

Tim Just — Just the Rules: Complete Collection

Chess Life Online Columns

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Tim Just



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Tim Just is a National Tournament Director, FIDE National Arbiter, and editor of the 5th, 6th, and 7th editions of the *US Chess Rulebook*. He is also the author of *My Opponent is Eating a Doughnut* and *Just Law*, both available from US Chess Sales and Amazon/Kindle.

Tim recently revised *The Guide To Scholastic Chess*, a guide created to help teachers and scholastic organizers who wish to begin, improve, or strengthen their school chess program. He is a member of the US Chess Rules Committee and former chair of the TDCC (Tournament Director Certification Committee).

His column “Just the Rules” ran on Chess Life Online from 2017 to 2026, helping clarify potentially confusing regulations for players, organizers, and tournament directors alike.

TJ: Top 25 TD Tips

1. Think like a player.
2. Post it!!
3. Announce it!
4. Be in the tournament room at time control.
5. Train someone to be a TD.
6. Use common sense.
7. Use the uschess.org/msa site.
8. Keep everything.
9. Use the US Chess forums.
10. Check bye and withdraw sign up sheets.
11. Check everything (even playing room arrangements) at least twice.
12. A short time after the round has started, check to see whom has not yet arrived at their board.
13. Consistently deal with the odd player.
14. Start the rounds on time.
15. Treat your TD job as a profession.
16. You cannot have more prizes than winners.
17. Submit your tournaments on-line.
18. Ask accessibility challenged players what they need.
19. Get a pairing program.
20. Listen to people.
21. Use a soft voice.
22. Don't take it personally.
23. Do not rush.
24. Nothing is perfect.
25. Be prepared.

Just the Rules: The Handshake

September 5, 2017

Keeping the Point!

At move 34 your opponent stretches out their hand. You silently engage in the traditional handshake. In the skittles room you analyze your hard fought victory with your friends. You pick up well deserved praise for your excellent tactics and strategy in an unclear position near the finish of the game. When you make your way over to the results sheet you notice your opponent has posted that the game result was a draw. But you won! When you, your opponent, and the TD get together to straighten out this reporting mix-up it is clear your adversary thought you were accepting his draw offer, not his resignation—messy, messy, messy...



Nepomniachtchi vs. Nakamura at the 2017 Sinquefeld Cup, Photo Eric Rosen

If an outstretched hand is what you saw, make sure it's a resignation and not a draw.

Your opponent reaches out and shakes your hand after stopping the clock. Are they resigning? Or are they agreeing to a draw? How about when your opponent mumbles something and stretches out their hand? Is that a resignation or a draw offer? Make sure you know the answer to those questions before you report the game results. Of course, a tipped-over king is good clue—as well as the words “I resign”—that your opponent has quit the game.

Many players don't realize that draw offers are off the table after

(1) a move has been made, (2) a piece has been touched and (3) the draw offer has already been declined. Players frequently incorrectly believe, as the opponent in this situation incorrectly does, that the draw offer may still be accepted many moves later. In this case you might consider saying, “Thanks for the game. You played well, and I am sorry you lost.”

Reporting the Results

After his first game was over Jack and his opponent went to the skittles room and analyzed their contest. This was a five round tournament and Jack’s final score was 4 wins and one loss. When it came time for the prizes to be doled out other players that scored 4-1, like Jack, were given their well-earned money—Jack got nothing. When he checked with the TD he discovered that his first round win went unreported. He and his opponent were forfeited. They were both given zero points. His opponent confirmed losing to Jack. The TD was willing to account for the win on the rating report. He was not willing to allow it to count towards prizes. After all, he pointed out; Jack got easier pairings than the other 4-1 scorers throughout the tournament due to his deflated score. And Jack did not point out this scoring snafu until after the tournament was over. No prize for Jack.

Win or lose, report the result of your game to make sure the right score is next to your name.

When your game is over, immediately make sure you report the results, usually on the pairings sheet. If you are a neophyte here is how to get that job done: In the space provided, place a “1” by the winner’s name and a “0” by the loser’s name, or “½” or “.5” by both names if the game was a draw. TDs usually announce if the reporting procedure is to be done differently, especially at scholastic events. If you miss this step, even if you lost the game, you could be unpleasantly surprised by your next round’s pairing and the long-term effect on your tournament score. Some TDs even double-forfeit the players in games with no reported results.

Example: How YOU Report Your Score

Bd	Score	White	Score	Black
119	.5	Rubin, Alex	.5	Ricky, Ross
120	0	Flahttn, Mike	1	YOU
121	0	Blale, Maurine	1	Turtle, Yuri

Next time we will look at those freebies—that one point win that counts towards your final prize winning score, even if you don't play a game!

Just the Rules: Forfeit Wins

October 17, 2017

How **YOU** Report a Forfeit Win

Bd	Score	White	Score	Black
119.	.5	Rubin, Alex	.5	Ricky, Ross
120.	0 F	Flahttnyn, Mike	1 F	YOU
121.	0	Blale, Maurine	1	Turtle, Yuri

It happens. There is an empty chair across from you where your opponent should be. Opponents sometimes don't appear for their scheduled games. You sit there with their clock running and anxiously await their arrival, but they just don't show up. The rules allow you to claim a forfeit win after an hour—don't forget your equipment must be set up. You paid your entry fee and expected to play all of your games. You spent time and money on travel, food, and perhaps lodging. Your opponent's no-show conduct is borderline disrespectful. And, you can put a stop to it for the rest of the tournament by reporting your forfeit win properly.

When your opponent is one hour late, a forfeit win is your fate.

To report a forfeit no-show, win you typically enter the results on the pairings sheet with a "1" followed by big "F" in the space for your score and a "0" followed by a big "F" in the space for your opponent's score (see Illustration below). That way your opponent will usually not be paired for the next round—and not cause any other player to sit around waiting for a no-show opponent. There are no rating points involved, but you do get one point added to your total tournament score, which counts for cash prizes and for pairings. In a tie for non-cash prizes—typically trophies or titles— that forfeit win often has little or no mathematical value when tie-breaks are calculated.

What if you start your clock and wait for your opponent to arrive, and they appear with seconds left on their clock before that one-hour deadline? They sit down, make their move, and press their clock before their 60 minutes are up. They made it in time. The game continues with you having a huge time advantage.

You may also be tempted to allow your opponent to be more than one hour late for the game while not making a claim with the TD—

you are being a good sport. If you opt for this, make sure that your opponent's clock is running while your own clock is idle, or else you may end up delaying the start of the next round for everyone. If your foe does show up after an hour you still get to essay a rated game with a huge time advantage—remember, if you had claimed a forfeit win at the 60 minute mark your contest would not get rated. The downside is that your adversary may not show up at all. Or, if they do appear at the board past the forfeit time and you let them play, they may still beat you—even if they are way down on time.

When the time control is less than one hour—for example, G/45, delay 5 (each player gets 45 minutes for the entire game with a 5-second delay), check with the TD about how long you need to wait for your opponent to show up before claiming your one point.

Watch out for special situations. Sometimes the TD has publicized, posted, or announced a different policy regarding late opponent arrivals, or you were mistakenly paired against an opponent that requested a bye for that round (it happens?!). TDs typically have ways to deal with those circumstances.

When a tardy opponent shows up at the tournament site but not at your board and their flag falls at the 60 minute mark, stop the clock and get a TD to help you sort out this predicament. The question becomes: Did your opponent really “appear” in time for their game—as per the rulebook wording?

Note: If you win a game via a forfeit no-show, see if the TD can rustle up a rated side game for you.

Unfortunately, there is little anyone can do about those missing last round opponents. You still get your free point, but officially dealing with those last round drop outs has had little success in the past—and, yes, there are rules about this rude behavior but enforcing those rules on an absent player is problematical.

Locally, we had a fellow that continually did not withdraw properly and became a no-show. Since we knew this was a strong possibility when he entered an event, we started requiring a deposit from him before he played even one game. His deposit got returned only if he avoided becoming a no-show.

Next time we will take a peek at what happens when the clock says a player is out of time; i.e., flag falls.

Just the Rules: Flag Falls, Part 1

November 5, 2017

There is a crowd gathered around an exciting contest. The position looks double edged. Both players are desperately trying to gain an advantage. Both their clocks are approaching those goose eggs—that dreaded row of zeros that says they have no time left to play the game. But then it happens: One of the observers yells out, “Flag!” Now we have a mess. Only players may make the call if there is a flag fall. What happens when your opponent runs out of time? You get to claim a win if you still have time left on your own clock. But only you get to claim the win, no one else: not even a TD, parent, friend, relative, or coach gets to make that call. That’s right, no one but you!



Flag fall (0:00) on digital clock set for one time control

Spectators have no rights in a chess tournament. If a player’s friend or coach or family makes that call for them that gives them an unfair advantage over all the other players, including their opponent, at the tournament. In this example had the bystander not made that call then perhaps the flags of both players would have fallen, and the game would be a draw—in the last, or only, time control when both flags are down without a claim of a flag fall then the game is a draw. The “what ifs” are mind-boggling. Now the result of the game is up in the air, with the TD expected to make an equitable decision. Perhaps the TD will allow the flag claim to stand while ejecting the bystander from the tournament room—or the entire tournament. Perhaps the TD will call the game a draw. Perhaps the TD will forfeit the player who got help from the audience.

Note that with two time controls and a digital clock it becomes problematic to tell if the flag fell or not. Typically a set number

of moves must be made in a specified time in the first time control (40/90, d5 for example). To set digital clocks for this time control the user also typically sets the move counter. Sometimes, for a lot of reasons, the move counter gets off kilter. Some clocks add the time for the second time control after the correct number of moves have been made. Some clocks add the time for the second time control only after all of the time (not number of moves) from the first time control has been used up. Knowing how the clock on your game displays the first of two or more time controls helps you know when to make a legitimate game ending claim.

Clock move counters have no place when trying to claim a flag fall case. The game clock says that 37 moves have been made in 60 minutes. The time control is 40 moves in 60 minutes with a 5 second delay (40/60 d5) for the first time control. During a time scramble, both you and your opponent stopped keeping score (as you are allowed to do in the last five minutes of any time control). Your opponent makes a flag fall claim based on the clock's move counter. But, without an accurate scoresheet, that claim is denied by the TD. Clock move counters may not be used to make such claims, only scoresheets can be used for this claim. Sometimes clocks are set or reset wrong. Sometimes they are started incorrectly. Sometimes they are inaccurate due to players' pressing the clock too many times or too few times. Move counters just can't be relied on to be accurate.

Next time in part 2 we will finish clearing up the fog surrounding flag falls.

Just The Rules: Flag Falls, Part II

December 22, 2017

There is tension in the air. A crowd is squeezed around your board. You and your opponent rush to make each move before one of you run out of time. BAM-BAM-BAM, you slam down your pieces while still managing to punch your clock. Your opponent has a few seconds left. Your time is even shorter. You are stalking their king. BAM, you checkmate your foe in an instant, and then your flag falls. Your adversary claims the checkmating move is incomplete. They contend you lost on time. They tell the TD you did not press your clock to prevent your flag from falling; therefore, you are out of time, and the checkmating move is unfinished. After all, they claim, to finish your move the rules say you have to press the clock. The TD denies the claim. You win the game. Why? Checkmate trumps everything if you can deliver it while it is still your move. At the instant the mating move is made, the game is over, and time stops. **Checkmate ends the game so there is no flag fall claim.**

The instant the legal move is made that delivers checkmate, the game is over. Anything that takes place after that, like a flag fall, is immaterial.



Checkmate is final.

Of course, if you let your flag fall first and then make a mating move; you are out of time and out of luck. Your opponent may now make

a legitimate flag fall claim. The rule of thumb is that whichever occurred first, the flag fall or the checkmate, determines how the contest ends. What happens if it can't be determined which one took place first—the checkmate or the flag fall? Then the checkmate typically gets the nod.

Watch out for the times when you and your opponent are in time trouble and one of you delivers a legal checkmating move—but neither of you realize it—and you both play on. When this happens, and it changes the outcome of the game, get a TD; furthermore, discovering a game changing checkmate earlier in the game during a later post-mortem becomes problematical—especially if you, your opponent, and both your scoresheets disagree about the earlier mate. Or, perhaps you are both in full agreement about the earlier game ender. Either way, it is time for a visit to the TD.

Interestingly stalemate also instantly ends the game and stops the clock in the same way checkmate does.

For the claim to not be a bust, mating material is a must.

Your opponent has lots of time left. You have mere seconds. Your flag falls. You are out of time. Your opponent has only a king plus a lone bishop and claims a win on time. Your adversary would never be able to mate you with his material, even if there were no clock on the game. The game is a draw—and the board's position isn't considered when this rule is enforced. Only the material on the board is examined. A flag fall claim is linked to mating material. For an official list of material that makes mate impossible, see the rulebook. Interestingly a single pawn is regarded as mating material (you can trade up to a queen!).

An interesting game strategy used by some players: Your clock's flag is about to announce that you lost. Your opponent has mating material. To change your pending zero into a half-point, simply capture enough of your adversary's pieces so that they are left without mating material!? No mating material means no win on time for them.

A player's fallen flag means they can't brag.

This seems kind of obvious, but you need to have time left on your clock (your flag can't have fallen) before you claim that your opponent is out of time.

If both flags are down in the last (or only) time control—and there

are no game ending claims pending before the flags fell—then the contest is a draw.

The next few postings will take a journey through the maze of drawing regulations.

Just the Rules: The Draw Offer Blues

January 13, 2018

There you are, staring at the board. The position is stagnate, and it is your opponent's turn to move. You offer a draw. Your adversary goes into a deep think and is trying to decide what to do about your draw offer. You continue to evaluate the position. Then it hits you: you see the winning move—for you! Your opponent can do nothing to stop it. Victory is in your sights. You inform your opponent that you are retracting your draw offer. Then, your adversary notices the same winning line that you just found for yourself, so they accept your draw offer. Of course you protest—you took your half-point offer off of the table. Besides your draw offer was made improperly—it was not even your move!? The TD rules that the game ends in a draw. There is nothing you can do about it. Why? **You can't rescind a draw offer after it is made—even if it is made improperly.**

So how do you properly make a draw offer? What is the right sequence? Make your move, offer the draw, and then press your clock—it's the law. Make your move—while it is still your turn—on the board *before* offering a draw, next offer the draw, and lastly press your clock. That is the correct procedure for you or your opponent when splitting the point by agreement. It does not matter whether you have tons of time left to play the game or are scrambling to beat the clock. Either way, these are the exact steps that *should* take place when you are offering a draw. And even if a draw offer does not follow these steps (an out of sequence draw offer), it can't be taken back.

If you offer a draw while your clock is counting down without moving a piece, your opponent can compel you to make a move before they decide what to do with your offer. They get to see what was on your mind before making up theirs. Unfortunately for them, you may find a checkmate move that instantly ends the game; thus, the draw offer is moot.

And remember to say, “Thank you for agreeing to a draw.” That-away you are sure that your rival does not think your handshake is a sign of resignation. Handshakes really don't mean a thing, though they are a nice gesture of sportsmanship.

Knowing how to offer a draw is only one part of the equation. Knowing how to reject a draw is the other part. To reject a draw, let your

opponents know—touch your piece or just say “no.” You offer a draw. Your opponent mentions that the game indeed looks “drawish.” You both make a few more moves, and you checkmate your rival. Your opposing general claims that the two of you agreed to a draw and that you were just analyzing, not playing on. First, the two of you should not be analyzing in the tournament room. Once a game is over, stop the clocks and leave the tournament room. If there is a difference of opinion regarding the game result, get a TD to help both of you sort things out. Playing on after the game score is determined creates a lot of problems.

By the way, most TDs will probably rule this game a draw, because both of you said the magic word “draw.” So, be careful how you reject any draw offers.

If you want to reject a draw offer, you can just say, “No thanks,” or simply touch one of your own pieces before you move it. That draw offer is now gone. It does not stick around move after move.

But how can a draw offer turn into a loss? Thinking about a draw offer may cause the blues: If your flag falls, you can still lose. You and your opponent are both short on time. They offer you a draw. While you check over the position, your flag falls—you are out of time?! Your opponent claims a win. You accept their draw offer. After all, it took place *before* your time ran out. Sorry, you lose. You have no time left to accept the draw offer.

Next time, we will travel deeper into the maze of US Chess draw law.

Just the Rules: Some Half-Point Claim Mysteries Solved

February 6, 2018

While the time on your clock approaches zero, you decide to make your move 39. That move will repeat a position for the third time (Triple Occurrence of Position). You record your move 39 and then pause your clock before claiming the draw (pausing the clock before making any claim is a good idea). Your opponent, playing the black pieces, points out that, since there was no perpetual check or a repeat of the position three times in a row that, the game must continue—there is no draw. It is time to get help from a TD. Before the director investigates the claim, he reminds both of you that a draw claim is also a draw offer. Your opponent tells the TD to investigate your claim before he decides on the draw offer. The TD correctly points out to your opponent that there is no “perpetual check” or “three-times-in-a-row” rule, so your claim will now be looked into.

After checking the score sheet, the TD rules that the claim was incorrect. Why?

The exact same position with the same pieces sitting on the same squares for both players (think of a photo) was verified, but all of the pieces did not have the same moves available to them as required by the Triple Occurrence rule. In the first two positions, on your moves 32 and 34, castling was available to your opponent. By move 39, the third position in the claim, your opponent's rook had moved away from its starting square and then back again before the third position occurred, i.e., while all of the pieces for both players were on exactly the same squares, not all of those pieces were able to make the same legal moves. The game continues. The draw offer remains in effect until you make your announced move 39 and your opponent accepts/rejects the offer (see my “Draw Offer Blues” column).

Let's take a peek at the two rules at work here: Three positions exactly the same? You have the right to make a draw claim. Imagine you are taking a picture of each position on the board when each move is determined. When three of those pictures are exactly the same, you may claim a draw by “Triple Occurrence of Position” (make sure that is how you word your claim). Make your claim on your move just before or just after that third snapshot is taken. Typically, the player making the claim is allowed to first write the move down on the scoresheet without making the actual move on the board

before making the claim; however, if the move is made first, but the clock is then paused—not pressed, the claim can still be made. Remember, all the pieces have to be able to make the same moves (even castling) in each picture-perfect position. Your accurate scoresheet is often your best source of proof. However, under some circumstances a TD is able to observe or re-create the threefold repetition.

And the wrong way to make the claim: Make your move, press your clock (which starts your opponent's clock), and then make your claim. The TD should deny your claim. You need to pause your clock—so that neither your clock nor your opponent's clock is running—before you make your declaration; otherwise, it is not your move, so you have no right to make a claim. Oddly, even though this routine is not proper, the improper draw claim still doubles as a draw offer until your opponent rejects or accepts the draw. Make a draw offer or make a draw claim: Either way, they are just the same. Making any draw claim—even an improper one—is the same as making a draw offer. You can't take it back. That means your opponent can accept a draw before the TD investigates and makes a ruling on your claim. And the draw offer, via your claim, is still in effect even if the TD rejects your claim.

Check out this example: The game has been long and hard. By your count, no pawn has been moved and no piece has been captured in the last fifty moves. As you make that last move to reach that magic count of 50 moves, you press the clock and make your claim. Even though you pressed your clock (a big no-no when making claims) instead of pausing it to make the claim, your opponent accepts your draw offer. The game is over, and you split the point with your opponent.

Here's a closer look at that 50 move routine: After fifty moves, a draw is proven if no pieces were taken, and no pawns have been moved. For fifty moves, neither you nor your opponent moves a pawn or takes a piece. It's time to claim a draw. Just make sure your score sheet is accurate. And, please remember to pause your clock when you make a claim, so that a fallen flag does not create chaos.

If you are in time trouble, you may ask the TD to silently count off those fifty moves for you. Most TDs will help you out with this task. Sometimes the TD will assign an assistant or a bystander to do the counting while they attend to other duties. Don't rely on your clock's move counter to make this claim. Remember, if a piece gets taken or a pawn moves, then the fifty-move count starts all over

again.

Next time around we will explore how some of the rules automatically hand you a half-point without almost any effort at all on your part.

Just the Rules: Instant Draws?!

March 13, 2018

The game was into the last seconds of the Sudden Death time control for both players. The two combatants were slapping down pieces while also banging away at their clocks. Then it happened. While it was the second player's turn he ran out of time, but he pressed his clock anyhow—he had not noticed his own flag fall. After his opponent made a move, his adversary's flag also fell. Both flags were down. Both players were out of time—the game was a draw. Both flags down may cause a frown. If both you and your opponent are out of time in a sudden death time control, then the game is drawn.

But what happens if your game has two time controls like 40 moves in 90 minutes followed by game 30 with a delay of 5 seconds (40/90,G/30,d/5)? While examining the position of move 39 near the end of the first time control (40/90), your opponent notices that both your flags are down—you are both out of time in the first time period! The game continues, and neither of you may make a flag fall claim.

And then there is this:

The general of the white pieces made his move with lightning speed. He forcefully slammed down the button on his clock, starting his opponent's timer. White's move was not check or checkmate BUT he left his adversary no legal moves. White's move created an instant draw—the game was over; i.e., a stalemate. Nothing that happened after that moment mattered—even flag falls. Can't make a move and it's your turn? Then a stalemate is what you've earned. It is your move. You are not in check, and you don't have a legal move on the board. You can't legally move a single piece. It's a draw.

Remember the column about checkmate instantly ending the game? Well, stalemate also immediately halts the contest. The move that causes the stalemate puts a stop to everything, including any flag fall claims; however, if your opponent's flag falls *before* they deliver the stalemating move, then feel free to make that flag fall claim. And if you discover a stalemate during postgame analysis which impacts the score, contact a TD immediately.

Since the publication of the 6th edition US Chess rulebook the law-givers have come up with two new ways to rule a game a draw. 14K. Director declares draw for lack of progress If one or both of the following occur(s) then the TD may declare the game drawn—without

any claim from either player:

The same position has appeared, as in 14C, for at least five consecutive alternate moves by each player. 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

Here is how it works:

Everyone could see it. The same pieces traveled around and around on the same few squares over and over, time after time. And neither wood pusher was making any kind of claim. The same position appeared at least three, four and five times. Having observed the same position a minimum of five times in a row, the TD declared the game a draw—without a player claim being made. It was a long hard fought game. Neither side had any advantage throughout the contest. Now the strategic endgame was creeping along. Black just finished making another move—move 105. Not a single pawn had budged and no pieces had been captured for the last 75 prior moves by either player. No claims were uttered. The TD broke the silence, “The game is a draw.”

It is as easy as ABC to ask for a bye from the TD. The most common ways to ask for a bye are to (1) sign up on-site or (2) when you register for the event. Simply telling the TD you want that half-point, without writing anything down, opens the door to errors. Make the safe bet and check what the bye request procedure is for the tournament you are entering—including the tournament’s bye policy for the last round.

And next month we will jump into the clock rules quagmire.

Just the Rules: Whose Clock Is It Anyway?

April 20, 2018

The round is about to start. After a quickly noting your board assignment you rush over to your spot in the playing room. Your opponent, the captain of the white pieces, arrives only a few seconds before you. According to the pairing sheet you are the commander of the black pieces. Since the organizer is not providing any equipment that gives you the right to choose the game's gear—if the organizer provides equipment you no longer get to choose what gear to use. With a bit of a flurry your standard equipment gets set up. You place your beloved Jerger analog clock on your right handed side of the board. Your opponent objects. Say what? Since the time control is Sudden Death with a 5 second delay (G/30, d5) your adversary wants to use his delay capable clock, not your analog clock. It's time for the TD to use his problem solving skills. "White's delay clock will be the game timer," declares the TD. "I'm playing under protest," is your reply to the ruling.

An analog clock is standard equipment—right? As the player of the black pieces you were denied the right to use your analog clock. Why? Because chess law says that the preferred clock to use in any game is the one that can be set for the announced time controls. The rules say that a preferred clock trumps all other clocks; i.e., delay clocks reign supreme in games with any sudden death time control, while increment-capable timers are the clocks of choice in games with any increment time control.

So, if you have a delay clock and your opponent has an analog clock in a sudden death contest, you can swap in your clock for theirs before the game starts. The proper clock for the proper time control trumps black's right to select the chess equipment. Similarly, if you have an increment-capable timer—in a contest with an increment time control—while your adversary does not, then you can once again swap clocks before the start of the game. **If sudden death time controls are used to play, then set your clock with delay.** If both you and your opponent have delay clocks, the player of the black pieces gets to choose which timer to use in sudden death time control contests. Clocks provided by the organizer can't be swapped for your own timer without TD permission. Unless it is announced (or advertised or posted) otherwise, the player of the black pieces may choose where to place the game timer—unless they are late to

the start of the game and their opponent has a properly set delay clock already in use.

Your game timer is down to the last few minutes of a G/30 d5 contest. Your opponent notices that the clock is not set right: the base time control was set properly (*remember we don't add or subtract time from the base time control for any kind of clock anymore*), but the delay was not active (set) for the whole game! Pause the clocks and get a TD to help straighten out this mess. Typically the TD will see to it that the clocks are set properly and then possibly assign any appropriate penalties. An increment time control would suggest that an increment clock is the best. Use the increment setting for games requiring it (G/30 + 30 sec, for example—a base time control of 30 minutes of displayed thinking time per player with 30 seconds added permanently to the displayed time control for each player each time a move is completed by pressing the clock). If your opponent does not have an increment-capable clock and you do, see a TD about using your clock for the game. Remember, if you both have increment clocks, the player commanding the black army gets to choose which increment clock to use, unless they are late for the start of the game. And there is a procedure for using a delay clock for an increment time control.

Delay clocks without the ability to set increment time controls should instead be set for a delay equal to the increment time (Example: G/45 + 30 seconds would result in a 30 second delay setting). For delay clocks that can't be set to equal the announced increment time then the largest amount of delay that is smaller than the increment time may be used as the delay setting instead

Analog clocks can only be set for the base time control with no extra adjustments, such as added time, to compensate for their inability to be set for the increment time; i.e., *all clocks in all time controls must now start the game with the same base time*.

But what if you are late to the game and your opponent has already set up their own analog clock? When your clock is more up to date, ask to swap it even if you're late. You are assigned the white pieces and are ten minutes tardy for the start of your game. When you arrive for your G/45 d5 match-up, black's analog clock indicates you have lost ten minutes of playing time; however, your delay clock trumps any analog clock in a sudden death contest. You may be allowed to swap your clock for black's (see the TD) as long as you have made no move—and yes, you should expect to still be down

ten minutes of thinking time when your properly set delay clock gets swapped for the analog timer.

Watch for more Clockamania next month.

Just the Rules: Little Used Clock Strategies

May 21, 2018



You sit down to your assigned game with your new clock—the one that you just purchased at the tournament bookstore. You are not sure how to set it, but another player claims to know how—so you let him. As your game progresses, you notice that the game timer display does not seem to reflect the time control—G/90/D5 (game in 90 minutes with a 5 second delay). Once you discover how to pause the clock, you find a TD. What was wrong with the way your clock was set? Your new toy was programmed for game in 90 hours with a 5 second delay—instead of game in 90 minutes with a 5 second delay.

If this game clock can't be set properly, then you are in the position of having to borrow a clock or play without one. No matter how the problem gets solved, you cannot be sure that any new clock settings will accurately reflect the correct amount of thinking time used by either you or your adversary. And the later in the game the problem is revealed—especially if it is only discovered during time pressure—the trickier it is to correct.

Know your clock's settings! It's to your benefit; you may not find anyone else who can set it.

TDs know how to set all of the clocks in existence—right? Wrong. Practice programing your clock at home before going to a tournament. Better yet, find out the time control(s) of the tournament and set your clock beforehand. Check out YouTube for videos on how to fine tune your clock. And bring your device manual with you to tournaments. Some clocks even have settings, or instructions,

printed on the bottom of their bases. Plus remember if it can't be set, then you can't use it.

By the way, if your digital delay/increment clock is not set using the delay or increment setting then your timer is equivalent to an analog clock.

Ask your opponent how their clock works, and then you'll be familiar with all its quirks.

Do you ever find yourself using another person's clock? Did the clock's functions and displays confuse you during the game? Before the game starts, ask your opponent about how their clock works. Find out how it is set, how it adds time for the second time control, how to read the display (especially if the display changes during time pressure), how to stop it, how to pause it, etc. This benefits you and often stops confusing situations from developing.

Use the same hand for your clock and pieces; the chances of a claim then decreases.

Did you know that players must use the same hand to press both the clock and to move pieces?

Watch out for players who use one hand to move the pieces and the other hand to press the clock. Why? The hand pressing the clock is sometimes used for the dirty trick of pressing the clock before the other hand completes the piece move. If you have an opponent who does not use the same hand to both move pieces and press the clock, pause your clock and see a TD.

Start white's clock to begin the game, black or white—it's all the same.

At the beginning of the game, white's clock is always started first, no matter what. This one simple act helps to keep the move counter accurate and avoids many problems later on. If the general of the black army is not there on time, white's commander starts his own clock, makes his move, and then starts his opponent's timer—just as if the player of the black pieces were on time. If the commander of the white pieces is not present at the start of the game, black simply starts white's clock. Move counters are great, but they're hard to keep straight.

Do you know how to adjust the move counter on your game timer? There will be rare times when it will be necessary to fine-tune this clock feature. Trying to figure out how to do that tune up at critical

moments, like during time pressure, just increases the probability that things will not turn out the way you expected. And don't forget that scoresheets, not move counters, are used to make correct flag fall claims—but any disagreement between the clock's move counter and a scoresheet can be very confusing. End the risk of a silly claim: Stop the clock at the end of the game!

You and your opponent are banging out moves in a sudden death time control. You mate your adversary. You offer to shake hands. Then your rival sees that your flag is down. They make a flag fall claim. Their claim is that you ran out of time before you made the mating move. Will the TD be able to sort this out? Probably, but if the TD has no way to tell which happened first (mate or the flag fall) they usually rule that the position on the board gets the nod. How can you avoid this scene? Stop the clock the instant the mating or stalemate move is made.

In theory, stalemate and checkmate end the game at the instant that they occur. In reality, it does not work out so simply.

Next month we will examine the clock rules for tardy players.

Just The Rules: Tardiness 101

June 19, 2018

You come late for your G/90,d5 contest. After finding your assigned playing spot you notice that there is no equipment and no opponent anywhere in sight. You set up your equipment—yes, equipment must be set up before the game clock can be started. By the time you get your equipment set up twenty minutes have passed since the start of the round. From your timer and your opponent's timer, you need to subtract ten minutes (half of the twenty minutes since the start of the round) so that each of you has eighty minutes left to complete your game. Now start your opponent's clock and let it tick off minutes until they arrive. If you are unsuccessful in following this procedure, then your game may end up going longer than expected. That can cause the next round to start late for all the other players. TDs can help you set your clock using this procedure. Tick tock, tick tock: Come late to a game and lose time on the clock. If you come late to your game and your opponent has no equipment set up yet, then you both equally split the amount of time you were tardy to the game. Without equipment it does not matter if one or both players are present—you need at least a set and board to start the contest.

Did you know that you can let your opponent eat their tardy time and not make a time forfeit claim as long as their clock is running? How does that work? There is a time limit for your no-show opponent to appear (ask the TD). When that time is up you can claim a time forfeit win, or not. You can let your opponent's clock continue to count down the minutes past the forfeit time with the hope that they will show up before their flag falls. If they do materialize, you can offer to let them play the game with whatever time they have left on their clock; i.e., theoretically the clock odds are in your favor. In practice those clock time odds may not work out as well as one would expect—you can still lose the game.

And remember, if your opponent is tardy (no matter which color they are playing) they also forfeit their right to use their equipment—unless the equipment you set up is substandard (as judged by the TD).

In a G/60, d5 time control the TD tells the players to start their clocks. You have no opponent, but as a good sport, you feel you should wait for them to arrive before starting their timer. They arrive 20 minutes late. The game clock finally gets started. The contest is an interesting back-and-forth game that uses up almost all

of the time on both clocks. Your game finishes well after what was supposed to be the start of the next round. Your good sportsmanship gesture—of waiting to start the game clock until your opponent arrived—has now inconvenienced all of the other participants in the tournament; i.e., at the very least the next round is probably going to start late. If your opponent is there or is not, start your clock on the spot. Properly start the clock when the TD begins the round, *even if your opponent is not there*. Many tournaments schedule the rounds to start at specified times, and that timetable is very often not flexible. And remember that if you are the general of white pieces then start your clock, make your move, and then start your opponent's timer. The leader of the black pieces can simply start white's timer. Have no timer for your game? It'll work out; you'll get one later, there is no doubt. In a G/30, d5 contest, you were unable to secure a clock, so you started to play without one. After you and your opponent have led your chess forces around the board for a total game time of 50 minutes, the TD places a properly set clock at your board. You and your opponent each get five minutes to finish the game (base time control of thirty minutes each totals sixty minutes of game time). The TD is splitting the remaining 10 minutes of total game time between you and your opponent equally. You protest that your adversary took a lot longer to move than you did, so you should have more time on your clock than he does. Sorry, without a clock on the game from the start, you have no proof of how much time either you or your rival took to push wood. You now each have five minutes to complete your struggle.

Occasionally neither you nor your opponent have a clock to use in your game—even after trying to borrow one. Tell the TD. If they don't have an extra clock to loan out, then start playing. If a chess clock becomes available later, it should be set so that both you and your opponent split equally the time that is left in the game. You may need the TD's help in doing this.

Next month those scribbles that we call notation will come under the "Just the Rules" microscope.

Just the Rules: Optional Notation?—A Quiz

July 9, 2018

US CHESS		888.512.4377 (CHESS) www.USCFSales.com		OFFICIAL SCORE SHEET
EVENT	BOARD	SECTION	DATE	
WHITE	BLACK	OPENING	PUBING NO.	
WHITE	BLACK	WHITE	BLACK	
1		31		
2		32		
3		33		
4		34		
5		35		
6		36		
7		37		
8		38		
9		39		
10		40		
11		41		
12		42		
13		43		
14		44		
15		45		
16		46		
17		47		
18		48		
19		49		
20		50		
21		51		
22		52		
23		53		
24		54		
25		55		
26		56		
27		57		
28		58		
29		59		
30		60		
CIRCLE CORRECT RESULT:		WHITE WON	DRAW	BLACK WON
SIGNATURE		SIGNATURE		



The world of chess notation is really confusing. It is not easy remembering when scorekeeping is required and when it is optional—yes, there are times it is optional. Below is a fun quiz to help you learn those exceptions. Of course to make it easy to remember if notation is optional or not just simply try to take notation all of the time.

That-a-way you don't need to waste brain matter trying to recall when it is necessary and when it is not. Besides, with notation you have one more piece of evidence when you make a claim.

True or False?

- 1) Your opponent's timer displays only four minutes of playing time left in a regular rated sudden death time control. You have seven minutes of thinking time remaining. You stop taking notation, and your adversary makes a claim that you must take notation: you have more than five minutes of time left on your clock! He insists that only wood pushers with less than five minutes of playing time displayed on their clock are excused from notating.

Show Solution

FALSE: In any time control where the total playing time is 30 minutes or longer, with or without sudden death, if *either* one of the players has less than five minutes of time left in any time control,* neither* player is required to take notation. But remember, without notation it will be difficult to provide proof for any claim you might have.

- 2) Your opponent is not taking notation in your dual rated G/29, d10 contest. He claims that since the game is both Regular and Quick rated—and Quick rated chess games don't require notation—that you are both exempt from keeping a game score.

Show Solution

FALSE: Notation is needed. In this game the base time + the sudden death time totals 39 (29 + 10). Games that total 30 minutes of playing time, or longer, require notation—even if they are dual rated. Why is a game dual rated? That is a topic for another column.

- 3) You do not need to take notation in Quick and Blitz rated games.

Show Solution

TRUE: In contests that are only Quick or Blitz rated no notation is required. If a game has a total playing time (base time control + sudden death, or increment) that is less than 30 minutes, then no notation is required; however, it gets tough to make claims without a scoresheet.

- 4) In tournaments that use increment time controls of 30 seconds or longer the players must take notation for every move—even in the last five minutes of the time control.

Show Solution

TRUE: The idea is that players have plenty of time to write down their moves, even in a time crunch.

- 5) Checkmarks on scoresheets count the same as notation.

Show Solution

FALSE: Check marks don't mean a thing notation wise.

- 6) Blind and disabled players do not need to keep score.

Show Solution

FALSE: *Some individual players require special notation rules; however, even they still need to keep score.* We value making chess more accessible and all wood pushers are allowed a variety of scorekeeping options. Ask the TD to explain those rules if you need more information.

See a TD if your opponent is not taking notation and should be.

Do you want to know more about those elusive digital scorekeeping usage guidelines? This column was about to review those rules but Chess Life for Kids (April 2018, page 23) already did an excellent job of covering those guidelines—so, check it out. **

Next month, more notes on notation.

Just the Rules: Avoiding Conflict!

August 21, 2018



Be sure to say “check” in Ultimate Moves, Photo IM Eric Rosen

You don’t need to say check in the game, but say it all the same.

You grab your bishop and slide it along the long diagonal to silently put your rival in check. Your opponent grabs their queen and snatches up the free pawn your bishop left unguarded and immediately starts your clock. You quickly press your timer button to restart his clock—pointing out that their king is still in check. Since you did not say “check,” your rival insists they can make any move they want. The TD rules your opponent must now use their queen—the touched piece—to get out of check, if possible.

Just say “check” when you put your opponent’s king at risk, who can resist?

The rules don’t require saying “check,” but saying “check” avoids a lot of messy situations. The rule in blitz (speed) chess is that you lose the game when you make an illegal move if your opponent points out the infraction. There are no second chances in Blitz to take back the illegal move (in this case, not getting out of check) and replace it with a legal one.

Wrong results need tweaking ASAP so the right info’s there for all to see.

OK, you’ve won your game. You report the results. Between that

moment and the moment the next round gets paired, the information gets mixed up and your win turns into a draw (or worse). The longer you wait to report any misinformation about your total tournament score, or individual game scores, the harder it is for the TD to sensibly correct it.

Your total score for the event is often printed on the pairing sheet—check yours. Exchanging your current tournament score info with your rival before the game starts is also an easy way to check if your records match the TD's for pairing purposes. If you notice your score is incorrect, tell a TD immediately. They *may* be able to perform some pairing magic to get you paired more correctly. If you notice any scoring glitches on the wall chart or pairings, then also inform the TD right away. Some TDs, if informed too late—like many rounds later— may count your correct score only for rating purposes but not for prizes. Why? Your incorrect score impacted the pairings you got instead of the pairings you should have had—and that is important if it continues over many rounds.

You can stay looking your best: Don't talk to others during your contest.

As your game progresses it wanders into familiar opening territory. When it is their turn, your opponent appears to be on their own in this opening and they often settle in for a long “think time.” So, you wander into the hall and socialize, make travel plans, schedule meals, etc. Those innocent conversations may be seen as inappropriate by your struggling opponent. Your opponent or the TD may get the wrong idea, no matter how innocent your communication turns out to be. Most casual conversations away from your game are just that, casual conversations between you and others; however, when your opponent claims otherwise, some very uncomfortable moments are going to follow.

Avoiding conflict is easier than dealing with conflict. Keep to yourself during your game.

And remember that cell phones and chess are not friends. While it is hard to stop, don't keep going out in the hallway and talking on your cell phone or texting.

When leaving the event for another quest, signing the withdraw list is the best.

Having just finished game four in a five round event you decide to pack it in. Your results thus far don't meet your expectations. The

tournament has ceased to be enjoyable for you. It is time to move on and skip round five. Please officially withdraw from the tournament properly. Don't just take off.

From time to time, you will need to stop playing in a tournament to attend to other thing in your life. You can do this by withdrawing from the event; please withdraw properly. By withdrawing properly, you will make sure that another player in the tournament will not be paired against you in the future when, in fact, you will not be showing up for the game. They came to play too.

Most tournaments have a withdrawal sheet for players to sign. At the very least, tell the TD you can't play the rest of the tournament. Some players note on the paring sheet, when they report their game result, the fact that they are withdrawing.

A wood pusher typically essayed games on day one of most two day events. He chronically did not show up for day two of the tournament. He also chronically did not withdraw from the tournament. Finally after many tries the organizers came up with a solution that motivated him to withdraw properly. When he entered an event he was assessed a huge refundable fee—in addition to his entry fee—that was returned to him **ONLY** if he withdrew properly; i.e., he had to sign out on the withdrawal list or contact the TD before the pairings were made for the round(s) he was going to miss.

Just the Rules: Mysterious Missing Move Pairs

September 14, 2018

FLAG! That is the word that moved your opponent's brain right out of the time scramble zone. He had 90 minutes to make 40 moves (40/90,d5) in the game's first time control, and your claim is that the general of the black pieces only made 39 moves before his time ran out. You have a scoresheet to prove it—or do you? Your adversary pauses the game timer and challenges your claim. He does not believe that your scoresheet is complete—reasonably complete scoresheets are a must for this claim to be valid (in general single time control games, quick chess, and blitz don't count here).

"I can prove," he exclaims to the TD, "that I made enough moves before time ran out. Give me a moment so that I can replace my check marks with accurate notation—I remember all of the missing moves." The TD immediately points out that once the claim has been made neither player may fill in missing moves or correct any previous notational errors. Those missing or corrected moves need to be scribbled in by both players before the claim is made.

