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The following notes deal with a number of points in the laws which are often misunderstood by players and can give rise to unnecessary confusion or disputes. They also discuss how the laws are implemented in competitions organised by the Cornwall County Chess Association ("CCCA") where there is a range of options or discretion to vary. Players should note that, in these cases, the organisers of other competitions (e.g. county matches, congresses) may apply different variations. The arrangements for junior events are at the discretion of the organisers who may apply a wider range of variation if they think it appropriate.

These notes are based on the revised FIDE Laws of Chess which came into force on 1st July 2014 in the edition published by the Chess Arbiters Association with notes and clarification (not forming part of the Laws) by the CAA. These contain much helpful material and are well worth reading. This copy of the Laws is available on the CCCA website at www.cornwallchess.org.uk/non-html/info/laws-fide.pdf

Preface

It is worth quoting the first paragraph in full.

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. 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 a solution to a problem dictated by fairness, logic and special factors. FIDE appeals to all chess players and federations to accept this view. *(My emphasis)*

While the laws are specific about how to deal with most situations, FIDE recognises that the arbiter must be allowed the discretion to use his judgement in dealing with unusual situations which are either not specifically covered in the Laws or where too legalistic an approach might create unfairness or absurdity.

Guidance Notes on the FIDE Laws of Chess

1) Castling

1.1 Castling is illegal if the king is in check or a square which it must cross or on which it lands is attacked. This does not apply to the rook. (Article 3.8)

Even the greatest players can forget this. In the 21st game of his World Championship match against Karpov In 1975 Viktor Korchnoi asked whether he could legally castle kingside in the current position, in which a bishop was attacking his rook on h1. The arbiter informed him that he could.

1.2 The king must be played before the rook. If you touch the rook first you may not castle on that side. If a legal move is available with the rook, it must be played. (Article 4.4b)

1.3 Castling is a king move. If you try to castle and it is found to be illegal then you must make a king move that is legal. If there is no legal move of the king you are free to make any move. (Article 4.4b)

2) Pawn promotion

2.1 You must remove the pawn and put the new piece on the promotion square yourself before completing the move by pressing the clock. (Article 3.7e)

2.2 The promotion becomes irrevocable when the new piece touches the promotion square. (Article 4.4d)

2.3 Where no piece (usually a queen) is available to complete the promotion, players sometimes leave the pawn in its place until a replacement can be found. Strictly speaking this is an illegal move and you risk incurring the 2 minute / loss of game penalty. (Article 3.7e). The correct procedure in this situation is to stop the clocks and restart them when a replacement piece has been placed on the board. (Article 6.12a)

3) Moving the pieces

3.1 Your move is complete when you press your clock. (Article 6.2a)

3.2 You can only adjust the pieces ("j'adoube" or "I adjust") when it is your move. (Article 4.2)

3.3 Touching a piece

Note: The following rules do not apply if the piece was touched accidentally. (Article 4.3)

3.31 If you touch one or more of your own pieces, you must move the first piece touched. (Article 4.3a)

3.32 If you touch one or more of your opponent's pieces, except the king, you must capture the first piece touched. (Article 4.3b)

3.33 If you touch one piece of each colour:

a) If the capture of your opponent's piece by yours is legal, it must be played.

b) Otherwise you must move or capture the first piece touched that can be moved or captured.

c) If it is unclear which was touched first, you are deemed to have touched your piece first. (Article 4.3c)

e.g. You touch your queen and then your opponent's rook. If QxR is legal, it must be played. Otherwise, if a queen move is legal, it must be moved. If not, the rook must be captured.

You touch your opponents rook and then your queen. If QxR is legal, it must be played. Otherwise, if a rook capture is legal, it must be captured. If not, the queen must be moved.

