playing under different conditions and this can be considered as unfair.

Let me discuss the issue of your proposal. In principal it looks to me quite sympathetic and logical. Nevertheless, I have a problem and it is demonstrated by the queen ending example. I am wondering what the procedure is if Black claims a draw. I understand that with the best moves (notice the plural) White will win. Does the opponent have to show the winning series of legal and best moves? Will the arbiter start to investigate the position, and will Black be very grateful for the analysis? I do not know. I still like the idea, but there is a difference with the draw claims of Article 9.2 and Article 9.8. In 9.2 the completed moves and intended move will be considered, but in Article 9.8 the possible next moves have to be checked. Article 9.7 is probably sufficient:

The game is drawn when a position is reached from which a checkmate cannot occur by any possible series of legal moves.

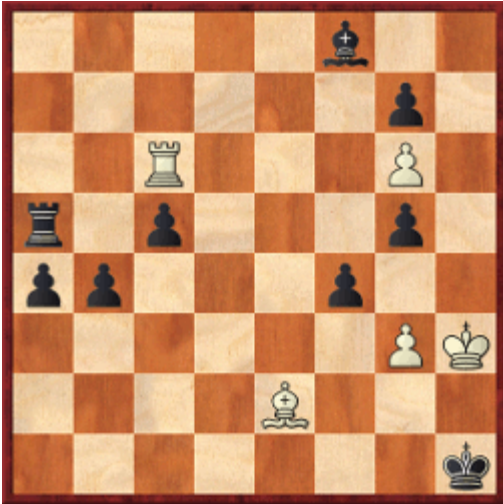
Also, the new Article is, in my opinion, of assistance in avoidong very long games:

If one or both of the following occur(s) then the game is drawn:

- a. the same position has appeared, as in 9.2b, for at least five consecutive alternate moves by each player.*
- b. any consecutive series of 75 moves have been completed by each player without the movement of any pawn and without any capture. If the last move resulted in checkmate, that shall take precedence.*

I am ready to continue the discussion, although I have to mention that a change or addition to the Laws of Chess can only come into effect from 1 July 2017.

Question Dear Geurt, This sequence was quoted in *Le Monde des Echecs*, 1948:



[FEN “5b2/6p1/2R3P1/r1p3p1/pp3p2/6PK/4B3/7k”]

1.Bh5 a3 2.Rd6 Bxd6 3.g4 and White watched his opponent’s flag fall and claimed the win.

“No”, said Black, “it is a draw as no matter what I play it will stalemate the king!”

Well? **Nick Barnett (South Africa)**

Answer Black is right, because stalemate cannot be avoided, this means that in this case there is no series of legal moves to checkmate Black’s king.

Question Dear Mr. Geurt Gijssen, I hope that the following questions will be answered in all three cases Blitz, Rapid, and Classic in a championship that will be attended by more than fifty players and only one Arbiter.

Question One If the time ends for one of the players what should be the decision whether digital or normal?

Question Two Does the arbiter have to interfere when watching an illegal move or at the end of the time of one of the players?

Question Three After the completion of one of the players moves if he dropped another piece and placed it back to another square under time pressure, what is the arbiter’s decision?

Question Four If a player requests a touch move claim and the opponent denies it, and if someone from the audience followed the game and has seen everything, can we take his opinion?

Regards. **FA IO Al Azmi Khalaf (Kuwait)**

Answer One I assume that you mean: A player oversteps the time limit. What will be done? It does not matter what type of chess clock will be used. If a player oversteps the time limit, the opponent may stop the clocks, call the arbiter, and claim a win, provided a win is possible. Also, the arbiter may in all types of play, when he notices the flag fall, declare the game won for the claimant. Again provided he can win. And this applies to all types of play.

Answer Two Yes, he is allowed to call a flag fall. This is according to the Laws of Chess that came into force from 1 July 2014. I would like to add that in the previous Laws of Chess it was not allowed to call a flag fall in Blitz and Rapid in case he had to supervise more than three games in Rapid Chess and more than one game in Blitz Chess.

Answer Three I read this question as what happens when a player knocks over a piece (not the one he moved) and places it back on the board to a different square from what it was on. This is an illegal action. It is clear that the opponent has to call the arbiter and inform him as to what happened. The problem is that it is very difficult to prove that something happened if the arbiter has not seen it.

Answer Four I already more or less answered this question in Answer Three. If a player denies that he touched a piece and moved another one, the arbiter is in fact helpless and he has to accept the actual position on the board. It is quite dangerous to ask the opinion of a spectator. How neutral is he? The arbiter does not know.

Question Good morning Mr. Gijssen, I would like to draw your attention to [FIDE-Handbook, Chapter C.05](#):

The last paragraph there deals with the “Recommended Tie-Break System”. The different types of tie-break rules “are recommended to be applied in the listed order”.

I am quite surprised that the criteria which are based on the opponents’ strength are listed very low on the list. The main tie-breaks are now:

- direct encounter (how to apply this in a group of, say, ten or more players with the same points)
- number of wins (will in most cases favour the player who started weak and recovered later against weaker opponents)
- number of wins with black (why that?, again without respect to the strength of opponents)

Then comes the rating average of opponents (OK), and only then the Buchholz system.

Can you explain why this rule has been introduced, which differs greatly from the normal procedure in most tournaments?

How mandatory are these recommendations for tournament organisers? Can a player insist upon application of this order?

Which order of tie-break rules would you suggest for a classical individual Swiss tournament?

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

Answer I am afraid that you overlooked what is written in the definition of Direct Encounter:

If all the tied players have met each other, the sum of points from these encounters is used. The player with the highest score is ranked number 1 and so on. If some but not all have played each other, the player with a score that could not be equalled by any other player (if all such games had been played) is ranked number 1 and so on.

I agree that the number of wins is not the best criterion. There will be a committee that will discuss all tiebreak systems and I am quite sure that this criterion for Swiss tournaments will be removed. By the way, the player who won the most games, also lost the most games.

Recommendations are never mandatory. It means that a player can never insist that certain criteria in a certain order must be applied. The tiebreak criteria should be announced in advance.

You asked which criteria I prefer:

a) If all players have reliable consistent ratings and the tournament has at least nine rounds, I prefer

- Average ratings of opponents calculated without the highest and the lowest rating.
- Buchholz Cut 1. That is the sum of the opponents’ scores minus the lowest score.

b) If the number of rounds is less than nine and/or the ratings are not consistent:

- Buchholz
- Sonneborn-Berger.

Copyright 2014 Geurt Gijssen and ChessEdu.org. All Rights Reserved.