The TD finds your score is accurate up to: ****37.Kd5 ____ 38. ____ ____ 39. ____ ____**** Are those five missing moves or three missing move pairs? And does it matter?

The rule allows for no more than a total of three missing or inaccurate move pairs. Move 37 is missing one move for black; thus, creating one missing move and one missing move pair. The two missing individual moves, one for white and one for black, for move 38 count together as only one missing move pair (while 37.Kd5 ____ 38. ____ ____ is three missing moves, it is only two missing move pairs)—ditto for move 39. The TD upholds your claim. Missing moves are not always the same as missing move pairs.

A scoresheet missing more than three moves is a scoresheet aiming to lose.

When your opponent runs out of time before making the right number of moves in the allotted time (you know, stuff like 45 moves in 90 minutes with a delay of 5 seconds, or 40/90, d5—sorry, in general single time control games, quick chess and blitz don't count here)—you may claim a win aided with a complete scoresheet. The



Magnus Carlsen and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, studying scoresheets post mortem in the 2017 Sinquefeld Cup, Photo Lennart Ootes

scoresheet has to be accurate. It can't have more than three missing or inaccurate pairs of moves—three missing or inaccurate moves can be something entirely different.

Some slick players like to point out that when a score is off by one move for many moves in a row that all of those one-off notations count as multiple errors. Check this out.

Score 1: 1.e4 e5 2.Be2 g6 3.d4 d6 4.d5 c6 5.c4. ... Score 2: 1.e4 **Be2** 2.g6 **d4** 3.d6 **d5** 4.c6 **c4**.

Compare the two scores. Score 1 is how the scoresheet should look. Did you notice on Score 2 those bold faced notations? White forgot to write down black's first move (1...e5) and instead just wrote down their own second move (2.Be2) in that empty space. This repetition went on move after move after move with that same one-off pattern. The rulebook only counts the first one-off notation (Score 2, **1...Be2**) as a single error and nothing more. The three moves that follow the initial one-off error (2.g6** d4** 3.d6** d5** 4.c6 **c4**) are not considered as three additional errors—or errors of any kind.

And minor notation miscues typically don't count as errors at all; i.e., when the scoresheet says 1.Nf6 and the move on the board is obviously 1.Nf3 that is a minor notational error. Of course the TD gets to give the thumbs up or down on defining minor scoresheet errors. **Checkmarks on a scoresheet can bear the blame for TDs' rejecting many a claim.**

It is a common practice to use checkmarks in place of notation during time trouble, but it is still not acceptable as notation. Those check-

marks are good for keeping track of the move count, but nothing else—and remember clock move counters don't count at all and are worthless in making claims. If you have the time left on your clock before your flag falls, you might try fixing your scoresheet before making a claim.

Move on the board then write your score, this avoids the claim that you may find a bore.

The main rule is that you must make your move on the board first, and then notate it on your scoresheet. This rule has a variation that allows wood pushers to first notate their move before making it on the chessboard. This variance never applies to electronic scoresheets. Since this variation is allowed to be unannounced, you should check with the TD to find out if the main rule or the variation applies to the tournament you signed up for.

The concept in the main rule is that when a move is written, erased, written, erased, etc. it is considered note taking—and note taking is against the rules. So the line was drawn in the sand by the law-givers to not even allow the process to start when even one notation was written down before a move was played. The main rule caused a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth; thus, the variation.

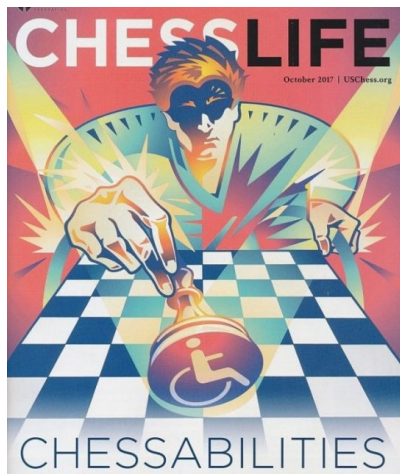
Besides the header info, only actual game moves, draw offers and clock times are allowed to be written on a scoresheet.

Are you missing moves on your score? Use your rival's to get more.

You may fill in your own scoresheet using your opponent's scoresheet while your clock is running and both of you have at least five minutes left on your clock displays. If your opponent objects, get a TD.

Just the Rules: Special Rules Q & A

October 18, 2018



Opponents with disabilities need special care, so there are special rules to make it fair. *The cover of Chess Life Magazine, October 2017 issue, which featured coverage of the first FIDE World Junior Chess Championship for the Disabled.* **Q: Why are some visually impaired, blind, and wheelchair assisted players' assigned boards far away from their score group?** **A:** The short answer is—accessibility. A player using a wheelchair often finds a board assignment on the end of a table next to a wide aisle very accessible. Blind players often have a second special board, or other equipment, that requires more space than a standard setup. That needed extra space is often found near the last board set up in the playing hall. Many TDs assign special needs players to the same accessible board for each round. So, if you are expecting to play on a board in your score group, but your opponent is a player with disabilities, you may be assigned to another board with better access for your opponent. If you are a visually impaired, blind, or a player with disabilities, informing the TD or organizer about what accommodations you need—well before the pairings for round one are made—is a win-win for everyone.

Q: My blind opponent has an assistant. What are these assistants allowed to do? **A:** Assistants are allowed to press the clock, keep notation, announce moves, give clock information, give

scoresheet information, help in adjournments, pause the clock and summon the TD (effective 1-1-19), claim a win on time (effective 1-1-19), and report a “touched” piece by the opponent (effective 1-1-19). And as a practical matter, many TDs allow an assistant to make moves for the player with disabilities on the non-disabled player’s board. If your opponent has an assistant, then you are also allowed an assistant. Be aware that the TD staff is not required to find an assistant for you; however, in most cases they will try. When the late NTD Ira Lee Riddle was paired against a player with disabilities, he often also offered to perform all of the duties of an assistant for his opponent.

Q: How do visually impaired or blind players know what moves their opponents made? **A:** Blind players and their opponents must announce the move that is made and have it repeated back to them by their adversary. This helps ensure that both chess warriors are analyzing the same position.

Q: What are the differences between a standard chess board plus pieces and boards and pieces designed for visually impaired or blind players? **A:** Chess boards for blind players are designed to let their “fingers do the perceiving.” The boards have raised and lowered squares in place of light and dark squares. Each square also has a small hole in the center of the square to accommodate the peg on the bottom of the 32 chess pieces. Each piece is typically Staunton in design and is secured in a square using this hole-peg system. Usually, the black pieces have a slight knob/peg on their tops to distinguish them from the white pieces. Typically, a game using a special board also employs a standard chess set and board for use.

Q: What does the rulebook say about the definition of a “touched” piece on a special blind chess board? **A:** Pieces on a special blind board are considered “touched” when the peg on the bottom of a piece fully leaves the hole in the center of a square. Outside of that touch restriction blind players can use their fingers to otherwise physically sense (handle) their special board and pieces all that they want.

Q: Do visually impaired or blind players use any special chess clocks? **A:** Many blind players in this country typically still use an analog clock with the “crystal” (glass) face removed. That-a-way they can touch the clock face to get the same information sighted players receive via their eyes. There are special digital delay/increment blind clocks available. They appear to be expensive. Features beyond the typical routine digital clock functions seem to include two earphone jacks and separate player adjustments for sound. Don’t be surprised if a TD rules that a special needs wood pusher’s clock trumps your digital timer. Without an assistant, a visually impaired player would not otherwise have any way to get information from those standard fancy delay and increment clocks.

Q: From a US Chess rules perspective is there a difference between legally blind and totally blind? **A:** No. All that is required is some paperwork from an MD that is then used to issue a government “legally blind” certificate. Some legally blind players can see well enough to use a standard set and board—plus, they may not need any special equipment or an assistant.

Q: How do visually impaired and blind players take notation? **A:** Several methods of keeping score are available: (1) a general use manual braille recording device can double as a scoresheet; (2) a braille typewriter also works well; (3) a voice recording device is handy—since each move needs to be announced and repeated anyhow; (4) an assistant keeps score on a standard scoresheet; and (5) a larger print scoresheet can be used. That last option works well for many legally, but not totally, blind players. If you are playing a person with disabilities, ask the TD to explain any unique rules that apply to that game.

Just The Rules: Bogus Chess Law?!

November 26, 2018

Have you ever stumbled across some off-the-wall unofficial rules of chess? You know the kind—rules that players think are really official, but are not. Check out these Facebook contributions to that list of bogus rules (edited to protect the guilty):

Nicholas Sterling: A kid in a class tried to tell me about something called “spicing”, whereby the rules of a game could be changed midway through. He insisted US Chess and FIDE Rules did not explicitly forbid it, and refused to believe me when I said they did.

Brenda Tramel Hardesty: My husband, Danny Hardesty, heard this one at a scholastic tournament: If I check my opponent seven times, I win, right?

Louis Reed (and others): You have sixteen moves to checkmate a lone king or you lose.

Tom Langland: Five illegal moves and you lose the game.

Tom Langland: The false claim of a checkmate equals the loss of game.

Rob Getty: I’ve had players claim a 50 move draw because they played 50 moves.

Rob Getty: I had a scholastic player claim the triple repetition of position draw by just moving her king back and forth three times while her opponent was capturing what was left of her pieces.

Rob Getty: My son was playing a non-rated tournament where a parent volunteer told kids that the game was a draw as soon as one player’s clock ran out.

Tom Langland: There is the “caging” touch-move rule. This is where if you hover your hand over a piece with all your fingers pointing down while you are thinking about moving it, you have “caged” it and must now move it.

John Moldovan: The higher-rated player wins the tiebreak.

Tom Langland: You are not allowed to press the clock with a chess piece—you have to use your finger.

Sara Walsh: If both players have pieces on the board when time ran out, the game was a draw.

Brad Crable: If you are only left with your King and can march it to your opponent's last rank, then you can get your queen back!

Neal Bellon: On two separate occasions at my club, a player thought “touch move” has to do with the clock. He touched a piece, changed his mind, and moved another. When his opponent correctly called him on it, the reply was, “But I didn’t hit my clock.”

Rob Getty: I remember being involved in a touch move incident 30 years ago where my opponent claimed that touch move didn’t apply because I hadn’t said, “check.”

Brian Karen: A player in my tournament covered his hands with his shirt sleeve when moving a piece. He learned the hard way this does not exempt him from touch move.

Tim Mirabile: For beginners, capturing pieces that a knight jumps over.

Tim Mirabile: I observed someone try to “en passant” capture with a bishop.

Bryan B Leano: A player claimed that to promote a pawn to a queen, the player has to actually say “queen”.

Louis Reed: At the end of the clock time the pieces are counted and whomever had the most pieces on the board would win the game.

Rulebook Rumors

US Chess is the new publisher of the rulebook, starting with the 7th edition. The plan is to publish selected chapters—the actual rules of play, tournament rules, and Blitz rules—on-line on or before January 1, 2019. The paperback copy of the entire book should be available early in 2019.

Just the Rules: Rulebook Judgement Calls

December 20, 2018

If annoying acts cause a migraine, see a TD and make a claim.

Your opponent complains to the TD that you are eating a sandwich at the board. The TD observes that you have a fast food burger that you are holding below the table. There are no crumbs or food on the board or table. You are observed taking a discreet nibble from your food occasionally.

But what if you had you been eating a crunchy snack from a noisy cellophane bag and getting crumbs all over the board?

And then there is the shirt that another player wears with slogans that supported a cause that you have spent a lifetime opposing—no offensive language or immoral suggestions, just words of support. Do things change if the language on the shirt is offensive?

Your opponent keeps tapping his pencil...

If the TD gets involved it is a judgement call on their part if any of these scenarios are annoying. Typically unobtrusive eating, unless a no-eating-at-the-board rule is announced, is not annoying. Crinkly, messy, and loud eating is probably going to get labeled as annoying. A tapping pencil often gets the heave-ho from many TDs; however, T-shirt babble is a close call and very subjective. Sometimes just wearing the disputed shirt inside out solves that problem.

Check with a TD if your opponent's behavior, or anyone else's, is annoying you. Once you contact a TD about what is annoying you, the TD gets to decide how big of a concern the alleged annoyance really is. Remember, what annoys you may be just normal behavior for everyone else.

Before you file an annoyance complaint, politely ask the person to stop their bothersome behavior. Making this kind of complaint should be a last-ditch effort on your part.

Playing black, have no fear: you get to choose the gear—or do you?

You are playing in a tournament where you are expected to provide your own equipment. You are managing the white pieces. Your oppo-

nent, as the general of the black pieces, wants to use his equipment. His board has bright polka dot pink and red squares, while his chess army is turquoise and red. You object.

Or, your opponent—playing the black pieces—claims the player with the black pieces gets to choose the equipment. They choose the Bart Simpson memorial chess set.

If you have to provide your own chess equipment, then the player of the black pieces gets to choose what **standard set, board, and clock** to use. Of course, if the player of the black pieces is not there at the start of the game, then they forfeit their right to choose, unless their opponent sets up substandard equipment.

What kind of substandard equipment?—substandard standard clocks for one. If either player is using a clock that is not appropriate for the tournament time control, then the other player may be able to swap out that substandard timer for a more appropriate clock before move one. You may need a TD to help you with this.

And if there is a dispute over equipment, then the TD gets to decide what will be used. Most TDs would rule the Bart Simpson pieces and the oddly colored board & pieces do not meet the “standard equipment” test.

If You Touch it, then Move it or Take it.

There was no thinking involved. It was intuitive. It was obvious to the most casual observer. Your Bishop move simply wins your opponent’s knight on the other side of the board. You grab the cleric and reach across the board to claim your loot. In the process you brush up against your opponent’s guarded pawn. Your adversary claims you touched that pawn and now you must take it.

Or, the wood pusher across the board from you touches the top of his queen with his finger tip for a few seconds. Suddenly he switches gears and grabs his rook. “He touched his queen and must move it,” is your claim. He retorts that he did not deliberately touch the queen and intended to move the rook all along.

If you touch your piece, you will have to move it. If you touch your opponent’s piece you have to take it.

Accidentally bumping or brushing up against a piece is not considered “touching a piece.” Using the “no intent, so it is not deliberate” argument muddies the waters of “touch move” but not enough to avoid moving the first piece touched—even with the tip of a finger.

However, when there is a dispute the TD gets to decide whether a piece was touched or not—a judgement call to be sure.

Just The Rules: No Claim, No Fame

January 16, 2019



Your opponent's flag is about to fall in a US Chess sudden death time control. The TD comes over to the contest to observe. They see that your opponent has run out of time—their flag is down, but the TD says nothing and does nothing. You look up at them with a quizzical expression, and still there is no response from the TD. To get the TD to act, you must point out the flag fall and *say something*—like “Flag” or “Flag Fall” or “Time.”

You and your opponent are locked in a position where your king gets checked over, and over, and over. The TD is watching this little dance contest; yet, says nothing. Why? There was no claim by a player. Note: the TD can declare a draw without a claim if the same position appears five times in a row.

Your opponent touches their queen but moves their knight instead. They do this right in front of the TD; yet, the TD does nothing?! But if you make a claim, what do you think the TD will do?

Rarely will a TD intervene in your game without an invitation by you or your opponent to do so. *TDs rarely rule on a claim that you don't make, even if they observe a violation of US Chess rules* (FIDE rules are a bit different and there are some rare exceptions in US Chess.) So if you want to claim a flag fall, draw, illegal move, touched piece, etc., then you have to make that request—verbally. One notable time a claim does not need to be verbalized is when 75 moves have been made with no pawn move plus no piece has been captured—then the TD can simply declare the game drawn.

If a TD sees an illegal move early in the game—the US Chess rules have some wiggle room here—a TD *may*, unannounced, step in and

correct the miscue (even though US Chess advises against it). They positively cannot do a thing about an illegal move in the last five minutes of a time control unless you or your opponent makes an illegal move claim-aloud.

Coaches, friends, relatives, spectators, teachers, and all others cannot make any claim in the game you are playing. Having someone summon a TD for you is not the same as making a claim. When the TD does show up, you have to state your claim yourself. House players may get a free game by telling the TD their name. If you can only play one round of a tournament, ask the TD if you can be paired as a house player. A house player offers the TD a way to find a game for a player who would otherwise receive a bye (because there are an odd number of contestants in the section). Since there are several good ways that a house player can be used in this situation, check with the TD to find out which method they prefer—and you get to play a rated game for free! Equipment is not provided as a rule, so bring your own and be cool. Most tournaments don't provide sets, boards, clocks, or any kind of chess equipment. So to be safe, bring your own gear.

If the equipment is provided by the organizer or TD, then you should expect to use their stuff. You can then use your standard set, board, and clock in the analysis (skittles) area.

Just the Rules: What Rule Would You Change?

February 18, 2019

In this month's, "Just The Rules" column, I asked organizers, TDs and fans of this column which rule they would change if they could. Please add your own in the comments!

Matt Phelps: All US Chess rules should be replaced with: "See the FIDE Laws of Chess."

TJ Comments:* Actually David Kuhns—former long-time Rules Committee chair—did create a document based on US Chess rules from chapters 1 and 2 in the 6th edition of the rulebook mixed in with the FIDE Laws of Chess. *

JJ Lang: I understand why the rule is that neither side has to take notation when either side is under five minutes. I wish the rule was that you can only stop taking notation when "you" are under five minutes. That way if you're low on time but your opponent isn't, you can still get the moves from them after the game.

Sam Copeland: Stalemate should be a win.

TJ Comments:* There are those that would ask why the player with the better position should be rewarded with a win for not being able to checkmate their opponent*.

Jarrod Tavares: Touch Move should always have to be called by the opponent. You should be allowed to touch your opponent's pieces all you like if he isn't seated at the board.

TJ Comments:* Unless there is a capture involved I don't understand why would you need to touch your opponent's pieces at all? By the way, your idea needs a bit of wording work to avoid complications with the "Coffeehouse Rules Benders Association;" i.e., if my opponent stands up at the board, could I then touch his chess pieces? We all know what you mean, but be careful with that wording. *

Greg Maness: I have a question, not a rules change. Has the misprint in Rule 14F (The 50-Move Rule) been corrected? For those who do not know what I am talking about, Rule 14F1 states "The game is drawn when the player on (the) move claims a draw and demonstrates that the last 50 consecutive moves have been made by each side without any capture OR(!!) pawn move." Meanwhile, the FIDE law states: "9.3 The game is drawn, upon a correct claim by

a player having the move, if: 9.3.2 the last 50 moves by each player have been completed without the movement of any pawn AND(!) without any capture.

TJ Comments:* Yep the US Chess rules and the FIDE Laws are different sometimes. Nope that alleged misprint in the US Chess Rules has not been addressed yet by the Delegates. *

Enrique Huerta: I would like the removal of the half-point bye requests.

Mark A Reyes: Parents and coaches should be out of the tournament room(s) at all times, even if it is a non-rated section of a rated event.

TJ Comments:* I believe that at this year's US Chess National Scholastics that rule will apply. *

Adam Saul Rubinberg: I'd allow a TD to call a game a draw if the same position happens five times on the board, regardless of how it reached that position each time.

TJ Comments:* Currently the TD can call a draw if the same position repeats five times in a row. Maybe the Delegates will consider your idea at their next meeting. *

Scott Hunt: Get rid of Rules 14B2 Draw Offer With Opponent On Move, and 14B3 Draw Offer Before Moving and combining them as FIDE does. Rule 14B1 should simply state "Players must offer a draw by first determining a move, offer the draw, then press the clock completing the move. Draw offers offered in any other manner will result in either a warning or time penalty..." The TDCC and Rules Committee agreed with me that the wording of this US Chess rule is badly written, but they sadly did nothing to correct it.

TJ Comments:* Once again US Chess and FIDE disagree on the wording of a rule(s). By the way, the TDCC and Rules committees can only suggest to the Delegates new wording for rules—perhaps if you remind those committees about your suggested new wording for this rule? Or get your Delegate to make a motion to change the wording of 14B1. *

Aakaash Meduri: Give a time penalty if an illegal move is made but don't force someone to move a piece just because it was touched.

TJ Comments:* Not requiring a touched piece to be moved, if it is legally possible, would be the star dish at the "Coffeehouse Rules

Benders Association” annual banquet. IMHO, allowing any wiggle room to the “touch move” rule is opening up the door for a lot of phony arguments. *

Terry Winchester: That Variation 14H—Claim of insufficient losing chances in sudden death—is still applicable regardless of the clock being a delay or non-delay timer.

From what I’ve gathered so far, it appears that the Delegates did not approve the 5th edition change to 41C from that of the 4th edition (“One convenient test is that the square formed by the bases of four pawns should be about the same size as any square on their board.”), and consequently, the new 41C has been added to the 6th edition as well—*editor’s note: and to the 7th edition*. I would like to see that rule revert back to what it was in the 4th edition. I really don’t know how the rules can be changed willy-nilly like that without Delegate approval. It has been my understanding that they are the ones who approve such things. Please correct me if I’m wrong.

TJ Comments:* The Delegates approved an enormous amount of rules changes from the 4th edition to the 5th edition in mass, not individually—the editors and a rulebook committee made countless needed changes and updates. In between editions the Delegates typically do consider the rules one at a time. Any wording changes to 41C have not been considered since the publication of the 5th edition. While there are some hoops to jump through, individual US Chess members do have some options to get rules changed. Perhaps I will address that down the road in another column. *

Lawrence Cohen: Add a rule to penalize a player \$30 for withdrawing from a tournament without notification. \$20 of that fine goes to the organizer and \$10 to US Chess. There should be a 6 month ban from rated play until the fine is paid. The player should be able to appeal such a fine. There will be cases where being called away for an emergency and not being able to come back or call back to the TD can occur This act (withdrawal without notification) usually effects another player, and is a constant problem that TDs have to deal with. Currently US Chess allows an organizer to fine an individual up to the cost of the tournament entry fee for doing this, but that only affects that organizer’s events. And until the player pays the fine issued by the organizer; the individual can only be banned from that organizer’s events.

Hal Bogner: At the amateur level, and certainly at the scholastic level, allow writing down your move before playing it on the board.

It adds some self-discipline for the impulsive, and helps reduce one-move blunders by bringing the player back to the “here and now” of the position on the board before playing the intended move.

TJ Comments: *You’re in luck. Check out rule Rule 15A (Variation I) that allows writing the move first—and organizers can also announce that the variation is going to be used at their events.*

Erik Czerwin: Prize distribution: I’m super familiar with everything else, but properly distributing cash prizes is daunting. So much that it prevents me from wading into cash tournaments without mentors

TJ Comments:* Both SwisSys and WinTD (tournament management and pairings software) have procedures to split up cash prizes. And having a mentor is a great idea. Sometime in the next year I plan a column or two that will step into the big muddy of prize fund distributions—both the math and terminology. *

Just the Rules: A Prize Fund Quiz

March 30, 2019

Test your knowledge of prize fund rules in this baker's dozen True or False quiz by Tim Just. **1.** A tournament advertising a “Guaranteed Prize Fund” must pay the entire advertised prize fund amount, no matter what.

Show Solution **True.** That is why it is guaranteed.

2. A tournament advertising a “Based On” prize fund must pay the entire “Based On” dollar amount, no matter what.

Show Solution **False.** This kind of prize fund is based on the number of entries. Based-On prize funds can be reduced by as much as 50%. When a \$1000 “Based On 50 players” tournament draws less than 25 players (less than half the advertised player total), the prize fund can be reduced by only 50%—or to \$500. That 50% reduction applies to all advertised prizes.

3. When a prize fund for a tournament is advertised as “\$2000 Based on 125 players,” and only 75 players enter the event, the organizer may reduce the prize fund to \$1200.

Show Solution **True.** The math goes like this: Only 60% ($75/125 = 60\%$) of the expected number of entries played in the event. So, 60% of \$2000 = \$1200.

4. “Based-On” prize funds of \$500 or less must pay out prizes in proportion to the number of players that enter a tournament compared to the number of players expected.

Show Solution **True.** A “\$450 Based-On 30 players” tournament’s entries only totaled 10 players. The organizer must pay out 33.3% ($10/30$) of the \$450 prize fund—or \$150.

5. When an event advertises a Class (not Under) \$100 prize for first place in the Expert Class, and only one Expert rated player enters the event, only that lone Expert may claim the \$100 Expert prize.

Show Solution **True.** When the Expert does not win any place prize worth more than \$100, no matter what they score—even zero points—the Expert prize belongs to them. They alone qualify for and may claim that Expert gold.

6. When a tournament publicizes an “Under 2200” prize and only one Expert rated player enters the tournament, only that lone Expert

may claim the “Under 2200” prize.

Show Solution **False.** Under prizes are different from Class prizes. Class prizes are restricted to players with ratings in that class. Under prizes apply to any player rated below a set rating. In this example the “Under 2200” prize can be claimed by the best scoring player rated below 2200, that includes Experts, plus players in class A, class B, class C, class D, etc.

7. All of the prizes an individual qualifies for can be claimed by that one person.

Show Solution **False.** Players can only claim one prize—the largest prize available to them, no matter how many other prizes they qualify for. Sometimes a player qualifies for a place prize and a class, or under, prize. They can only claim the larger of those two cash amounts. So if a wood pusher’s score qualifies them to collect both a place prize of \$200 and a class, or under, prize of \$100, they can only collect the \$200 place prize.

8. When there are ties for place prizes the players in the tie may place all of the funds they qualify for into a pot that they will be split with the other tied players.

Show Solution **False.** The same “one prize per player” rule applies when there are ties for \$\$\$ to be split up; i.e., each player can only bring their one largest prize to the pot to be split. The number of prizes shared by the tied players can never be greater than the number of players that are dividing up those \$\$\$: Three players tie for first (\$500), second (\$400), and third (\$300) place prizes. One of those players also can also lay claim to the top Expert prize of \$200. That expert cannot collect both the Expert prize and a place prize. In this example those top three wood pushers—including the Expert—share only place prizes totaling \$1200 (\$500+\$400+\$300) equally, or \$400 each. The Expert prize of only \$200—far less than any of the place prizes—is awarded to another player.

9. Organizers must award all prizes at the tournament site.

Show Solution **False.** Organizers may award prizes at the tournament site or send them to the winners in a timely manner—well, as long as the organizer has their contact information. Organizers may also require that players fill out IRS forms to claim their prize.

10. Tie breaks should never be used to determine money prizes.

Show Solution **True.** Tie-breaks are used to determine non-monetary indivisible prizes—like trophies.

11. Special prizes are not counted when it comes to awarding prize \$\$\$.

Show Solution **True.** Special prizes—like best senior, best woman, best scholastic player, etc. are awarded separately from place and class, or under, prizes. A 75 year old player might claim a \$200 place prize AND separately also claim the \$50 “Best Senior” prize without breaking the “one prize per player” rule; special prizes don’t count towards the “one prize per player” rule and may not be shared with other players that don’t qualify for those special awards.

12. When an organizer makes a profit at a tournament they must increase prizes appropriately.

Show Solution **False.** There are no US Chess rules that require an organizer to pay out more \$\$\$ than the advertised.

13. You can withdraw from a tournament and still claim your prize!

Show Solution **False.** Players that withdraw from a tournament do not qualify for prizes. You must play all of your games or receive a bye for any rounds that you will miss—including the last round—to claim prize money.

Just the Rules: Making Rulebook Magic

April 26, 2019

Tim Just

“That rule is stupid. I’ve played chess for 50 years now and always done it that way,” exclaimed the player that was warned for touching his Rook first when castling. “That rule needs to be changed.”

“That rule is ridiculous,” was the reaction of the player that was penalized for notating his move on his electronic notation device before executing it on the board. “That rule needs to be changed.”

“Rating floors are silly,” exclaimed the player rated 2000—his ratings floor—that was not allowed to play in the “Under 2000” (U2000) section at the event he wanted to enter. “That rule needs to be changed.”

“I lost because I was one and a half hour late for the game due to someone else losing my car keys?” “That rule needs to be changed”.

Players get mad as—well, you know what—and they are not going to take it anymore. Some chess rule or another has finally really ticked them off. Rules can be changed, added, or deleted from the Rulebook—and Delegates Magic can do that.

Finding a Delegate.

The Delegates are in charge of the rules. They vote on what goes into, out of, and adjusted in the US Chess rulebook—you know, Chapters 1,2, and 11. Other people are in charge of all that extra additional stuff in the rest of the Rulebook. So, job numero uno is to get a rule’s idea in front of any Delegate.

Where are the Delegates? Each state has Delegates that attend the annual convention and vote on rules changes—the 2019 list of Delegates can found [here](#). Get in touch with any of them regarding any rules changes—typically one’s own state Delegate is the best bet for gaining support. There are some hoops for a Delegate to jump through. The best hoop is to get a rule’s change motion published in the advanced Delegates Convention agenda.

Why? Typically those Advanced Delegate Motions (ADMs) get discussed on the Forums and at the committee level weeks before the meeting. Plus, plans to change a rule get vetted at the workshops held during the week before the Delegates meeting. Given the short time limit for debate at the meeting, advanced agenda ADMs get

great sales exposure before word one is spoken at the convention. Be aware that motions added by a Delegate on the floor of the convention get no such long term sales pitch before a vote is cast.

No Delegate, No Problem.

There is a shortcut to all that early hoop jumping. Attend—or get someone to attend for you—the US Open annual membership meeting (held the day before the Delegates Convention). Present any intended rule change as a motion(s) at that gathering. If the motion passes there, then the next day that motion makes it to the top spot—ahead of the published ADMs—on the Delegates’ agenda. There will be no early sales opportunities using this shortcut.

Delegate Convention Magic

At their annual get together the Delegates debate rules motions and sometimes change them—and those changes could make one’s head spin. Next, they vote on it. If it passes then the rules motion must wait for one more year (a new procedural change beginning with the 2019 Delegate’s Convention) to be voted on and passed again—with no changes—before becoming chess law. There is a provision that if 85% of the Delegates pass any rule’s motion, then it is instantly effective on January 1 following their August meeting. And rather than vote yes or no on the motion the Delegates sometimes simply send it off to a committee for review. It gets re-evaluated there before being sent back to the Delegates, at their next meeting, where the two year voting cycle starts all over again.

Review the Magic:

- (1) A motion for a rule’s change (or addition or deletion) needs to make it onto the Delegate’s agenda.
- (2) The Delegates will debate the motion, and then vote on it or send it out for further review.
- (3) If a rule’s motion passes then it will need to pass again at next year’s Delegate Convention, with no changes before it becomes chess law. But the motion can pass instantly—year number one—with an 85% Delegate approval rate.

Making Your Own Magic.

But of course if you don’t like how the Delegates make rulebook magic, then you can simply side step them altogether: How? By posting and announcing any rules changes you want to make at the

events you organize (or direct). As a player you can encourage the powers that be, at the events you attend, to post, or announce, the rules changes that you desire at their tournaments. And that is how to make your own rulebook magic.

The US Chess Rules (Chapters 1-2+11 from the 7th edition rulebook) are now downloadable and available on-line.

Just the Rules: Bye Me This, Bye Me That

May 27, 2019

The pairings got posted at the 2019 City Chess Championships, a sectioned event. Players weaved their way through the maze of sets and boards to find their assigned seat. After exchanging pleasantries—a task that helps wood pushers verify that each player was facing off against their assigned opponent and essaying the correct designated color—the chess generals shake hands. The anticipation of waiting for the tournament director’s command to start the games was felt throughout the tournament room. And then the TDs voice rang out, “You may start your games.” But you had no game in your section—the “C” section. And with an 1150 rating you were playing up into a tougher section. Your opponent on the pairings sheet is listed as “Bye.”

When a score group has an odd number of players there is going to be a lone player that does not have an assigned opponent—a player without a game. Typically that player is the lowest rated contestant with the lowest score that has not received an earlier assigned Bye. On the pairings sheet instead of an opponent for this player the word “Bye” appears. You are that player for this round.

What options are available to you from most TDs when you are staring at an assigned “Bye?”

Take the “Bye.” You can enjoy some time off and recharge your batteries—hey, a free point without having to play a game is still a pretty good thing. And you will get a pairing for the next round. In-between this round and the next one you can enjoy some R&R. If your “Bye” comes during the last round of the day (or the tournament), you may get to go home early.

Extra Games Section: A player in the U2200 section is scheduled to be assigned a “Bye.” You are a player in the U2000 section and in the same situation. If you both choose to face off against each other you can push wood in a rated contest in an “Extra Games” section. You both also keep your one-point byes in your respective sections. Those byes count for both your final tournament scores and towards winning prizes. Your game result in the “Extra Games” section counts for ratings only—not for prizes and not towards any tournament final score.

In events that are not sectioned—true Open Tournaments like the US Open—an extra section is created so that if you chose to you can push some wood in a rated game against a House Player or spectator (more on that later). You still receive your one point “Bye”—which you get to keep—plus you get to play a rated game.

Cross Section Pairing: There is no need for any “Extra Games” section here. You will face off against another player with a “Bye” in your—or your opponent’s—section of the tournament. The contest actually takes place in the higher ranked section: You are scheduled to be awarded a “Bye” in the U1200 Section. Another weekend chess warrior is going to get the “Bye” in the U1600 section. The two of you can still play rated chess in the higher—U1600—section. You will still get your “Bye” in your U1200 section. Your opponent receives no “Bye.” His game Vs you counts towards his final score and prizes in his section, not yours. Next round you both will be paired in your own section.

The House Player: Push some wood against a spectator—or a “House Player.” That one-on-one contest can take place in an “Extra Games” section or in your section (where the game counts for prizes and your final score). Some house players are seeded into the pairings so that there is an even number of wood pushers. BTW, being a “House Player” is a nice option for spectators that can only hang around for a round or two.

Cross Round Pairing: Wait for a few minutes until another player finishes their game in your score group. If they lose quickly you can play them—this is called a “Cross Round Pairing.” Instead of you being assigned a “Bye” this round—while your opponent is probably getting that same one-point present next round—you both get to play a game in your score group. The results of the game will count for you in this round and in your opponent’s next round. Cross Round Pairings are rare.

Be aware that sometimes despite a lot of effort by everyone, you may still be awarded that one-pointer and not get to play a game. Always check with the TD to find out what is available to you.

Just the Rules: Gamesmanship to Dirty Tricks

June 29, 2019

I asked my colleagues to present tricky situations, all on different spots in the continuum between cheating and gamesmanship. Many are particularly effective because they are hard to prove. Some names were changed or deleted to protect the guilty.

Erik Czerwin: The high school team that I coach had a match in our school library. The cheerleaders were practicing just outside the library windows. My team faced in towards the library. Our opposing team sat facing out the windows with the cheerleaders in view.

Walter High: Deliberately setting an electronic clock so that you have delay and your opponent does not.

Chris Merli: I used to know a player that in blitz games would play Nf6 and as the N passed through g7 would bump the pawn to g6.

Tim Lund: Wear funny or distracting t-shirts.

Daniel Parmet: Your opponent rearranges the board in front of the TD and claims your scoresheet is made up.

Michael Atkins: Player A offers a draw. Player B thinks for 45 minutes, agrees, and Player A says, “I never offered a draw.”

Brian Harrigan: With less than 5 minutes left on his clock to finish his game a player stopped notating. A 3 time repetition of position occurred. He made a draw claim. His opponent replied by continuing to move and repeating the position. The player also repeated his moves a couple more times before finally playing something else. He lost the game. After the game he told his opponent, “That was a draw, you know.” His opponent replied, “Since you stopped notating, you have no proof that a repetition occurred.” A TD was never involved in the game.

G.F. David: I was playing blitz and time was low. I was about to promote a pawn to a queen in a couple of moves. While I was moving my opponent picked up the queen and held it in his hand. When my pawn reached the last rank, I reached for the queen that was there just 20 seconds ago—it wasn’t there. I lost 8 of the remaining 10

seconds looking for the queen in his hand thereby allowing him to draw and not lose.

JJ Lang: Player A touches his queen and then he lets go of it. His opponent, Player B, claimed, “Touch Move” indicating Player A touched his bishop instead.

Brian Karen: As the story goes a famous young GM was warned about his upcoming opponent. The opponent would write down a blunder on his score sheet, push it toward his opponent, then cross out the blunder and play a strong move. But when he showed the blunder the GM shouted, “TOUCH MOVE!” Of course the opponent claimed he never touched the piece. The Grand Master said, “He did - look he even wrote it on his score sheet!”

Tim Mirabile: When in a complicated position, your opponent reaches for a piece that can make a strong move, you yell, “TOUCH MOVE” just before he touches it. The opponent then denies that he touched the piece, and this is upheld. When he goes back to play his move, there is a chance he will wonder why you wanted him to move that piece so badly, and may doubt his calculations while moving another piece instead.

Neal Bellon: When your opponent is in time pressure, you make a move that is NOT a check and deliberately say, “Check.” The idea is for him to eat more clock time looking for the phantom “check.” It’s a cheesy way of clocking your opponent.

Mike Shuey: I’ve heard of people calling checkmate when there is no checkmate on the board.

Tim Just: To rattle their opponents, some players make false claims—especially false claims of cheating.

Frederick Rhine: It is the last round of the unrated state team championship. The top two teams are playing for the title. On Board 1, Player B has a winning position—a piece up. The players are in mutual time pressure. Player A makes his move, knocking over several pieces in the process, and hits player B’s clock. Player B, foolishly, lets his clock keep running while he assists Player A in picking up the knocked over pieces. While they are doing this, Player A yells, “Flag!” The arbiter at the tournament, who is also the coach of Player A’s team, rules that Player A has won on time.

Just The Rules: 10 Rulebook Hacks You Can Use Right Now!

July 18, 2019

Simple rulebook concepts get bogged down in confusing language—language that is difficult to comprehend and remember. Here are ten rulebook hacks that are easy to use and easy to remember. Will they have exceptions? Yep, but on a practical level those exceptions will rarely ever be seen.

No Notation: You have five minutes left in your Regular (or dual) rated game before your time runs out. Do you need to still notate? No. Your opponent has five minutes of playing time left in that same contest. Do you still need to scribble down your moves? No. *Neither player* is required to notate if *either player* has five minutes—or less—of playing time on their clock for this time control. There is an exception to this hack—Increment. Some Increment time control games follow this rule, some do not. Without having to learn and remember the exceptions just keep right on notating throughout your game if there is an Increment time control of any length. Yes, even in the last five minutes of the time control. And don't forget that Blitz and "Quick rated only" contests don't require any notation at all; however I would suggest notating your Quick rated games using the same "last five minutes" hack that you just learned. That-a-way the hack is easier to use and remember. Besides, (1) you will then have a copy of your moves to analyze later and (2) you have a score sheet to help you make a claim or two.

Freezing Time: You may stop the chess clock to get a TD to come to your board and make a ruling. Let your opponent know why you stopped the clock. If all you have is a general question, not a claim, then the clock should keep right on ticking. Freezing the time prevents a lot of complications—like having a flag fall during the resolution of the claim.

No Pieces, No Time, No Victory: If your flag falls and your opponent does not have mating material (even a pawn is mating material!), the game is a draw. Player's must have mating material to claim a win.

Draw Offer: Make a move *BEFORE* offering a draw. Players have a right to see a move before deciding to accept that half-point or not. Besides, there is also the outside chance that the move you executed before offering a draw is the start of a mating combination. It is

too late to take back a draw offer once it is made. And remember the draw offer can be decline either verbally or by touching a piece without adjusting it.

Perpetual Check?: You can claim a draw if any position repeats three times—*EVEN IF THAT POSITION DID NOT OCCUR THREE TIMES IN A ROW*. While a triple repetition of a position typically occurs three times in a row, there is no perpetual check rule, just a three position repetition rule. And those same positions don't have to be three in a row!?

The Best Clock: The clock that trumps all others in your game is the one that supports the advertised tournament time control. Delay clocks are #1 for games with time delay. Increment clocks are the top choice for increment games. The classic analog clock (or a clock set that way) is always at the bottom of acceptable timers in delay or increment contests.

Draw Claims = Draw Offers: Making a draw claim is the same as making a draw offer. If your opponent makes a draw claim you can instantly accept their draw offer—even before the TD makes a ruling. Or if you decide to wait and the TD rules against them, they still need to show you their move before you decide to accept or reject their draw offer.

TD Invitation: In US Chess rarely will a TD intervene in your game without an invitation to do so by you or your opponent. If you need help, ask.

Instant Endings: Stalemate and checkmate—well, legal stalemate and legal checkmate—instantly ends the game. Anything that happens after that, especially a “flag fall,” is meaningless; however, to prevent a lot of misunderstandings your best bet is to also stop the game timer.

Flag Fall Tops Claims: If your opponent's flag falls before any claim is settled—like your offer of a draw—you may claim a win on time (even if the draw offer was made first).

Do you have a favorite rulebook hack?

Just the Rules: Rulebook Speedbumps

August 31, 2019

Castling: Moving the Rook First—Maybe?

The TD listened carefully as the player made his claim: “My opponent touched his rook first and then they castled. They must move that rook, and they can’t castle on this move. That is the rule!” The TD denied the claim. He pointed out that this tournament was using the “Rook touched first” rule variation from the 7th edition of the rulebook. That rule variation is clear: there is no penalty for touching the rook first. “But,” the player pointed out, “that rule states an announcement to that effect needs to be made at the start of the tournament.” The TD reminded the player that the rule variation announcement was made just before round 1 began. “I was not here at the start of that round,” declared the player. The TD then further pointed out, “We also posted all of our rules variations here at the event and on-line. That rule variation you are referring to only requires us to make an announcement about its use at the start of the event—which we did. By the way, that web page address for all of our rules variations was publicized in all of our pre-event publicity.” The player’s opponent gets to castle this move.