3.34 If applying the above rules produces no legal move, you are free to play whatever move you like (Article 4.5)

3.35 For the position regarding castling and pawn promotion see notes 1) and 2) above.

3.4 Illegal move

The penalty for the first illegal move by a player is for 2 minutes to be added to the opponent's time. A second illegal move results in the automatic loss of the game, unless the position is one where checkmate is impossible. (Article 7.5).

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Before 1st July 2014 two illegal moves were allowed before forfeit.

4) The clock

4.1 Your opponent must be allowed to stop his clock after making his move, even after you have made your next move. (Article 6.2a)

You are not allowed to "blitz" your opponent by making your move in his time. You must wait until he has pressed his clock before making your move, however serious your time trouble.

4.2 You must make your move and press the clock with the same hand. (Article 6.2b)

4.3 Once you have made your move you must not deliberately pause before pressing the clock. (CAA note to Article 6.2)

Although this is not specifically referred to in the laws, the arbiter, as part of his duty to ensure fair play (Article 12.2a) has the right to caution or penalise you for this if he considers that it is being done in order to distract your opponent.

4.4) Flag fall

4.41 The arbiter decides when the flag has fallen. This is either by personal observation or a where a player makes a valid claim (i.e. his flag is up and his opponent's is down). (Article 6.8)

4.42 If both flags are down and it cannot be established which fell first, the game is drawn if this happens in the final period, otherwise the game continues. (Article 6.11)

a) Where 4.32 applies the arbiter should disregard any information offered by spectators who should not interfere anyway.

b) Where the game continues and it is necessary to add time to the clocks for the final period, in my view the clocks should not be set back to zero before the time is added. This is a personal interpretation and is not covered by any law or official statement that I am aware of.

5) Default time

5.1 The default time is determined by the event organisers and needs to be specified on the entry form. (Article 6.7a)

5.2 This is measured from the actual not the scheduled start time. (CAA note)

5.3 In Cornwall the default time is 30 minutes for league matches (General Rules 2).

At the annual Cornwall championship congress it is 30 minutes by custom.

6) Recording the moves

6.1 Strictly speaking the only notation allowed for recording the moves is algebraic. (Article 8.1a)

For games played in Cornwall, while algebraic is preferred, the descriptive notation is equally acceptable.

6.2 Recording your move before playing it is not allowed. (Article 8.1a)

6.3 Both players must record the offer of a draw on the scoresheet with the symbol (=). (Article 8.1d)

6.4 If you have less than five minutes on your clock you may stop recording until the time control is reached. (Article 8.4)

6.5 At the first time control both players must update their scoresheets, using the opponent's or arbiter's record if necessary. (Article 8.5a)

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The main purpose of this is to check whether both players have made the requisite number of moves before the time control.

7) Offering a draw

- 7.1 The correct procedure is: **make your move, offer the draw, press your clock.** (Article 9.1b(1))
If your opponent is away from the board when you complete your move, you must offer the draw as soon as he returns to the board.
- 7.2 The draw offer must be recorded on the scoresheet using the symbol (=) (Article 8.1d).
- 7.3 You must offer the draw in your own time. It is not acceptable to make the offer while the opponent is thinking. If you do, the arbiter may treat it as conduct likely to distract or annoy the opponent and penalise you in one of the ways listed in Article 12.9. (Article 9.1b(1))
- 7.4 The offer is unconditional and cannot be withdrawn. It remains valid until the opponent accepts it or rejects it orally or plays a move. (Article 9.1b(1))
- 7.5 If you offer a draw before making a move, your opponent is entitled to insist that you make a move before he considers his decision. The offer cannot be withdrawn. (CAA note to Article 9.1b(1))
- 7.6 Unreasonable or repeated draw offers may also be treated as conduct likely to distract or annoy the opponent (Article 11.5)

8) Claiming a draw

Players are often confused about the correct procedures to be followed when claiming a draw. Carelessness in this area can lead to what would otherwise be a valid claim being rejected by the arbiter.