Which Deleted Rule Still Has A Variation?

The tournament was using sudden death time controls. The two weekend chess warriors were using an old style analog clock. The player’s clock showed less than two minutes of playing time left for him to complete his game. He was a piece up in a superior position. He made a 14H claim—Insufficient losing chances. When the TD arrived at the contest he let the opponent know the claim was the same as a draw offer. The offer was rejected verbally. The player’s opponent further pointed out that the 7th edition of the rulebook deleted rule 14H. The player interjected: “But rule 14H—despite being deleted—is alive and well and labeled as a variation! In fact that variation is exactly the same as the old, deleted, rule 14H.” As the TD noted, the variation use does not need to be announced in pre-event publicity. And the rule givers did not mention any requirements to announce the 14H variation at the start of the tournament. The TD ruled: “The 14H variation is being used at this tournament, so I uphold the claim—the game is a draw.”

Like Rodney Dangerfield: Analog Clocks “Can’t Get No Respect.”

When the general of the black army is late for the start of his contest, he forfeits his right to choose the equipment—or does he?

The player of the black pieces is 5 minutes tardy for the start of the round—G/30, increment 10 seconds. His opponent has already set up the equipment, including an analog clock. The player assigned black insists on using his digital increment capable timepiece. The TD agrees and the increment capable clock—properly set and reflecting black's tardiness—is placed on the game.

In this instance, white's analog device would even get undermined by his opponent's delay-only capable clock. The TD would simply set the delay clock for 10 seconds, the amount of increment time.

BTW, if the game sported a delay time control, and not increment, the TD still would have made the same decision—with black's delay capable timer replacing white's analog clock.

Now-a-days analog clocks are at the bottom of the pecking order—the rule of thumb here is that a digital chess clock is preferred over an analog clock—even if the captain of the black pieces chooses all the other equipment.

Just the Rules #25: Law and Order

September 30, 2019

In the TV series *Law & Order* we get the crime, arrest, and trial all in 60 minutes minus the commercials. In real life, even in the chess universe, it does not work that slick. It is not a short process.

While the three most common committees have some minor differences in dealing with complaints, they all have some procedures in common:

Complaints require a \$50 good faith deposit. If the complaint is found to be non-trivial—not correct or incorrect, but non-trivial—by the ruling committee then the deposit is returned. All complaints should be typed. Why? If they can't read it, they can't deal with it. Make sure to cite any pertinent rules or regulations in your grievance. Focus on the incident at hand, not earlier instances from other tournaments. And make sure you are a party directly involved in the incident—yes, the parent(s) of young children, or the coach of a team impacted by the episode, can also file the complaint. Spectators can't typically initiate this process. Include all evidence with a complaint including first-hand person typed witness statements. Committees and the US Chess office are not investigators—they're not equipped for it. The complaint will be forwarded to the respondent for a rebuttal, with a due date for a response. Committees sometimes, but not always, need more information. They will then request that the office forward those committee questions to the appropriate individuals. The Ethics Committee typically does not ask for further information from either party. The committees will discuss the complaint and all evidence amongst themselves. They will then issue a recommendation(s) including: rejecting the complaint, sanctions, re-education, etc. Any party involved has 30 days to appeal a committee recommendation.

For the step by step filing procedures for each committee check out the following links: Ethics, Rules, and TDCC (Tournament Director Certification Committee). One thing those documents don't mention is that after a committee issues its report on your complaint-appeal they may also refer the case to another committee for further deliberations.

Sample TDCC Complaint

You are pretty comfortable in your last round Sudden Death game. Your clock shows that you have 15 minutes before your flag falls.

Your opponent has a mere 6 minutes before their flag goes south. It is your move. The TD steps in and halts your clock. He explains that the tournament has to vacate the premises in 10 minutes. He grabs the game timer and sets both your time and your opponent's at 3 minutes each—with no delay. Despite your protests he starts your reset clock.

Sample Rules Complaint

You really enjoy your Thursday night rated chess club meetings. The club provides the space and the players provide the equipment. One player continues to bring his oversized medieval pieces that rest on an undersized chess board—with the squares being too small. It is a tight fit for those pieces—they seem to touch the edges of each square. And right there on the pairings sheet you see that you are in charge of the white pieces against this fellow. You complain to the TD that your opponent's equipment is not standard while yours is. You want to use your set and board. The TD points out that your opponent is playing the black pieces and gets to choose the equipment. He rules against you.

Sample Ethics Complaint

Recently there has been a player at every local event you have been at that continues to drink alcohol to excess during the event—flasks are the vehicle of choice here. By the end of the day this player becomes rude, loud, and verbally combative. The TDs and organizers have counseled him about changing this behavior to no avail. Event after event, chance after chance, he becomes disruptive. In desperation they ban him from their events.

Sidebar: Sometimes a TD will use a tournament on-site appeals committee or a special referee to initially hear an appeal of his ruling. On site appeals committees typically have a disruptive impact on many events, so they don't get used much now-a-days. Special referees can be contacted instead. A list of experienced TDs that do that job can be found on-line. And even if an appeals committee, or a special referee, rule against you, you can still file an appeal (complaint) with US Chess within 7 days after the event has ended.

Just the Rules: Time Control and Ratings Quiz

November 18, 2019

This month's column is a test! Strap yourself in and test your own time control and rating knowledge.

1. For a game to be Regular rated only the base time control in minutes + the delay (or increment) in seconds must total more than 65 minutes of playing time per player. Which of the following time controls will be regular rated?

- A. G/60, d/5
- B. G/45, inc/30
- C. G/55, inc/10
- D. G/65, d/5
- E. 40/90, G/30, d/5

Show Solution Answer: Your winners are B) $45 + 30 = 75$; D) $65 + 5 = 70$; and E) $90 + 30 + 5 = 125$. All of those time controls total more than 65 minutes of playing time—E) was a give away from the start with that 90 minutes of playing time in the primary time control—that already far exceeded the 65-minute cap. And what about A) and C)? Well, A) $60 + 5 = 65$ and C) $55 + 10 = 65$ both do not have total playing times *larger* than the magical barrier of 65 minutes of wood pushing. But they do qualify for a Dual rating—more on that later.

2. For a game to be Quick rated only the total playing time—those minutes + seconds—must be less than 30 minutes, but more than 10 minutes. Can you find the Quick only rated time controls below?

- A. G/25, d/4
- B. G15, inc/30
- C. G/20, d/10
- D. G/4, inc/25
- E. G/5, d/5

Show Solution Answer: The only Quick chess rated time control is A) $25 + 4 = 29$ minutes of individual playing time. Why? That total of 29 is more than the lower barrier of 10 and less than the upper

barrier of 30. Answer C) $20 + 10 = 30$ does not meet the requirement of being *less than* 30 minutes of wood pushing time. While B) $15 + 30 = 45$ is way over the 30-minute mark. That lower hurdle of 10 minutes is met exactly in answer E) $5 + 5 = 10$, but to be Quick rated the total individual playing time must be at least *greater* than 10 minutes. BTW, if you selected D) $4 + 25 = 29$ than you tripped over a little-known rule that requires the base time control to be at least 5 minutes for all Quick, Dual, and Regular rated games—D)’s basic time control is only G/4.

3. Now let’s take a peek at Dual rated time controls—yes that’s right, Dual ratings. You get two ratings for the price of one. When the total time a player receives to essay their contest is from 30 to 65 minutes, the game is dual rated; i.e., then the game is rated as Regular rated AND as Quick rated. Why Dual rated? That is a column for another time. The short answer is that the Ratings Committee needed more data to analyze and this was the solution they came up with. Now, which of the following time controls calculate as Dual rated?

- A. G/60, d/5
- B. G/20, d/10
- C. G/15, inc/30
- D. G/5, inc/30
- E. G/20, inc/10

Show Solution Answer: All of the above—don’t you just love those *multiple guess exams* with “all of the above” and “none of the above” as a solution? Any total playing time that slips below 30 or above 65 is not Dual rated. All of these choices total 30, 65, or something in between.

4. The last time control that impacts a player’s rating is Blitz—Blitz is the new kid on the block. When you are the general of a chess army with time controls starting at a total of 5 minutes through (and including) a total of 10 minutes your game is Blitz rated only. And remember that Blitz rules require that the primary (base) time control be at least 3 minutes Can you spot the Blitz time controls below?

- A. G/3, d/7
- B. G/5, d/0
- C. G/3, inc/2

D. G/5, inc/5

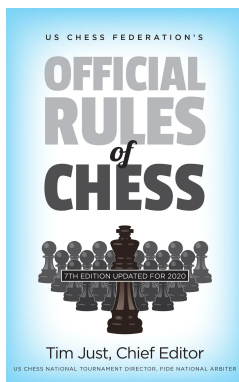
E. G/3, d/10

Show Solution Answer: A) through D) are all legitimate Blitz time controls. Their totals—base time in minutes + delay/increment in seconds—all meet the rulebook criteria. On the other hand, E) $3 + 10 = 13$ is outside the bounds of US Chess Blitz rating limits. Be aware that the standard rulebook suggested time control is B) G/5, d/0.

And then there are FIDE time controls—that is a topic for another time.

Just the Rules Changes Already! – Tim Just on the 7th Edition Rulebook

December 26, 2019



Rulebook cover

Tim Just elaborates on rule changes effective with the 7th edition of the Rule Book.

Why? One rule change will blockade the avenue traveled by the Rules Benders Association. The other adjustment sees to it that the intent and meaning of a rule's words match. Change is inevitable. **Why: Wait and See Rules Flaw?** Your opponent calls the TD over to your contest. He claims you made an illegal move—seven moves ago. While the TD confirms your opponent's claim you realize that you did accidentally make an illegal move, while not in time pressure. You did not intend to make an illegal move, but things happen. The TD uses his “WayBack Machine” to set up the position to right before the illegality took place. He requires that you make a legal move. And as a penalty, your counterpart gets two minutes added to his playing time. So, your opponent waits to see that your illegal move resulted in a position favorable to you, and not him—plus he gets a two-minute payment for pointing that out?

TJ: To eliminate this kind of unfair flaw in the rules, as of 1-1-20 rule **11D** will add some wording to eliminate this delayed claim reward. The rule is not taking away the right of a player to still claim an illegal move, just their ability to receive those extra two minutes if they wait too long to speak up. To still qualify for that extra two-minute reward, the player making the illegal move claim will need

to do so before making their own next move. **Why: Meaning Vs Intent.** You and your opponent are in time pressure. The game clock shows less than five minutes for each of you; i.e., time pressure. And then it happens—your counterpart makes an illegal move. You instantly call him on it. The clocks are stopped. The TD rolls back the position to match the one right before the illegal move. Your opponent must try again to make a legitimate move. The clock is started. ***Hold on, what happened to your two-minute reward?*** Both your opponent and the TD point to wording in the rulebook indicating that after the position is reinstated properly there shall be: “...no adjustment to the time on the clocks.” Penalties, they both claim, are adjustments to time on the clocks; therefore, you do not get two-minutes added to your time—say what?! That is not the intent of those words.

TJ: When old Rule 11D1 was massaged, before the publication of the 7th edition, the rules givers tried to make sure that TDs did not reinstate the clock times that existed before the illegal move was made; thus, the wording: “...no adjustment to the time on the clocks.” Those words to some were interpreted to literally mean that no time adjustments of any kind were to be made to the game clock, no matter what—even adjustments for penalties. As of 1-1-20 those often-misunderstood words will be eliminated from **11D1**. Penalties can be dished out, but clocks cannot be reset to show the previous time before the illegal move in time pressure.

Below are the revised rules 11D and 11D1. Eliminated language is indicated by the strike out font. Any new wording is indicated in red. 11D. Illegal move. **If a player completes an illegal move by pressing the clock, in addition to the usual obligation to make a legal move with the touched piece if possible, the standard penalty specified in rule 1C2a** applies** (i.e. two minutes added to the opponent’s clock). If the opponent has completed a move subsequent to the illegal move, the standard penalty shall not apply. See also 11J, Deliberate illegal moves**** and 16D1, Illegal moves. TD TIP: *A player should make sure to claim an illegal move made by his opponent before completing his next move, in order to be eligible to receive the additional time.* **11D1. Illegal move in time pressure.** Time pressure is defined as a situation where either player has less than five minutes left in a time control and the time control does not include an increment or delay of 30 seconds or more.**** A director should not call attention to illegal moves in *time pressure*, only the players may make that claim. If, during the

game, in time pressure, a player's claim that one of either player's last two moves was illegal is upheld by the TD, the position shall be reinstated to what it was before the illegal move and the procedure in rule 11A**** shall be followed with no adjustment to the time on the clocks. ****See also 16D1, Illegal moves****;**** 11H, Director corrects illegal move in non-sudden death****; and 11J, Deliberate illegal moves.**

BONUS QUESTION: Why was rule 16D1 eliminated as a “See also” reference from both 11D and 11D1?

Answer: Rule 16D1 was eliminated some time ago—it no longer exists.

Just the Rules: Scholastic Rules Rumble?

January 31, 2020

When I think of a rumble I think instantly of pro wrestling or West Side Story. Scholastic chess does not come to mind, until recently. In the words of Michael Buffer: “Let’s get ready to rumble!”

THE SETUP: The scholastic community has always had a separate set of rules and regulations for its US Chess National events. This document in its entirety does not appear in the US Chess rulebook. Those National Scholastic contests typically include all sorts of tweakable rules: school team prizes (size and quantity)—a rarity in adult chess tourneys, school team composition, notation (very young children can’t write yet), sections qualifications, team and individual ratings used, etc. Two new far-reaching polices are kicking in during the 2019 – 2020 Scholastic National Chess Tournament season. What was impacted? Let’s take a peek at the new *spectator access to the playing area* and *electronic score keeping device* regulations.

SPECTATORS ARE NOW RESTRICTED from the National scholastic playing area.

Why? Noise, crowds, and cheating claims—especially cheating claims.

For as long as there have been National Scholastic tournaments there have been crowd control issues. Besides answering a player’s question or addressing their claim, TDs are charged with also verifying every game result. Allowing spectators near each game, or confining them to the center aisle, often put up physical roadblocks for the TD to maneuver around. Some adult hangers-on even managed to talk well above a whisper while spectating. Numerous warnings and removal from the tournament hall did not substantially dampen the noise. Add to that the increasing number of cheating claims that need to be investigated (spectator involved, technology involved, etc.) and tournament administration has turned into an energy and time draining enterprise; thus, the ban on spectators from the playing area.

Fear and anxiety over cheating far outweigh the actual instances of verified cheating. Yes, some small amount cheating probably occurs, but not as much as we all dread. We all want a level playing field. Check out this tale from the distant pre-technology past:

The top board was front and center on the makeshift platform stage. A demo board behind the scholastic contestants let the spectators fol-

low along in the unfolding drama. Supporters—teammates, coaches, and parents—from both camps had front row seats in the multi rowed seating area in front of the stage. The teammates for one of the wannabe champions complained to the TD that the opponent of their teammate and his dad were cheating—sending signals back and forth. Dad was a master. The TD, himself a master, did some observing. He even checked over the board position. His final ruling was that no cheating was taking place. The opponent was losing badly, so if signals were being passed (something he never could verify) the master-son combo was doing a real bad job. The player's teammates did not agree with the TD and did their best to block the line of sight between the player and his dad for the rest of the game—creating an entirely different problem for the TD to solve.

ELECTRONIC NOTATION DEVICES ARE NOW BANNED at National Scholastic events.

This ban of all notation devices at National Scholastics may be the Royal Rumble in the scholastic community. Remember that this device ban does not impact the other National tournaments organized by US Chess, just National Scholastics. Organizers of non-national scholastic events—aka adult events, state scholastics, etc.—are also not impacted by this National Scholastic device ban.

Fear of loss is a great motivator. No one likes an unfair contest. No one likes to believe that they are being cheated. Mix those attitudes up and cook them in the “anxiety” oven and you get all sorts of notation device claims: possible hacking, signals sent, signals received, possible installed chess engines, using devices as a second board, etc. These claims can't be ignored by the event staff. But those claims are burdensome on the staff—too often they don't have time left for their other duties. Without those devices, the ability to use them to gain a potential edge disappears—as do the cheating claims; thus, electronic notation devices got banned. Players with special needs get a free pass from this regulation—well, if they jump through the “approved for use” hoops. On one side there are those that loudly support the ban. On the other side there are those that just as loudly object to the ban. Both sides have engaged in a back-and-forth contest over and over on the US Chess Forums and on social media. A Royal Rumble indeed?

And before the dawn of notation devices there was this:

In kindergarten sections expecting notate is problematical. The participants typically can't write yet, let alone take notation. One cre-

ative parent knew the value of notating a game. But since his offspring could not yet deal with scoresheets, he came up with a clever solution—videotaping. He set up his equipment near his child's game and took on the role of cameraman so that he could capture every move on tape. His lens not only recorded every move of the game but also recorded a lot of other players on the surrounding boards. He was very unhappy when the TD had him move out of the playing area—which by the way banned spectators. His efforts were well meaning but capturing other participants on tape created a few perceived legal problems of their own. Additionally, his equipment limited the movement of both players and TDs—plus created a safety hazard. His equipment followed him out the of the playing area. He and his son embraced notation devices when they appeared on the chess tournament scene.

Just the Rules: US Chess vs. FIDE

February 28, 2020



Sometimes change sneaks up on us. Ever so slowly FIDE (the world chess organization) rated tournaments are arriving on the U.S. tournament landscape more often. How big of a deal is that rules wise? All of the pieces still move the same way in both organizations. But there are some tournament procedures that are markedly different.

Ken Ballou is an NTD (National Tournament Director), an IA (International Arbiter) and the current chair of the U.S. Chess Rules Committee. He has compiled a detailed summary of those differences. FIDE requires FIDE rated tournaments to follow FIDE laws. So, every player and arbiter (the FIDE term for TD) should be familiar with these FIDE tournament variations to US Chess tournaments. How different are some of these tournament procedures? Let us take a peek at the more common showdowns (click on the summary link for Ken's complete detailed list of major and minor rules differences):

The TD/Arbiter Job

US Chess: Our Federation has a “hands off” policy when it comes to TDs interjecting themselves into a game. Only the players can make claims like “flag falls,” “draws,” etc. TDs may correct illegal moves up until the last five minutes of the game—then we are back to the “players only make claims” rule.

FIDE: Arbiters have a lot more wiggle room when it comes to breaking into a game. They can call “flag falls,” “touch move violations,” “draws,” etc. at pretty much any point in the game, even during time pressure.

Electronic Devices

US Chess: Devices are allowed into the tournament room if they are completely shut off. Penalties are pretty much left up to the TD.

FIDE: No devices are allowed in the tournament room. The player violating this rule can pretty much expect to lose their game. The wiggle room here is that at FIDE events the organizer may allow electronic devices if they are powered off and in the wood pusher's bag throughout the contest. But I would not count on this wiggle room for an event that awards a FIDE title.

Scoresheets

US Chess: Make the move and then record it is the basic rule. There is a paper scoresheet variation that allows for writing the move and then completing it on the board.

When either player has only five minutes left on their clock, both contestants can stop recording their moves.

A complete scoresheet (minus only three move pairs) is required to prevail in a game winning claim. In non-sudden death time controls a wood pusher can even call his own flag to stop his opponent from filling in any missing moves on the claimant's score. Only the claimant's scoresheet can be used to determine if the claim is valid.

FIDE: Without any variation at all players **MUST** make the move on the board and only then record it.

Contestants can stop taking notation **ONLY** if their own clock displays five minutes or less.

An incomplete scoresheet can win on time. There is no “calling your own flag” rule that stops either player from filling in any missing moves on their scoresheet. Both scoresheets can be used to determine if the claim is valid. Arbiters are allowed to take score for the players in time pressure and then “call the flag.”

Odds and Ends

US Chess: TDs can penalize a player for making illegal moves—as many times as necessary.

There is no rule requiring the use of only one hand to make moves (except for Blitz).

Touching the king first is the rulebook norm for castling. There is a variation that allows chess players to touch the rook first.

Inverted rooks can be used as queens when a pawn promotes.

FIDE: The first time a player makes an illegal move the opponent receives an additional two minutes of playing time. The next time

the same player makes an illegal move, they lose the game.

Using both hands to make a move is illegal.

Castling requires that the player touch the king first. Touching the rook first is a rook move, not castling.

Inverted rooks CANNOT be used as queens when a pawn promotes.

Just the Rules: The Re-Entry Gambit

March 31, 2020

You worked hard for weeks. You understand your opening systems. Your middle game and end game are the sharpest they have ever been. Your attitude is upbeat. Then it happens—one little misstep in time pressure. Now you have lost your round 1 tournament game. Your entry fee seems like a waste. Your travel and lodging feel like money pits. Your hunt for prize money seems like a distant dream. What can you do? You might be able to re-enter the event! Some tournaments allow you to re-enter the event just as if you were a brand-new player. Now you are once again in the hunt for prize money! Your old score is usually discarded when it comes time to divvy up the prize money. Ask the TD if you can re-enter.

Understanding the Re-Entry Gambit: An Example You enter a tournament and choose to play in the three-day schedule—one game on Friday, two games on Saturday, and two games on Sunday. You lose your first contest on Friday. You withdraw from the three-day game schedule and enter into the two-day schedule—three games on Saturday and two games on Sunday. You pay the reduced re-entry fee and get to start the tournament all over again with a new round 1—with a faster time control—on Saturday. The two playing schedules merge—or combine—all the players from both playing schedules starting with round 3 on Saturday night. You win all of your games and tie with no one for prizes. The first-place guaranteed prize is \$2,000. You take home all of the top place gold. But remember, a re-entry simply gives you a second chance to pick up some pocket change along with some rating points—like in this example. It is not a guarantee of either one.

Because There Are Two of You... When you re-enter a tournament, your old score and your old entry still appear on the wall chart, as if you played a round and then withdrew. That score is not used for pairings, and it is usually not used for calculating your final score. Your new entry (the new you) is used for pairings and prizes. On a wallchart it is easy to mix up your old withdrawn entry and your brand-new re-entry—after all they are both you. To help you, and others, to keep the two of you straight, many TDs indicate your new entry by adding something to your name, such as an asterisk or the letters RE. And when the new you gets paired, you usually are not paired against any opponent whom you faced as your old withdrawn self.

And A Few More Things Some events, with only one playing schedule, only allow you to re-enter with an appropriate number of byes for the games you missed. Other events don't allow re-entries at all. There is no chess law that forces tournaments to allow re-entries. Most re-entries require an additional, though discounted, entry fee. You are not limited to re-entering only after round 1. You can also re-enter after any other round—like after your round 2 game. This strategy works best in the early stages of the tournament. Sometimes, rarely, your *original entry* score trumps your re-entry score. Then the rule book allows you to switch back and use that *original entry* score for the start of the next round and the rest of the event—for pairings, prizes, etc.! One example: Your *original entry* score after the first two rounds is a mere one point. You re-enter into a different round schedule and score only a half-point for those two new rounds. You are allowed to go back and use the one-point score from your original entry for the rest of the event. Your re-entry score is frozen and not used any future games.

A Super Swiss Myth? After failing to gain the game point in round 1 on the Friday of a four-day Super Swiss event, a player re-entered this big money tournament. He started all over again essaying a different round 1 game on the Saturday three-day schedule. He tripped all over himself and lost his starting contest again. So...he re-entered into the two-day schedule that started with a new round 1 on Sunday. The third time was a charm. He scored victory after victory and only lost his last round match after the three tournament playing schedules merged. His score got him a tie with several others for a share of third place gold. He took home enough cash to pay for his entry, two re-entries, travel, food, and lodging. Plus, he had a few \$\$\$ profit left over. Did this really happen? Can anyone verify this?

Becoming A Believer I was introduced to re-entries at my own Winter Open. I knew they existed but my attitude was “meh.” This event is two days and five rounds long. There is only one playing schedule. After losing the first round, one unhappy wood pusher wanted to re-enter. I pointed out there was no advertised re-entry. Besides, there was no other schedule for him to re-enter into. He plopped down half of his entry fee and asked to be re-entered into round 2—with a ½ point bye in his new re-entry schedule replacing the goose egg from round 1 (in his old schedule). Since the tournament was only breaking even \$\$\$ wise, this re-entry was profit. I accepted his cash and paired him as per his request. The customer

is always right.

Just the Rules: Is There A Lesson Here?

April 30, 2020

And what lessons can we learn from these real-life tales? Note: some details were changed to protect the guilty.

Oops?!

It was the two fingered top of the piece grip. He had performed this maneuver for decades. The bishop's cap was squeezed between his thumb and forefinger. The player aimed his cleric for the other side of the board along the h1-a8 diagonal. The target—his opponent's rook on a8. But fate, and slippery fingers, are funny things. The bishop wiggled out from his grip, and landed on d5—a legal square for the bishop to occupy. Not the dark squares e5 or d4, but a light-colored square on the bishop's diagonal path. At the same instant that the bishop slipped from his grip, the wood pushers around him heard the proverbial, "Oops." He grabbed the errant piece at almost the same moment that it touched d5. In fact, it was a close call determining if the piece even occupied that square. The bishop immediately continued his journey to capture the rook on a8. His opponent insisted that the bishop remain on d5. On d5 he could capture it and save his rook. Some TDs would rule that the bishop legally occupied d5 and must remain there. Other TDs would not—it is a roll of the dice. The lesson here: Slippery fingers sink games.

Be Careful—Be Very Careful.

He was completely disgusted by the TD's ruling. He mumbled, "With a ruling like that I might as well resign." Then it hit him. You know the moment. It's that instant when an idea burns bright. He decided to appeal the decision of the floor TD. His appeal ran up the authority staircase, but was denied each step of the way. Why? He had resigned the game before he appealed. The lesson here: Timing is everything.

Reward Gained; Reward Lost.

The TD ruled in his favor. He was going to get an extra two minutes of playing time. He had a brand-new clock. It was the latest greatest newest model in the chess timer market. This clock had seen its fair share of practice settings at home before the event even began. The instructions, of course, were homebound. It was also a clock that no one knew how to adjust. Setting a new clock was one thing, adjusting it was something entirely different. The wood pusher did not get his

two minutes. The lesson here: Clock instructions—don't leave home without them.

Get Real?

Only the players and the tournament staff were lodged in the scholastic playing hall. It was a huge area—at least the size of a football field. There was a stage at one end of the tournament room where the top boards were battling it out. A board at about the half way point—between the entrance at one end and the stage at the other end—had a problem. One of the chess warriors was unable to take notation. The TD found a volunteer in the hallway to fill that role, a chess parent. After some time, the father of one of the players on stage lodged a complaint. The parent taking notation in the middle of the room was cheating. He and his son on stage—a good 50 yards away—were signaling back and forth. That note taking volunteer's son was the opponent of the dad filing the complaint. The complaint was denied. The TD could barely see the players on stage, let alone any of their gestures. The lesson here: No good deed goes unpunished.

Arrested Development.

The last round started. Championships were at stake. Prize money was at stake. Personal glory was at stake. It was a multi round and multi day Super Swiss at a luxurious hotel playing venue. The time controls guaranteed that each game could last for many hours. Then it happened. The police arrived. They came into the playing area and removed one of the players. He was ousted from the hotel. The player had been drinking adult beverages at the hotel bar. He had also become outraged that he was cut-off from purchasing any more alcohol. He expressed his frustration in a very rude, loud and threatening manner. The hotel called the police. After the player was removed from the hotel property his opponent wondered if they were now required to wait for the missing player's flag to fall—after all moves were already made, the clock was running and his opponent was not late—just missing. Was his adversary coming back? The lonely opponent was instantly awarded the game point and sent on his way home—no waiting necessary. The lesson here: Sometimes common sense outweighs the rulebook.

Just the Rules: Tim Just on Online Chess

May 31, 2020

Our recent virus induced vacation from over-the-board (OTB) chess got me thinking. Online chess exploded onto the scene. US Chess even rates Blitz and Quick games. Club Swiss events are also possible using pairings (etc.) from offsite US Chess certified TDs—check it out here. It is much more common to participate in a match (even a one game match) or round robin at one of those on-line sites.

So, how do the two compare? Those chess playing sites use *their* programming to replace many traditional TD chores.

With my tongue firmly planted in my cheek let's go for a ride:

REQUESTED BYES OTB:

I've traveled a long way and paid a large entry fee. I have expenses. So, don't give me a bye for any reason.

Cyberspace:

A bye is needed why? There's no travel for on-line chess. You don't even need to leave your home. You can play in your most comfortable socially unacceptable cloths—no one will know. Most events have time controls that make them one-day affairs—if not less.

\$\$\$ OTB:

I coughed up my US Chess dues at last weekend's tournament. I'll pay tomorrow.

Cyberspace:

The on-line mantra would be "No pay, no play."

PAIRINGS OTB:

That pairing will impact my tie breaks negatively. You should know not to pair us! I know I'm late so you should accommodate me (insert reason here) by repairing this round. Fix my pairing this round to make up for the bad pairing I received earlier. I have a better set of pairings. You must accelerate the pairings. You always have to pair me up. I want to re-enter.

Cyberspace:

The software on-line pairs as it sees fit in a Swiss. In US Chess rated games offline/offsite TDs will be allowed to make pairings—I would

bet they use the standard chess pairings software. You get notified, in general, about the event start time. You probably know the names of your opponents in the more common round robin or match play. If you don't want to essay a game with some other player(s), don't enter that event. There will be another event coming along shortly.

RULES OTB:

The rules don't say you can't do that. Where does it say that in the rules? I want to appeal your ruling.

Cyberspace:

Internet sites have their rules just a click away. Look them up. They even have an appeals process—or at least a contact person.

CLAIMS: OTB:

My opponent touched one piece and then moved another one! I didn't mean to move that piece. I claim a three-fold repetition of position. The game is a draw.

Illegal move. My opponent is not keeping score.

Cyberspace:

A provable “mouse slip” or disconnect claim might work. BTW, most sites keep score for you.

CLOCKS OTB:

I don't know how to set my clock. My opponent is not using one of the “preferred” game timers for this time control. He claims he has the choice of equipment because (fill in the blank).

Cyberspace:

The site will set the cyberspace game timer for you.

CHEATING OTB:

Cheating is a problem that has yet to be 100% solved. Catching swindlers is labor intensive—and labor gets fatigued.

Cyberspace:

Cheating is a problem that has yet to be 100% solved; however, software—chess engines—get to hunt down those gray shadow frauds—and they don't get fatigued. Match an engine and get tossed off of the site.

Tim Just recently appeared on Chris Bird's weekly "the TD show." You can watch the entire thing here.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__RKyla_it3Y&t=13s

Just the Rules: Leftover Loot

June 30, 2020

What is leftover loot? That is the prize money that no one qualifies for at a tournament. It does not matter if the event is US Chess rated on-line, a Super Swiss, a small round robin, etc.

“Guaranteed” prizes are just that—a guarantee that all the promised gold will be divvied up and passed out to the best of the best.

“Based on” prize funds have almost the same commitment to pay out their cash on a graduated scale. The rulebook provides a formula that generates that percentage pay out number.

But sometimes no one is eligible to get a prize—players that don’t cash their prize checks is another column for another time.

Only one player with a rating of 1297 qualifies for the U1400 top prize. After round 3, of a five-round event, he withdraws. Greenbacks don’t get paid out to withdrawals—it is in the rules. That prize money is leftover loot. No one rated below 1200 enters the tournament. The U1200 top award is \$30. That thirty bucks is leftover loot. In a weekend contest there are two prizes for the top U1500 chess warriors: first = \$50 and second = \$25. Only one player rated 1489—the lowest rated chess warrior in the event—qualifies for those two prizes. Hmmm...one player, two prizes. Second place cash becomes leftover loot. What happens if that same 1489 competitor has the event of their life and takes home \$100 from the U1600 prize pot? Now no one qualifies for either of the U1500 prizes (\$50-\$25)—leftover loot. The only Class E player at the start of round 1 pre-registered in the tournament and decided at that time to play up into the Class C, section—despite the extra “play up” entry fee. That means there are zero wood pushers in Class E that qualify for any of that prize money—more leftover loot.

There is a rule in the 7th edition that allows the organizer to keep any leftover loot that no one qualifies for; however, organizers often ignore that rule and find ways to dole out that extra cash anyhow. But just who gets that money? Our rulebook gives little in the way of guidance—maybe it should, maybe it shouldn’t. The upside is that sometimes a player (perhaps you?) unexpectedly pick up some coin that they did not expect.

Here are a few ways some organizers have creatively distributed that leftover cash:

All the other prizes get a boost when the extra gold is divided up equally among them. For example: A prize winner that expects a \$500 first place payday instead gets \$501.13. That extra \$1.13 comes from the equal distribution of the leftover loot among all the other event prizes. It is not exactly a windfall—and it looks unusual—but it is nicer than \$500. Or, a new unannounced extra top prize is created with those surplus coins. If there are only three top place prizes, then a fourth-place prize magically appears. Or, an extra prize can be created in another class; i.e., if there is no “D” player qualifying for the “D” gold, then an extra “C” prize is added to the available cash awards. This newly created extra prize can bring a bit of unexpected wonderment—along with a big smile—to a player’s life when they open that USPS envelope with their surprise check in it.

Do you have any ideas on how to deal with leftover loot?

The free, updated as of 1-1-20, US Chess Rules (Chapters 1+2+11 from the 7th edition rulebook) are now downloadable and available on-line. Past “Just the Rules” columns can be viewed [here](#).

Just the Rules: New TD Tips For The On-line Rulebook

July 31, 2020

Major rules changes are made by the Delegates and then worm their way into the print (and e-book) editions every so often—about once per year at the current rate.

Some recent TD TIP changes, coupled with a handful of editorial fixes, recently were posted to the new on-line version of the rules (Chapters 1-2+11). The TIPS give valuable insights into a rule's meaning and application for both TDs and players alike. A shout out goes to clock guru Micah Smith for his assistance in this update.

TD TIPS and other revisions to the on-line rules.

Revised TD TIP for variation rule 14h2.

Comment: There is updated wording referring to digital clocks—rather than delay clocks—plus a new reference regarding improperly set delay capable clocks.

TD TIP: Except for rule 5F5 there is no rule allowing players to ask for a properly set delay clock to be placed on their game, which would replace an analog or non-delay digital clock. For delay capable clocks not set with delay, see rule 16P1. Only the TD can initiate placing a clock with time delay capabilities on a game after a Variation 14H claim has been made and the steps of 14H2 have been applied. As a result, the player wishing to place a time delay clock on the game must first make a Variation 14H claim.

New TD TIP added to rule 16B2.

Comment: This TIP addresses the proper setting of increment time controls starting at move one.

TD TIP: Not all digital clocks correctly give the increment for move one when you set increment on the clock. For clocks that don't, the increment time in seconds should be added manually to the base time, if possible, so each player gets the increment for move one. For example, for G/3;inc2, each player gets 3.02 (three minutes and two seconds) to complete move one. If the clock only gives 3.00 for each player's first move when the clock is set—with a base time of three minutes and increment of two seconds—then, if possible, two seconds should be added to each player's base time when setting the clock. If a game is started without the increment applied for move one, it

is recommended that the TD not allow the clock to be subsequently adjusted to add the increment for move one. This failure to adjust the clock initially should not be allowed as grounds to contest a later time forfeit claim.

Revised TD TIP for rule 16B2c.

Comment: A link reference to setting digital clocks was removed. That info is no longer available on the US Chess site. And the concept of TDs not knowing how to set clocks was expanded to ALL clocks. It is unrealistic to expect a TD to know how every digital clock is set.

TD TIP: Directors are not expected to know how to set all digital clocks 5F.

New TD TIP for rule 30G.

TD TIP: Some TDs prefer to randomly assign pairing numbers by lot for Quads.

TD TIPS and other revisions to the print and e-book editions.

Revised the “see also” internal document hyperlinks for rule 39A.

Comment: Some link names were updated along with the addition of a new link.

See also 42, Chess Clocks; 42C, Standard clocks; 42D, Delay clock preferable in sudden death; and 42E, Increment clock preferable.

Revised TD TIP for rule 39A.

Comment: Extra wording was eliminated and a link was replaced.

TD TIP: Players of the black pieces sometimes misunderstand this rule when they want to use an analog clock. A properly set digital clock is preferred equipment and supersedes Black’s choice in cases where White has such a clock and Black does not (5F).

Rule 42B is in italics—italic formatting removed.

Comment: The italic formatting was removed from the rule wording. Italic formatting is reserved for TD TIPS, not rules.

Revised TD TIP for 42E1.

Comment: The first two sentences of the TIP were replaced with more informative wording. The rest of the TIP—starting with “Either function...”—was left intact.

TD TIP: Check the clock manufacturer’s manual. Ideally clocks add the increment time to a player’s side of the clock once he has completed the move by pressing his clock (known as: add-after)—some clocks may work differently. The player’s total playing time, including the added increment, should now be displayed. Some clocks wait until their opponent presses their side of the clock for the increment time to be added to the player’s display (known as: add-before). The TD TIP for rule 16B2 explains the procedure to use if the increment time is not automatically given at the start of move one. Either function...

A new chapter 10 is coming soon!

Because online games are now rated by US Chess, the “powers that be” are working on a new chapter 10 (Internet Chess). It is expected to be available for posting at the US Chess site months before it can be incorporated into any print or e-book version. Of course, the Delegates must first approve the new language for this chapter.

The free, updated as of 5-11-20, US Chess Rules (Chapters 1+2+11 from the 7th edition rulebook) are now downloadable and available on-line. Past “Just the Rules” columns can be viewed [here](#).

Just the Rules: New Internet Chess Rules—Essential Player Tips

August 19, 2020

Here are some “Rules of Thumb” for navigating the new US Chess Internet Rules (Chapter 10): <https://new.uschess.org/news/7th-edition-rule-book-chapters-now-available-download>.

Test Your Equipment: Playing online will probably motivate you to get slightly better digital connection equipment—like a more responsive mouse for example, or a better modem, etc. Test out your gear before you essay your first online contest.

Know Your Rating: You have a variety of online ratings from US Chess: Online Quick, online Blitz, online regular, or an assigned online rating from the TD. To make matters a bit more confusing some of you already have earned some sort of rating at your favorite online site. Sometimes the online tournament entry info lets you in on the rating that will be used for the event you are entering. If not, find out what rating you will be assigned—check with the TD. If you don’t have an online rating then ask the TD how they plan to give one for pairing and prize purposes. BTW, there is no “dual rating” for US Chess online ratings.

Know Your Host Site Settings: Each of the major online platforms have slightly different settings available to you—get to know them! Make sure the TD will allow you to turn them on or off.

If the host platform you are using for a US Chess online rated game only allows a pawn to be promoted to a queen, that might prove to be the difference between a win or a draw.

Are all draw options automatic? Three-fold repetitions? The 50-move rule? No progress? ...

Are flag falls automatic wins?

What happens with disconnects?

What is the “mouse slip” protocol?

What happens to unfinished, interrupted, or unplayed games?

What does the site software do about illegal moves?

Can you turn on/off “smart-moves?” (You click on a piece that has only one legal move and that move is automatically completed for

you.).

Can you turn on/off “pre-moves?” (Your opponent makes a move on your time. That move is locked in and automatically completed for them once you finish your move.).

Know How to Make Online Draw Offers: Offer a draw before you make your move. Once you make your move the online software executes it—after that it is too late to make an offer.

Know the Players with Disabilities Rules: Players that are disabled may make use of Game Assistants—much like they do in OTB chess. An assistant may make a player’s announced move for them. While organizers and TDs can help a disabled player find an assistant, the player is ultimately responsible for arranging their own Game Assistant.

Know the Fair Play Rules—Steps to take if you think your opponent is cheating: Cheating is the bane of chess. It is hard to catch players cheating OTB—it is even harder to catch and prove they are cheating online. Some event organizers may require the use of electronic (or human) monitors at every site. Game service providers typically have proprietary software that analyzes each game and provides and then determines if there is a likelihood that cheating occurred—that software is not the same for each site. Not only are individual games analyzed, but the won-loss record of a typical player with that rating may enter into that determination. Even your opponent’s contests with other players may get analyzed.

If you think your opponent is, or was, cheating contact the TD. You can also file an Ethics complaint, but you will need evidence. The US Chess Ethics Committee only considers the material you present—they do not investigate the claim for you. And don’t be surprised if the on-site proprietary software coding, or detailed reports, are not available to you upon request. TDs may hold off turning in the online tournament to US Chess until they receive the “fair play” report from the service provider.

Using Online Handles: Player’s online handles—used on their favorite chess playing site—are not the same as their US Chess ID and name. Wood pushers have a right to know the US Chess name and ID for everyone registered for the tournament.

What are Acceptable Online Formats: US Chess only allows the Swiss, Round-Robin, Quad or Match Play formats to be US Chess online rated

Tips for Registration: Entering US Chess online events will probably have an earlier cut-off date than you are used to. That-a-way TDs can verify all entry info.

Pairing Systems to Expect: Know which pairing system will be used to match up players. TDs can use the standard pairing software that they own and use in OTB tournaments; however, site platforms also offer their own pairing systems.

Viewing Pairings, Standing, and Wallcharts: All players have a right to view the tournament's pairings, standings, and wallcharts.

Follow Organizer Directions: Organizers and TDs are currently given a wide berth when it comes to creating online contests. Each tournament may have special rules and options that apply only to that single event. All players should have access to those rules.

Additionally, organizers and TDs are given a truckload of advice in this new set of rules on how run successful online events.

The free, updated as of 9-1-20, US Chess Rules (Chapters 1+2 + 10 +11 from the 7th edition rulebook) are now downloadable and available online. Past "Just the Rules" columns can be viewed [here](#).

Just the Rules: Linkamania is Running Wild!

October 1, 2020

Where in the world is that link? I asked myself.

Like any good Carmen Sandiego adventure, finding the right link in a time of need is quite an undertaking. Plus, recent disruptions with uschess.org while the website was upgraded (that is what happens with upgrades) only added challenge to my detective work.

I thought it might be worth exploring some of these links, in case they don't make the cut when the final phase of the site renovation has ended. Right now, COVID-19's impact on US Chess income has slowed down those improvements. So it was the perfect time for me to go hunting for linkable treasures—Linkamania!

On the uschess.org main page, I found the same pull-down menus that we all see on just about every other website, and the site's lower ribbon displays what seems like a truckload of links— though I did notice the addition of ICC and Chess.com links since my last visit. Many of these links open long lists of even more links, and the site renovation has left some links temporarily out of order.

Here are the ones that I bookmarked:

Complaints

Even during this time of pandemic, a rule or two might get bent too much for our liking, even online. Did some TD go out of bounds when making a ruling in one of our games? Being the victim of an ethical violation leaves a bad taste in our mouth. What is the recourse when the rules get all twisted out of shape? The final word on jumping through official hoops to get your day in chess court is linked here:

Rules complaints

TD complaints

Ethics complaints

FIDE complaints

Special Scholastic Chess Rules

Kids' tournaments are a lot of fun for everyone. Youngsters experiencing the joy of chess brings a lot of good cheer to their hearts. But

kids are not little adults, they are kids. Youngsters need special rule variations not found in the rulebook that address their chess needs. This Scholastic Regulations link focuses on the extra wiggle room that US Chess allows our young woodpushers at National Scholastic events (plus an extra 45 links or so, off to the right.) You can pick over those regulations and adopt many of them to your own local scholastic events.

Let me stop here and pat the dean of scholastic chess Dewain Barber on the back. Look at the bottom of this column and find the free link to his Guide To Scholastic Chess. While a lot of that document might be dated due to the coronavirus (because schools are not meeting in person), much of it is not. The links in that work often refer to online services that benefit not just students, but all beginners including teachers and coaches.

Ratings “Rules of Thumb”

Generally, most of us just want to know how the rating system applies those formulas, and how they impact the bottom line of our individual ratings. We are not looking for a high-level math lesson here. We don’t really want to understand formulas that go way beyond basic algebra. What we want are some rules of thumb. What we want are FAQs.

A direct link to a ratings estimator— emphasis on the word *estimator*—can be found at the bottom of uschess.org. That link’s software formula is filled with wiggle room, allowing numbers that may not be official, or when you just don’t have all the accurate stats that you need. Though the formula is several years behind the times, supply as much info as you can about your opponents and the estimator will spit out an estimated rating of your performance. While the number may end up a bit different than your exact rating, the estimator is still fun to use.

Potpourri

I did find links that go beyond what typical chess warriors care about. Links for those of us that want to get involved in the chess universe beyond the 64 squares. These links often address our need to give back to this great sport of ours: State affiliates, Governance Procedures (yep, 30 more links to investigate at that site), Organizing Guidance (lots of links to explore on that page), TD certification new and upgrading (you can now direct events right from your home!), plus a new user TD/Affiliate sign in page. Many of these links are

easy to find—others, not so much.

And Then There are Forms

Not only are there 45 additional links within there, but all kinds of doors get opened to all types of material. It looks like a storage spot for links that don't seem to fit anywhere and everywhere all at once.

What links do you want to add to this list? What makes Linkamania work for you?

The free, updated US Chess Rules from the 7th edition rulebook are now downloadable and available online. Previous “Just the Rules” columns can be viewed [here](#).

Just the Rules: Rulebook U-Turns

November 2, 2020

The way we take notation and the way we set clocks are two prime examples of rulebook U-Turns: rules that have gone through a 180-degree reversal.

The Notation U-Turn **In the Beginning:** In the pre-technology days—paper and pencil times—players mostly moved their chess soldier first and then notated it later. Then along came a fellow by the name of Alexander Kotov. In his book *Think Like a Grandmaster*, he advised that players first write down their move on their score sheet. This procedure, at the very least, slowed down many a wood pushers’ knee-jerk response to their opponent’s last move. It created a moment when a player could reconsider their plan before executing it. A lot of players and scholastic coaches bought into the idea—write your move first! A whole generation of chess wizards grew up notating their idea before completing their move over-the-board.

Rule-Benders Association Strikes Again: Like any well-meaning idea, this was one of which was taken advantage. Some players would notate, reconsider, erase the move, notate again, reconsider, erase that move – again and again before physically moving any new piece on the board. Eventually, a vocal minority claimed this methodology was cheating, under the argument that it was note-taking. They never did drum up enough support for their “cheating” claim among the delegates – until the advent of e-notation devices.

E-Notation Devices: When e-notation devices appeared on the scene the landscape changed instantly. With those devices, a player could view what the board position would look like on their screen, before actually committing to that move – that’s cheating 101. The delegates changed the rules: Everyone, regardless of those with or without e-notation devices, **MUST** make their move first on the board before notating it.

The U-Turn: The player backlash to that “move first dictate” forced a rulebook U-Turn. Today, an unannounced variation to the main rule (move first-notate next) allows a player using a paper scoresheet to scribble first, then make that same move OTB. But none of that write, erase, write again, erase again stuff is allowed.

Interestingly, online games now sanctioned by US Chess avoids the

notation problem altogether, as online services automatically take notation and avoid the entire issue of the player notating first or moving first.

Setting the Clock U-Turn In the Beginning: The journey of the clock-setting rulebook U-turn is short. In the analog-clock days, setting your device was easy: simply set the clock mechanically for the base time control, no delay, no increment. Then came digital clocks, which provided delay and increment.

Delay: For games with a delay, the players' base time waits for a delay period before counting down after each move. That extra delay time results in digital-clock gamers receiving more playing time than analog gamers, so the delegates created a rule for balance: Games with delays reduced the base time by one minute for each second of delay. Digital clock manufacturers had delay controls built standard, but not for that adjusted base time, and fiddling with those digital clocks proved to be annoying and cumbersome.

Increment: When increments entered the scene – adding valuable base time after each move – all sorts of fairness issues reared up. Again, games with digital increment clocks were providing more playing time than analog-clock games. To compensate, analog clocks were permitted to add to the base time, an extra minute for each second of increment. It didn't take long for players to believe that analog clocks gave them more playing time.

The U-Turn: All this fiddling with clocks stopped when the delegates saw the light and did a 180-degree turnabout. Now all clocks, digital and non-digital, have to start with the same base-time control. No adding time. No subtracting time. No clock fiddling. We now all start at the same point— another rulebook U-Turn!

Future Rulebook U-Turn? There is one last bit of minutia that the delegates will probably still need to handle: increment time starting at move one. Some players believe that base time plus increment time together need to be displayed at the start of the game (ex: the clock for a game 60 with a 30 second increment would be seen as 60:30). But the argument is that extra 30 seconds might be the difference between a flag fall and extra playing time. Not all digital clocks have the capability to make this happen, instead only showing the base time for move one. The increment time is then automatically added only after the clock is pressed, so that the increment only becomes available starting with move

two – not move one. To have the increment start at move one, we are back to fiddling about with those timers again!

I wonder what OTB rules will come under U-Turn scrutiny with the advent of any new online US Chess rules?

The free, updated as of 5-11-20, US Chess Rules (Chapters 1+2+11 from the 7th edition rulebook) are now downloadable and available on-line. Past “Just the Rules” columns can be viewed [here](#).

Just the Rules: Think Like a Cheater?

December 1, 2020

Has anyone considered hiring bad guys to catch the chess cheaters? I'm talking about other cheaters. Why? Because the bad guys know how other bad guys think. Because the bad guys have a mindset—and probably a skillset—that many trusting good guys do not have. In the chess universe: to catch a cheater, perhaps you must think like a cheater.

And if you can't do that, hire one.

Up until now, the chess universe has been reactive - not proactive - about cheating. Let's take a peek.

The Lone Wolf: In the ancient times, Mr. X took a lot of restroom breaks —“bad kidneys” was his explanation. Mr. X was also a wizard at chess openings. He played the start of his games with the precision of a Grandmaster. One day, Mr. X finally got caught in the restroom with his copy of MCO (Modern Chess Openings) while his game was in progress. The powers that be reacted by creating a rule prohibiting the use of written material while a contest was ongoing.

Of course, today Mr. X has a cell phone, complete with a chess-playing program loaded onto it. At OTB tournaments, he still takes those restroom breaks. The reaction: organizers began posting restroom sentries to collect cell phones from everyone before they entered the lavatories. This at least keeps honest players honest. FIDE even outright banned all electronic devices from even entering the playing site.

Mr. X has been forced to find other private spots to conduct his nefarious business.

The Magician's Assistant: The art of mental magic often depends on the secret communication between the magician and their assistant—it is no different in chess. Our good friend Mr. X hired chess masters to help him crush his opponents. The master circulated the tournament room like an interested spectator, paying especially close attention to his employer's game. When it was his boss's turn, he would use an agreed-upon signal system to indicate a four-star move. The wink of an eye or a head scratch might easily refer to a piece. Standing by the water and then walking over to the other side of the room could represent a starting square and an ending square. Of course, there are rules against this behavior, but catching it is

problematic and preventing it is also challenging. Luckily at OTB events there are many eyes to detect when something fishy is afoot.

In the pre-pandemic OTB world, Mr. X did not even need help from a master-strength cohort. All he needed was any regular partner with access to a cell phone and the aforementioned chess-playing program. Add the right equipment—like invisible ear inserts—and the job of feeding four-star moves to Mr. X becomes even easier.

The biggest roadblock is the transmission of moves between accomplices, especially if they are positioned outside of the playing area—but again, a simple signaling system and several partners-in-crime could solve that problem. Of course, today if the games are broadcast online, Mr. X only needs those invisible ear plugs plus one prodigy friend out of camera range—even if they are in another room.

This suggestion was given to me independently by no less than three sources. One of them is a well-known local sandbagger—it takes a cheater to catch a cheater!

Blatant self-promotion: In my book with Wayne Clark, *My Opponent is Eating a Doughnut*, the tale “Old School” paints an interesting picture of cheating using a coffee cup.

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Just the Rules: Online Side-Effects

January 1, 2021

The forced migration of chess to online environments has created some interesting side effects. The marriage of over-the-board (OTB) wood pushing with the online universe produced a whole new set of unforeseen concerns—or unintended consequences. Take a look at what the troops discovered:

Bob McAdams: The platform I was using erroneously decide that either I or my opponent had abandoned the game and counted it as a loss for that player, even though the player still had plenty of time left on his clock.

I also had a situation just in the past couple of weeks when I was playing a game with a friend, had a winning piece-advantage, but as I was in the process of moving my piece (I had picked it up and was about to set it down on its destination square), my platform suddenly declared the game a draw with no explanation, even though I still had plenty of time left on my clock.

TJ: *Your experience is exactly why players would be wise to check out what their chess-playing platform is programed to do in these kinds of situations. It has been rumored that at least one platform automatically promotes a pawn to a queen—that is probably good to know before you get to that point in an endgame. I suspect there will be a bit of pointing and clicking to find the document that lists those platform regulations, but it is well worth the time in the long run to dig it up. We are still in the infant stage when it comes to the relationship between US Chess and the platforms. As chess grows in our new world order, I suspect there will be some prodding from US Chess to tweak those platform routines.*

Neal Bellon: In the long run—well after COVID has passed—the emphasis on online chess will hurt OTB, as people will view it as the easier option and as (the new) normal.

TJ: *It will probably all depend on how available the post-pandemic world makes OTB chess. Your prediction brings to mind an observation by my friend Peter Spizzirri: At first there was a McDonalds on one of the four corners of a local intersection. Soon three of the four corners housed a McDonalds, Burger King and a Wendy's. One would think that at least one of them would be put out of business due to the insane competition. Instead, all three are swimming in burger profits. Perhaps the availability of US Chess OTB tournaments cou-*

pled with the ease of online chess will have them both swimming in members.

Hal Bogner: The way to leverage online play to support OTB and chess club infrastructure is to establish supervised rated play at a distance—something which Greg Shahade has shown how to do. Initiate leagues ala the old National Chess League, or Greg’s USCL, with four players and a TD at each location.

TJ: *Ideally you have a point. In fact, the old Chapter 10 internet rules required a TD onsite. The trick here would be getting four players and a TD safely together in our infected world.*

Shaun Bowcaster: Why do online platforms need the USCF at all? Once they put up a searchable page where common people can look up a player’s rating... the USCF will be done. What caused the first jump in USCF membership? Arpad Elo’s rating system which is a measure of Human Ego. When people’s online rating is higher than their USCF rating, their Ego will dictate that’s the better rating. When the chess online platforms start telling people they are a master or an expert, they ...will love telling their friends and family that they are a master or an expert.

TJ: *Hmm, I have known more than a few individuals who make the claim of being a Master or Expert in US Chess, but they are not. I have observed that their friends don’t bother to check out such grand claims. Why? Those title spouters generally crush their friends at chess. That is all the evidence their pals need—no rating verifications necessary. While any online platform may post searchable ratings, I suspect that hardly anyone will use it to check out any proof of chess title claims. Just like right now.*

Charles Roberson: At the end of an event the tentative leader was insistent that he didn’t cheat; therefore, he won. Charles pointed out, “...it is possible the person a half-point behind you lost a game due to cheating; thus, that result was flipped for (all of) his opponents—then (maybe) you wouldn’t be the leader (after that score change).”

TJ: *The only real concern I have seen discussed is one player earning his way to the top prize, while another player, due to a cheating opponent, is freely handed a score that gives him the top prize. Organizers might consider creating a document that explains their process behind the adjustment of scores due to a cheating player, and how it might impact prizes. In general, the opponent of the cheater will have their loss turned into a draw and their draw turned into a*

win, but organizers and TDs do have wiggle room here.

Dennis Kosterman: There are just numerous things I don't like about playing online. One of them is that the vast majority of events are at quick (or even faster) time controls. I never liked those time controls OTB either.

Cheating is also a big problem, and anti-cheating measures can cause their own problems. If you're required to be "on camera" for the entire game, how do you go to the bathroom (a frequent necessity for old men like me, especially at longer time controls)?

TJ: *You might try hunting around in those Chess Life TLAs to find an event with longer online time controls. Don't get overly concerned about those two camera appearances, especially if you alert the TD about your bathroom break. Leaving the camera is not the only indication that something fishy is going on.*

Daniel Miller: In Vegas, if you use electronic devices to cheat and win money, you go to jail. In online chess, they give you a one-year ban and tell you not to do it again. If you're looking for suggestions on rules: The punishments need to be much, much higher. A lot of us will never trust any online tournament, and feel there should not be titles or money associated until the penalty for cheating is much higher.

TJ: *Perhaps your concern here will catch the attention of the US Chess delegates—you know: the rule givers. A heavy cheating penalty would probably also require hardcore evidence. And I suspect you are referring to adult chess warriors when it comes to severe penalties, not kids. I did notice you are concerned about electronic cheating, but not unfair human help. In my opinion, the penalties for both fair-play violations should be the same.*

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Just the Rules: The Same Thing, Only Different

February 3, 2021

Did you ever notice that things tend to come around again in different disguises? The “same old, same old” all dressed up in different clothes. So-called “unfair advantages” in chess wear many costumes but, in the end, it is still a protest about those alleged advantages. Check this out:

Two-Dimensional Boards in a Three-Dimensional World

Those digital notation devices were game changers for OTB chess. No more illegible scribbles on paper scoresheets. Games could be broadcast live on the internet. Tournament game bulletins went from tediously entering moves to point-and-click data transfers. But like anything new, those devices came with some baggage.

Many pragmatic wood pushers soon discovered a valuable and unintended notation device asset—they could preview the intended move on their two-dimensional gizmo, before they actually had to make their move on the three-dimensional game board. The outcry from the troops did not go unnoticed. The rule givers—the delegates—dictated that moves had to be made on the game board before they were entered into those note-taking gadgets. While the outcries died down somewhat, a new protest arose.

The new argument claimed unfairness that device-users could analyze their exact three-dimensional positions on a two-dimensional screen. But the counter-argument to this pointed to the widespread use of top game “demonstration boards” that already allowed players to evaluate their own current games in 2D. Some devices featured the ability to project games onto large screens, which have become the replacement for those old-style demo boards. This improvement allowed the top contests in each section to be viewed by everyone—even the two players.

There was no evidence that players analyzing their own games, be it on demo boards or two-dimensional screen projections, provided any advantage whatsoever. The law-givers passed no regulation governing this activity: Wood pushers analyzing their games on a two-dimensional replica of their current three-dimension contests were not banned. (An individual organizer might ban this activity, though, so checking that event’s special tournament rules was always

a good idea).

Three-Dimensional Boards in a Two-Dimensional World

The pandemic replaced OTB chess with digital chess. Online platforms replaced onsite tournament halls. Three-dimensional chess boards were replaced by two-dimensional replicas. The rulebook updated Internet Chapter 10 with new regulations. Now the question from some contestants is: “Can I use my 3D set and board next to my 2D online board?”

Ironically, these days I hear rumblings about the physical board next to its digital cousin as an alleged unfair advantage – but the 2D equipment is the standard. It’s the same old, same old alleged unfairness in a change of clothes: the same thing, only different!

There is no specific language that allows or disallows a 3D sideboard. The closest the US Chess rulebook comes to addressing this 3D question is in chapter 10, rule 6A, which points out that organizers in this new online era can create online event specific rules—just like they are able to do for OTB tournaments. FIDE recently published their own set of online rules that addresses the extra 3D board subject.

If having that extra third dimension set-up for US Chess events concerns you (one way or the other), check with the organizer before you sign up for their online tournaments. And, of course, be prepared to move your troops first on the 2D board before they do any marching on your 3D board—the camera will know!

Just the Rules: Hybrid Chess

March 1, 2021

The world chess organization, FIDE, recently published its own set of online chess rules. There are some differences from the US Chess rules, which is chapter 10 in the rulebook, and free online. One major addition to FIDE's set of regulations are the rules for Hybrid Chess competitions — that is, the offspring of over-the-board and online chess.

It is nearly impossible to effectively monitor online chess at every site. There are not enough FIDE arbiters or US Chess tournament directors to watch each game individually at every single location. So how did FIDE solve that problem? Hybrid chess.

Hybrid chess works like this: Players play in a room, or any area, on computers that have online access. Two local arbiters are required at each of the event's various sites – one is site chief, the other is technical arbiter. Now, check out these highlights:

- Only players and the arbiters can be in the playing area.
- Players must remain in the playing area unless an arbiter gives them permission to leave.
- The site must be monitored by cameras.
- No communication devices are allowed.
- The organizer provides internet connection.
- Players can use their own playing equipment (computers) if the organizer allows it.
- No extra programs are allowed open on the computers.
- The event rules must tell the players how irregularities will be handled.
- The minimum number of arbiters is two.
- Arbiters can modify game results and override some platform automated results.
- Arbiters may adjust clock times.
- The organizer may require the use of scoresheets.
- Traditional boards and sets can be used in games that include at least a 30 second increment, if the organizer allows it. Moves

must be made on the digital screen before being executed on a physical board.

FIDE's new setup sounds a lot like what US Chess uses for the unrated online Amateur Team playoffs. In that event, which pits the four regional team winners against each other, there is one onsite TD present at each playing site. There is a lot of food for thought here:

- How will the tournament deal with the COVID safety of the players—both real and imagined? There will be regional legal restrictions on the room setups and capacities. Will that meet FIDE requirements?
- It may be possible for players at the same venue to be paired against each other, instead of a rival sitting at another far away location.
- A typical hotel gets a nice big fee for internet connections to their meeting rooms. That is a cost consideration for the organizer which may impact the entry fee.
- Sites don't necessarily have to be located at a hotel—there are plenty of other spaces that could work out just fine.
- Do we have enough FIDE arbiters in this country to meet the minimum of two per site?

One last note here involves an often-seen phrase in FIDE's Hybrid Chess document: *unless the competition regulations say otherwise*. That wording gives a FIDE Hybrid tournament organizer a lot of wiggle room in the rules, and similar US Chess rulebook wording gives organizers that same right. Either way, it is a good idea for players to check those special tournament rules before they sign up to push electronic wood.

Just the Rules: Do We Need A New Flag Fall Rule?

April 1, 2021



Analog Clock

It seems strange to call that row of zeros on a digital chess clock a “flag fall.” The term is left over from the days when analog clocks were the standard. Those timers had actual tiny flags that dropped, or fell, when a player had used up the allotted playing time.

Flag falls in the digital universe are not much of an issue. When the allotted playing time has run out, your chess-playing website’s programming automatically makes that call for you. The same can’t be said for games over the board.

A US Chess Tournament Director getting involved in a game without being asked is rare indeed – only the players can make a flag fall claim. TDs have to wait to come onboard until (if) the claim is disputed. Then there could be a lot of hoops to jump through. In fact, that was a topic for two of my earlier columns: Flag Falls Part One and Part Two.

The International Chess Federation, FIDE, gives its onsite officials (arbiters) a bit more wiggle room when it comes to flag falls. FIDE arbiters are allowed to call the flag, and can end the game. They can even take notation for the players that are banging out moves. Can we apply that kind of wiggle room to OTB US Chess? In my honest opinion: maybe.

There is something of a precedent in US Chess. About the only time a TD can jump into the fray is if both flags are down and no time forfeit claim has been made in the final time control period. At that point, the game can be declared a draw by the TD (rule 14G2). Otherwise, without some external intervention, the two opponents might play on, and on, and on ...

Since there is a rule that allows only the two players to make a time forfeit claim (rule 13C1), changing that regulation should be a simple matter to also allow the TD to call the flag. Unfortunately, it is not that simple—is it ever? Consider the following:

Situation 1: In a marathon game, you and your adversary have been pushed to the limit. For every intricate move, a complicated countermove, and both of you have made liberal use of nearly all of your allotted time. Ultimately, your flag falls first, but your opponent does not notice and no claim is made. So you keep on shuffling your chess army around move after move and, finally, your opponent's flag falls too. You make the draw claim: two downed flags equal a draw! You have turned a goose egg into half-point gold!

- **If a TD is allowed to call the flag**, then you would lose the moment your clock runs out of time. You would lose the ability to play on until your opponent's time runs out, and thus any chance to make your double-flag draw claim. Zero would be your score, not the half-point for which you had aimed.

Situation 2: In a game using a classical time control, you have a lot more time left on your clock than the woodpusher sitting across from you. Though their flag eventually falls, their final moves of the game happen faster than lightning, and you have not been taking notation for many moves in the end. With the time you have left – before your own flag falls – you fill in the missing moves on your scoresheet, before you claim your point.

- **If a TD is allowed to call the flag**, then you would have no chance to catch up on your missing notation. Because all notation must stop once the flag fall claim is made, your scoresheet would not be usable to verify your claim. An accurate scoresheet is imperative to making a time forfeit claim in classical time control game.

If the US Chess rule-makers allow the TD to also call flag falls, then both of the aforementioned situations need to be addressed. Given that our members are now pretty used to the online software making that same claim, the door has been opened to giving our TDs the

same discretion.

Any thoughts?

Just the Rules: Things Change

May 6, 2021

We all know that things change. Sometimes that change takes place in small increments, or your life is simply turned upside down with a surprise visit. COVID-19 turned the face of the OTB chess universe upside down, but the virus was not the only change in our corner of the world. Let's check on some of the situations in which we will need to adjust.

Membership Categories and Dues Let's begin by saving you some hard-earned cash. An increase in US Chess dues is headed our way on June 1, 2021 via the delegates meeting from last year. Some membership categories will be jettisoned, while other categories will see a boost in membership dues. The paper copy of *Chess Life* will be an add-on and not automatic, in some cases. **By renewing or joining now (before June 1), you can lock in the old rates.**

New FIDE Rating Fees FIDE, the International Chess Federation, has also changed the fees charged to its member federations – US Chess in our case – for rating FIDE tournaments. Don't be surprised by slightly higher entry fees for those events.

New Correspondence Rules US Chess correspondence rules haven't changed since 2004. Back in those ancient times, email was not yet the medium of choice for transporting moves, and post cards were mostly still the rule of thumb. A task force committee updated many of the old terms and old rules, and their recommendations reflect today's reality. One of the new innovations appears to be that tournament directors will be able to run their own US Chess correspondence events. When the delegates approve, or at least tweak, those recommendations, the next rulebook will be updated with a new chapter nine.

Fair Play Rules There you are in the middle of a US Chess online tournament. One of the event's requirements is that you must have access, typically some sort of membership, to the host site so that you can utilize their interface to play your games. And then it happens: WHAM! The site removes your access, having allegedly violated their "fair play policy."

You believe it must be a false positive, but the TD does not have the ability to get you reinstated. You can't finish the tournament. And the TD must retroactively adjust your opponents' scores, upward from earlier rounds and typically to unrated results. If the TD hands

in the impacted games as rated, that might fiddle with the accuracy of the rating system. The TD might also decide to report the incident to US Chess. So, how can you untangle this Gordian Knot?

For each online platform, there is a set of proprietary “fair play,” or anti-cheating, rules. In different ways, they all determine if a player is consistently performing well-above their expected norm. Being able to outshine Grandmasters move after move, in game after game, is unlikely for most of us.

The only fly in the ointment is a false positive. In the middle of a US Chess-rated event, an online platform may simply close a player’s account. Guilt or innocence aside, that player is barred from taking part in any more games in that event. Players may file protests after the fact with US Chess; however, US Chess has zero control over what a platform does—much like when a hotel bans a player from their site during an OTB tournament. To completely unravel your “false positive” problem, appeals are needed to both US Chess and the online platform.

Is OTB’s Fresh Face the New Normal? As more OTB tournaments resume, an increasingly familiar disclaimer says it all:

Please note, entering or attending this event constitutes acceptance of the US Chess COVID policy. Plans are subject to change based on federal, state, and municipal policy/guidelines in effect at the time of the event. US Chess will update this site as needed to reflect such changes.

With every state having their own COVID policy for group meetings, the hoops that a tournament organizer must jump through are variables at best: from the number participants allowed, to masks or no masks, to proof of vaccination, and on and on.

If you plan on attending an event, it is probably wise to find out what those regulations will be before showing up. After all, you may not be able to meet one.

Just the Rules: Non-Rulebook Rules?!

June 9, 2021

The situation: In a tournament hall near you, a tournament director denies a player's claim, despite the regulation appearing in the US Chess rulebook.

"Your claim is not upheld because our tournament rules don't support such claims. Those rules are posted here at the site, and I mentioned those rulebook variations in my announcements at the start of the round. We also published our list of rulebook modifications online, and all our major rulebook differences were in the advanced publicity. When you entered the event, did you check those lists?"

A short and concise reply from the player: "No."

"That explains why I am not able to uphold your claim: We are using a variation of the rulebook here. Our language is different from the rulebook."

Most players are unaware of local rulebook variations until they are impacted personally.

Entering chess tournaments is a lot like those pop-up screens that bring our computers and smartphone activities to a screeching halt. Continuing blindly on our merry way, too many of us just point and click that "I agree" button, without ever considering the small print.

With your entry fee, you are agreeing to play the royal game in some standard fashion, and US Chess has a rulebook that tells us how to do that. And the first thing in that rulebook – Rule 1B, to be exact—is a section that addresses those rules that do not appear in the rulebook: we call them "non-rulebook rules," or variations. At any individual tournament, those non-rulebook rules are the standard for that particular event.

But too many of us don't read the small print.

Organizers are supposed to let you know what non-rulebook variations they are applying; at the very least, variants need to be posted at the tournament site. Major rulebook variations get announced in the tournament publicity – though what is considered a major variant? One rule-of-thumb suggests that a major variant is any non-rulebook rule that might impact attendance. Examples are disallowing digital clocks, or all electronic-notation devices. Awarding prizes based on players' highest rating in the last six months might

sway some decisions to attend a tournament, as could forbidding draw agreements in the first 20 moves.

Today, all the major – and even minor – rulebook variations are easily posted on a tournament’s web page. A printed copy of that page is often available, posted somewhere at the site. Most organizers and TDs announce the big stuff at the start of the round – though how often does your average woodpusher actually listen?

In the end, every player has the responsibility to make sure that they have investigated those local, non-rulebook rules. Don’t wait until a major variation costs you a win or draw.

Just the Rules: Remember When ...

July 1, 2021

The Queens Gambit on Netflix has done a lot for promoting our beloved royal sport, and has also triggered a flood of nostalgia. You know the feeling: the emotion that grabs those filtered memories from a time in the past—a place different from the here and now. Do you remember when ..

Analogue clocks were the gold standard? Now they appear to be going the way of the dodo bird. Almost any digital clock seems to be “more-preferred” for tournament wood pushing. Interestingly, many of our modern rules still refer to a “flag fall,” which is a term rooted in the way those old-style analogue clocks indicated a player’s playing time was up: a flag literally fell.

Descriptive notation was the standard? Algebraic notation is easier to teach, easier to use, more accurate, and less confusing. Once chess games started being published in algebraic it was the beginning of the end.

Long time controls of 40 moves in 2 hours, with 20 moves per hour after that—ad infinitum? Those time controls challenged the intestinal fortitude of both players and TDs. They were the main reason for the next item on the list.

Adjournments were commonplace? Adjournments were common for those long time controls. Among other things they insured everyone got some sleep and some nourishment. Plus, they helped the next round start on time. Adjournments provided extra time for teams of analysts to come up with some sound strategy for posting a win when the woodpushing resumed. As time controls decreased, and the abilities of chess-playing software increased, adjournments became almost extinct. Realistically, in regards to overnight evaluation, the software replaced the team approach: suddenly class players could get GM-quality insight into a position without needing the actual GM. Nowadays, an adjournment’s only function seems to be getting the next round started on time—typically when a time increment allows a game to drag on and on.

Tournament halls were cloud-filled dens of smoke? Local, state, and federal legislation did away with smoke-filled rooms in public for all kinds for various health reasons.

Tournaments were one Open section only? The standard used

to be one huge “open” section where every player of any rating participated – sections were unheard of. You played in the Open, or you didn’t play at all. There were prizes for the various classes of wood-pusher, though class players did not necessarily get paired against each other. Everyone was liable to be paired with anyone of any rating.

There were no side events? You showed up, played, and then analyzed in the skittles room. Sometimes you had to wait hours and hours for your next contest to be posted.

Wallcharts and pairing sheets were scribbled by hand? Often it was difficult to decipher them. NTD and IA Todd Barre used to color code players’ names on his pristine wallcharts by hand. That way, late entrants added at the end of a wallchart, whom also qualified for class prizes, were easily identified. Tournament management software has made handwritten wallcharts and pairings sheets almost obsolete—and much more readable.

Rating supplements were published on paper every three months? Along the way, the official paper supplement gave way to the now-standard digital supplements of official monthly ratings. A nice side effect of the digital age is the ability to look up our new ratings online (MSA) as soon as our event has finished. Those ratings are often unofficial but give us immediate feedback on our tournament performance.

Chess Life and Review could be found on the newsstand? Somewhere along the way the cost outweighed the benefits, and our house magazine disappeared from the public view on newsstands.

Your dues were \$20 or less? The US Chess Forums suggest that some old-timers usually paid less than \$15 for their first-time membership. The most-common starting payment was \$10. Also popular for chess enthusiasts was doubling their future payments for ten years—a Sustaining Membership that converted into a Life Membership.

The rulebook was less than 200 pages long? The 1st edition from Kenneth Harkness came in at 121 pages. Martin Morrison’s second edition tipped the scales at 122 pages. The 196-page 3rd edition, from Tim Redman, put a bit more heft into our rules. The 1994 publication, edited by Bill Goichberg, Carol Jarecki and Ira Lee Riddle, added chapters to make the 4th edition seem like a handbook.

Their 370-page version became the standard length for the 5th (Just & Burg) and 6th (Just) editions. The 7th edition (Tim Just again) changed its book size to a 6" X 9" format—transforming those same revised 370 pages into 296 pages.

Do you have anything to add to this list of nostalgia?

Just the Rules: Adjournment Rules of Thumb

August 1, 2021

You may recall a mention of adjournments in last month's "Remember When..." column. In the Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*, our heroine would sometimes call for her move to be sealed in an envelope while having the game halted. She finished the contest at a later time—typically, the next day. Why? She could go off and do some home-brewed analysis for her current board position.

Some readers have only been around since the inception of the faster, delayed or incremented time controls. Adjournments are simply not on their radar, despite the fact that an adjournment might rarely be needed for a game with an increment time control. The details of those game recesses are covered in rules 18 through 19—spread out over six pages—in our rulebook (see also rule 11E). That is a lot of information for anyone to digest.

Here are a few rules of thumb that are easier to recall if you get caught in the labyrinth of an adjournment:

- If you are the player sealing the move, do not make your move on the board. Your opponent has to guess what your sealed move will be and analyze from there. You only need to calculate your opponent's response(s).
- If you are sealing the move, write it only—and clearly—on your scoresheet. If it is illegible, or an illegal move, you might not like the TDs ruling when the game resumes.
- The TD will seal the scoresheets from both players in an envelope. The move can still be changed before the envelope is sealed.
- Check the info on the envelope for accuracy: position, clock times, names, move number, etc. Any inaccurately recorded data can cause all sorts of headaches when the game is resumed.
- The TD keeps the envelope secured. There is a lot of info recorded on the outside of that envelope, which will be needed to resume the game—not to mention the actual move inside the envelope. A lost envelope becomes a messy business.

- Know when you have to show up to finish the game. If either player is late for the start of the resumed game, all sorts of rules kick in regarding the clock, opening the sealed envelope, etc. Everything is easier if both woodpushers show up on time.
- At any time before the game resumes, the players may agree to a draw, or either player may resign. If either outcome happens, the game continuation is no longer necessary. Don't forget to inform the TD about this result.
- The TD will take care of the details when the game resumes. There are all kinds of procedures that need to be followed when the game starts up again—that is TD territory (and you wondered why adjournment rules are printed over six different pages).

One small item for your consideration: TDs sometimes ask each player (separately and discreetly) for which result they are playing. The pairings for the next round take this information into consideration for pairing purposes. If both participants are playing for a draw, the TD usually declares the game a “draw” on the spot.

Just the Rules: Case Studies in Forgetting to Press the Clock

September 5, 2021

*There is no such thing as reality. There is only perception — **
Gustave Flaubert.*

CASE 1 YOU: Great, my opponent made a move — well, they grabbed a piece from one square and let go of it on another one. But their clock is still counting down their playing time. Why is their clock still running? Why don't they just press their clock to complete their move? What could they possibly be thinking about? Should I do something here? Ok, just this one time.

THEM: I made my move. My opponent's reply is forced. It is hard to believe that their next move is taking this long. Why is my opponent pointing at my clock? Are they trying to distract me? OH NO!! I forgot to press my clock — they are reminding me! That was nice of them.

TJ Says: This is probably the most common practical non-rulebook solution when an opponent does not press their clock.

CASE 2 YOU: Hmmm... my opponent seems to not have pressed their clock *again*. That is the same thing that happened a couple of moves ago. They probably just forgot — again. I will, as quietly as possible, remind them to do so.

THEM: Aw crud?! I better press my clock and not make that mistake any more. I am glad my opponent reminded me — again. I should apologize to my opponent. After all they could have just ignored my oversight and let me lose playing time — which might cost me the game at some point?!

CASE 3 YOU: I have reminded my opponent several times to press their clock after their move. This is getting silly. I have to stop doing that. It is not working; they haven't started pressing their clock on their own. If they lose on time, it is their own fault.

THEM: Wow, my opponent is taking a long time to calculate a reply to my last move — say what? My flag fell? I lose?

CASE 4 YOU: My opponent has forgotten to press their clock. I don't want to win by making a time-forfeit claim. I know their clock is running; however, I can work out my response on their time, then

make my move on the board, and finally, I will pretend to press my own clock.

THEM: Oh good, they moved. I'll think about my reply — got it! I need to make my move and press my clock.

OR An Alternate Response...

THEM, Alternate Response: Whoa, I forgot to press my clock, but my opponent made a move anyhow. They can't do that — it is still technically my turn! Doesn't that cheat me out of my increment? I need a TD to solve this problem.

CASE 5 YOU: It is obvious my opponent has forgotten to press their clock. I'll make my reply on the board anyhow, press their clock, and then press my own clock. That should get the move counter (and increment time) back in order!

THEM: What's wrong with my opponent? They have no right to just press, or even touch, my clock — no matter what! Where is the TD?

TJ Says: It is probably better to get your opponent's permission before you try this. Otherwise you risk the possibility of some unneeded wailing and gnashing of teeth.

CASE 6 YOU: I can see that my opponent made a move, but their clock is still running. If I am patient their time will run out. I can simply sit here and then make a time forfeit claim, all according to the rulebook.

THEM: I lost on time because I forgot to press my clock?! I know my opponent has no rulebook obligation to remind me to do that; however, ????

So, what do you do when your opponent does not press their clock?

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Just the Rules: Rulebook Updates for 2021-22

October 1, 2021

The 7th edition of the US Chess Rulebook brought a long list of individual updates from the previous edition. Most of those tournament-impacting changes are found in the first two chapters and the Blitz section, though one major uptick was the replacement of the old ethics rules with brand new wording in Chapter 6. Additionally, some minor improvements to the Tournament Director Certification list were made in chapter 7.

The pandemic brought the advent of online rules in 2020-21, rolling out a huge change to Internet chapter 10, which got a complete make over. This time around for 2021-22, correspondence chess in chapter 9 will sport a new set of rules that are scheduled to kick in on October 1, 2021.

Let's take a look at the big-ticket changes for 2021-2022:

Summary of Major US Chess Rules Updates in the Seventh Edition for 2021-2022

Rule 5B1c: Added a TD TIP that deals with the nuances of simple delays, Bronstein delays and increments.

TD TIP: There are two forms of delay: *Bronstein* and *simple*, which is also referred to as “US” delay. Both are mathematically equivalent and equally acceptable for use, and the only difference is how the delay is displayed on the clock screen.

Simple delay separates the delay time from the main time, often by showing the delay countdown in digits, or perhaps the word “delay” flashing each second during the delay countdown. Bronstein delay, by contrast, combines the delay with the main time into one single display. If a player uses the entire delay time or more for a move, the clock adds the delay time to the main time. If a player uses less than the delay time for a move, the clock returns to the time that appeared at the beginning of the move.

What makes a delay different than an increment is that the main time never increases. With an increment, also commonly known as “Fischer” or “bonus,” extra seconds are added to the main time with each move.

Rule 14G: Added a TD TIP examining the procedure when both players' flags are down.

TD TIP: If both flags are down, some clocks indicate which flag fell first. That information, however, cannot be used to make a time-claim win. A win must be properly claimed by a player before his own flag falls.

Chapter 8, Rule 4 Matches: Updated wording to include blitz ratings in matches.

Chapter 9, Correspondence Chess: All new and effective as of October 1, 2021.

The rules for this chapter are scheduled to kick in today and may be viewed in full here. Correspondence players registered with US Chess with valid e-mail address should have received a notification of these new regulations already. A summary of those rules can be found here.

Note that the summary contains some interesting wording: “... *will allow for a future where affiliates/TDs can run their own US Chess rated CC events. However, while the rules have been revised with this future direction in mind, affiliates/TDs will not be able to run their own CC tournaments until a mechanism is in place to allow them to submit such events for rating.*”

So, while it sounds like some stars still need to align, the future appears like a TD or an Affiliate will be able to run their own rated correspondence events. I am looking forward to that announcement.

Chapter 10, Rule 15B: Added two new TD TIPs.

TD TIP: No players expelled for a “fair play” violation, as well as their opponents, should have any games reported for rating purposes.

TD TIP: Players removed from a tournament for a “fair play” violation by the host platform are not automatically reported to US Chess by that platform. TDs need to report that violation.

Chapter 11, rule 17: Added wording to the TD TIP.

TD TIP: A completed illegal move, for any reason, loses instantly if claimed correctly. The standard one-minute penalty applies to other Blitz rule infractions, but does not apply to illegal moves.

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the 7th edition rulebook) are now downloadable and available online. Past “Just the Rules” columns can be viewed [here](#). Plus listen to Tim when he was a guest on the US Chess podcast “One Move at a Time.”

Just the Rules: You don't have the time?

November 3, 2021



There is no tick in my tock! Through a series of unforeseen circumstances, you leave your chess equipment at home—including your clock. But only half of the tournament's wood pushers need a timer, right? So, no worries: you just assume to use your opponent's clock. Your opponents have provided the clock in each of your other games, and you expect the same result here.