8.1 Claiming a draw by repetition or under the 50 move rule.

- 8.11 In both cases the procedure for claiming a draw is: **write your move down, inform your opponent that you are claiming a draw, stop the clocks, inform the arbiter.** (Articles 9.2a and 9.3a)
- 8.12 The claim cannot be withdrawn and the move cannot be changed. (Article 9.5)
- 8.13 It is very important to note that touching a piece invalidates the claim. (Article 9.4)
- 8.14 If the claim is rejected, two minutes are added to the opponent's time and the recorded move must be played. (Article 9.5b)

8.2 Claiming a draw by repetition.

- 8.21 You may claim a draw if your next move will cause the resulting position to appear for a third time **with the same player to move** or the position has already appeared three times **with the same player to move.** (Article 9.2b)
- 8.22 For the claim to succeed every feature of the position must be identical. If at the start of the sequence a pawn could have been captured en passant or later in the sequence the king loses castling rights, the position is not identical and the claim fails. (Article 9.2b)

Two common misconceptions are that the moves must be consecutive and with the same pieces. Both are false. As long as the position is identical it does not matter if there are interpolated moves or if the sequence starts with the move of a different piece.

8.3 Claiming a draw under the 50 move rule.

- 8.31 You may claim a draw if your next move will result in the last 50 moves by each player having been made without the movement of any pawn and without any capture, or the last 50 moves by each player have been completed without the movement of any pawn and without any capture.
This is straightforward. Playing in a tournament at Newcastle I once witnessed a strong player attempt to convince the arbiter that his opponent's claim should fail because the sequence contained some checks. Unsurprisingly the arbiter was not impressed.

8.4 Claiming a draw in a rapidplay game or in a quickplay finish under the 2 minute rule.

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Refer to section 12. You should note that the procedure for claiming a draw under the 2 minute rule is slightly different.

8.5 "Mating material"

The game is drawn when a position is reached from which a checkmate cannot occur by any possible series of legal moves. (Article 9.7).

The often used phrase "mating material" is imprecise. For example white has pawns on b4,d4,f4,h4, bishop on c3, king on c2 ; black has pawns on b5,d5,f5,h5, bishop on d7, king on e7. This is "mating material" in the loose sense but the game is automatically drawn under the laws.

9) Mobile phones and other electronic equipment

This rule (Article 11.3b - was 12.3b) has changed drastically. Before 1st July 2014 mobile phones, handheld computers, laptops, etc. were only permitted in the playing venue if switched off. "Playing venue" means the whole area allocated to the event, not just the playing area. The penalty of automatic loss only applied where the device made a sound.

From 1st July 2014 it is forbidden to have a device in the playing venue whether switched on or not. The default penalty is the loss of the game but the local rules may have a less severe penalty. (Article 11.3b)

9.1 Application of this rule in events organised by the CCCA

In its comments on the 2014 Laws the Chess Arbiters Association recognises that a total ban on mobile phones would not be realistic. The 2014 Laws allow for competition organisers to specify a different, less severe, penalty. In the spirit of the CAA's recommendations it was decided at the Secretaries' Meeting on 26th June, 2014 that the rules applicable to team matches, the annual congress and other CCCA competitions should remain unchanged According the following arrangements will apply:

9.11) Players may keep their mobile phones with them in the playing area provided they are switched off, unless prior permission has been obtained from the controller (or team captains in team matches) to keep them switched on in cases of urgent necessity. If the phone makes a sound in these circumstances, there is no penalty but the player must either switch the phone off or leave the playing area immediately.

9.12 If it is apparent that a device is switched on without permission, the player is to be warned that if he doesn't switch it off he is liable to forfeit the game if it makes a sound. No penalty applies at this stage unless the phone makes a sound.

9.13 For team matches if the phone makes a sound, whether the player has been warned or not, his opponent may claim the game.

9.14 For the annual congress and other CCCA competitions the organisers may specify that the penalty for the phone making a sound is the immediate loss of the game. If this applies, it must be clearly stated on the entry form.