"Pairings are up," shouts the TD! You see that your game is booked for board 39, and you get to lead the black chess army into battle. You pick up a scoresheet and fill in your opponent's info—the standard stuff like name, rating, etc.

You are the first to arrive at the site of the upcoming game. When your adversary appears, you both go through the usual pleasantries, and then you fess up on your lack of a proper timer, asking: *"How about we use your clock?"*

Which draws the unexpected reply: *"No, I don't own a clock."*

Now what?

Scrounging?! Getting a fellow chess player to loan out their clock is usually an easy task: just ask around. Most tournament chess players are good people. Finding a loaner clock typically works well in the early rounds, though the last round of the day can sometimes be a hassle. The lender may finish their game early and want their clock back, which turns into a messy situation all around. Some players avoid this hassle simply, by not being a clock loaner during the last round.

Additionally, borrowing a clock in the old days had an upside, as those analog wonders were generally easy to set and use. Today,

however, digital timers are high-volume items at most events, and non-familiar models are not always easy to set. Borrowing a clock that is hard to use might work for the moment, but they might not prove worthwhile if they ever need to be reset, stopped or adjusted. And don't expect the TDs to know how to work every model ever produced!

You and your opponent are having problems finding a usable clock or a generous donor. Time to ask the TD for some assistance.

So the Tournament Director says... Your request to help locate a loaner clock could come with one of several different responses, and beware that all TDs and all events are different; there is nothing wrong with any of these replies:

1. Play your game without a clock.
2. I don't have extra clocks, so loaning them out is not an option.
3. Yes, I have extra clocks that I can share with my players.
4. I used to loan out clocks, but the difficulty in getting them back is not worth it.
5. I have spare clocks. They are used only on boards without timers in the last five minutes of the final time control period. I slap a properly set one on those contests.
6. If I find a clock for you, I will place it on your game.

At scholastic tournaments, the first option is often the preferred choice for most TDs, because many of the games in lower sections finish well ahead of the scheduled round time. If a clock in a scholastic game is eventually needed near the end of the round, then the TD typically opts for choice number-five.

We don't need a clock! So you start your game without a clock and hope for the best. You normally play fast, and the clock has never been an issue in any of your previous games – though you are not sure about your opponent, who appears to be moving slower than a river of molasses.

Hooray! The TD found a loaner clock, and only 30 minutes have passed since the round started. The TD explains that the device is properly set for the event's time control, and both players will have 15 minutes deducted from the base time control, which splits the elapsed round time equally between the two of you.

You protest! “*I moved faster than my opponent and should get less time deducted from my clock!*” But the TD has no way to prove how much time either player took to make the moves, so the correct play here is to split the elapsed time equally between both players.

And don’t forget the final, most-important instruction from the TD: “*Return that clock directly to me at the end of your game. I need to return it to its owner!*”

Don’t go to a tournament without your chess clock! And please know how to set and use it! They come with instructions – but that is another topic altogether.

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Just the Rules: The Amazing Journey of 14H

December 3, 2021

Sudden death time controls, which force an entire game in a specified amount of time – such as G/30 or G/60 — began to appear regularly in the early 1990s. And when the 4th edition of the US Chess rulebook rolled around, the “chess law-givers” penned the first rules addressing sudden death.

Rule 14H took aim at a frequent concern: flags falling in sudden death for players in overwhelmingly won positions. And much time was spent in the process of applying this one single rule.

When those flags fall, technically a player could claim a draw despite the position offering nothing but losing chances. The phrase “with both having ample time” observed that a Class C player would have little chance in the position against, say, a Master, and the concept became the rule of thumb for those claims.

Analogue clocks were the standard timing devices in those bygone days, as digital clocks with their delays and increments had only just begun to worm into the chess universe. As those digital clock enhancements began to become the norm, giving the advantaged player enough time to crank out the clear result, Rule 14H was relegated to application only for games with analog clocks.

Side Effects The “Insufficiently Losing Chances” rule had some interesting side effects, the least of which was allowing TDs at a class-level to enforce the rule when a claim was made in a GM vs GM contest.

One legendary story tells of a GM convinced that his game was not the draw that the TD had declared. The lower-rated TD had granted a half-point when the GM’s opponent made the 14H claim, so the GM threw down a wad of cash and offered it to any “Class C” player who could draw the position against him! The TD’s ruling was appealed and overturned.

The enforcement of 14H enforcement also allowed the swap of an analogue clock for a properly set delay clock, an option for TDs who were not sure about that “Class C player...” rule of thumb. Soon players began to make the 14H claim early just so they could have a delay clock placed on the game. Wood pushers then started to believe they could ask for a clock swap at any time, without even making

the claim! In reality, only the TD could perform that switch—and only when a 14H claim was made.

Missing in Action The 5th and 6th editions of the rulebook continued to tweak the 14H rule, putting ink to paper outlining its specifics. Becoming clear was more digital clocks being used at tournaments, with analog clocks surrounded and outnumbered. And analog devices were no longer the gold standard by the time the 7th edition went to press, with digital clocks becoming the rulebook choice for their delay and increment abilities. 14H was headed down the road to obscurity.

While it did still hold some die-hard supporters, the anti-party believed both the timer and the rule was becoming archaic, arguing that 14H had become clunky and filled with too many procedures. By the 7th edition of the rulebook, 14H still existed but came complete with new wording: “No claim of insufficient losing chances in sudden death will be allowed.”

The old rule was now officially MIA—or was it?

It’s Alive! Hold up. While the original rule and all its tweaks had disappeared, a new variation to 14H was born. But this newly minted variation is simply a duplicate of the original 14H rule, and one that does not even need to be announced in the pre-event publicity. So why bother with this apparent magic trick? The answer is probably simple: Tournaments were getting bogged down by 14H as it had become. Smaller events are likely to still see a mix of analog and digital clocks, keeping Rule 14H – now a variation – as a useful tool at those tournaments.

The bottom line for wood pushers with analog clocks is to learn if their next tournament will enforce the new 14H or its reincarnated variation. Realistically, if your opponent has a properly set delay or increment, the rules say their digital device gets the nod over your analogue ticker anyhow.

Milestone Can you believe it? This is my 50th “Just the Rules” column, and yes! It is still fun. I am still trying to digest my good fortune – a big THANK YOU to my readership. – TJ

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Just the Rules: The Slippery Slope

January 10, 2022

Let's start out the year by putting on our rulebook thinking caps. This quiz pushes the limits of slippery slope thinking. The solutions are at the end of the exam.

THE QUIZ 1. You and your fellow wood pusher are in time trouble. A quick calculation on your part puts your opponent in check. They swiftly grab their bishop. It slides across the board with the greatest of ease and gets firmly planted on its destination square. At that instant you point out that the bishop move is illegal. Why? Your opponent's king is still in check.

With the clocks stopped, the TD informs your counterpart that he must put the bishop back on its starting square and make a legal move to get out of check. The penalty your opponent must suffer? You get two extra minutes of thinking time. He objects. He points out that he did not make an illegal move; therefore, there can be no penalty. He argues that he had not yet pressed the clock so his move was not yet legal or illegal, just incomplete.

- (a) You get your two extra minutes of penalty thinking time.
 - (b) You get no extra thinking time because the move was not yet legal or illegal.
2. Your rook is pinning your counterpart's knight to his king on e1. The knight has no other guardian. He grabs his king and sets it two squares over on g1. Your eyes bulge and your heart starts beating faster and faster. Your brain is screaming at you, "He is going to lose that knight!" He lifts his hand from the king so he can grab the rook.

He promptly halts. He notices that his knight is hanging. So, he does a U-turn and does not grab the rook. The castling maneuver is incomplete. Instead, he moves his king to the empty d1 square to protect the knight. He knows that that he must move the king since it was touched, but he argues that he does not need to castle.

- (a) Your opponent must castle
 - (b) Your opponent does not have to castle.
3. Despite your best efforts your adversary marches their c-pawn down the board. Square after square the lowly pawn aims to raise itself up to higher standards. Now it is sitting on c2 —

only one square away from your first rank. It is only one step away from getting an upgrade. Your challenger's hand darts over to grab a queen sitting near two of her subjects — a knight and a rook — just off the edge of the board. The queen touches the c1 promotion square but stops short of being released. A trade up to a queen will create a stalemate.

The queen returns off-board next to her minions. Instead, the rook gets the nod. The waiting pawn gets removed from c2 without ever moving onto the c1 promotion square. The clock gets pressed. You claim your opponent must promote to a queen. He says the whole process was illegitimate due to the pawn never actually moving forward onto the promotion square before it was replaced. Your opponent points out he never touched the pawn so the queen swap was not required. Besides he never let go of the queen.

(a) The pawn must be promoted to a queen.

(b) The pawn can be promoted to the rook.

THE SOLUTIONS: 1. B: Be careful when you make your claim. Your opponent here is right — he did not press the clock so his move was not complete. Had you waited until the clock was pressed you would be eligible for that extra two minutes of thinking time.

2. A: Castling is the only king move that lets a monarch move two squares in either direction along the rank. This king moved two squares. The only move available at this point is to complete castling. Now, if the opponent had moved his majesty over two squares AND not released it, the castling maneuver would not be mandatory. The king could then make any other legal move.
3. A: In the older rulebooks this created a messy situation. In the current edition some extra wording by the “Law Givers” says that the promotion takes place — even if the pawn does not move onto the promotion square — as long as the upgraded promotion piece only “*touches*” the promotion square. In this case the queen touched the promotion square. The pawn promotes to a queen.

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Just the Rules: More Tournament Hacks

February 2, 2022

It's the small stuff that makes up the quality of a good tournament experience. You have some control over that.

Have a look at an earlier “Just the Rules” column where technical rulebook jargon was replaced with everyday language. Common language is easy to understand and remember for players and TDs alike. This month, it's time for some more hacks with a slightly different bent.

Here we are going to look at how you can increase the odds of having a hassle-free tournament — at least rule-wise. Learn how to avoid tripping over the rules with these pro-active hacks. Some problems are preventative, and hacks like these stop major headaches before they become migraines.

1. Learn to Set Your Clock: Most wood pushers know how to set their own clocks, at least for the tournament time control. Not only do those devices come with instructions, but there are online videos that point owners in the right direction. Running around at the start of a round to get your clock set properly is icky at best.

TDs don't know how to set every clock ever manufactured. They might know how the major brands are set, but those new, just-off-the-assembly-line models? Not likely. Setting your own device avoids all the hassles of waiting for the TD.

You could try the book seller instead. But don't expect the seller to interrupt a sale to help you!

Your fellow chess lovers might be able to help you out, but will they do it right? Will 90 minutes turn into 90 hours when they get the job done?

Are you willing to learn the opening lines of your favorite chess weapon? If you are, then taking a bit of time to learn to set your clock for the event's time control is even easier. And if you get real ambitious learning to add two minutes of penalty time is a nice touch — in the rare event that happens in your contest.

2. Don't Bother with Your Clock's Move Counter: You can't use the clock move counter to make any claim of any kind — even time forfeit claims.

3. If You Have Special Needs, Alert the Staff Early: If you have special needs, alert the TD staff (or organizer) well ahead of time. They typically can meet your requirements if they are alerted early. Physical handicaps are one obvious entry into the special needs category. Another typical concern is religious; *i.e.*, some players have restrictions regarding notation and clock pressing. Springing any kind of need on a TD at the last moment may not be met with much success.

4. You Can Ask the TD To Not Pair You with a Relative or Teammate: Do this well ahead of the pairings. There is really no downside to doing this ASAP — like at registration. The worst case is if the TD denies your request, which they are allowed to do. You have lost nothing if that happens. Talking to the TD before the event's round one pairings are made is ideal. You might find that a TD is willing to allow the non-pairing in the early rounds only. And some will simply just honor your request.

5. Use the Bye Request Sheet: Ideally you should get this info to the TD before the tournament starts — like at registration. But things change. Sometimes you need to take a round off. Please don't just tell the TD. They might forget. Ask where the bye request list is located and use it.

Do this well before the pairings are made. At some events there may be a time limit for signing up for half-point byes — find out what that time limit is. Some byes may be only worth a zero point after that cut-off time passes. This little gesture, using the bye sign-up sheet, means some other wood pusher will not be sitting there waiting for you to arrive when you get paired but don't plan to show up.

6. Withdrawing? Sign the Withdrawal List: If you plan to not finish the tournament, find the withdrawal list and fill it out. If you decide to not play after you have left the site, get the withdrawal info to the TD.

In this day and age of electronic communication, notification of withdrawal is probably an easy task. Worst-case, one of your friends might be able to get your withdrawal notice to the TD before the pairings are made. You don't want to leave someone sitting there waiting for a no-show opponent.

7. Check the Wallchart and the Results Sheet for Errors: Avoid errors. Check the accuracy of wallcharts and results sheets ASAP. Getting mis-paired as the result of an error does no one any

good. Waiting for several rounds to report an error just diminishes your chances of getting a satisfactory fix.

8. Check on the Mask Rules: While you are used to the COVID-19 mask regulations in your neck of the woods, they are not the same everywhere. Rules can vary from town to town, county to county, etc. Find out ahead of time about the event’s COVID-19 rules. Then decide if those regulations meet your needs or not — and don’t fight with the organizer about how they runs their tournament.

9. Make Sure the TD Has Your Contact Info: If you want your jingle jangle, the organizer (often the same person as the TD) needs to know where to send your loot. Leaving your contact info allows you to disappear early at the end of the event when you are in contention for some prizes. It also gives the TD some method for contacting you if there are any questions about your game result.

10. Shut Down Your Electronic Equipment Completely: Do you want to avoid being accused of cheating? How about preventing the pain-in-the-neck complaints if your device makes unexpected noises?

Shut down completely ALL of your electronic gizmos. None of them should inadvertently: beep, flash, alert, automatically display messages, or do anything else for any reason. Tuck all of that turned -ff gear away if you are keeping them in the playing room. Or, leave ALL of your electronic equipment someplace safe outside of the playing room.

And for those of you using electronic medical devices — please bring some sort of verification in order the use that equipment. Contacting the TD early is advised.

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Just the Rules: How to Get an Entry Fee Refund

March 7, 2022

Refunds are good things. Some businesses have a “no questions asked” refund policy. Remember the old Sears policy? You know the one—they replaced their Craftsman tools if they ever broke or stopped working—forever. In general, most retailers allow a refund if what you purchased does not meet your expectations (broke, too big, too small, the wrong color, etc.). All you need is to prove you bought the product, returned it in a timely fashion and mostly unused.

Refunding is harder to deal with for concerts, movies and most other participation events. The event goes on despite a no-show patron. So, what do the US Chess rules say about entry fee (EF) refunds?

1. Refunds go to players that withdraw before registration ends.

Example 1: Registration for the State of Confusion Open ends at 10:30 a.m. on day one of the event. You pre-registered two weeks ago to take advantage of the less expensive entry fee (EF). Now you find you can’t play in the tournament. The event’s ad (and online) displays a phone number—and an email address—to use if you will not be attending. You call and email by 9 a.m.—the night before is even better. You get your EF refunded.

Example 2: Your friend puts off doing things until the last possible moment—taxes, bills, dishes, shopping, etc. He calls the cell phone number listed in the ad to withdraw from the State of Confusion Open at 10:35 a.m.. Remember registration ends at 10:30 a.m. He also sends an email five minutes later—at 10:40 a.m.—to make sure he has withdrawn. Technically, he is too late. The rule says he does not get his EF back.

The bottom line here is the tournament staff wants to make pairings AND avoid pairing an intended no-show. Of course, the current rule was written years before e-mail or cell phones were the norm. Now-a-days some TDs will bend the rule and refund an EF as long as the round one pairings have not yet been made. After that, players can’t count on getting their money back.

2. No refunds after the tournament starts.

Example 1: In the State of Confusion Open your friend notifies the

staff after the round 1 games have started that he will not be able to play any round, including the first one. If a player withdraws after being paired then they have participated in the tournament. Your friend left a fellow chess general sitting there waiting for a no-show opponent; thus, no refund

Example 2: You pushed wood in round 1. Afterwards, you decide to withdraw. The rulebook says there is no whole or partial refund available. An EF gives wood pushers the opportunity to play in the event. If you withdraw and play in only part of the event, then no refund.

3. No refunds for players giving the TD, or organizer, bogus information—ratings, IDs, etc.

This is self-explanatory. Don't do it.

4. Refunds are available if the tournament staff trip over themselves in processing a player's data.

Example: You did everything right when you registered for the event. Along with your EF you included your name, rating, and contact info. When you checked the pairings for the section you registered in, your name was missing. Oops, you got paired into the wrong section. The tournament staff at the State of Confusion Open simply got your info wrong. Your name was right. Another player with the same name, but a different ID number and a different rating, was entered in your place. You decide to withdraw due to that miscue. At that point you can opt to receive all of your EF back. You might even be able to negotiate a reduced EF if you stay and push wood using your corrected data.

SOME NON-RULEBOOK ENTRY FEE REFUND VARIATIONS can often be found in the advanced publicity for the tournament:

Events may offer a free or a reduced EF to their next tournament(s) instead of a cash refund.

Organizers, or TDs, might set a time limit much earlier—or later—than the end of registration to withdraw for a player to still qualify for a refund.

There may be a service charge for processing EF refunds.

A NEW REVISED CHAPTER 7 (TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR CERTIFICATION) is now available online. If all you

are looking for are the changes to the old Certification document check this out.

AND A PAT ON MY BACK FROM MYSELF. FIDE's new Arbiters' Manual now includes "advice." That "advice" is enclosed in gray boxes within the manual. First there were "TD TIPS" (my lightbulb idea) appearing in the fifth edition of the rulebook. Now we have FIDE's copycat version—"advice."

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Just the Rules: Is That Still a Rule?

April 5, 2022

Nostalgia has a way of making us feel good about the past. We look at things through the “warm and fuzzy” lens of time. We tend to ignore the idea that things change. Some old ideas still hold on in today’s world. Sometimes a good idea from long ago really has lost its shine in the here-and-now, but it is still remembered fondly.

Some chess rules improve with age. A tweak here. A tweak there. They grow with the times. With analog clocks headed towards extinction via their digital cousins, the chess clock rules were adjusted. The recent updated language for both chapters nine (Correspondence Chess) and ten (Internet Chess) turned them into a grown-up version of their younger selves.

Adjournments (rules 18 and 19) are so old that they are new again—thanks to increment time controls. (Just the Rules: Adjournment Rules of Thumb)

Then there is Rule 36. It’s the one at the end of chapter two in the rulebook. The one with some old-fashioned language and old-fashioned concepts. A rule that now seems to reflect outmoded technology. It addresses a need that barely existed in its own time, let alone now. Nostalgia is not a word associated with *Rule 36: Rules and Regulations for Computer Participants*.

That’s right, computers were allowed to enter chess tournaments with the rest of us wood pushers as far back as 1994, and earlier. Goichberg’s *4th edition* published in 1994 was the first time Rule 36 was included in any US Chess (then USCF) rulebook—though according to Mike Nolan, US Chess Ratings Consultant, computers were issued Federation memberships as far back as 1991, and even before that. Tim Redman’s *3rd edition* (1987) makes no mention of computer wood pushers in chess tournaments. Let all of that marinade with you for a moment.

Just what does Rule 36 say? Check out this digested version with commentary:

A non-commercial membership is required—directly available from US Chess.

Computer participation in events must be advertised in advance.

Players can’t object to being paired with computers—Rule 36D

(more on that later).

Computers can't be paired with each other.

The operator's responsibilities: They can't fiddle with the computer while a game is in progress; They can move the pieces for the computer on the game board; They deal with all rules and functions of the game clock, including pressing the clock; They can accept draws, resign, or claim a win on time (using the game clock) for the computer; They can jump through the adjournment hoops for the computer; And, they can swap memory units when asked to by the computer (talk about something that doesn't need to be done any more!?).

The US Chess Computer Rating Agency rates commercially available computers. What? Does this agency still exist?

And related rule 28M1 suggests using a computer as a "house player." Hmmm... has anyone ever done this? What was the procedure? Both Mike Nolan and I want to know about those hoops.

In the beginning, chess playing computers were a novelty—a collection of circuits that had questionable chess ability. Weekend chess warriors often looked forward to essaying games against computers—it was a free, easy, tournament point for the human—not to mention free rating points. Chess computer programing improved. They started to consistently beat higher and higher rated opponents. They became Chess Masters. The free game and ratings points disappeared.

When those CPUs traveled along that upgrade highway it gave rise to greater and greater backlashes from humanoids. Organizers and TDs had to start offering humans the opportunity to not be paired with that technology—despite rule 36D. Why? Because organizers wanted to hold onto their traditional clientele—the ones generating dollars from those entry fees. The fallout from the "I'm not playing a computer" sign-up sheet was that pairings became problematic—if not impossible. The alternate solution was to not allow computers to enter in person events (NC in the *Chess Life* ads). Eventually, that became the norm. Not allowing computer participants made the paying crowd happy. Chess playing computers faded from the tournament scene.

Rule 36 is still kicking around. Check out the last rule in chapter two in our current (7th edition) rulebook. But when was the last time a tournament had a computer entrant? Nolan points out that 2003

was the last year that a computer membership was issued—though some memberships got issued using their creator’s own names. Has Rule 36 outlived its usefulness?

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Just the Rules: Rulebook Reality - No TD Needed

May 12, 2022

Without TDs (tournament directors) chess events would be a mess. Someone has to process those entries—though organizers (often the TD) can also crank those out. Who is responsible for the pairings? The TD—now-a-days that would include some help from tournament pairings software. You can also count on the TD to manage recording all of those wins, losses, draws, forfeits, withdrawals, and byes PLUS report them all to US Chess. Paperwork is their bread and butter.

Small stuff like board numbers would go undone if not for the TD/organizer. Providing you with an enjoyable past time falls within their job description.

When TDs get together, they relate stories about their problem-solving skills to each other; i.e., unraveling those real-world rulebook puzzles that pop up in the tournament room. Helping players with games that need a referee is a source of pride and joy for tournament officials. They love to brag about their prowess as problem solvers. But most games don't need any rulebook assistance at all. Why? In the real world, wood pushers typically resolve rules issues by themselves—no TD needed.

1. Your king is sitting on d1. Your opponent slides their rook to d8—check! Your monarch moves to a new home on e1. His rook slides to a brand-new attack square—e8. Your royal highness is in check again. Your king goes back to d1 to escape the check. His rook travels back to d8, delivering another check. This king-rook dance continues on and on and on. Your opponent claims a draw by perpetual check. You agree—no TD was needed.

Tim Just says: There are no perpetual check or repetition of moves rules. The correct claim would have been “Triple occurrence of position.” In this instance the players agreed to a draw without any TD involvement—despite the inaccurate rulebook wording claim. They understood the idea behind the rule. Besides, draw claims are also draw offers.

2. It is your move. There are only moments left on the game clock for both of you—time trouble indeed. A delay of 10 seconds is built into each move before the clock starts the playing time diet. Pieces get slammed down. A game of “bang the clock”

continues—mostly during those 10 seconds of delay time. The small amount of unused playing time, for both combatants, appears to be almost frozen—unused. The air is filled with tension. Neither chess general seems to have an advantage. On your turn you offer up one word, instead of a move—“draw?” Your opponent agrees.

TJ says: No TD was needed. The exact language in the rule says that you should make your move before offering a draw. Your opponent could have asked you to do that. Instead, the two of you agreed to split the point on your own.

3. You have the only queen on the board. Your forces are descending on your opponent’s position. Every calculation proves that the enemy king will succumb in the upcoming skirmish. Your adversary throws in the towel—he resigns. After he tips his monarch over, he offers to shake hands. The game is finished. No TD was required.

TJ says: This example is probably the one that needs a TD the least. It is the one that takes place most often at a tournament.

4. According to his clock your opponent’s thinking time disappears. You hear yourself speak the inevitable, “Flag,” as you stop the clocks. The game is over, and you both know it. There is no confusion or rule bending going on. The two of you exchange pleasantries and then head out to analyze the game—outside of the tournament room, of course. The match’s end is reported. No TD is needed.

TJ says: When would a TD get involved in a game ender like this? (1) Your opponent makes a claim that the flag has not fallen. (2) Or, that the clock was set wrong. (3) Or, that he checkmated you before the flag fell. (4) Or, that a stalemate position ended the game before time ran out.

Are there any other instances of non-TD involvement that you can think of?

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Just the Rules: The Unrated Prize Puzzle

June 6, 2022

An unrated player is a puzzle waiting to be solved. On the one hand they are often—especially at the scholastic level—beginners that are just learning the basics of the royal game. But sometimes they are not beginners. They are individuals—usually adults—that have been essaying games for years with family and friends or with strangers at beaches or public parks. Those wood pushers typically are not weak. Then there are players that are rated in far-off lands that are now competing in tournaments here in the U.S.A. In their first US Chess event they have no rating; they are Unrated. This mix of abilities is the puzzle that needs solving in events that offer prize money. Scholastic unrateds are an entirely different discussion for a future column.

Our rulebook does address the unrated prize fund puzzle. They can only claim top place prizes or designated unrated prizes. Any variations from these regulations needs to be advertised by the organizer.

The rules briefly mention that unrateds can have prizes designated just for them—“Top Unrated = \$50” is one example. The rulebook does mention this idea but also says that it is not advised; however, many organizers do use this plan and advertise it

The upside is that unrated wood pushers, no matter what their score or playing strength, can only take home gold specified just for them. They can’t claim any dollars designated for rated wood pushers.

The downside is that if there is only one unrated in an event, they automatically get that prize. It often makes them happy and encourages them to come back again sporting a provisional rating.

The TD can assign a rating to an unrated player. This method addresses the unrated prize puzzle solution without any advanced publicity. There are a series of steps in the rulebook outlining how to make this happen. The procedure involves finding proof of an unrated’s ability via foreign rating lists, FIDE rating lists, club won-loss records, etc. A rating for that player—typically higher than what is discovered in that research—is then assigned on the wallchart. That assigned rating is good only at that tournament for pairings and prizes. It allows an unrated player to compete for all the money that their assigned rating qualifies them for—top prizes, class prizes, under prizes, etc.

In my humble opinion, it seems risky to assign a rating below 2200 to any unrated player with gray area playing strength credentials.

Limiting the amount of money an unrated can win is yet another method not encouraged by the chess law givers. It is, however, a fairly common advertised practice for solving the unrated prize puzzle.

The upside is that it prevents strong non-rated players, that have no US Chess rating, from claiming prizes aimed at rated chess warriors.

The downside is that it is messy, messy, messy. Especially if the cap on unrated winnings is lower than the rated player prize that their score would otherwise qualify them for?

Check out this example: In a five round event, first place is \$100 and second place is \$50. The unrated prize cap is \$25. The unrated scores a perfect 5-0, the only player to do so. Now, where does the rest of the gold—you know, that extra \$75—go? The rules tell us where to distribute those funds—not how to distribute them.

Here is one of many ways to shift that left-over loot—downward. That \$75, in this example, could go to the second-place finisher. Since the second-place finisher can't claim both the leftover loot (\$75) and second place money (\$50), where does that extra money (\$50) filter down to? In this instance the organizer can create a new (unadvertised) third-place prize of \$50.

Another variation—using this example—is to give the unrated their \$25, the second-place claimant gets their \$50, then create two extra unadvertised prizes from that leftover \$75. One of many possibilities is to hand out \$45 as a new (unadvertised) third place prize plus \$30 as a new (unadvertised) fourth place prize.

These two methods of distributing leftover funds are only a couple of many. And let's not even get started on what to do with the leftover money when ties are involved with players that have prize caps—that is even messier.

What have you seen in practice?

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Just the Rules: Wouldn't It Be Nice If...

July 5, 2022

It is said that those hand-held communicators in Captain Kirk's *Star Trek* universe were the inspiration for those first generation "flip phones." Here is my list of inspirations of what yours truly would like to see at tournaments. It is a list devoid of any notion of being doable or affordable. Nor is there any thought given to the unintended consequences that may arise from their implementation. I have faith that those who excel at creating technological miracles can find a way to create these niceties:

Improved Tournament Entry System: Using an online format – or an at the site form – tournament officials can look up the data they need to make sure you get to push wood at their events. At some point that data gets transferred to a computer pairings program, or to a paring card. That data transfer is an opportunity for error infection.

Wouldn't it be nice if that data could instead be directly entered into the pairings software – via an app perhaps? That could reduce the number of errors that creep into the current data transfer system. Right now, a TD can sit there with a computer and directly enter player data into a pairings program for their on-site entries. That works well for small to medium-sized tournaments, but not so well for those Super Swisses. A direct data entry system might also reduce those long lines for on-site entries.

Adding phone contact info to that data would also be a plus. Some sort of privacy concerns would need to be addressed, but it would up the ante for the next item on this list.

Your Pairings Via Text: Actually, this sometimes happens right now. *Wouldn't it be nice if* it wasn't so clunky and expensive? The entire process needs to be easier to use for the player and organizer/TD; it needs to be more automated. It should be just as easy as to request a bye. The pairings software could receive and log that request automatically, with no extra data entry required from a TD. Of course, the traditional posted pairings sheet would still be available.

Game Reporting Made Easier: *Wouldn't it be nice if* chess generals could report their game results (text? online?) and get them instantly recorded by the pairings software? And once again, traditional ways of reporting your win-loss-draw results would still be

available.

Audio Chess Clock Setup: *Wouldn't it be nice if* you could just tell your chess clock the info it needs to be set properly? You would be able to set those time controls using just your voice! Wood pushers that like setting their timers by hand should still be able to do so.

Notation Without Effort: Nowadays, that is possible with the purchase of a special game board. Those boards don't come cheap — and they don't roll up for travel. *Wouldn't it be nice if* games got notated on every board without any special equipment?

Recent electronic devices that offered a substitute for paper and pencil notation had their fans – and their critics too. But they still required humans to do the data entry for every move. The idea here would be some system where all of the tournament games get notated without any human effort at all. Traditional scoresheets would be optional.

Claimless Rules Enforcement: Cheating at chess online is a serious concern. Rules enforcement is not. Without any human involvement at all items like stalemates, mates, touched pieces, triple repetition of position, illegal moves, etc. all get the watchful eye of online software – the rules get enforced automatically. *Wouldn't it be nice if* we could get this process to work over the board?

The philosophy that players only are responsible for making their own claims over-the-board Vs not needing to make any claims online seems a bit like believing two opposite things at the same time (cognitive dissonance). Enforcing simple straight forward rules like threefold repetition of position, checkmate, touch move, stalemate, etc. is, in my opinion, better done by non-humans.

Video Recorded All Games: If the “Claimless Rules Enforcement” idea isn't workable, then *wouldn't it be nice if* the use of video (surveillance cameras?) could validate a rule's claim? No more bickering at the board next to you regarding a simple rule's enforcement issue. Of course, it would also add a huge expense to the tournament bottom line. Future gizmos might make this an affordable idea?

What else can we add to this list?

US Chess informed me that I will receive the 2022 Tournament Director Lifetime Achievement Award. A big THANK YOU to the chess universe is in order. I have said often that as a player in a five round tournament, I can make five people happy. As the TD of a

five round event, I make a great many more people happy.

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Just the Rules: Wiggle Room Rules

August 2, 2022

Just what is a *wiggle room* rule? A specifically worded rule with some leeway—an escape hatch—built into it. In the chess universe that means someone is given the authority to do an end around that specific language.

Penalty Time?

Your opponent breaks a rule. You call them out on their miscue. The TD warns them to not to make that error again. Hold on! Why didn't the TD assess the standard penalty—two minutes added to your playing time?

Let's take a look at a trio of regulations at the start of our rulebook. We are told in 1C2: "In areas in which the director has discretion, it is appropriate to be strictest with rules enforcement...."

That directive is immediately followed by wording in 1C2a that defines the standard penalty: "Except where specifically noted in the rules, the standard penalty...is to add two minutes...."

1C2b then follows with the *wiggle room wording*: "The director may assess penalties either more or less severe than the standard penalty...."

That is why TDs can hand out warnings before applying that two-minute penalty — *wiggle room wording*. Besides 1C2 also tells us: "Being harshly penalized over a trivial rules violation can be sufficiently upsetting to deter a beginner from future participation." IMHO, being harshly penalized can be upsetting to more than just beginners — us old timers can also get bit annoyed.

Throw the Bum Out!

No one likes to sit at their assigned board and wait for an opponent that turns into a no-show. When that vanishing act takes place, you get your game point. Sometimes your opponent signs up to play the royal game but can't make it to round one and beyond. Sometimes your opponent just rudely takes off from the tournament without telling anyone. Of course, there are circumstances that your fellow wood pusher has no control over. What do the rules tell us tells us about how to prevent that mystery opponent from pulling out unannounced again? Check out 13G: "...may be ejected from the tournament, and may be fined...." Now-a-days not too many fines are

handed out, or even collected. Rule 13G then goes on to massage that ejection language with some *wiggle room wording*: “On request, the player may be retained in or readmitted to the tournament at the director’s discretion.”

Rule 28P similarly states: “That player is then dropped from the tournament unless (now there is a word that foreshadows some upcoming *wiggle room language*) he or she presents an acceptable excuse to the director.”

Complaints, Complaints — We Get Complaints.

In your OTB contest the general of your opposing chess army breaks a rule. You make a claim. The TD sides with you. Your opponent continues the game officially “under protest.” You score a victory. He intends to file a complaint (appeal) with US Chess. The TD’s decision, from his point of view, caused him to lose. Two weeks later his appeal appears at the US Chess office.

The filing deadline is clearly stated in Rule 21L1: “Appeals in writing must be postmarked within seven days of the end of the tournament....” Of course, now-a-days that “postmark” wording also applies to e-mails. The *wiggle room wording* then kicks in: “Appeals submitted after the seven-day deadline may be considered at the discretion of the committee hearing the appeal”—that *wiggle room language* gets your opponent’s appeal processed.

TJ Says: Everything has an upside and a downside. Writing rules that have no wiggle room ignores the possibility that sometimes things just don’t go right despite everyone’s best efforts. *Wiggle room wording* is needed to fix those inadvertent miscues—not the blatant disregard for a rule. The flip side of the coin is that some people will take advantage of that *wiggle room* so that they can circumvent the rule.

If it appears that a rule is not being applied properly, then checking for any *wiggle room wording* might be in order.

“If it’s not one thing, it’s another”—Gilda Radner (Roseanne Roseannadanna), SNL (Saturday Night Live)

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Just the Rules: The Tournament Ad Said What?

September 2, 2022

A lot of the same kind of info appears in just about every tournament ad: dates, round times, time controls, prizes, site address, entry fees, bye info, etc. There are also a lot of non-standard items that you need to watch out for.

Sometimes organizers — often the same person as the TD — like to fine-tune the rulebook. Those tweaks appear in their pre-event ads, or are announced and posted onsite. Their rulebook adjustments might impact your decision to play in a tournament. The rulebook tells us that those modifications — well, at least the major ones — must appear in the pre-event advertising.

My Rating is What? In the “State of Confusion Thanksgiving Quick Chess Open” there are several sections. You check your rating in the US Chess ratings supplement, the official monthly update of player ratings. Your official Regular Rating for November is 1525. Your Quick Chess number is a bit lower at 1322. Since this event is Quick Rated you enter the Under 1400 (U1400) section. When you arrive, you find you have been assigned a rating of 1525 and are kicked up into the U1600 section. What happened? The TD points out that their ad specifically says that the highest rating that they can verify for you is the one that will be used for pairing and prize purposes; however, only your Quick Rating will be impacted by your game results. The ad triumphs.

TJ Says: Players should carefully read those ads for all sorts of rating assignment procedures that apply **ONLY** to that one tournament. Some organizers (TDs) intend to assign you the highest rating they can find for you: Regular, Quick, Blitz, Online, Local, State, Club, etc. Some events stipulate which ratings supplement will be used to determine your rating. If an event’s publicity says nothing at all about how your rating will be assigned, then the rulebook kicks in. Your official rating is then determined by the monthly supplement that is the same as the tournament date’s month.

But My Equipment is US Chess Approved! When they were more popular, you opened your piggy bank and sprung for one of those fancy electronic notation devices. Your game record keeping (but not your playing strength) improved dramatically. When you showed up to the “State of Confusion Fall Open” you find that your approved

US Chess notation device is banned at that event. Right there in the advanced publicity it states: “No electronic notation devices allowed.” Score one for advanced publicity.

I Was Allowed to Do That at My Last Tournament! At the end of round three, on the first day of a two-day five round “State of Confusion Open,” your score is disappointing. You need some time to get your head on straight. You reason that by skipping the first game tomorrow — round four — you will gain the perspective you need to push wood in round five. You ask the TD to give you a half-point bye for your upcoming round four absence. You still plan to play the fifth and final round of the event. The TD understands, but points out that all half-point byes had to be requested by the end of round two, as per the advanced publicity. Your upcoming round four will be assigned a zero-point bye. You object. The last tournament you played in allowed half-point byes for any contest that you were not going to push wood in. The only requirement was to ask for the bye at least 30 minutes before the round was paired. What gives?

TJ Says: There are all sorts of details that can change from tournament to tournament without violating any US Chess rule or policy, as long as those differences are publicized or announced. Not publicized? Not announced? Then the default is the rulebook. Do yourself a favor and check out what is important to you before entering an event. Assume nothing.

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Just the Rules: 2022 Delegate Rulebook Roundup

October 5, 2022

What did the Delegates do this year at their annual meeting rulebook-wise? Some proposed rules were passed. Some proposed rules were put on hold. Some proposed rules got a thumbs down.

- (1) First up is an oldie but goodie — there was a motion proposing to eliminate the variation that allows touching the rook first while castling.

Many moons ago the US Chess rule for castling was changed to essentially mirror the FIDE rule — players must touch the king first when starting that maneuver. In US Chess practice that “you must touch the king first” version of the rule flopped. It was extremely unpopular among the troops. Countless American wood pushers had grabbed their rook first at the start of castling for years and years. They were upset for being punished for their lifelong habit.

There were attempts to change the new rule back to its original wording. Those tries never mustered up enough votes among the Delegates to take a trip in Mr. Peabody’s “Wayback Machine.” The debate carried on, and finally, a compromise was reached that seemed to end the debate. The new “touch the king first when castling” wording stayed put with an added variation. That variation allowed for the rook to be touched first. The debate was over, or was it?

One of this year’s Delegate motions aimed at eliminating that “rook touched first” variation. Did it get a thumbs up from the lawgivers? The motion was not exactly voted down by the delegates, but in a parliamentary move it was buried by a “postponed indefinitely” maneuver. Is the debate finally over? We shall see. Right now, we are keeping the current “rook can be touched first in castling” variation.

- (2) Allowing US Chess TDs to call the flag.

The motion to give “calling the flag” authority to tournament directors was well researched. Every spot in the rules impacted by this possible change got the proper wording modification(s).

In past discussions about allowing our rulebook to reflect this FIDE type of rule some interesting points were considered. Among them: FIDE events were better staffed. More staff means more eyes watch-

ing clocks with hanging flags. It seems unfair to have the TD call the game on some boards but not on others. There is also the point that some TDs might appear to be secretly influenced by one of the players. And what about the concept that in our rules a wood pusher with their flag down may remain silent until their opponent's flag also falls — right now that game is draw. If TDs call flags that opportunity is lost.

This motion also suffered the “postponed indefinitely” fate. Players, not TDs, are still responsible for making their own flag fall claims.

- (3) The Delegates sent a list of amendments to rule 28I (Opponents of expelled players) to the Rules Committee.

The committee will dive into this one for possible implementation on January 1, 2023. The amendments are mostly variations on what scores can be award the opponents of players expelled from an event — which includes being expelled for receiving assistance. Watch for news on this one.

- (4) Beginning January 1, 2023, new wording will be added to rule 21L1: A reasonable explanation for any late filing of an appeal to US Chess will be required.

Late appeals make gathering testimony and evidence problematical. Sidebar: 21L1 was discussed in an earlier column titled Wiggle Room Rules.

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Just the Rules: Old School and New School Cheating

November 7, 2022

Cheating in chess has been around for a long time. Old-timer Ruy Lopez is reported to have sat his opponents so that the sun was in their eyes. Nowadays there is a lot of electronic gear involved in the underhanded cheating process. Is the use of that gear the same or different than the good old days? Let's take a peek.

Bathroom Stalls Using the shield of the bathroom stall to cheat during a game is not new. Taking a book, or pocket chess set, into that out-of-sight location was an early try to gain an advantage. That morphed into the “phone-a-friend” practice. With more technological advances, a player can now hide inside a stall while consulting with chess-playing software on their phone. Some Super Swisses have hired staffers to help stem that software tide by “wandering” tournament players before they enter the restroom. They even sometimes secure a player's phone before the facilities are entered. Those anti-cheating measures have cut back on electronic cheating opportunities. Plus, it generates a lot of “peace of mind” for the honest wood pushers.

The old school method of using books or a pocket set in the stall is still very hard to prevent.

Clocks An analog clock's timer is pretty easy to fool with. The timing mechanism is essentially a spring that unwinds. The tension on that spring controls how fast or slow a clock ticks off playing time. There are a pair of levers on the back of the device that help control the speed of that tension. The dishonest player can use those levers to set one clock to run faster than the other one, or they can set their own timer to run slower.

A close relative of the lever trick is the clock-winding trick. On the back of an analog clock, there is a key for each timer that allows the user to wind the spring when its tension is low. By winding one spring tighter than the other, the two clocks will unwind at different speeds.

With the new digital clocks, the time is controlled without the aid of springs. So, adjusting the playing time is very difficult. What is easier, with some of those clocks, is to adjust the amount of delay and increment time for either you or your opponent. Those clock

displays are not that easy to read in order to determine if the delay or increment is set properly — and the same — for both sides. One player's delay, or increment, could be set differently than the other's (depending on the brand of timer). This difference can go unnoticed altogether, or at least until the end of the time control approaches.

In the above cases, how often do tournament chess generals actually check out how an opponent's clock is set? If most of you are like me, the answer is: never.

Analog clocks have two posts on top — one for each player. When a wood pusher presses down on their own post it stops their clock from running while starting their adversary's timer. Those two posts are typically connected internally by a bar, or rod, of some kind. Much like each side of a playground teeter-totter, when one side goes down the other side goes up. What is the trick here? The cheater can often, but not always, hold down their own post. This prevents their opponent from stopping their clock and starting the cheater's timer. Doing that every move is too obvious. Doing the “hold ‘em down” routine only every so often works much better. Given the widespread use of digital clocks, however, this time-fiddling trick has gone the way of the dinosaur.

Cheating That Works Without Technology Opponents can still agree to a draw before they even sit down to push a single pawn. They take their seats and whip out a move or two before officially agree to the half-point.

Opponents can also agree in secret to throw a game when greenbacks are involved. One of them gets a cash payment outright for losing — or, the opponents secretly split the prize money later when the win by either one can guarantee a payday.

Cheaters can still use a cohort — typically pretending to be a spectator — to signal them game-winning moves. This one is really hard to catch. When is a wink, nod, or scratch a signal versus something else?

Swapping player IDs is an oldie but goodie. The much better player simply pretends to be a lower-level wood pusher in order to mop up opponents and collect some greenbacks. This is a bit risky and gets caught more often than not by others who know the true identity of either player.

A player perusing books related to their current contest at the chess bookstore is still an oldie but goodie.

What have you seen over the years?

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Just The Rules: It's Q&A Time

December 1, 2022

This month, Tim takes questions from readers on a variety of topics ranging from claiming wins on times, how to claim a draw by repetition, and when the clock 'really' starts. - Ed.

Claiming a Win on Time

Q:* I had to make 15 moves in two minutes to meet the 40 moves in an hour (40/60 or 40/1) first time control in my game. Each time I, or my opponent, made a move, I inserted a check mark on my scoresheet. My opponent had three minutes left on their clock and also filled in their scoresheet, move by move, with check marks. They ran out of time. Their flag fell on move 39. I claimed a time forfeit win. The TD denied my claim and instructed us to play on into the next time control. Why?*

A: To make a successful time forfeit claim in that kind of time control, you need an accurate scoresheet. A scoresheet with no more than three missing or inaccurate move pairs is required. Check marks count for nothing when making a draw claim. By the way, you also need to have mating material to make a time forfeit claim, or else the game is a draw.

Q: *Do I need a complete and accurate score to make a time forfeit claim in a Sudden Death time control?*

A: All you need to do in a Sudden Death time control is demonstrate that your opponent's time ran out. Typically, their clock will note they ran out of time, you simply need to point this out. Yes, you still need mating material to make that claim.

Claiming a Draw by Repetition

Q: *I claimed a draw by perpetual check. The TD denied my claim. Why?*

A: Because there is no "perpetual check" rule. There is a rule that says if the same exact position is reached three times — not necessarily one move after another — during the game, a claim of a draw can be made. Imagine a camera that could take a picture of the board position after each move. When the exact same image appears 3 times — like on moves 23, 27 and 31 — then the game is a draw if the claim is made properly (see rule 14C). By the way, a draw claim — even a bogus one — is the same as a draw offer.

Q: *I was going over my game after it had finished. I lost. I noticed while analyzing that the same position appeared three times. Neither of us signed the other's scoresheet. I notified the TD that the game should have been scored as a draw, due to the same position appearing three times. The TD did not change the reported game result — a loss for me — to a draw. Why?*

A: You need to make claims while the game is in progress, not after the fact. A lot of evidence can get lost, or altered, after a game is over. Your score showed those three identical positions. Your opponent's score may not. Neither score was signed. A signed score helps verify that the scoresheet was an original. Are there any witnesses? After the game there is not even a board position for the TD to look at. Making claims after the end of the game is iffy at best. About the only concern a TD may take more note of is one involving cheating.

Starting the Clock

Q: *My opponent was late to our game. I am a good sport so I waited until they arrived before I started their clock. While walking around the playing room a TD spotted that my timer had not started ticking down for either player. I explained why. The TD said I could not do that. That seems unfair.*

A: I applaud your sportsmanship. Your kindness to your opponent was not the issue. If the two of you start your contest very late, it could hold up the end of the round — and possibly the start of the next round — for everyone else.

Q: *I left home without my set, board, or clock. The organizer did not provide any equipment. At the start of round two I went over to my assigned place. My opponent was not there. He showed up with his equipment twenty minutes after the start of the round. He set our clocks so that each of us got docked ten minutes of playing time. I pointed out that I should be allotted my full playing time — I was there at the start of the game. He should be docked the full amount of his tardiness — twenty minutes. The TD agreed with my opponent.*

A: Equipment must be set up before the clock can be started. In this instance both players had to split the time that the equipment was missing. You had no equipment. Your opponent was not there. Neither you nor your counterpart had a chance to make even one move. The opportunity to move and press a clock might prove to be very important if a player arrives near the “late for a game” forfeit time. With no equipment that opportunity is lost. By the way, if

you had both been on time without a set, board, or clock, then the time it takes both of you to find, and set up, equipment for your contest is equally deducted from both of your playing times.

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Just The Rules: How Does That Happen?

January 3, 2023

An Unrated Wins the Upset Prize Chess rules simply can't be written to cover every possibility, especially for unintended results. Sometimes lengthy, wordy fixes take care of the problem. Often those fixes — by the powers that be — create their own unintended outcomes. Often it is just better to let individual organizers and TDs deal with those outcomes in their own way.

Here is one such scenario, explained in three simple steps. First, the tournament offers an upset prize. Then, the tournament assigns a rating of (0) to unrated players. Finally, an unrated player wins the upset prize ahead of “more deserving” upsets. Now, let's explain how each step happens, and then discuss potential solutions.

First: The tournament offers an Upset Prize Upset prizes are easy to calculate, as it is simple arithmetic. The ratings of the two wood-pushers in the contest are subtracted from each other. If the lower rated player wins the game, their score is that point difference. If the game is a draw, their score is half of that point difference. At the end of the tournament, the lower-rated player with the largest score takes home the Upset Prize gold. That math seems pretty simple, until the “unrated question” comes up. What numerical rating should be assigned to an unrated player when doing the math?

Second: A rating of zero (0) gets assigned to an unrated player when calculating the Upset Prize Most unrated players are beginners playing in their first rated tournament. But some “unrateds” are actually very skilled and experienced. Remember that the “unrated” moniker is not typically replaced with a provisional rating until *after* their first event. Using a zero for unrateds in making the Upset Prize evaluations gives them a huge advantage over established and provisionally rated wood-pushers competing for the same prize.

For example, an unrated is assigned a zero when doing the arithmetic for this award. That zero does not get used for pairings or other prizes. Their opponent is rated 700. They beat their opponent. The unrated's score towards this prize is 700. That is a big advantage overrated wood-pushers trying to claim the upset reward. A 1400 that beats a 1992 only collects 592 points?!

Third: The unrated player wins the upset prize with their 700-point score The rulebook does not specifically address this calculation concern. Organizers and TDs alike each have their own brand of solu-

tions. In my experience there are two common ways to deal with this Upset Prize quirk:

- (1) Pre-event publicity, like: “Upset Prize for rated players only.”
- (2) Don’t offer this prize at all.

If players are concerned about those calculations, ask before entering.

News: 2023 rules are now online There are not enough changes to our rulebook to justify an updated print, or e-book, version for 2023. It is simple economics: the cost of production would far outweigh the income from sales.

If you already have a print copy of the seventh edition, a list of changes for 2023 can be downloaded [here](#). Print it out, fold it in half, top-to-bottom, and place it in your rulebook. A free updated online seventh edition for 2023 is available by using the link below.

On another note, I made an adjustment to 28D1 that was so minor it was not mentioned in the change document online: “Changes are likely in the future and will be announced in US Chess rating supplements **by US Chess**.” Now-a-days our supplements are simply ratings lists, not information vehicles as per the old days. And yes, years ago the Delegates gave the editor the ability to make small editorial changes like this without first running it by them.

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Just The Rules: Faulty Thinking or Something Else?

February 3, 2023

As long as there have been chess rules there have been thousands of different ways of bending them. Sometimes those bends are intentional, but most times they are not. It takes effort to see how far a rule will bend without breaking. Here are two examples.

Twisting The Words to Change Their Meaning. You make a move without pressing your clock, an oversight. After a long think, and an even longer wait, your adversary replies to your move and places his piece on a new square. Yes, while your clock is still running. Now he notices that his brilliancy is really a first-class blunder.

You have yet to reply to this blunder. As fast as he can, he takes back his newly minted mistake. You claim, “You touched that piece, you have to move it. I claim the touch move rule.”

He points out, “It was still your turn to move. You can’t claim the touch move rule when it is still your turn to move. After you complete your move by pressing your clock, I can still make any move I want. Touch move does not apply here.” Those rules, he is trying to argue, all say “touch move” only applies to the player who is “on move;” i.e., it is their turn to move.

Faulty thinking or a dirty trick?

TJ Says: The intent of those “touch move” rules are to ensure that if a player touches his piece, it gets moved. The chess lawgivers approved the letter-of-the law that they believed made that idea clear. Those rulebook entries even have language to cover the accidental “touch” of a piece. But the chess law makers can’t realistically foresee, or cover, every possible situation. It is clear in this case that your opponent intended to essay that blunder, as he picked up that piece and released it on new real estate. The blunder stands.

It’s the TD’s Fault?! Your opponent is not notating in a G/45 + 30 contest (each side has 45 minutes to make all of their moves plus an additional, cumulative, 30 seconds per move). It was early in the game but he is not scribbling down his moves on his scoresheet. You make a claim. Your adversary chimed in to inform the TD, “I can remember all of the game moves, so there is no need to write them down.” After courteously explaining the rule, the TD instructed him to write down his moves — plus your moves — as they were

completed. The TD also told him, politely, to catch up on the game score on his own time. He was warned that playing time would be added to your clock if he broke the notation rule in the future.

Half a dozen moves later he started, again, not jotting down the game score. You complain again. This time the TD penalized him and added two minutes to your playing time, as per her warning.

Yep, a few moves later your fellow wood pusher's non-notating plan is once again in effect, and you make another claim. You gain another two more minutes of playing time. The TD notifies him that the next penalty will be to subtract playing time from his clock.

It only took a few more moves before your opponent once more failed at their score keeping duties. This time the TD, as promised, subtracted two minutes from your opponent's thinking time. In this instance she warned him that if he failed to notate again, he risked being forfeited. He quickly made his next move — a major blunder — and instantly resigned. Sidebar: he also failed to register that move on his scoresheet.

While walking away, he mumbled, "The TD disrupted my concentration with all of those nonsense rulings." He added, "Those interruptions made me lose focus and caused me to make that game-losing move. I'm going to appeal." Of course, you were interrupted just as much as he was, but you did not blunder!?

TJ Says: This case reminds me of a Morgan Freeman (?) quote: "Don't allow your emotions to overpower your intelligence."

If players want to appeal a TD's ruling, then they should collect their evidence, not their hurt feelings. Feelings-based appeals, without verification, are just a waste of everyone's time. The game is over. Simply appealing the TD's decision up the chain of command at the time of the incident might have been a better reaction: at least inform the ruling TD that you are playing under protest. Trying to indict a TD for your own lack of emotional self-control is no proof at all. Looking up the rule to make sure you are on solid ground before walking the appeal path might save you a lot of heartache. In this case the TD was right, and very patient indeed.

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Just The Rules: Combined Sections, New Prizes?

March 2, 2023

The State of Confusion Class Tournament advertised that some classes may need to be combined, for instance if one section has too few warriors to even pair. This tournament is a five-rounder. Playing up one class is allowed for an extra fee.

The last section — Class D & Below — is for those rated below 1400. There are only four entries and three prizes: \$75-\$50-\$25. Imagine how happy those four players are about the odds of taking home some gold.

The next higher section — Class C — has fifteen entries including five Class D & Below players that chose to play up. The prizes there — with a top rating cap of 1599 — are: \$100-\$75-\$50. Often, lower-rated players choose to play up so they can face tougher opposition.

The TD may decide to combine those two classes to create a new hybrid Class C/D & Below section. The only question now is what prizes can those five Class D players who chose to play up can qualify for. Can they now claim any of the newly added Class D & Below prizes that have suddenly become available via the section blending? After all, when they paid to play up, they relinquished the opportunity to compete for the prizes in the Class D & Below section.

Option One: The Class C players (1400-1599) can win only the \$100-\$75-\$50 prizes. The original four Class D & Below wood pushers, from the lower section, qualify only for their original prizes of \$75-\$50-\$25. The five Class D players — who shelled out extra greenbacks to play up into the higher section — can win prize money from either class.

The four D & Below wood pushers who did *not* elect to play up are going to be really disappointed. They are barred from taking home any of those Class C prizes. And now, they also now need to battle for “their” prizes with those other Class D & Below contestants that chose to play up. That makes it nine players seeking the \$75-\$50-\$25 prize fund instead of just four.

Option Two: The opportunity to win gold remains the same as in option one for the C Class contestants. The lower newly added Class D & Below entrants, that moved into this upper section, still can only compete for their original prize fund. Those five Class D

players that paid the extra fee to play up into the higher section get a refund for their play-up fee. But now they can only compete for the prizes set aside for Class D & Below players in this combined section.

This might make those four players from the lower D & Below class a bit grumpy. After all, there were three prizes to claim for those four weekend gamers. In the newly configured section, there are now nine players (the four initial D & Below entries plus the five playing up entries) competing for those same three original prize amounts of \$75-\$50-\$25.

Option Three: This one should look familiar to most of us: it is essentially a prize fund like those we are used to in Under sections of other tournaments. Every player in the newly merged section can chase after the original top Class C prizes. Only the best three scoring Class D & Below players (now, *all* nine of them) additionally also qualify for the D & Below prizes of \$75-\$50-\$25. The five original playing up wood pushers get refunded their extra fee.

Realistically it is not likely, now, that any of the nine Class D & Below rated players will essay many games with those Class C players. In theory the C-rated weekend gamesters will likely take home those top prizes, but one never knows for sure. Additionally, those rated below 1400 will probably now face off against each other more often — especially in the later rounds — than against the Class C players.

Option Four: Leave both sections alone. The shortfall of game players in the D & Below class section — with only four players — can be paired against each other more than once.

If the TD can get every player to agree, they might even consider a Double Round Robin where each player faces off twice against each of the other players (pushing both white wood plus black wood against each rival). Of course, for that to work the time controls would need to be tweaked to fit in the extra game needed for the double Quad pairings. Remember that the tweaked double-play Quad time controls would create more than the advertised five contests. There might be issues of noise in the tournament hall with that section's new game schedule.

There might be one player that objects to the new time controls. Given the lack of pre-event publicity regarding any section's low attendance alternatives, that would cancel the entire Quad idea. A Swiss pairing system of sorts, with no tweaked time controls, could

be implemented. The idea would still be that *some* contestants would need to play each other more than once.

TJ Says: In any mid-to-large tournament with multiple sections, combining sections would probably not even be required. All of the sections would draw enough chess enthusiasts so that reasonable pairings could be made in each round. In smaller events, the need to combine sections becomes more of a reality.

I like options three and four. Why? Option three is about as fair as it gets when following the exact announcement on the pre-event publicity. Option four keeps the sections intact. Everyone receives what they expected and more; i.e., it gives more bang for the buck with the tweaked time control double-play Quad option with a bonus game added to the lower section

And let's not get started on what to do if trophies are involved.

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Just The Rules: Nine Rules of Thumb for Color Distribution

April 4, 2023

“What color am I playing next?” It is a time-honored tradition for players to study the wallchart searching for their next opponent. Wallcharts nowadays can be generated by pairing programs from the top scores on down for every round. This automatically places players in order within their appropriate score groups. Results sheets are often posted close by. That makes it easy for wood-pushers to see which players they could face in the next round.

First: check for byes, withdrawals, and other players dropping in or out of your score group. Only then can you split your group in half to find your probable next rival (top half vs bottom half pairings). Now, calculate what color you will play.

Ideally players alternate between playing the white and black pieces from one round to the next. Unfortunately, that is not always possible. Rule 29E (Color Allocation) takes up 13-plus pages of ink in dealing with color assignments. Even then, all the bases don’t seem to get covered. Within those 13-plus pages are nine TD TIPS, many detailed examples and seven variations of the basic color assignment rules. If you are interested in the details, check out 29E’s examples.

This column will not try to cover 13-plus pages of all that material. Instead, here are some “Rules of Thumb” that cover the basic ideas that help players guess at their next color assignment. Or, you can just wait for the TD to fire up their pairings program and crank out the games for the next round.

ONE: “Rules of Thumb” are only estimations.

“Rules of Thumb” are not totally accurate. Rather, they are just general tips that work most of the time. There are going to be occasional rare exceptions.

TWO: Typically, a player will not play the same color three games in a row.

Playing the same color three times in a row is a rarity, yet, rulebook-wise, it is possible. One way is when there is no other way to pair a score group. Next, if a player needs to equalize the number of times they played the white and black pieces. Which brings us to...

THREE: Equalizing the color assignments for a player is more important than alternating colors.

This concept is typically called “due color.” The rules aim at making sure as often as possible that wood-pushers have played the white and black pieces the same number of times while also rotating between being the general of the white and black pieces.

Remember, in the even-numbered rounds balancing the color assignment is one of the primary goals.

Example: In a six round tournament, Player A was assigned B-W-B-B-W in their first five games. Balancing the number of both colors assigned — three blacks and three whites — is the aim for round six. According to our “Rule of Thumb,” this player’s due color for round six is white.

In the odd numbered rounds, there will always be a color imbalance. With an odd number of games there will be an odd number of color distributions.

By the way, FIDE more often emphasizes alternating colors rather than balancing colors.

FOUR: Byes and forfeits don’t count towards due color.

Example: Player A has essayed B-W-B-B-W while Player B has played B-W-BYE-W-B.

Player A has been the general of the black pieces more often than with the white pieces, so the colors are out of balance. Player B has had the colors of white and black assigned to them the same number of times: two of each (that bye does not count for color). If player A plays the black pieces in the next round— round six for them — that would mean four blacks in six games. If Player B plays either color in their next game— their fifth game — they would be out of balance either way. Their pairing is:

*Player A (B-W-B-B-W-**W**) – Player B (B-W-**BYE**-W-B-**B**)*

FIVE: Swapping players is the preferred tool when fixing due color problems.

One player can be swapped — within limits — for another in the same score group. That way, as many players as possible get assigned their “due color.” These swaps can get very complicated, especially if the swap pairs two rivals that have essayed an earlier game against each other (not replaying the same opponent again trumps color

assignment rules). Swaps avoid many of the nuances required in our “Rules of Thumb.” Swaps may produce unfair pairings by exchanging a much lower rated wood pusher for a much higher rated opponent. So, switches of more than 80 points between those players, to balance or alternate colors, are not recommended.

Example 1. The natural top half of the score group vs the bottom half of the score group pairings:

Player A 1594 (W-B-W) – Player B 1595 (W-B-W)

Player C 1550 (B-W-B) – Player D 1510 (B-W-B)

If Players B and D swap places the color assignments are solved. And the switch is well within the 80-point range.

Player D 1510* (B-W-B-**W**)* – Player A 1594 (W-B-W-B)

Player C 1550 (B-W-B-**W**) – **Player B 1595*** (W-B-W-B)*

Why the 80-point rule? Try this out:

Example 2. The natural top half of the score group vs the bottom half of the score group pairings:

Player A 2001 (W-B-W) – Player B 1967 (W-B-W).

Player C 1904 (B-W-B) – Player D 1705 (B-W-B).

The swap of Players B and D is a lot more than an 80-point difference. While the color assignments get solved, look at the difference in those ratings — and therefore the playing strengths — between Players B and D. That swap would result in a 262-point difference — far from the 80-point limit — and a huge mismatch. A better choice is the swap of Players C and B. Their rating difference is only a 63-point spread. It also solves the color problems for all four players without any huge mismatches:

Player C* 1904 (B-W-B-**W**)* – Player A 2001 (W-B-W-B).

Player D 1705 (B-W-B-**W**) – **Player B* 1967** (W-B-W-B)*

Yes, there is also a 200-point switcheroonie rule. It involves more complex swaps in order to solve way out of balance color problems. If you are interested check out rule 29E5b. These “Rules of Thumb” adhere to the “keep it simple” principle. This way, color assignments can be worked out in one’s head from the wallchart. That 200-point rule only kicks in when things are not simple plus way out of whack.

SIX: The player that is most out of balance typically gets their due color.

Example: Player A has essayed the colors W-W-B-W. Player B's color scheme was W-B-B-W.

Player A has a surplus of three whites in four games. Player B's colors are perfectly balanced. Player A is assigned to defend with the black pieces in their upcoming contest with Player B. Their round five pairing:

*Player B (W-B-B-W-**W**) – Player A (W-W-B-W-**B**)*

SEVEN: The higher-ranked player gets the nod for equalizing color assignments.

If opponents are within the same score group, then higher-ranked means higher-rated.

If an opponent comes from outside a higher score group, they are considered the higher ranked player even if their rating is lower than their opponent's. The 2½/3 score group has an odd number of wood pushers. The lowest rated player in that group — Player A, rated 1502 — drops down to find an opponent in the 2/3 score group. Their opponent is Player B, rated 1599. Player A is the higher ranked player.

If two opponents have exactly the same color history in exactly the same order, the higher-ranked player will get the nod for their “due color” assignment.

EIGHT: Out of balance colors? Different color histories? Due the same color? Look to the past.

Example: Player A (B-W-B-W-B) – Player B (B-B-W-W-B)

Player A and Player B are out of balance, both with too many black piece assignments. Each of them is looking to be assigned white for their next game. Looking back, they both played black in round five. The two of them also essayed white in round four; however, in round three they played the opposite colors: Player A was the general of the black pieces while Player B was the commander of the white pieces. So, for round six:

*Player A (B-W-B-W-B-**W**) – Player B (B-B-W-W-B-**B**)*

NINE: Don't break up a score group!

Finding an appropriate opponent in another score group simply to balance color assignments is to be avoided. Players need to stay in their own score group, even if their color assignments are out of whack.

A wood-pusher can leave their odd-membered score group to make it an even membered group by jettisoning down into the next lower group. Typically, the lowest rated member of the score group moves down.

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Just The Rules: Quiz-a-mania is Runnin' Wild

May 1, 2023

This columnist has come across enough material to create another fun quiz for your enjoyment. Let's get started!

That can't be my pairing!! 1. After the pairings are posted for the first round, Player A approaches the TD and points out that the pairings are wrong. Why? They are paired against Player B, a member of their club. Five members of the club, including both Players A and B, all entered the event all at once together online. The TD should have known to not pair them against each other. After checking the early entry fee records the TD cannot find any non-pairing request. What can the TD do at this point?

- A) The TD can do nothing. Player A must play Player B since they did not request a non-pairing.
- B) Player A must play Player B in round 1. The TD will avoid pairing club players against each other for the first half of the event in future rounds.
- C) The TD can look at the pairings around this game and see if a reasonable switch can be made. The TD will avoid pairing all the club players against each other for the first half of the event in future rounds.
- D) All of the above.
- E) None of the above

What time was the clock set for? 2. You and your opponent are in time trouble in a game with 90 minutes per player and 15 seconds of increment per move. You still have several minutes left. Your opponent's digital clock is displaying all zeros on move 60. You claim a win on time. Your opponent disputes your claim. They point out the clock was set with an increment of 10 seconds instead of 15 seconds; therefore, the missing time (5 seconds per move) should be, and can be, added to the playing time. The clock is theirs. They set it wrong. What did the TD Rule?

- A) The TD agrees, after checking the clock settings, with your opponent via rule 16P1—the increment was not set properly and is handled like a 16P claim (erroneously set clocks).
- B) The TD denies your opponent's claim. The wording of rules 16P1 and 16P can't be applied here as the game is over.

- C) The TD does some math and calculates that by move 60 each of you were denied that extra five seconds of increment time per move, or 300 seconds (5 minutes). The TD resets both timers by adding 5 minutes to each clock. The game continues.
- D) All of the above.
- E) None of the above.

Blitz Chess—you gotta be fast. 3. In a rated US Chess Blitz game your opponent grabs a piece from the board and hesitates before setting it on the intended square. During that hesitation their digital clock displays those dreaded zeros, meaning that they are out of time. You have mating material, so you claim a win. They claim that the intended move was going to be checkmate; therefore, they did not lose. They claim that you lost and they won. “That’s the rule,” is their explanation. What did the TD rule?

- A) The TD upholds your opponent’s claim, you lose
- B) The TD rules that the game is a draw.
- C) The TD denies your opponent’s claim, you win.
- D) All of the above.
- E) None of the above.

Solutions: 1. Rule 28T tells us that players can request a non-pairing as long as it does not cause any pairing problems. But if those requests come late — like after the pairings are made — that is a problem. TDs have workarounds if they choose, but are not required, to use them. So, in this instance, “D” is the correct answer.

- 2. In rule 16P1 the rulebook solution when there is no delay or increment set is: “*The delay or increment should be set for the remainder of the game.*” Since this game is over, rule 16P1 — and/or rule 16P — can’t be applied. Players need to make a claim about any clock issues *before* the flag falls: they had the entire game to notice any irregularities. Given that the clock owner (your opponent) set the timer, their claim just might be a dirty trick. Or is it? Did they plan the clock miscue? This is fodder for a lot of investigation. The best bet by the TD here is answer “B.”
- 3. “C” is the answer. Why? Your opponent’s flag fell before checkmate was delivered (Chapter 11, rule 7c). Besides, the wording to the rule they cited does not appear in the rulebook. One of the challenges with Blitz chess is that there are many different types of local rules that players might be used to, but these rules cannot be used in officially rated US Chess events.

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Just The Rules: Did You Ever Notice That...

June 6, 2023

No fancy studies are needed. No complicated math is necessary. All that is necessary is for us to see something time after time before we make it a generalized “getting along in life” rule. For example: way more often than we would like, we buy something only to see it go on sale a week late for a lot less moola. Here is a list of chess tournament generalizations that seem to occur over and over again.

Did you ever notice that despite the number of signs posted at a tournament, many players fail to read them? There are signs with round times for each day of an event; yet TDs constantly get asked about the next round time. Some events post their own “*for this event only*” rules Those posts go begging for readers. “Use the Other Door” is a sign that gets disregarded by a small percentage of event participants. Those door signs are often there to help keep the noise level generated by foot traffic, hallway chatter and squeaky doors to a minimum inside the playing area.

Did you ever notice that the number of pairing disputes has plummeted since the advent of computer-generated match-ups? In the past, especially at Super Swisses, making pairings by hand was subject to TD fatigue coupled with many wide-ranging rulebook dictates. Computers changed all of that.

Did you ever notice that too many players fail to stop their clock when making a claim? If the clock is still running while the claim is being processed, the odds increase that someone is going to lose on time before there is a resolution to the dispute.

Did you ever notice that, “I used to be rated...,” is the most common response to the question, “What’s your rating?” That was something the late NTD and IA Wayne Clark observed.

Did you ever notice that players want tournaments with five-to-six rounds all played in one day using long time controls (like two-to-three hours)? And, of course, round one does not start until 11 AM with the last round finishing around 9 PM. Another of Wayne Clark’s Chess Universe perceptions.

Did you ever notice that chess players think TDs can set every brand of chess clock, even the obscure ones? There are only very few major brands of timers that TDs *might* be able to set; however,

those off-brand clocks are probably not in the tournament official's skillset. Also, consider that TDs can't afford to purchase every brand of clock just to learn how to set them. And what if the TD rules that you deserve an extra two minutes when your claim is upheld? If neither the TD nor you can adjust the game clock, then it becomes a problem. Check out rule 5F7. It basically says players, not TDs, are in charge of setting their own chess timers. As a matter of practice most TDs will help a wood pusher set their clock anyhow. Well, if it is in their wheelhouse, that is.

Did you ever notice that at least one chess warrior per tournament still manages to ignore the Bye and Withdrawal sign-up sheets? Talk about messing up pairings and scores for other players, not to mention that a fellow chess-lover will need to sit and wait for a no-show opponent!

Did you ever notice that chess warriors sometimes forget to post their results? The rules do say that both wood pushers are responsible for this task. There is an air of excitement when a game ends. The desire to analyze the moves is understandable. Realistically — despite attempts by event officials and rulebook instructions — game-concluding emotions sometimes outweigh getting this necessary game ender task done. When the game contestants do not report their results, it opens the door for a lot of potential, avoidable, pairing and prize problems.

Did you ever notice that wall charts seem to not be checked for accuracy as often as they should be by the event's competitors? Having correct results and player info benefits everyone.

Did you ever notice that way too many post-mortems take place in the tournament room?

Do you have any additions to this list?

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Just The Rules #70: My Opponent is Rated What!?!?!?

July 3, 2023

What's Their Rating? You made a decision to check out the competition before the start of round one at the State of Confusion Class. The organizers updated the event's pre-entry list daily on their webpage. Among the entries you find several GMs that are scheduled to push some wood. Further on down the list you spot some of the event's yearly participants, and many of them are good chess friends. You're looking forward to essaying some Blitz and Bughouse with them. There appears to be just one unrated player among the early entries. Your section is a couple of rungs up the ladder away from their Unrated section.

The first-round pairings go up. You instantly recognize your opponent's name. It is the same unrated player that you spotted earlier while perusing the pre-entry list. Except now they have a rating. A rating that places them squarely in your section. How is that possible?

28C. "...the director has assigned a player a rating."

Starting with the language in the rule above, and proceeding through rule 28E3, TDs are given all sorts of advice to follow when assigning a rating to a player. Let's look at a few of the more common instances:

Official Published Ratings Adjustments There are times between the official monthly ratings supplements that a wood-pusher earns a higher rating than the one published for that month. TDs are allowed to use — but are not required to use — that higher rating for pairings and prizes. This adjustment is *good only at* that one individual tournament: it does not follow a player from event to event throughout the month. Lower ratings that fall below the official published ratings are not eligible for this adjustment.

Example 1: You enter an event with an official rating of 1593. Shortly before the pairings are made you show the TD your new online (but unofficial) rating of 1611. The TD can (might) assign you the 1611 rating for pairings and prizes for this one event only, but they are not required to that.

Example 2: You show up at a class tournament sporting an 1806 rating — a rating that places you into the Class A section. You show the TD your new unofficial online rating of 1791. That would

allow you to qualify for entry into the Class B section. Your 1806 rating can't be lowered by the TD. You must compete in the Class A section.

Players without US Chess Ratings Often an experienced chess warrior from a faraway land will travel to essay games at a US Chess event. That individual is probably not really non-rated. They probably have a rating from a foreign country, or they have a FIDE rating. With today's instant access to the net, TDs can usually verify those ratings with relative ease. The rulebook has a boatload of information on how to convert those (verifiable) ratings into US Chess ratings (for the purpose of pairings and prizes at that one tournament). Those conversion formulas are different from one home country to another. There is also more information about conversion formulas in the US Chess online ratings document (section 2).

Example 1: A Canadian (CFC) player enters a US Chess tournament while claiming their homeland rating to be 1782. They ask to be entered into the Class B section of the event. The Canadian federation lists this player as 1782. The rulebook says no adjustment is needed. The US Chess online ratings document uses the formula $1.1 \times \text{CFC} - 240$ ($1.1 \times 1782 - 240 = 1720.2$). The formula is slightly different for CFC ratings equal to or below 1500, before you get any ideas. Our Canadian visitor can play in the Class B section with a rating of either 1782 or 1720. As a practical matter, the TD can follow the rulebook wording and not adjust their rating.

Example 2: Player A is a visiting foreign wood-pusher. They have a FIDE rating that is verified as 2385. There is a prize for those rated below 2400. For this one event's pairings and prizes, the rulebook conversion guide says to choose one of three formulas: **FIDE + 50** ($2385 + 50 = 2435$), **FIDE x 0.895 + 367** ($.895 \times 2385 + 367 = 2501.6$) or **FIDE + 100** ($2385 + 100 = 2485$). The US Chess online ratings document indicates that the math for converting FIDE ratings is $1.02 \times \text{FIDE} + 20$ ($1.02 \times 2385 + 20 = 2452.7$). The formula is slightly different for FIDE wood-pushers rated equal to or below 2000. The TD can choose whichever FIDE formula that works for them. Note that all of this player's converted ratings put them out of contention for any 2300 prize. The safe move for a TD is to assign the highest converted rating of 2502 (rounded up from the conversion formula) to this player; however, any of the converted ratings can be used.

One Last Word When a player's rating is unverifiable, they typ-

ically play as Unrated in their first event, or they are seeded into the top section. Some events limit the prizes for this first timer's over-the-board experience.

Individual organizers may use different formulas and methods to determine what converted rating to use for foreigners *as long as they advertise that method in their publicity*. The bottom line is that TDs can follow US Chess advice, use their own formulas, or just make these players essay games as an Unrated.

Some organizers have been known to check all the available sources when seeking a player's highest rating. That top number then gets assigned to that player for that event. So, if an entrant's top of the line rating is in Blitz or FIDE or foreign or Quick or..., it trumps the US Chess official monthly regular rating. Of course, this ratings assignment method needs to be advertised in advance of the tournament.

For a bucketful of information about all the different ins and outs of assigned ratings—improperly assigned ratings, players with multiple official ratings, assignments based on non-rated activity, etc.—check out the rules cited above using the online link below or see pages 89 – 93 in the printed rulebook.

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Just The Rules: Organizer Blues

July 27, 2023

Four Things You Didn't Know About Affiliates Our rulebook has scant wording regarding chess tournament organizers. In contrast, Tournament Directors (TDs) get an entire chapter to themselves. But organizers only get Rule 23.

The first sentence of that directive puts to rest the idea that individuals are the organizers of rated chess events. Only US Chess Affiliates get that official privilege. You can sign up for an Affiliate Membership [here](#). Rule 23 tells us what expectations come with that Affiliate Membership. Without an affiliate, a TD cannot submit a tournament ratings report. In practice there is even more to know about affiliates than rule 23. Check out these top four things that you might not about affiliates:

1. The TD and the Organizer are two separate jobs that can be done by two different people.

Many TDs also wear the organizer's hat, but those two jobs don't need to be fulfilled by the same person. Affiliates can authorize TDs to be their onsite official. It has been observed that smaller events — especially club tournaments — often are directed by a TD that happens to also be the affiliate. This has led many a player to mistakenly conclude that a single person must always be both the TD and organizer. At Super Swisses, organizers are the ones that take care of pre-event publicity, event details, site rental, staffing, etc. Then, once the tournament starts, the TD takes over. At smaller events, one person likely wears both the TD and the organizer hats at once. The larger an event gets the more likely that the TD and organizer are not the same individual. All the same, it is still difficult for the average tournament wood-pusher to tell the difference between those two jobs.

2. Organizers can submit rating reports to US Chess too.

An affiliate — i.e., the organizer — on a routine basis authorizes a TD, or several TDs, to submit official rating reports to US Chess for them. If a TD releases the ratings report directly to an affiliate, the affiliate — instead of the TD — submits the rating report directly to US Chess.

3. Organizers are responsible for paying the prize fund, not the TD.

Affiliates, not their designated TDs, are responsible for seeing that the prizes and all other chess bills — like new and renewed US Chess memberships — get paid. Sometimes one of their TDs has access to the affiliate's accounts. That allows that TD to hand out prize gold directly to the tournament winners. Other times all a TD can do is calculate the prize money and pass that list along to the affiliate for payment.

TDs must have an affiliate's consent to file rating reports. To avoid securing an affiliate membership, some TDs simply have an affiliate add their name to an existing affiliate's approved TD list. That-a-way, those extraneous TDs can submit rating reports using that affiliate's ID. Those onsite officials typically do their own leg work in securing a site, creating event details, publicizing the tournament and paying prizes; however, if that TD fails to pay the prizes, submit a ratings report, or collect US Chess dues, then it's the affiliate on the hook. Those affiliates could then experience US Chess sanctions as well as possible civil liabilities.

4. There is more than one kind of affiliate.

While the rulebook does not list them, there are four kinds of affiliates: College, School, Prison, and General. Those names alone signal the specific interests, and privileges, for each kind of "affiliateship." State affiliates get pulled from the General affiliate category via US Chess/Delegates. They have extra duties and responsibilities to US Chess: naming delegates — via some process — to the yearly Delegate's convention, determining various state champions (typically via sanctioned events), etc.

Any affiliate's US Chess sign-up needs to designate a manager, or managers. Only those managers are allowed to make any changes to the affiliate's US Chess data such as designating TDs, official addresses, adding and deleting managers plus TDs. In other words, the paperwork! Those managers do not need to be the ones responsible for the event-to-event details. Clubs (affiliates) change leadership upon occasion and those new details need to be noted to US Chess.

If you are interested in which affiliates are in your area click **here**.

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Just The Rules: Some Rulebook Updates Coming in 2024

September 1, 2023

Not all of the rulebook updates passed by the delegates at their annual meeting were major. There will be some minor housekeeping rules changes that will clear up any real and potential language confusion. Of course, there will be some big changes. Here is a list of adjustments that will probably be noticed the most:

Notation required for both 30-second delay and 30-second increment.

In recent times, games with a 30-second delay followed the rules for delay time controls: no notation in time pressure. Not scribbling down your moves with a hanging flag works great for shorter time delay controls. It flops big time for longer time controls. What is the notation difference in a 30-second delay and a 30-second increment time control? Currently, a 30-second increment requires notation, but a 30-second delay does not.

However, the point of both long-delay and long-increment time controls is to give the wood-pusher enough time to bang out the moves and notate them, especially at the end of time control. Shorter time delay and shorter increment time rules will remain the same. But in 2024, the 30-second—*or greater*—time controls for *both delay and increment* will require jotting down all of your moves, even in a time crunch.

Chess computers banned from tournament play!

The first time computers were allowed to essay rated games in an OTB tournament appeared in Tim Redman's fourth edition of the rulebook (1987). That regulation, and all of its references, will be gone, erased and eliminated starting in 2024. In reality, there has not even been a US Chess computer membership purchased for several years. In the past, those hunks of wires, diodes and circuits were not quite as strong as our top-notched human wood-pushers. Some upper-echelon players looked forward to being paired with those electronic wonders: it was like getting a free point. The days of weak chess-playing computers is long gone.

Another real problem developed in the past when players were allowed to sign the "Do not pair me with a computer" list. That "no-play" list created wacky pairings. As a result, organizers individually

started to not allow computers to enter their event. Eliminating the rule simply reflects the current reality of chess-playing computers not entering — and not being wanted at — rated tournaments.

Use of the reasonably complete scoresheet rule gets cleared up.

An adequate scoresheet is not the same as a “reasonably complete” one. Some claims — other than time forfeits — only need an adequate scoresheet: triple repetition draw claims, director counting moves in sudden death and 50 consecutive move claims, to name a few.

For the triple repetition claim, for example, the entire scoresheet is simply not needed. All that is required is the notational evidence that proves the three-peat claim. With a reference to a reasonably complete scoresheet embedded in the three-time position rule, some claims were denied. Why? Several stumbles in notation early in the game deep-sixed the three-position claim. That early shortfall should not deny an adequate triple position claim much later in the game.

To clear up when the use of an adequate score can be used, those references to “a reasonably complete scoresheet (13C7)” are going to be removed from the appropriate rules to avoid any misunderstanding. For some rules only the small accurate portion of the score will do as evidence in some claims.

NOTE: Still in effect in 2024, with no changes, is rule 13C7 (“Definition of a reasonably complete scoresheet”). It outlines what is and is not acceptable when using a scoresheet to make a non-sudden death time forfeit claim.

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Just The Rules: Quizamania is Runnin' Wild, Again

October 5, 2023

Three multiple choice goodies flavored with a touch of astonishment. The solutions are at the end of the column.

1. Bending the Rules? You could see by the way the four of them strolled up to the registration desk that they were headed toward complications. It was just like one of those slow-motion strutting quartet scenes from the movies. It was probably their body language that gave them away. They had a special request when entering the Annual State of Confusion Quads. They did not want to be paired against each other, as they were family.

Their ratings would make them the first-, second-, third- and fourth-highest-rated wood-pushers at the event. Those rankings seeded them all into the same quad. Since they did not want to essay rated games against each other. What options are available?

A. Place those four players in the top quad. They have to play each other.

B. Thank them for coming to the event and don't accept their entry fees.

C. Place each of the four family members, individually, in different quads.

D. All of the above are possibilities.

2. Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire?! Your opponent makes a move and offers you a draw. It's a tough decision. You both need a win to collect serious tournament cash. A draw soothes the ego, but reduces your take home pay. After a deep think, and some serious headache causing game analysis, you utter, "I accept your draw offer." Your opponent's reaction is totally unexpected, "What draw? I didn't offer you a draw. You are a liar!" And now the real headache begins. Oh, what to do?