9.15 The arrangements concerning mobile phones should be included in tournament entry forms and announced at the start of play in matches and tournaments and at the start of each round at the congress.

9.16 The use of mobile phones, etc. for photography is not forbidden provided that the controller's permission is obtained and the players are not disturbed.

10) Conduct of players and spectators

10.1) It is forbidden to distract or annoy the opponent in any manner whatsoever. (Article 11.5)

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The Golden Rule. It covers a multitude of sins, some of which are listed. The arbiter has a duty to intervene if he observes a player acting in this manner, even if there is no intention to disturb or annoy and whether the opponent complains or not.

10.2 Article 11.3 deals with the prohibition of mobile phones and other communications equipment at the playing venue. This is discussed in detail under rule changes.

10.3 Guidance for spectators (including players who have finished their games)

10.31 You must not interfere in the game in any way. If you are aware of an irregularity, you should inform the arbiter and no one else. (Article 12.7)

If a player is about to promote a pawn you must not fetch a queen and hand it to him. This is interference that could benefit that player by helping him to avoid incurring a penalty for making an illegal move (Article 3.7e) – it is his responsibility to complete his move correctly. The correct procedure is set out in Article 6.12a.

10.32 You must stand well back from the board and give the players plenty of room.

10.33 You must remain silent and still throughout. You must not speak to the players or to other spectators.

10.34 You must under no circumstances say or do anything to signal flag-fall to the players.

A natural reflex action when watching a time scramble is to move away as soon as one player's flag falls. This inevitably leads to the opponent checking the clock, observing the flag fall and (rightly) claiming the game. This can affect the result of the game. Perhaps the winner would have checked the clock anyway but it is also possible that he would have played on until his flag fell in which case, with the arbiter absent, the game would have been a draw (Article 6.11). You must not move away until the result has been determined.

11) Rapidplay and blitz

11.1 A rapidplay game is one in which all the moves are completed in a fixed time of more than 10 minutes but less than 60 minutes for each player. 10 minutes or less is blitz, 60 minutes or more is standard play. (Appendix A1)

The definition of blitz has changed. It used to be 15 minutes.

11.2 In rapidplay and blitz games if you make an illegal move, you lose the game (draw if no mate legally possible). (Appendix A4b)

11.3 In rapidplay and blitz games the moves do not need to be recorded. (Appendix A2)

11.4 In rapidplay games you may claim a draw in some circumstances when you have less than two minutes remaining on your clock. (Appendix G5). This is explained in detail in Section 12. This does not apply to blitz games. (Appendix G3)

12) Quickplay finishes

12.1 The penalty for an illegal move is 2 minutes added to the opponent's clock. If you make a second illegal move, you lose the game (draw if no mate legally possible). (Appendix A4b)

12.2 Claiming a draw under the 2 minute rule. (Appendix G5)

12.21 If you have less than two minutes left on your clock, you may claim a draw on the basis that your opponent cannot win by normal means or is making no effort to win by normal means.

12.22 The procedure for claiming the draw is: make your move, inform your opponent that you are claiming a draw, stop the clocks, inform the arbiter.

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12.23 The arbiter will do one of the following:

- a) Accept your claim and declare the game drawn.
- b) Reject your claim and tell you to play on. In this event 2 minutes will be added to your opponent's clock.
- c) Postpone his decision and tell you to play on. If he chooses this option he may subsequently declare the game drawn even if your flag falls.

NB: If your opponent's flag falls, he loses. He could have conceded the draw but chose to play for the win and by doing so accepted the risk of losing.

12.24 This claim is not available in blitz games. (Appendix G3)

12.3 Guidance for players on claims under the "two minute rule"

12.31 The arbiter will take the nature of the position into account but only in conjunction with the moves played and factors he considers relevant. He will not adjudicate the position.

The question the arbiter has to answer is "Disregarding the time factor, is a draw the most likely result of this game as it is being played by these players". If he cannot answer "yes", he should refuse the claim or postpone his decision.