A. There is no evidence that your opponent offered a draw. The game continues.

B. Your claim is the same as offering a draw. Your opponent rejects the offer. The game continues.

C. Your claim is the same as offering a draw. Your opponent accepts the offer. The game is a draw.

D. All of the above are possible.

3. Scoresheet Accuracy Not Needed? Your scoresheet accurately shows no pieces were captured — by either you or your opponent — since move 57. Neither of you can show any pawn movement for that same move count. You make your draw claim.

Your opponent challenges your scoresheet's adequacy. He points out errors in your score keeping — errors made long before the 50-move proof you offer. You have score keeping slip-ups way back at the start of the game. A total of four mistakes in the first fifteen moves. Your claim is also a draw offer that your opponent rejects. Is it a draw?

A. The game is a draw. Those early errors don't count as proof for this claim.

B. The game continues. Those early errors make your scoresheet inadequate.

C. None of the above, the game continues.

D. None of the above, the game is a draw.

Solutions 1. Amazingly all three of the solutions offered here can happen. Why? The TD does not have to honor the “no-pair” request (28T). So, solutions A and B are obvious choices that those four players need to make for themselves. Option C is the third choice that may not have much of a downside, as it just needs the approval of the other quads. Spreading out those same family pawn pushers will change the nature of the other quads. The question is how much of a change? The change may be almost unnoticeable. Or, the change may drop one of those relatives into a group that they outrank by leaps and bounds. Since quads by their very nature try to keep the entrants close in rating, this change would seem unfair. Simply asking if the new redistribution is ok with the three other members of the impacted quads could prove workable. If the family's quad distribution does not work out because of other player's objections, then those four kinfolks are back to deciding on option A or B. The bottom line is that A, B and C are all *possible*: D is the solution.

2. Without evidence the only solution is D. IMHO, A and B are the most likely outcomes when the TD gets sent over to make the call.

Given the circumstances, it is unlikely — but possible — that C is going solve the problem. But, all three are *possible*.

3. Option A is the correct solution. This scenario is the point of an upcoming rulebook wording change that kicks in on 1-1-24 (see my September column). A reasonably complete score (13C7) is proof that a stated number of moves (*starting at move one*) must be made in a defined period of time — like 40 moves in one hour (40/1). The wording change will re-emphasize that a 13C7 definition of a completed scoresheet is not necessarily appropriate for other scoresheet claims — check out the current TD TIP to rule 14F. Why? Scoresheet evidence for other claims don't always require proof starting at move one (13C7). In this case the move count does not start until move 57; i.e., from move 57 onward the scoresheet needs to be adequate for 50 moves.

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Just The Rules: How Common Is This?

October 30, 2023

Time Control Hack? Remember this from the old days? You were on move 37 of a 40/90 (40 moves must be made in 90 minutes) contest. Your time was running very low. It was the era before time delay, increment, and sudden death. The position is complicated. You decide to force the position to be repeated twice: a small two step dance. Why? That gains you two more moves on your scoresheet. You are now on move 39 and one step away from making move 40 on time. You are one step away from that fatal flag fall. This hack still works the same way with something like a 40/90, d. 5 game time control.

This two-step dance also works with increment. While the result is slightly different (you gain time), the idea is still the same. Given a time control of G/90, inc. 30 (sudden death in 90 minutes with a 30-second add on for each move) you see a way to force a two-move position repetition. That adds a valuable extra sixty seconds to your thinking time. How common is this?

Electronic Notation Devices? They were all the rage: MonRoi, eNotate, PlyCounter, ChessnoteR, etc. They were craved by many. US Chess even certified them. Some of those approved electronic device manufactures have even shut down. One major problem was that several of those game scoring devices were housed in old cell phone cases. That, of course, led to speculation of outside contact (cheating), which was never proven. One manufacturer faced a parts shortage. The sale of these gizmos has fallen short of expectations. Plus, some events ban all electronic gear, including approved notation devices. So, how common are these devices at tournaments?

An Empty Section? Did you ever show up at a tournament and noticed one of the sections had no players? What happens to that prize money? According to the rulebook it does not need to be distributed (rule 32C3). Be aware that sometimes a wood-pusher will notice that zero entries section, withdraw from their section and then enter the no-player section. Why? Because rule 32C2 will insist that the sole wood-pusher in that section can take home a prize. How common is this?

Membership Expiration During the Tournament? The tournament was a two-day affair. After day one your friend withdraws. Why? It turns out that their US Chess membership expires at mid-

night on the first day of the event. They can't afford to renew right now. Their membership will be expired on day two of the tournament. The problem is that US Chess requires that *all memberships must be active throughout the entire event*, even for withdrawn players. The tournament will not be rated if there is even one lapsed membership at the end of the event. The TD or Organizer can pay a fee — okay, a small fine — to get the tournament rated. That process does have some hoops to jump through. How common is this?

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Just the Rules: Rulebook Versus Sportsmanship, You Decide

December 4, 2023

Editor's note: In this month's column, Tim Just asks readers what judgment calls they would make when the letter of the rulebook departments from the spirit of sportsmanship. How would you respond in these situations? Sound off in the comments!

The Ira Lee Riddle Solution You are paired against a blind chess warrior. The rulebook has all sorts of regulations for that kind of meeting. Your opponent can use special equipment and an assistant. You have the same opportunity when it comes to having an assistant. During the game you and your opponent, at the very least, have to announce your moves and wait for an echoed response from each other for verification. The opponent's assistant can help with a variety of tasks (see rule 35 for more info).

Then there is Ira Lee Riddle—a now deceased NTD. In one event, when he was a contestant (not the director), he was paired against a blind opponent without an assistant. He took on the task of helping his opponent: in other words, he became the assistant. He pressed their special clock (after a move was verified) kept score for him (in case they needed to make a claim), kept them informed about the clock times, yadda, yadda, yadda.

What path would you take? Would you follow the Ira Lee route or not?

Pressing The Clock One of the most common happenings in chess is when your opponent does not complete their move via the clock press. Their time just keeps right-on ticking. If you wait long enough your sparring partner will run out of time, and you can claim a win. In some situations, your timely win may give you a prize. It might allow you to obtain a personal goal. Most of the time there is not anything at stake beyond winning your game.

Many chess warriors seem willing to remind their opponent that they forgot to complete their move with a clock press. Would you be a sportsman, no matter what? How many times would you be a good sport in that contest? Does it matter who your opponent is? Or, would you simply follow the rules and let their flag fall?

Waiting For an Opponent The announcement to start your clock booms across the playing area. Your opponent is missing. Typically,

their timers then count down the minutes until they appear. The rules give them some wiggle room on how long they have to appear at their board. If they don't appear in a defined amount of time, they lose the game and are withdrawn from the event (see rules 13D, 22A and 28P). If your adversary shows up and makes a move within a few minutes — or even seconds — before the game's defined forfeit time, they still get to push wood in that contest. Of course, they do lose all of the used clock time due to their tardiness.

Some players believe it is good sportsmanship to start their sparing partner's timer *only* when their adversary arrives at the board — the TD's announcement to start the game is irrelevant. It is a nice sporting gesture. If your opponent shows up within a few minutes of the official starting time there is generally not much concern about waiting to start their timer. But waiting too long to start your game may occasionally delay the start time for the next round, which impacts all the other event's wood pushers. Will you be a good sportsman here or follow the rules?

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Just the Rules: Scholastic Chess and Reporting Game Results

January 3, 2024

You love the game of chess. You want to pass your passion onto your children. Some parents are not die-hard lovers of the royal game, but they are die-hard supporters of their child's devotion to the 64 square universe. At scholastic chess events the adults stay out of the tournament room. The young'uns essay their games and report the results in various ways. How game results are reported can lead to a mixed bag of concerns.

The Winner Reports the Game Result

In adult events, wood-pushers are expected to report their own game results. Typically, they simply mark their score on the pairing sheet, or some other posted form. This works out okay in the adult chess world. It falls flat in scholastic chess. It is especially difficult for very young wood-pushers in the K-3 sections. Scorekeepers sitting by the exits are a good solution. One of the competitors needs to tell the score keeper their game result as they leave the playing room. But having just a single scholastic contestant report the game results leaves some pretty big verification holes.

Both Players Report the Game Result

When the contest is finished, the pieces are placed back on their starting squares. The scholastic opponents then go together and report their game results to a scorekeeper.

The upside is that the two budding GMs must agree on the game result to get it recorded. The downside is that if they disagree there is no position on the board to verify their conflicting claims.

Sometimes the two wood-pushers legitimately forget the results as they walk away from their board and stroll over to a scorekeeper. Just remembering their board number is also a real challenge. This phenomenon seems to mostly affect the younger gamesters.

The downside: Things get messy for everyone — coaches, parents, teams, TDs and players — when only one of the opponents shows up to report a game result and it gets reported incorrectly. Real young wood-pushers really have a tough time taking notation, so there is no help there. The pieces are already back in their starting gates, so no help there. The missing player might be really hard to find to

help verify the reported game score. More than likely any miscue is only noticed after the pairings for the next round get posted. TDs then have to spend a lot of time verifying the game ending outcome.

The TD Gathers the Results.

A labor-intensive — but quite effective — method of gathering scholastic results, with a minimum of errors, is to hand that task over to floor TDs. When a game is concluded the position on the board stays in place. The wood pushers raise their hands and a TD arrives. The director asks for the results and verifies that the players agree. The position is checked to make sure the reported results match the verbal results. The game ending position is then reverted back to the game's starting position. If there are any disputes, the TD has some detective work to do.

At National tournaments there is also a form at each board that needs to be filled out with the game results and signed by each player: names, teams, results, etc. Since the younger players that are still struggling with printing, let alone cursive writing, it takes some special TD effort to get those signed verifications.

And Now for a Good Scholastic Story – Digested From “*My Opponent is Eating a Doughnut*”

It was a US Chess National Scholastic event. A parent came to the backroom (where all the pairings are made) to ask why his upper grade school son's last game result was reported as a loss, since he had won!? Since it was a National Tournament, the TD had collected and verified the game results at the board when the game ended. The form that required signatures was all in order. The young man had agreed that he had lost the game. The board position was inconclusive, as the young GM wannabes had reset the pieces to their starting squares. But the form was clearly signed by the young man indicating that he had lost. The staff showed the form to the parent.

The parent looked at his child and explained, “A contract is a contract. Contracts need to be honored. You signed that contract. You agreed that you lost. So, you lost.”

By the way, if you like humorous chess stories, like this one, check out *Humor in Chess I, II* and *III* by Dewain Barber and Ralph Bowman. It is rumored that they are about to release volume *IV*. Their profits go directly to scholastic chess. I am not connected in any way with those books—they are just a fun read.

Updated 2024 Rulebook

The 2024 printing of the 7th edition of the US Chess Rulebook, with a new cover, is available from US Chess. This printing contains all the updates from all the previous 7th edition printings. The e-book edition is available from Amazon. The free online rules chapters are still available at the link below.

The free, updated US Chess Rules (Chapters 1+2 + 9 + 10 +11 from the 7th edition rulebook) are now downloadable and available online. Be aware, while the book was at the printers there was a change to the TD Tip link for rule 28D1. *Non US Chess ratings verified.* The formulas in the linked document are for converting FIDE ratings to US Chess ratings. Those new formulas kick in on January 1, 2024. Watch for more info later, as this column was written before the new Glickman document, with the new formulas, was scheduled to be posted:

$$\text{USChess} = 932 + 0.564 * \text{FIDE} \text{ (if FIDE} \leq 2000 \text{)}$$

$$\text{USChess} = 20 + 1.02 * \text{FIDE} \text{ (if FIDE} > 2000 \text{)}$$

The revision to the above formula for players with $\text{FIDE} \leq 2000$ comes from the recalibration algorithm FIDE will be using, specifically.

$$\text{Revised FIDE Rating} = \text{Old FIDE Rating} + 0.4(2000 - \text{Old FIDE Rating}) \text{ for FIDE Rating} \leq 2000$$

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the US Chess podcast “One Move at a Time.”

Just the Rules: Hotel Stories presents, “Lying Eyes Rob”

February 1, 2024

Here is a story that just missed being part of *My Opponent is Eating a Doughnut*. Minor changes were made to protect the guilty.

BACKGROUND Have you ever been to one of those Super Swiss events held at a hotel? The prizes are big. The crowd is big. The playing room is big. There are side events. There is a book dealer. There are GMs. All in all, it is an incredible experience. Before wood-pushers even hear about the event, the organizer has had a meeting or two — or even three or four — with the hotel. In other words: to make sure that you have a great experience, a lot of juggling takes place.

Hotels typically are not used to hosting chess tournaments. They have a standard model for weddings, business meetings, etc., but not for chess events. If an organizer is not careful when talking to the hotel, the tables might end up being not wide enough to even hold a chess board.

One of the standard practices used by the hotel industry does have an impact on you. Part of the hotel contract is to link the cost of the playing area to the number of hotel sleeping rooms rented by the tournament’s wood-pushers: the top priority for hotels is to sell sleeping rooms. If you stay at the event’s hotel, the cost of the site’s ballroom goes down. Room-sharing can bring down your cost and at the same time it helps out the organizer. Yes, there are probably less expensive sleeping rooms at a nearby motel. Sleeping there saves you pocket change. It also means that the organizer might need to consider adjusting future entry fees upward to help pay for the playing area.

Scholastic tournaments take up even more hotel space than a Super Swiss. One obvious difference is that scholastic events include a lot of adults that accompany our future grandmasters. An adult hanger-on — or several of them — have been known to camp out in the skittles area. They permanently capture a table or two for themselves and their team. Other teams opt to rent a team room — a hotel meeting room reserved only for that one team — from the organizer.

The hotel loves it when a chess weekend is finished and they can immediately start setting up for the next group coming in on Monday

meeting. That scheme works well, until it doesn't.

LYING EYES ROB Rob was the hotel's sales representative. His hotel checked all the boxes: the right dates, a large skittles area, multiple team rooms, reasonably priced sleeping rooms, TD work rooms, etc. The price was right. The contract was signed.

Another event was scheduled to follow the scholastic spectacle. That event indeed started on Monday. After the scholastic event ended on Sunday the hotel planned to get started on that group's special set-up.

One of Rob's staff contacted the chess organizer to mention that the tournament space would not be available for their scholastic weekender. The incoming Monday group needed a lot of time to do their set-up. Their contract — signed before the chess event contract — allowed them to set-up on that same weekend, as they had special security needs. Rob assured the organizer that his staffer was mistaken. Rob assured the organizer that the scholastic event was still a go. The other group was not going to need that same weekend.

A few weeks before the tournament was set to get underway, Rob informed the organizer that the other group would start their set-up on the Saturday and Sunday dates set aside for the scholastic tournament. It turned out that this other group decided to enforce their contractual agreement. Their needs did not include the entire hotel, just a huge part of it. The scholastic event still had use of the ballroom for their weekend tournament, but that was about all the kids could use. Some team rooms had to double as sleeping rooms. A skittles area was out of the question. The list of lost space went on and on.

Rob offered a shuttlebus to the organizer. That bus would take the scholastic people between the sleeping rooms at Rob's hotel and a close-by sister hotel where the actual wood-pushing would then take place. There would even be a lot of extra room for the chaperones. The shuttle's schedule was intermediate at best. That ferry idea, coupled with the tournament publicity listing Rob's hotel as the wood-pushing site, was not acceptable to the organizer.

Instead, the hotel's sales staff had to take turns keeping everyone associated with the scholastic event away from the other group's secured set-up space. The scholastic players essayed games in the advertised hotel ballroom. The adults had to sit out in the hallway, closed restaurant, and lobby like sardines in a can. The TD work

area was assigned to a sleeping room several floors above the event.

Why all the security fuss? The incoming Monday group was a weapons and equipment show for police SWAT teams.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the US Chess podcast “One Move at a Time.”

The free, updated US Chess Rules are now downloadable and available online.

Just the Rules: The Bye Zone

March 4, 2024

When it comes to byes, we are all pretty familiar with the half-pointers and one-pointers. You can ask for a half-pointer when you need to skip a round. Some tournaments have limits on how many half-pointers can be requested, and when you can make this request. The hoop-jumping for getting a late-round half-point bye is typically early on in the event.

You can pick up a one-point bye when you are left without any opponent after the pairings have been made. The pairings require an even number of players. When there is an odd number of contestants, someone ends up without an adversary. Your one-point reward is compensation for not having someone to push wood against.

Buried in rules 22, 28L and 28M are some ideas of what you can expect if the TD chooses to apply an alternative to your one-point bye award. You can also add a free point to your tournament score when your opponent is a no-show, but this is technically not a bye. Rather, it is a forfeit win; however, for all practical purposes there is no difference. A free point is a free point.

Then there is the zero-point bye. Like Rodney Dangerfield, it gets no respect.

Zero-pointers are not prohibited via the rules: indeed, they are not even discussed. They do exist but are not common. They have limited uses. That zero-point option might be all that is available if you need to miss a round and are out of requested byes. They also come in handy when you are assigned a one-pointer for being the odd unpaired player. You can ask the TD to give you a zero-point bye when you get stuck with an unwanted one-pointer. Why?

It has been noted that awarding a left-over wood pusher a full point — for being the lowest-rated player in the lowest score group — is not really compensation, but more like a punishment. Sometimes no point at all — or even a half-point — is a more desirable benefit. Why? As a struggling player, that one-point “award” kicks you up several score groups for the next round, where your struggle becomes even harder. Keeping yourself in the same score group with a zero-point bye — or even moving up one fewer score groups with a half-point bye — might be a better deal; however, your extra point does give you a huge leg up on claiming a tournament prize. While you are

receiving that freebie, your rivals have to earn their points. Beware, TDs are not required to honor your request for a zero-point bye.

Welcome To the Bye Zone Sometimes there are unintended results to picking up those free points.

Meet the Dubber. Dubber is his official nickname. He is rated 1325. At one time, he claims, he was a class A player; however, there is no evidence of this that anyone can find. Dubber decided to essay games in his state's Senior Chess Championship. Little did he know he was about to enter the Bye Zone.

It was a decent time control, five round, two-day, one section (open) contest. The top scorer would earn the title of State Senior Chess Champion. There were separate championship crowns — and cash prizes — for lower-rated classes. A total of two half-point requested byes were allowed, which is an extremely generous event benefit. In fact, it is a benefit that the state organization senior players had requested over the years. Dubber paid his entry fee and took advantage of this excellent offer. He asked for half-pointers on the last round of each day: rounds three and five.

On day one he scored a victory in his first contest. His round two game was a barn-burner that only netted him a goose egg. Round 3 was his first half-point requested bye, so he headed home. The next morning he picked up a free point when his opponent for round four bailed and became a no-show. The last game, round five, was one he had previously requested as his last half-pointer.

Dubber's early victory netted him one point. His round two goose egg added nothing to his tournament score. His first half-point bye request came in round three. The forfeit win in his round four morning match-up added another point to his total. His last round was the second of his requested half-point byes. That equals a five-game total of three points ($1 + 0 + 1/2 + 1 + 1/2$). His $3/5$ score awarded him the Class D/E senior crown, title and some pocket change. The final count of his closest rival in the event was a mere two points. Dubber chuckled a lot about his prize... all the way to the bank.

Only in the Bye Zone could a wood-pusher win only a single game to become the State Senior Class D/E champ.

This Bye Zone tale was based on an actual tournament.

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Just the Rules: Fiddling With Clock Settings

April 1, 2024

Fiddling With Analog Clock Settings Ever since chess clocks were imposed on the royal game, so was the inevitability of fiddling with their settings. Analog (mechanical) clocks work using a spring mechanism. That spring gets wound up. As it unwinds, it provides the power that moves the gears that move the hands on the clock. Springs do not all unwind at the same rate.

You could adjust analog chess clocks with little levers on their backside in order to fine-tune the rate at which the spring unwinds. Still, things don't always mesh enough to make each and every mechanical clock perfectly accurate. To compensate for any slight mechanical imperfections, those chess timers required some fiddling when being set. In particular, you had to add an extra minute to the game's base time. So, 40 moves in 60 minutes (40/60) becomes 40 moves in 61 minutes at the start of the game.

Eventually analog clocks became more and more reliable. Some battery powered analog clocks even appeared on the scene, meaning that those iffy springs got swapped out for batteries. Digital chess clocks were starting to make headway onto the tournament circuit, too. The need for that extra added minute became extinct. The rulebook as far back as the 4th edition (1993) eliminated the need for that extra time (rule 16X).

Fiddling with Delay Time Control Settings The era of delay time controls presented new clock setting challenges, and new fiddles were needed to make things right between delay and analog clocks.

Delay time controls gave the user extra seconds before their timer began its count down. Delay time does not accumulate, and unused delay time disappears.

Analog clock users had no such option. Their devices started ticking away as soon as it was their turn to move: no extra think time for them! Is that really such a big difference?

Try this experiment: Set an analog clock and a digital delay clock for the same exact base time. Set the delay for 5 seconds. Now press the plungers back and forth several times on the analog clock. Do the same for the digital delay clock. Wait at least one minute between presses. Compare the time left on the analog timer vs the time left

on the digital delay device. Which style of clock has the most time left to play your game?

To equalize this time difference between the two timers, digital delay clock users had to fiddle with their base time settings. They had to subtract one minute of time from the base time for every second of delay, starting with move one. So, the base setting for a digital timer in a Sudden Death game 60 contest with a delay of five seconds, would be G/55;d5. The analog timer would be set for G/60, typically starting at five o'clock on the timer's face. Fiddling with those digital delay base time settings proved to be a headache for players and TDs alike. There were simply way too many perceived different hoops to jump through for every separate unique clock manufacturer.

Fiddling With Increment Time Control Setting Increment time controls add time to each move. That time accumulates. The analog clock owner realized that they were missing out on a lot of thinking time when increment time was automatically added to each move on digital timers.

Try that same experiment we used earlier for comparing delay and analog time settings again, only this time set the digital clock with an increment time of 10 seconds. The increment clock wins the extra thinking time race.

The solution this time was to do some fiddling when setting the base time control, but this time the analog clock got the nod for that job. For every second of base time increment on the digital clocks, the analog clock users were allowed to add one minute of thinking time to their base time control.

Example: If the increment time control setting on a digital clock was 30 seconds for a 60-minute game ($G/60 + 30$), then analog users were allowed to set their timers for G/90 (with the clock face set to 4:30 instead of the typical 5:00) at the start of the game.

The perception among wood-pushers was that the analog clock gave them more time, no matter how many moves were made. Analog clocks were on the fast track to becoming the player's choice for increment time control. Those old-time devices were also on the fast track to extinction. Digital timers were becoming the player's choice at tournaments, replacing analog clocks.

Fiddling With Clock Settings Today With all the hassles, hoop-jumping and drama-fiddling caused with setting base time controls, the powers that be instituted a *no-fiddling with the base time control*

clock setting policy (rule 5F). No matter which kind of clock was set on the game, the base time control no longer needs fixing.

Rule 5F does provide for some adjustments when an increment capable clock is not available for a contest with an increment time control. If a digital delay clock is available — because there is no increment clock around — the non-cumulative delay is set to match the increment exactly, or, at least, as close as possible. But those adjustments don't involve fiddling with the base time control, just the delay setting.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts “One Move at a Time” and “The Chess Angle.”

Just the Rules: Is the On-Site Appeals Committee Still Relevant?

May 2, 2024

Did you know you can appeal a TD's ruling right there at your event's site? There are some hoops to jump through first, but it is possible (emphasis on the word possible).

If you surmise that the TD's ruling is out there in left field all by itself, you can do something about it. More often than not a player will send in their \$50 fee — refundable if the appeal is not frivolous — for one of the US Chess Committees to evaluate. It is not a short process.

Also available is to have a tournament on-site appeals committee judge your case (rule 21I). They are judge and jury: read on.

The Ins and Outs **One:** The TD will see if they can find at least three unbiased wood-pushers willing to take on the appeals task. This alone can be a chore and a half. The committee members do not have to be players in the event: they could be bystanders. The rules recommend that two of the three committee members have TD certificates equal to, or higher, than the event's chief honcho. They should have no connection to either player in the dispute. You can well imagine if one of the contestants had a relative, team member, or friend on the committee: that just looks bad. Equally shady would be to have a committee member be in a position to gain a prize if the group's decision goes one way or another.

Two: The appeals committee will hear evidence. The two adversaries and the TD get a chance to make their cases.

Three: They will talk to unbiased witnesses. Often other wood-pushers heard or saw something regarding the disputed ruling.

Four: Of course, the rulebook's view will be consulted.

Five: A verdict will be issued. The committee is limited to judging if the TD's ruling was correct or not: they can't substitute their own judgement for the TD's. Their ruling has the same impact as if they were one of the tournament's directors.

Forming an appeals committee, presenting evidence, deliberating, and issuing a ruling takes a lot of time and effort, I assure you that you can count on it. There is an alternative: The Special Referee.

The Special Referee A simple phone call to an experienced TD can take the place of an appeals committee. If no one comes to mind, a list of available referees can typically be found on any affiliate's US Chess dashboard's TD/Affiliate page. That referee is unbiased — a key factor — and can render a judgement in short order after jumping through the same hoops as an onsite committee. By the way, an onsite appeals committee is allowed to consult with a special referee or simply turn the case over to them.

The Escape Hatch But, there is an escape hatch to this entire process nestled away in the wording of 21H4, "...the director shall appoint a committee (21I) or a special referee (21J) to hear the appeal, unless the orderly progress of the tournament would be disturbed by such action." So, the TD is not required to act on your request. An appeals committee, or a special referee, could easily, for one example, devour announced round starting times.

As you can imagine the work of the appeals committee — or even a special referee — in a fast time control, or a blitz, tournament may take more time than it takes to essay an entire round. That is going to be fairly disruptive. At the very least it may hugely impact the next round's starting time. That's when the 21H4 trap door opens and your request may be denied.

So, is the on-site appeals committee still relevant? How about those special referees?

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts "One Move at a Time" and "The Chess Angle."

Just the Rules: What Choices Does the TD Have?

June 12, 2024

Sometimes solving chess rules problems is easy: the answers are all right there in the rulebook. Sometimes the solutions fall into the creative zone. Check out these situations. Are they creative or not?

1. The lowest section at the State of Confusion Open has only two entries and one \$30 prize. For a five-rounder, those two spots make Swiss Pairings problematic. Some TDs would simply make that section a match, well, as long as all the constraints for match play are met. Another typical solution is to add those two wood-pushers into the next higher section, bringing their prize along with them. At the end of it all only those two chess warriors can make their respective claims for any tag along cash. When the final scores are tallied neither player could score even a single point: goose eggs are what they earned. The possible solutions:
 - A) They get no prize money as they scored no points.
 - B) They split the \$30 prize.
 - C) They play a blitz game to see which one of them gets the \$30.
2. Your digital chess clock is ticking away (can one really say “ticking away” about digital clocks?) while you wait for your opponent to arrive. The board, men and clock are all set up to start the game. You’ve parked yourself behind the black pieces (the color you were assigned to essay). All you need is an adversary. After 20 minutes the general of the white pieces appears. The problem is that she claims she is supposed to be in charge of the black pieces, not you. You are seated in the wrong position at the assigned game?! You made a mistake. As the pairing sheet shows, you — not your opponent — are the general of the white pieces. The possible solutions:
 - A) You and your opponent split the 20 minutes and start your game with your assigned colors.
 - B) The TD switches the assigned player colors and your opponent is now playing white. They lose 20 minutes of time.
 - C) You take charge of the white pieces. Your opponent loses 20 minutes of playing time as the new mover and shaker of the

black pieces.

3. The contest has started. Your counterpart is not taking notation. You get the TD to come over and make a ruling. Your opponent is warned to take notation. A few moves later your adversary stops notating again. You complain again. This time the TD awards you two extra minutes of thinking time. This scene replays itself several more times — your challenger simply is not willing to notate the game — a G/60 contest. The possible solutions:

- A) The TD forfeits your opponent.
 - B) The TD starts to subtract greater and greater time from your opponent's clock until their flag falls.
 - C) You have many minutes of playing time left. The TD sets your opponent's clock so that they only have five minutes left to finish their game. Now the rules don't require them to notate.
4. The event's announced time control is a G/40, which qualifies those contests to be earmarked as dual rated. The games will get rated in both the Quick and Regular rating systems by US Chess. After the round one announcements are finished, the TD takes a moment to deal with any player questions. One enthusiastic wood pusher shoots his hand in the air, "Since the games are dual rated can we choose to not take notation? After all we don't need to notate in Quick Chess games." The possible solutions:

- A) The TD allows each player to choose whether or not to notate in these dual rated games.
- B) No notation is required.
- C) Notation is required.

SOLUTIONS:

1. The players are tied at zero points and the money gets split between them: B is the solution. The rules only address the fact that there is a tie, not what that tie score is. The Blitz game is a rare solution, it is also often impractical in most situations.
2. Some TDs post that the equipment — set, board, clock and you — must be in place as set to go (if at all) for you to make this tardy claim. If you are parked behind the wrong-colored chess

men they consider both you and your opponent tardy. After all your opponent has arrived late and still can't make their first move due to your improper seating arrangement. Without any posted rules variations, either B or C works as the solution.

3. The TD can choose any of the three solutions. Personally, I would go with C, but that is just me bowing down to creativity.
4. The announced tournament time control is for Regular Rated games, not Quick Chess. The announced time control dictates game notation requirements, not the Federation's policy to rate the games under both rating systems. C is the correct choice.

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Just the Rules: Cheaters, The Rulebook, and You

July 2, 2024

The aura of chess cheaters has changed chess. Their underhanded ways have backed tournaments into implementing all sorts of stop-gap anti-cheating measures, especially at big prize buck events. We see this with their electronic gear usage, the restroom wand routine, limits on hallway conversations, cell phone storage requirements (or bans), etc. These measures do manage to keep honest people honest. They also give wood-pushers some reassurance that cheating has become a lot more difficult to pull off.

Some would-be scammers still put in the effort. A few have even tried some fairly simple methods to increase their win-loss score, such as nestling an unobserved cell phone in their lap. When they do get spotted receiving outside game help — i.e. proof! — they get tossed from the event. Did you know if you were an earlier opponent of the (alleged) cheater, you are due compensation? The rules give us some insight into just what game score help you might expect.

You Won Your Game Against the Cheater

If your earlier score against an expelled cheater gives you the win, then there is no adjustment needed to your victory point, and no, you don't get an extra game point. The game is rated. But this necessary rule does beg the question: how is it that you beat a cheater? Isn't it more likely that you lost to them?

You Scored a Draw Against the Cheater

Okay, in an earlier round you managed to score a half-point against the now-expelled cheater. It is impossible to know if they cheated in your contest or not. It is impossible to know what your score would have been. Your score is now adjusted upward to reflect a one-point bye, replacing the old game score of a half-point. Again, a needed rule. But a cheater that could only muster up a draw? That is some really incompetent swindler.

You Lose Against the Cheater

The rules do need to look at all cases of you against the cheaters. Most likely, your wood-pushing efforts will result in you walking away with zero points against an expelled cheater. Your new adjusted

game score is now a half-point bye that counts in the standings and for prizes.

The Cheater is Caught During Your Game!

You win via forfeit.

Besides cheating, there are other reasons that one of your opponents may be removed from the tournament. Depending on the circumstances, those games may or not be rated.

There are also some variations on how to treat your score against the expelled cheater. They will not be discussed here. Typically, most chess warriors don't even realize what happens to their game score after a rival tries to fudge game results. Jumping into the mazes of rule 28I variations is left for another time.

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Just the Rules: Your Opponent is the TD?!

August 9, 2024

Surprise, surprise, surprise! You find your board for round one. Your pieces take their assigned places on their squares. Your clock is set correctly. Your opponent appears at the board ... and it's the TD! What can you look forward to?

The TD Service Call

At some point your opponent may be called away to solve another player's problem. The time it takes away from your game depends on how much of a puzzle they need to solve. Most TDs will stop the clock in your mutual contest (see rule 21E) to go off and engage in the fine art of rules enforcement. The more wood-pushers that attend the event, the greater the chances are that your TD will be called on to make a ruling. During their time out from your game you are allowed to keep on analyzing the position. Yep, that's right, you get extra thinking time.

A knotty problem will probably take a long time for your TD-opponent to untangle. Your mutual stopped clock may impact the time it takes to finish your game. The longer it takes the tournament official to return to your contest to start the timer ticking, the greater are the chances that your game will be one of the last ones to finish. Add to that that, at the end of your game, there is the possibility that other chess warriors will need TD help with their own "flag-fall" claims. That may, in turn, impact the start of the next round. Your TD has a lot of duties to take care before the current round ends and the next one begins. Duties that will be difficult to attend to while they are pushing wood with you. Difficulties that may weigh on their mind.

There is a Claim Made in Your Game

Who deals with any claim — flag-fall, touch-move, illegal move, etc. — in your game? If your TD-opponent makes a ruling in that contest there is always the aura of bias, intended or not. How would you feel if they ruled in their own favor? While it is not always possible, someone else besides your TD-opponent needs to make the call on claims in your game. A spectator or a fellow event player (that happens to be certified) can often fill that role. A call to a special referee is also a good option.

Impartiality

And then there are your fellow gamers that will cause your opponent — or you — anxiety. They may make a bias claim in the pairings: especially when it comes to those pairings impacting prizes. No one likes playing a game with a cloud hanging over it. A little sunshine can peek through the clouds if your TD-opponent doesn't allow themselves to collect any prizes. Sometimes they even direct for free — or at least for a free entry.

The Bottom Line

Rest assured that all of the above does happen, but rarely. If a playing TD gets called away from a contest, that time out will probably be short. Your extra analysis moments will also be short, and probably not make any significant difference in the outcome of your game.

Most TDs are not willfully dishonest or biased in their pairings. In general, pairing programs do the grunt work in assigning those contests. TDs might make inadvertent mistakes. Intentional dishonesty will be rare

When playing TDs are backed into a corner and forced to make a call in their own game many of them, anecdotally, seem to bend over backwards to be overly fair. And don't forget there is an appeals process — via rules 21H, 21I, 21J and 21L — at your disposal in case a playing TD drops the ball. [Click here](#) for a past “Just the Rules” column on rules 21H – 21J.

Be aware that without a TD-player combo many clubs would not exist.

It has been observed that many TDs that push wood at their own tournaments seem to traditionally lose rating points over the long haul. The rulebook disallows TDs to direct and play in national US Chess events: rule 21E again.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts “One Move at a Time” and “The Chess Angle.”

Just The Rules: Your Game is a Split Result?

September 3, 2024

When your tournament game ends there are typically three results: a win, a draw or a loss. It turns out there is a fourth option: *split results*!

Understanding Split Results *Split results* is a tool in a TD's or US Chess committee's toolbox that adjusts an inequitable game result. It upgrades an unjust game result into something fair for both players: a 1–0 game score could be changed into 1–½, etc. See the cases below for some examples.

Split results can be rated. The TD simply uses special codes when reporting those games to US Chess: N for a Win, R for a Draw and S for a Loss.

Split results are not required to be rated. Rather, it is up to the TD.

Split results are used for both prizes and pairings.

If a case is appealed to US Chess, one of their committees could impose a *split result* to resolve the appeal. The organizer might be required to redistribute the prize fund.

Example 1 You make a claim that the position has repeated three times. You are essaying the white pieces. Your opponent disagrees. It is time for the TD to get involved. After checking your scoresheet, etc., your friendly tournament official does not uphold your claim. While your scorekeeping ability — and penmanship — are not ideal, it is clear to you that there was a threefold repetition. Now, you are required to keep on pushing wood. Your opponent eventually checkmates you. The game ends with a score of 0–1. After all, it is hard to think when you know your claim was denied.

After your contest ends, you appeal the TD's decision. Your scorekeeping ability is good enough to prove to the Chief TD that the threefold repetition claim should have been upheld. The Chief TD is on your side. The Big Kahuna declares the game a draw for you. Your opponent objects. She deserves her win, she argues, as it is not her fault that the initial TD made a bad call. The Chief TD declares a win for your opponent. The result is a *split results* of ½–1 as the new outcome of the game.

Example 2 You are the general of the black pieces. In time trouble you and your counterpart are banging on the game timer. Pieces are racing from one square to another. Some pieces are flying off the board. No one seems to have an advantage. An audience gathers around to watch the show. And then it happens: you blunder. Instantly, someone in the crowd yells out, “Take the Knight, it’s free!” The bystander is removed from the playing room. The knight capture is obvious. Your opponent grabs your errant stead. You are down a piece. A few moves later you lose. The game score is 1–0 in your opponent’s favor. You protest.

Your opponent had help, and that’s not fair. If the clear knight capture had been overlooked by your counterpart, the game was headed towards a draw. You point out that the bystander helped him find that move. The TD’s solution is a *split results* score: 1–½. Your opponent keeps their win. You get the half-point. Equity!

Bill Smythe, Jeff Wiewel and Mike Nolan contributed to this month’s column. Thanks guys!

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

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Just the Rules: A Finished Game Gets Scored as a Bye?!

October 3, 2024

Byes are given out to players for games not played. Sometimes it is a full-point bye. Sometimes it is a half-point bye. Occasionally a zero-point bye creeps into that mix. And then there is the bye you pick up as a substitute for your just completed game. Check out two such scenarios where this could happen, and what to do if it does:

Converting an OTB Victory into a Bye?! “PAIRINGS ARE UP,” is the shout heard around the tournament site. Wood-pushers are drawn to those posted match-ups like a hungry person drawn to a Vegas buffet. You find that you are at board 17 essaying the black pieces against an unrated opponent: it is their first event.

When all is said and done you pick up the win. You properly record your 0–1 victory. Later, when you check the wallchart, you notice your contest was scored as a full-point bye for you, and that your opponent had disappeared. It is as if you did not even play that game. What does the wallchart say about your opponent? You can’t even seem to locate your adversary’s name. Did your rival’s identity fall into a wallchart wormhole?

The TD explains that your opponent slipped through the cracks. Rule 23C requires all tournament participants to have a current US Chess membership, but your opponent was not a US Chess member. The TD fixed your problematical game versus the non-member wood-pusher by erasing them from the event entirely, as if they had never entered. You still get your victory point towards prizes and pairings, but it is simply noted as a one-point bye. The TD then avoids paying a small fix-it fee — when submitting the tournament report — that would temporarily make that non-member legal for this tournament only.

TJ Says:

The TD is blatantly ignoring rule 23C (all of the event’s players need to be US Chess members) to save a few fix-it bucks. Your rating is impacted. Ask the director to fix (stop!) this practice. If they fail to do so, notify US Chess.

The Mix and Match Game You got your dream job, but it is located in a different time zone. Moving that far away means jumping through a lot of hoops, including finding a new chess club. With a

little detective work you find that new venue to essay your games. This new club holds weeknight events that allow both US Chess and non-US Chess members to enter ... in the same section. Only games between US Chess members will be reported to US Chess in the rating report.

If any non-member is one of the wood-pushers in any match-up, the appropriate byes for both contestants are recorded to reflect the actual game score. The game winner is awarded a one-point bye while the loser is assigned a zero-point bye. If the game is a draw, a half-point bye is given to each contestant. All those byes count towards pairings and prizes. The exact game results for games played between two US Chess members are left intact.

The TD fudges the US Rating report by first eliminating the non-members. In rounds where the US Chess member pushes wood against those — now removed — non-members, only the appropriate bye for the US Chess member (reflecting the actual game result) is recorded. The club (TD?) claims that the purpose of this style of tournament is to promote chess.

TJ Says:

The club (TD?) is blatantly ignoring rule 23C. Your rating — as well as every other US Chess member's rating — in this tournament is impacted. Ask the club and director to stop this practice. If they fail to do so, notify US Chess.

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Just the Rules: Why TD TIPS?

November 1, 2024

By 2002, it had been a long decade since the publication of our 1993 4th edition rulebook (edited by Bill Goichberg and others). The delegates had delivered what seemed like tons of new or upgraded rules. The US Chess (then USCF) office had new procedures. The Executive Board implemented what seemed like masses of new policies. Those new rules, procedures and policies were dutifully cataloged each year in the annual rating list (and its printed supplements).

After almost ten years, that collection of updates took up a lot ink in those publications. It was time for a new rulebook; one that would include all those upgrades. Tim Just (*moi*) and Dan Burg were tagged in for the job of editing US Chess's 5th edition (2003) rulebook.

Dan and I created a list of updates and enhancements that got bounced off of a committee of 30 or so volunteers. That group kicked around their own thoughts for improvements plus acted as a sounding board for the 5th edition's editorial ideas. One of our editorial ideas was for TD TIPS.

When I got the nod for the 5th edition editorship, I had just finished a gig as a columnist for the *Illinois Chess Bulletin*. That feature — “Rulebook Tactics” — came about because too many players had that glazed stare when it came to understanding technical rulebook jargon. The column's focus was to unravel, in practical terms, just what all that legal-like mumbo jumbo was about. Those articles cultivated an improved sense in wood-pushers of what the rules were all about.