12.32 Here are some indicators that the arbiter might take into account in ruling a claim to be valid ("WLCC" refers to some useful notes on the website of West London Chess Club):

- a) Your opponent starts to shuffle his pieces, moving without plan in order to win on time, which is not considered to be "by normal means". (WLCC)

WLCC gives an example of this. White: Kf2, Ra4; Black Ke5. Play continues 1.Rb4 Kd5; Ra4 Ke5. The arbiter correctly awarded a draw, because white was artificially prolonging the game, hoping to win on time.

- b) The position is a book draw. (WLCC).

This is insufficient in itself; what matters is whether the arbiter is satisfied that you are capable of drawing it. Normally he will want to see further play in order to assess this.

He may also take account of your description of how you intend to play the position.

In this example from WLCC white had Kh1, Bf5; black had Kb3, Bg3, Pc3, h6. White claimed a draw and informed the arbiter that, when the pawn moved to c2, he would sacrifice the Bishop for that pawn so that black would remain with a Bishop plus Rook's pawn of the wrong colour, a book draw. The claim was accepted.

- c) Neither side can make progress. This situation becomes evident when your opponent starts to shuffle his pieces, possibly starting to repeat moves. This situation can be encountered with pawn blockades and opposite-bishop endgames etc. (WLCC)

- d) Your opponent has insufficient mating material. If you are winning but running out of time, you may claim the draw on the grounds that your opponent cannot possibly win. (WLCC)

- e) The position is a book win, but you are running out of time. (WLCC)

You can claim the draw if you can demonstrate the forced win conclusively. This will apply only to the most straightforward of situations; in all other cases the arbiter will wish to see further play.

- f) You are running out of time and have an overwhelming material advantage; your opponent has no immediate mating threats. (WLCC)

12.33 WLCC comments that some consideration should be given to the strength of the players and that very strong players might find having to explain a trivial endgame insulting to their intelligence.

I do not agree with this. In my opinion all claimants should be required to provide evidence that the most likely result of their game is a draw. No one is entitled to special privileges however strong they claim to be or are thought to be. The mere assertion by a claimant that the position is a forced draw is not

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sufficient evidence to justify awarding the draw immediately. Moreover, if the arbiter is much weaker than the claimant, the only means at his disposal of testing the claimant's assessment of the position is to make him play it out.

12.34 On occasion I have had to deal with players who, not understanding the rule and the considerations involved in applying it, have been offended by a claim and decision made against them on the grounds that this constituted a slur on their honesty. It must be stressed that a claim, or the acceptance of it by the arbiter, is not an allegation of cheating or sharp practice. The decision on whether to accept a claim or not is one he has a duty to make using his judgment on the evidence before him based on chess principles.

13) The role of the arbiter

13.1 The principal role of the arbiter in relation to the conduct of the game is:

- a) To see that the Laws of Chess are strictly observed. (Article 12.1) and to ensure fair play (Article 12.2a)
- b) To resolve disputes and make decisions on points arising from the laws (Article 12.3)
- c) To impose penalties on players in accordance with the laws where appropriate. (Article 12.3)

13.2 The role of the captains in team matches

a) Under rule 6 of the CCCA Rules Applicable to all Team Matches the two team captains act as joint arbiters with authority to delegate this responsibility if necessary.

b) Where any issue arises regarding the laws of the game, including claims under the 2 minute rule (see section 12), and at least one or both of the team captains are playing or otherwise unavailable, a competent person (or if necessary two people) who knows the laws should be appointed to act on the captain's behalf. If nobody suitable is available it may be necessary for the captains to suspend their game(s) in order to deal with the issue.

Ian George

Cornwall County Chess Association

21st November, 2014

Subsequent Amendments

12/12/2014

Note 11.2 (Illegal move – rapidplay) corrected and merged with note 11.3 (Illegal move – blitz). Subsequent paras renumbered.

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