The 5th edition editorship also came along at a time when, at the urging of Dan Burg's wife, I took up walking as my exercise of choice. Not only did I get in shape, but it afforded me an opportunity to ponder, think and reflect about a variety of topics, including the 5th edition rulebook. One day while strolling along, a thought sneaked into my brain. A thought that married my TD Tactics column brainchild with the 5th edition. A thought that recognized that both players and TDs would benefit when practical rulebook applications were revealed. At that instant the TD TIPS were born.

TD TIPS are not rules. They change and shift focus at a faster pace than rules. They unlock rulebook secrets. They can be ignored. They are only suggestions. Rules are generally requirements. Rules

are under the direct control of the delegates. The TIPs are managed by the editor. The editor takes advice on their content from a variety of sources, including the delegates. When a rule change is proposed, the delegates can suggest to the editor a TD TIP to accompany the new, or revised, rule phrasing. To date the editor (your author) has never turned down their suggestions.

There is also an idea that has floated around to have the TIPs published in a separate volume; the rules in one book and the TIPs in another. Would our chess-playing members be willing to buy both of those volumes? Or is having both the rules and TIPs in the same source book a better idea?

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

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Just the Rules: Scholastic Chess Regulations

December 2, 2024

US Chess tournaments have their rules. FIDE tournaments have their separate rules. And then we have the US Chess Scholastic Regulations, via the Scholastic Council and the Executive Board. Kids are not adults. Kids are not mini adults, either, despite how they look. Their brains are struggling to connect the dots so that the world around them makes sense. Their chess universe is filled with individual/team chess, coaches and chess parents. Our national scholastic chess scene leans heavily on the US Chess rulebook, adjusted to meet the needs of youthful wood-pushers, also known as the US Chess Scholastic Regulations. Let's do some exploring:

Truth in Advertising: The Scholastic Regulations govern US Chess National Scholastic Tournaments only. They are not requirements for state, county, district or local scholastic events. However, these regulations are an excellent guide for handling any kind of scholastic event at any level.

Bughouse: National Scholastics Regulations have something that none of our main rulebooks have ever had: Bughouse rules. With some adjustments, these rules also work pretty well in non-scholastic events. Check them out.

Blitz: National Scholastic Regulations have their own set of Blitz rules. The basic concept of Blitz is Chapter 11 of the 7th edition US Chess rulebook. The scholastic document takes that chapter and sets a few more “must follow” standards without a lot of wiggle room.

Team/individual prizes: National Scholastics are paired as individual events. Unlike the US Amateur Team where one team of four wood-pushers directly face off against another four-player team. Scholastic teams may have any number of players, but only the top finishing scores — three or four, depending on the tournament — are summed together to generate a team score. Those top scores don't always come from the highest-rated players. There are a lot of sections in scholastic tournaments based on grade and age. Prizes and titles are awarded to the top individuals and top teams in each separate category. Avoiding pairing team members against each other is one of the main pairing rules.

No Spectators: Still. This policy has been around for a few years

now. Spectators at scholastic events are a good example of the 80-20 rule: 20% of your customers cause 80% of the problems for everyone else.

Air Tags: Bringing electronic gear into the playing hall is more than frowned upon in our main rulebook. The Scholastic Regulations are now going to allow air tags. Yes, there are a few hoops to jump through to allow this specialized electronic gear onto the playing field. Why allow air tags? The “No Spectators” policy means there is no direct line of sight between a player and the grownup responsible for them. With thousands of youngsters pushing wood, parents and coaches are concerned about their safety. They get legitimately uneasy when their wards can’t be easily located, especially after the game ends.

Notation: We all know that our 7th rulebook edition — along with earlier versions — requires game notation. There is an entire group of young wood-pushers — mainly, but not exclusively, kindergarteners plus first graders — that are exempt from taking notation. Why? Those young’uns are still struggling with mastering their own signatures. Notation is way out of their ballpark. As you can imagine, TDs in those sections have a tough job settling disputes without a score card.

30-Minute Tardy Policy: New this go-around is the 30-minute no-show policy. If you are not there to play within that 30-minute window, you forfeit the game and are withdrawn from the tournament. To get back into the event there are some hoops to jump through, including permission from the tournament officials.

[Click here](#) for Scholastic Regulation details.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts “One Move at a Time” and “The Chess Angle.”

Just the Rules: 2025 US Chess Rulebook Update News

January 3, 2025

After the Delegates Meeting at the U.S. Open, there are bound to be some rulebook changes. After all, the Delegates are in charge of our rules.

The 2025 7th edition rulebook update is slim pickings for this go around. A few wording deletions and changes of note are all we have. In fact, there were so few changes that only the online rulebook will reflect those new words (sorry, no print edition). The link at the end of this column is repeated here: [7th Edition Rule Book Free Chapters: Updated For 2025 | US Chess.org](#)

Or, simply slide down to the bottom of the US Chess homepage and try that connection.

14F1. The 50-move rule.TJ SAYS: Rule 14F1 removed, “...or pawn move...,” in favor of the clarifying, “...**and without any pawn move.**”

14F1. Explanation.

The game is drawn when the player on move claims a draw and demonstrates that the last 50 consecutive moves have been made by each side without any capture or pawn move **and without any pawn move**. If the director wishes to allow more than 50 moves for certain positions, details must be posted at the tournament before the first round. **See also** 15H, Reporting of results.

28D1. Non-US Chess ratings verified.TJ SAYS: The 28D1 rule change for 2025 did not pass before the Delegates’ eyes. Instead, your friendly editor picked up on the fact that changes had been made to the official formulas that are used to convert FIDE ratings into US Chess. So, that change is now reflected in our 2025 edition. The old formulas are referenced in an Old TD TIP insertion.

General conversion:

****USChess = -1073 + 1.5667*FIDE if FIDE ≤ 2000****

****USChess = 20 + 1.02*FIDE if FIDE > 2000****

OLD TD TIP: Here are the old formulas for the sake of reference.

$$US\ Chess = FIDE + 50US\ Chess = 0.895 (FIDE) + 367US\ Chess = FIDE + 100$$

OLD Formula (1) represents an average conversion. This means that 50 percent of the time the FIDE-rated player will be stronger than his or her converted US Chess rating would indicate. This becomes important for prize considerations when the FIDE rating is in the low 2100s; i.e., FIDE players between 2100 and 2149 will remain in the US Chess Expert class after their ratings are converted with this formula. By using OLD formula (2), the FIDE-rated player will be stronger than his or her converted US Chess rating only 10 percent of the time, thus providing a degree of protection for the players with established US Chess ratings. OLD Formula (3) provides a great degree of protection for players with established US Chess ratings without compromising the integrity of the FIDE player's strength compared to their new converted US Chess estimate rating. The above is for players with FIDE ratings but no US Chess ratings.

TD TIP: For more information on conversions go to section 2.1 in the US Chess rating system document: [us_chess_rating_system_specs-2024-03-01.pdf](#) ([uschess.org](#))

Chapter 7TJ SAYS: TD Certification rules 25, 29, 33, and 37 had some new, plus deleted, wording regarding TD certification; i.e., expirations and renewals. The “chief” and “chief assistant” jobs language has vanished from the rulebook. In their place is wording that simplifies those former requirements. Now, only the appropriate number of tournaments worked as a TD — instead of the “chief” or “chief assistant” jobs — is the new standard.

25. Expiration.

Three-year renewable term. Every three years, the club TD may apply to extend the Club TD Certification for an additional three years. This three-year renewal requires that the applicant pass an objective test of moderate difficulty designed to measure the applicant's knowledge of basic rules at the 70% level. Except for the first exam, which may not be waived, the testing requirement for recertification is waived for a Club TD with satisfactory performance as the chief or chief assistant a TD of three tournaments or **a TD at three different tournaments** during the three-year term. Club TDs meeting the rating and directing experience requirements are encouraged to take the Local TD exam. Club TDs passing the Club TD exam at the 80% level that also meet the experience and rating requirements for Local TD certification may have their Club TD

certification automatically upgraded to a Local TD certification

29. Expiration.

Four-year renewable term: The testing requirement for recertification is waived for a local TD with satisfactory performance as the chief or chief assistant TD of four tournaments **a TD at four different tournaments during the four-year term.**

33. Expiration.

Five-year renewable term: The testing requirement for recertification is waived for a Senior TD with satisfactory performance as the chief or chief assistant TD of five tournaments **a TD at five different tournaments during the five-year term.**

37. Expiration.

Six-year renewable terms: The testing requirement for recertification is waived for an ANTD with satisfactory performance as the chief or chief assistant TD of six tournaments **a TD at six different tournaments during the six-year term.**

TD TIPs.5A. Time controls and time limits.

TJ SAYS: The rule 5A TIP further explains the differences between a time control with a number of required moves — like 30 moves in 45 minutes — and a time control without any required number of moves — like G/45.

***TD TIP:** G/45 is an example of a game that ends in a single time control period of 45 minutes. There is no limit on the number of moves that must be made. There is a limit on the allotted time for each player to end their game. There are no new time periods available after the allotted time expires. In this example if a player that does not win their game (regardless of the number moves they made) in 45 minutes, they lose the game when their flag falls.*

32b3. Ties for more than one prize.

TJ SAYS: What happens when players qualify for more than one prize and are tied with fellow competitors? The revised TIP for 32b3 addresses which prize to use for the prize pool that is split, like when a wood-pusher is tied for a place prize and may also claim a class prize.

***TD TIP:** The number of prizes in the pool to be split may not exceed the number of players in the tie. Only the largest cash prize earned*

by each player is the amount added to the pool for that player.

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Just the rules: No claim, no problem

January 30, 2025

No Claim, No Problem: The TD Calls It a Draw Anyhow

We all know that the TD can't interfere in your game without a claim being made. It is one of our golden rules. Or is it? Let's take a look at a few exceptions!

Flag ‘em Danno It is a Sudden Death contest. The pressure is on. You are focused, but so is your opponent. Both of you are banging out moves at lightning speeds. Both of you are playing “Beat the Clock.” Someone's playing time is going to disappear first. Then it happens. The TD's voice registers in your brain, and you hear words you can't believe, “The game's a draw!” Both of you look stunned and confused. Neither of you made a claim. How can it be that the TD called your game a draw?

The clock shows that the two of you each ran out of time but continued to push on without a claim. When both flags are down in a Sudden Death time control, and there was no claim, the game is instantly a draw and at an end, as stated in Rule 14G2.

The Standoff You make your move. Instantly the TD calls it a draw! Who made a claim? How can the TD make a ruling in an ongoing contest? Isn't that against the rules?

Your move created a stalemate, as your opponent is not in check but is left with no legal moves when it is their turn. Stalemate instantly ends the game in a draw; no claim is necessary. At that point comments are not barred from any quarter, even a TD. The game is over ala Rule 14A.

The Check ‘em and Wreck ‘em Dance Your king and your adversaries' queen are dancing back and forth, over and over and over the same small set of squares. Her majesty checks, your monarch moves—back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth...

Stubbornly, you and your opponent both hold on with the hope of running the other's clock out of time. The TD steps in and declares the game a draw, no claim necessary. Rule 14K has kicked in: the same position appeared *five* times.

It's a Long, Long Road 75 moves. That's all it took, 75 moves. Those 75 moves were hard-fought. Those 75 moves were time-consuming. Long after the contest started, the pawns stayed

anchored to their destination squares during those 75 moves. Both generals moved their forces up, down, and sideways all over the board for 75 moves without a casualty.

Despite that, the TD called it quits for the two of you. The chips were cashed in for the both of you. Why? Neither of you moved a pawn for those 75 tries. Neither of you captured anything after 75 times at bat. Once again Rule 14K lets the TD enforce the rule by calling it a draw, and no claim is necessary.

Can you think of any other times the TD can jump into your game without your permission?

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

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Just the Rules: First Rules Quiz of the Year

March 3, 2025

Are you ready for the first rules quiz of the year? Put on your thinking caps to solve this quartet of problems!

Question 1. At the State of Confusion Scholastic Championship, two young grade-schoolers faced off to battle it out over-the-board in a G/45 contest. After a lot of struggling, both combatants had to admit to being defeated by the requirement to keep score. They both knew — via their respective coaches — the importance of having accurate score sheets. To solve their notation problem, they mutually decided to start another game with a vow to do a better job of scribbling their moves down. Of course, this solution did not involve a TD.

When a floor TD walked through the tournament room to check on the few remaining games, he noticed that the two young wood=pushers were still in the opening phase of the game. This seemed odd to the TD; a few minutes earlier their game seemed to be well into the late middle game. Of course, as is common at scholastic events, the two chess warriors also had no chess timer on their contest. When the two players noticed the TD eyeballing their board they proudly informed him of their game restart. What are the TD's options?

- A) Put a clock on the current game. Split the elapsed time between the two players and start the clock.
- B) Forfeit both players.
- C) Call the game a draw.
- D) None of the above.

Question 2. Your local club scheduled a rated five-rounder at the local park district facility, with a schedule of one game per week over a five-week period. A half-point bye was available, upon request, when entering the event. One competitor asked for their half-pointer to be awarded for Round 4, as they would be on vacation that week.

Rounds 1, 2 and 3 ran without a hitch. They were rulebook perfect. Round 4, however, ran into a glitch, a big glitch! That glitch had a familiar name: Mother Nature. Mom's nasty weather made safe travel impossible (go ahead, insert your own natural disaster). No one was able to show up to push wood that night. The missed round

played havoc with the club's schedule. Their facility had allowed them only those five weeks for their tournament. The club's space was not available beyond the scheduled 5th round. What are the TD's options?

- A) Give everyone a zero-point bye for round 4, including the bye-requester.
- B) Assign everyone, including the bye-requester, a one-point bye for round 4.
- C) Change the tournament into a 4-round event. The previous requested bye is invalidated.
- D) Any of the above.

Question 3. A bit of time after the G/60 contest began, one woodpusher is not taking notation. His opponent complains to the TD. First, warnings were issued by the TD. Next, time was added to the opponent's clock. The player simply refused to take notation. The TD then started subtracting time from the offending player's timer, but even that did not encourage keeping score. What is left for the TD to do?

- A) Forfeit the player for not notating.
- B) Set the offending player's clock so that they only have five minutes left—at that point no notation is needed.
- C) Deduct time from the player's clock AND add time to the opponent's clock.
- D) None of the above.

Question 4. At the annual State of Confusion Scholastic Chess Championship, the TD approached a game to record the final results. Essaying the white pieces, one future GM wannabe — player A — claimed an agreed upon draw was the final result. The opponent, player B, claimed the full point! Why? No words were spoken when a handshake was offered by player A and accepted by player B. The clocks were stopped. Player B claims that the handshake and clock stoppage indicated that his opponent resigned. Player B points out that the handshake and clock stoppage in an equal position means the game is a draw. The position on the board appeared to be locked up. What did the TD rule?

- A) The TD rules the score is the split result of $1\frac{1}{2}$.
- B) The game is over, and player A wins.
- C) The game is over, and is ruled a draw.
- D) None of the above.

Solutions1. The only reasonable thing to do is place a clock on the current game with the elapsed time split between the two wood pushers. There is no readable score for game one. Splitting the elapsed time between the players keeps the current game on track to end the contest (so the next round can start on time). Since notation seems to be a challenge for the two youngsters, the TD might also consider setting the timer so that both contestants each have only five minutes left to finish their present game. This way, no notation is required (Rule 15C). So, **A**) is the correct answer.

2. All of the options A), B), and C) have the same end results. So, **D**) “Any of the above” is correct.
3. Continually dealing with players that don’t respond to all efforts to convince them to keep score is frustrating for everyone. Choosing **B**) makes everyone happy. The offending player — with only five minutes of remaining playing time — no longer needs to notate during time pressure (15C again). Of course, they also can’t make any claims based on their score sheet. Yes, the opponent keeps all of their thinking time, and they should keep an accurate score until they get into time pressure. Any other choice just sets up a lot of unneeded drama.
4. Picking **D**) is correct. None of A), B), or even C) gets the job done acceptably. The split results of A) rewards someone unnecessarily. The choice of B) or C) begs the old fast-food commercial question: “Where’s the beef?” There is no evidence to support either wood pusher’s version of events. Plus, there is no rule to support a non-verbal handshake and clock stoppage as either a win (13B) or a draw. Since the board and pieces are still set up with the last played position, **the game should continue.**

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts “One Move at a Time” and “The Chess Angle.”

Just the Rules: I Need To Ask This

March 31, 2025

How is it that so many players have not read the rulebook? It is free online. Most tournament players will find that chapter one is the most useful section. Finding a rule in the online version (by the way: it is also downloadable) is as easy as using your device's FIND function.

Hint: start the FIND function at the beginning of the online rules. Why? The Table of Contents is near the top of the document, and it is linked to each rule. The odds are that what you are searching for will pop up first (or near it) in the Table of Contents. Keyboarding your search term and ending it with a period also is neat hack. Also, every "See Also" reference is linked to its source.

Onto the questions:

How do players miss the fact that **if their time runs out** — a flag fall — **their opponent must have mating material** to claim a win? Why do so many tournament pawn-pushers not read a **tournament's posted rules variations** before the tournament begins? After the fact it is too late. How come it is **much easier to see the right move** when you are a spectator than when you are a competitor? Perhaps a psychiatrist out there can weigh in on that one. **Armchair TDs** are a dime a dozen. Perhaps that should be a new US Chess director certification level? Why do wood-pushers making claims believe that only their word is enough to prevail? **Evidence is also needed** to prevail. Why do **hotels find it so hard to understand** chess tournament needs? What rule states that if a chess warrior initiates a forced checkmate variation that it is a win, **even if the flag falls** before the variation finishes? If time runs out before checkmate can be delivered by an adversary, the **game ends with a loss** for them when you point out the flag fall. Players can **appeal a TD ruling on the spot**. So, why do they wait until much later to make that appeal? Besides the obvious, why do players with winning positions offer a draw after their flag falls? Do they really expect that side-step maneuver to work? By the way, **once the flag falls — and is pointed out — the game is over**. Anything after that moment is meaningless to the contest's results. Why does the meaning of some chess rules get **obscured by their wording**? Why do digital clock manufactures make it so **difficult to set their timers**? Why does the **aura of cheating** far exceed actual cheating? How can we make **announcements before the**

start of a round more engaging? Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts “One Move at a Time” and “The Chess Angle.”

Just the Rules: What's the Deal with Rules Variations?

May 1, 2025

Our rulebook is filled with variations on the main rules. I once counted slightly less than 50 of them in chapters 1 plus 2 alone. Some of those variations require an announcement, or publicity—others, not so much. This hodgepodge is baffling to the typical wood-pusher.

Why even have variations at all? Simply put, the answer is that there are times the main rule just does not get the job done for everybody. So, variations take care of those times. Sometimes variations are simply another way to do the same task. For the most part, those variations need to be noted in advanced publicity—or at least announced at the playing site (Rules 1B1, 26A and 26B). A huge handful of variations can be found in the pairing rules in Chapter 2. They generally are not announcements that are meaningful to the non-TD crowd.

Let's take a look at some peculiar variations:

Variation 14H takes the prize for weirdness

When sudden death (single time control games – *ed.*) was all the rage, the lawgivers realized that something had to be done about the glut of games that ended with wood pushers in overwhelming winning positions that lost on time. Rule 14H (Claim of insufficient losing in sudden death) came to the rescue.

However, the rescue proved to be complicated in its step-by-step procedures. It did not have a lot of fans. The followers it did have were legendary in their support of 14H. Eventually the Delegates jettisoned the whole 14H claim procedure, and its wording ceased to exist. At the same time that 14H was gutted, Variation 14H came to life: Variation 14H (Claim of insufficient losing chances in sudden death). Yep, the entire variation is worded exactly the same as the old (now-extinct) main rule 14H. Talk about having your cake and eating too?!

Castle me this, castle me that: The 10I2 Rook touched first variation

For a few years, the debate raged on and on regarding castling. FIDE was first when it insisted that, if the rook was touched first in that

procedure, then the rook had to be moved (plus castling in that direction was then not allowed). US Chess eventually followed suit. That follow-up caused a lot of headaches for the wood-pushing crowd that had — for years — always castled by touching the rook first. TDs did not look forward to enforcing this unpopular rule of forcing a rook move. Players had to swallow the penalty by moving their rook instead of castling, and it was a harsh punishment. For some time, the debate continued with the wording and meaning of rule 10I. Then the dust settled on the current version—with one odd variation; rule 10I2 (Variation I) Rook touched first.

First off there is only one variation, so why the “Variation I” designation? The wording of this variation is almost the same as rule 10I2 (Rook touched first) except with some added verbiage. The variation allows the rook to be touched first — without penalty — while castling legally. This variation only needs to be announced at the start of the event. Typically, the main rule issues a warning to the offender before the gavel of justice (making them move the rook instead of castling) descends upon them.

Rule 15A Variation I: A scorekeeping disagreement?

Another long-debated topic involved the simple act of keeping score. Scribbling the move first, before executing it over the board, is considered notetaking by many. Using notes is illegal (20E). GM Alexander Kotov, in one of his books, recommended writing down your move, surveying the board, and then essaying your move on the board when, and only when, you were satisfied. This procedure gave the players a chance to look around and check out their thinking. This advice proved invaluable to many scholastic coaches when they tried to have their students slow down before generating a move over-the-board. Those students grew up and continued to essay games in adult tournaments, still writing down their move before making it. It was a lifetime habit, and a hard one to break.

Enter those nifty electronic game recording devices. Any wood-pusher noting their move on them instantly had the new game position displayed on their device’s screen. As a result, they got to peek at the position before making the move on the board. That seemed unfair. In the 6th edition, Rule 15A got a makeover: everyone must make the OTB move first! That applied to every method of scorekeeping. Kotov’s followers were not happy campers.

After rule 15A kicked in for a bit, the lawgivers came up with some wiggle room wording when creating 15A (Variation I)—a nod to Ko-

to's fans? Sidebar: Why "Variation I" when it is the only variation available? This variation does not need to be advertised in advance. The 15A Variation once again gives thousands upon thousands of wood-pushers the option of either making the move first or scribbling it on their score sheet first. By the way, some of the important wording for Variation 15A has roots in the 3rd edition of our rulebook, from *Rule I.13, The Recording of Games*, which states that, "The player may first make his move, then write it on his score sheet, or vice versa..."

Just remember the basic wordsmithing of 15A is still the main rule. So, when there is no announcement about score keeping, ask if the 15A variation (I) is being used or not at your event.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts "One Move at a Time" and "The Chess Angle."

Just The Rules: Club Versus Super Swiss

June 2, 2025

Our rulebook covers what takes place on a chess board's 64 squares. How the pieces move is essentially the same everywhere rated games are essayed in US Chess—or is it? The experience of facing opponents has a different feel to it at your weekly club meeting versus a Super Swiss.

You're a club player. You've essayed games for decades at one local venue or another. The TD and organizer inhabit the same body. On top of administration duties, the TD also pushes wood at those club events. Without her, rated chess dies locally. The fees are low. The chess is fun. And it is a social event as much as it is a chess event. You get together with about the same group of other chess addicts once a week to pay homage to the goddess of chess, Caissa.

Now you have finally decided to take the plunge. You've dreamed about it for years. You enter a Super Swiss (a big tournament with big prizes). Additionally, there will be simul, GM analysis, GM lectures, organized blitz side events, and a chess bookstore. Your final bill for the entry fee, travel, food, plus your hotel room will outdistance what you typically spend throughout the entire year at your club. Still, it is the same 64 square arena where you and a challenger battle for success — but somehow it does not feel the same. There are hundreds and hundreds of others in the ring here, perhaps even a thousand. The largest tournament you have ever entered in your life was a local 50 player contest.

In today's online universe, you have managed, from time to time, to be the general of your chess army from the comfort of your home. You tried postal chess in the past. Neither of those experiences are the same as an OTB face-to-face contest.

In the hallway, you overhear some players wish that the organizer had provided the sets and boards. Instead, everyone is on their own when it comes to providing that gear. Their concern is that they expected sets, boards, and clocks to be provided, just like at some other Super Swisses.

The pairings get posted. A mad rush ensues. A little push here and a light shove there defines that mad scramble. Where will one's contest take place? What color will you play? What is your opponent's rating? At the club, the TD just reads out the pairings and then sets it down on her TD table, where you can always check out your

pairing info on your own time. Not here — the process is a bit different. In fact, some of Caissa’s worshipers are receiving their pairing information on their cell phones!? Who knew!!

The playing hall is massive. You find your assigned playing space. Your opponent is already setting up their equipment. With you guiding the black pieces, you get to choose the clock — NOT?! Why? The time control includes an increment, and your clock does not support increment time control. You point out to your opponent that you can fiddle with the basic time control to compensate — just like at your club. Your adversary says that this is now against the rules. *Sigh*. You will need to use their increment-capable clock for this contest.

While essaying your game, you discover one more hard-and-fast rule: make your move first, then notate it!! At the club, no one seems to mind one way or the other which comes first — the notation or the OTB move. It turns out the club uses the variation. Of course, this motivates you to check out the posted special rules just for this tournament.

Your club seems to not have any concerns about cell phone, but this Super Swiss bans not only cell phones but all kinds of electronic equipment. There’s even a TD at the restroom doors with a wand. That wand will alert them if you try and enter with an unseen cell phone neatly tucked away — out of sight of course.

The socializing that takes place in the skittles room is unlike anything you could ever imagine — the uproar of bughouse and blitz permeates the air. Hangers-on stake out entire tables as their personal camp site — no claim jumpers allowed. New friends are often made in the skittles room.

The memories from this event will be burned into your long-term memory. Back at the club you will have great tales and tall stories to tell for many eons to come.

How many of us have great memories of our first Super Swiss?

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts “One Move at a Time” and “The Chess Angle.”

Just the Rules: Proposed Rule Changes?

July 1, 2025

Every year at the U.S. Open, the Delegates from each state have a chance to change our rulebook. Sometimes it is just a tweak or two (or three). Most of the new approved rules kick in on the first day of January (1-1-26) after their Delegate's August 2-3, 2025 meeting finishes.

The changes we are interested in get listed on the now-published advanced agenda. Yes, there are also non-rulebook matters that don't concern us on that same agenda. But for the rules motions, the rules become almost-instant chess law if the Delegates vote them in with a super 85% approval rating. But, if those ideas only get high passing marks from the lawmakers, then they get shipped off to the Rules Committee for comment. That nets them another guest appearance on next year's advanced agenda for another vote. Then, a second approval rating from the Delegates installs them as chess law. Any non-approval vote in either year sends them packing.

Here is a peek at the abridged versions of the major proposed rulebook changes that will be debated this year. Notice that Blitz chess seems to have grabbed most of rulebook headlines.

Blitz Chapter Replacement: One major motion wants to replace the current set of Blitz rules with a new mix of old and new material; i.e., it would be the replacement for the current chapter. This set of proposed regulations first showed up on last year's agenda. Since it did not garner the needed super 85% vote for instant approval, it was sent off to the Rules committee for comment. If this set of Blitz instructions gets the nod this year, they will be the new Blitz regulations starting in 2026.

The makers of those intended new rules are aiming for a set of directives that speak directly to Blitz chess only. They suggest that any reminders regarding the regular rules are more appropriate as TD TIPs rather than as part of the Blitz rules.

Final Blitz Appeal Made Clear: There is a motion onboard to make it clear that rule 18 in the Blitz chapter refers to the Chief TD as the last refuge for an appeal at the site. Any other plea would involve a direct one to US Chess.

Modified Blitz Rule 7E: There are some steps offered to clear up what rights triumph when an illegal move faces off with a flag fall.

The new language also puts a stop to tricksters attempting to claim an unearned victory in that faceoff.

Late Arrival for the Game (13D) Amendment: Some steps are being proposed that would outline the process, when an opponent is tardy, of allowing the general of the white pieces to notate their first move only on their scoresheet without making that move on their board. This revision has been reviewed by the Rules Committee.

Correspondence Chess Upgrade: The correspondence rules are in need of revisions. They are several years old and have not kept up with the technology needed by the US Chess staffer to supervise these events. If the Delegates approve the revisions it will create a new Chapter 9 (Correspondence Chess). These changes were already reviewed by the Rules Committee.

Note: The exact wording of all advanced motions on the agenda can be seen here.

After the advanced agenda is discussed and voted on, more new rules can be introduced by the Delegates via their meeting procedures. We will need to wait until the meeting is over to report on those new ideas.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

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Just the Rules: No Good Deed?

August 4, 2025

TD Help or Interference?

At the end of a long tournament game, it was clock-banging time. Both contestants were aiming to win via a flag fall, or a fast checkmate: tick, tick, tick. Pawns did their best foot-soldier impression and raced to reach the opposite side of the board. Their aim was simply to become royalty — to become a queen. Then fate intervened.

Your pawn was a lot closer to gaining a throne than your opponent's. Then it happened. Your lonely pawn reached its destination. The promotion ceremony only needed a queen for the regal swap. Her majesty was available to you if you stretched out in a semi-seated, semi-standing position to reach her. Her majesty was hastily nabbed by your nervous fingers. The queen's journey towards the playing field was on ... until you bumped the edge of the table. The queen went flying down to the floor only to roll, roll, roll into infinity.

The TD watching the contest stopped the game timer to help you locate the missing empress. Our chess official had noticed where the rolling queen had hidden herself. It was a quick trip right back to your hand. With the clock running again the game continued. Her majesty delivered mate in short order.

The opponent claimed that the TD had interfered in the game. Did they?

TJ Says: In this instance, the promoted piece dropping to the floor while hiding in plain sight creates a missing piece. By understanding the idea behind rule 8F7 (Promoted piece not available) it is clear the clocks should be halted and the piece (the queen in this case) retrieved. In practice, many TDs carry extra queens with them for just such goofy times. TDs are encouraged to have the result of the game take place on the board and ignore any attempts to twist a rule's words to create a loophole. The TD did not interfere.

Pairing Error Fix?

Inadvertent inequities creep into the pairings. During Round 1, an unnoticed pairing miscue appeared. Sometimes data just goes astray, even with pairings software. Misinformation is entered and inferior pairings go out. Sadly, flawed data sometimes goes undiscovered until the game is over. If you are the one that suffered through a

mismatch in a game, bring it to the TD's attention. Please don't wait until well after your contest has ended. The TD will correct the data for future pairings.

A few rounds later, you may see a way for the TD to make pairings that benefit you. The matchups you propose would not follow the standard Swiss formula(s) for making pairings; however, your suggested pairings would make up for the earlier error. This time the error would be in your favor. Should the TD accept your suggestion?

TJ Says: The TD should reject your idea. While you would benefit from the skewing of the Swiss pairings in your favor, other contests will then fall short of their due matchups, creating their own version of unfair pairings.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

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Just the Rules: Last-Round Byes

August 29, 2025

There is an entire rule devoted to half-point byes in our rulebook. There you will find directives on when to allow them and when not to allow them. Those directives are also furnished with escape hatches. That mix makes it as clear as mud.

One should ideally ask for last-round byes early on — like, before the tournament begins. Why? It rubs people the wrong way when a wood-pusher checks out the wallchart before their last contest, sees that a half-pointer in their upcoming game guarantees them first place gold (or, at least, some gold), and then requests a half-point bye.

If the TD allows that late-requested last-round bye — which is one of those escape hatches — it may result in ire from the crowd raining down hard upon officialdom. This reaction makes some sense: Surprising and unearned top spot victories — particularly those that come with a payout — create a lot of negative emotions.

Late Last Round Bye Requests

One challenge the TD has when denying a last-minute finishing-round bye request that leads to a top tier finish is controlling what happens next. That wood-pusher's last round contest can, way too often, then lead to a quick draw. Even imposing a move limit before a draw can be offered can still backfire.

Rule 22C does point out the timetable for requesting byes: before the event begins and during the first half of the tournament is best. A safe bet for the organizer is to publicize a tournament's bye policy. Surprising players with an unstated bye policy is not the best idea.

Canceling an Earlier Bye Request

Sometimes a last-round bye request comes in early enough to satisfy the rules. But, when a chess general realizes that a last-round win would put them into prize contention, they may decide to play the system and request to cancel that tournament-ending half-pointer.

Taking advantage of the escape hatch mentioned earlier, the TD is allowed to pair them (say what?)! But, in that instance, the game score would at most count for only rating points, not for prizes. Only the half-point from the bye would be calculated for any event gold. Their

opponent's final tournament standing, and possible prizes, would be calculated using the actual game score.

Wiggle Room: Last Round Bye Requests

The TD can stick to holding players to their irrevocable last-game bye request — asked for early in the tournament. In rule 32C1, wood-pushers that do not complete the event cannot claim prizes. Byes in the last round may be considered a withdrawal.

Sidebar: Before rule 32C1, some clever players that wanted to withdraw instead asked for a late last-round bye. That-a-way, they could go home early and still collect a paycheck.

Depending on the circumstances, the TD might vary — on an individual basis — their rulings in dealing with those last rounders. Playing the last game, instead of receiving a bye, when money — or a trophy — is at stake is one thing. The half-point stands. Allowing the switcheroo from a bye to a game in the final contest of the day — when no prizes are at stake — is something else. In that instance, the TD may reason that there is little harm in allowing a last-round bye request to morph into a last-round pairing where the final contest score for the two wood-pushers counts both for ratings and final standings.

Sometimes, there are good reasons for those last-round half-point bye requests: family obligations, travel, etc. In small club or local events, there does not seem to be a huge problem with contestants asking for those last round half-pointers, or for canceling them. It is those Super Swisses with their large paydays that causes the most concern.

The Bottom-Line Best Practices

1. Late requests for last-round byes should not be honored when prizes are involved.
2. Early requests for last round-byes should be honored exactly as requested when prizes are involved.
3. Early and late requests for last round byes have wiggle room when prizes are not involved.
4. A list of bye requests should be posted early for all to see.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives.

Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on the podcasts “One Move at a Time” and “The Chess Angle.”

Just the Rules: How AI Wrote This Column!

October 2, 2025

Editor's note: In the spirit of this essay, I am choosing to publish it as-is. There are a few changes I would make — including putting spaces around the em-dashes (like this!), per our style guide — but I think there is value in seeing how AI writes. Furthermore, I think it can be dangerous to try to pass off AI-generated writing as human writing, so it feels disingenuous (not to mention, missing the point) to try to human-ify it. Thanks for the day off, Tim! - JJL

TJ's Question: I asked AI (Copilot) to write a “Just the Rules” column in the style of Tim Just. Look what it spit out:

AI's Answer: Absolutely! Tim Just's “Just the Rules” column is known for its practical, sometimes humorous, and always insightful commentary on the intricacies of chess tournament rules. It's written from the perspective of a seasoned Tournament Director (TD) who's seen it all—from clock disputes to doughnut-eating opponents.

Here's an original article in that spirit, blending rule interpretation with real-world chess drama:

Just the Rulings: The Curious Case of the Phantom Draw

It was round four of a local Swiss tournament, and the tension in the room was thicker than a Sicilian Defense. Two players—let's call them Knightmare and BishopBasher—were deep into a blitz endgame. The clocks were ticking, the pawns were flying, and then... silence.

Knightmare extended his hand. BishopBasher shook it. No words were exchanged. No scoresheets were signed. No TD was summoned.

Five minutes later, BishopBasher approached the TD table:

“We agreed to a draw, but he's now saying he won. What gives?”

Rulebook Reality Check

According to the US Chess Federation's rulebook, a draw must be clearly agreed upon by both players and recorded appropriately. A handshake alone? Not enough. Especially in blitz, where gestures can be misinterpreted faster than a rook sacrifice.

The TD ruled it a win for Knightmare—because BishopBasher failed to make a formal claim, and Knightmare resumed play before the draw was officially recorded. Harsh? Maybe. But rules are rules.

Lessons from the Board

Always verbalize your draw offer. “I offer a draw” is not just polite—it’s procedural. **Confirm with the TD if there’s any ambiguity.** A 30-second chat can save a 30-minute dispute. **Don’t rely on gestures.** Chess isn’t charades. **Bonus Tip: The “No Claim, No Problem” Trap**

Players often assume the TD will intervene if something’s off. But unless a claim is made, TDs are like ghosts—watching, but not haunting. If you want a ruling, you have to ask for it.

Want more tales from the trenches of tournament chess? I can spin up another one involving illegal moves, clock slaps, or the mysterious “doughnut distraction” rule. Just say the word.

TJ Asks: So, how did AI do? Can I retire now?

NEW LINKS:

TJ Interview (Thanks Kathy Lin and the Columbus Chess Academy).

New 2025-26 Scholastic Regulations (changes).

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives. Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on “One Move at a Time,” “The Chess Angle,” and my interview via Kathy Lin (Columbus Chess Academy).

Just the Rules: Contradictory Rules Quiz

October 31, 2025

Our rulebook has some rules that require a face-off: apparently contradictory rules that each claim they are top dog. A pair of rules, in other words, that require a TD as the referee. Can you navigate the tension and ace this quiz?

1) Draw Offers Versus Annoying Behavior Your game is a contest of one exclamation-worthy move after another. For every move, there is an equal, opposite countermove from your opponent. As the time control approaches, you have a notion. A series of steps that give you a slight advantage. You are making progress. Your plan will, at the very least, give your opponent pause to think.

Your challenger's response is to move quickly and offer a draw — over and over and over and over.

Of course, you decline each of the seemingly uncountable offers. Yes, your rival properly makes his move and then immediately offers the draw before starting your timer, as the rulebook specifies, but enough is enough. You stop the clocks and summon the TD to complain that the repeated draw offers are annoying (Rule 20G). Your opponent insists he is allowed to offer draws (Rule 14B1).

- A) Your opponent can continue to offer draws, it's his right.
- B) Your opponent must stop offering draws.
- C) Your opponent is warned. He can only offer draws when the position has significantly changed.
- D) None of the above.

2) Piece Adjustments Versus Annoying Behavior After each of your moves, your opponent (on his turn) adjusts several pieces on the board (both yours and his). He especially does not like chess soldiers that are not centered perfectly on their squares. Knights facing the wrong way really frost his cookies — he likes them faced sideways so they appear as they do in chess puzzles. You like your knights faced forward. Your rival does utter, “I adjust,” for each individual adjustment, as the rulebook specifies.

But all this adjusting often prevents you from seeing the board. You file a 20G (annoying behavior) complaint with the TD. Your opponent points out that rules 10A and 10F allow piece adjustments when it is his turn.

- A) Your opponent can continue to adjust when it is his turn, but only the piece that you just moved.
- B) Your opponent must ask permission from the TD to make any piece adjustments.
- C) Either of the above.
- D) None of the above.

3) No Electronic Equipment Versus Possible Exemptions You are considered a tech wiz by a lot of fellow chess enthusiasts. Your club revels in the cell phone pictures you post on your club's social media. The club is sponsoring this one-day weekend event. Before your contest starts, you explain to your adversary that, during the game you will be taking pictures of the event — with your phone — and posting them online. You even offer to pause the game timer to allow your opponent to watch every action you take to get the job done. You were given permission to do this by the TD.

“You can't have electronic communication equipment turned on in the tournament room,” exclaims your opponent (Rule 20N). The TD is called over. She explains that she has given permission for you to take pictures and then post them online. Is she correct?

- A) No: You may not use your phone for any reason during the game. Turn it off and put it away.
- B) Yes: You may use your phone to take pictures and then post them online.
- C) None of the above.

Solutions 1) There is even a special rule about this case; i.e., Rule 14B5, Repeated Offers. That rule acknowledges that repeated draw offers can be “construed” as annoying. Penalties *may* be imposed by the TD. Typically, the TD will first issue a warning, along with an explanation, before imposing penalties for any subsequent behavior. Since this is the first complaint, answer C is the correct choice.

- 2) Sometimes wood-pushers push the limits of a rule too far. This is one of those cases. Answer C looks out for the rights of both players.
- 3) The TD gave her permission. The first words of Rule 20N, Electronic communication devices: Without the permission of the director... You clearly have permission from the TD. Answer B works here.

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives. Plus, listen to Tim when he was

a guest on “One Move at a Time,” “The Chess Angle,” and my interview via Kathy Lin (Columbus Chess Academy).

Just the Rules: January’s Rulebook Updates 2026

December 2, 2025

Editor’s note, Dec. 3, 2025: The section on the TDAC (formerly TDCC) has been slightly revised on a technical level.

What rules updates, changes, deletions, and additions can you expect starting in January of 2026? Fasten your seat belts, here we go.

Delegate me this, Delegate me that: The Delegates only passed one rule improvement for 2026!

The upgrade was so good it eliminated the need for the old rule’s TD TIP. Just nine little words (in *italics*) made everything crystal clear in the Blitz rules:

18. *Subject to the right of appeal to US Chess*, the decision of the chief tournament director is final.

FYI, the old rule plus the gone-baby-gone TIP:

Old Blitz Rule: 18. The decision of the tournament director is final.

TD TIP: This rule’s intent stated more accurately could be: “The decision of the chief tournament director is final.” Many Blitz events have a staff of TDs. The decision of a floor TD can obviously be appealed to the chief TD. An “appeals committee” or a “special referee” would unnecessarily delay the tournament. Players may appeal directly to US Chess, via their appeals process, after the event is over.

From the Powers That Be (AKA The Executive Board): The TDCC has a new moniker: TDAC. The Tournament Director Certification Committee (TDCC) had their name changed to Tournament Director & Arbiter Committee (TDAC) to deal with FIDE arbiter certification and Arbiter directing miscues (Chapter 7).

The TDAC is currently adding official regulations regarding USA Tournament Directors obtaining the Arbiter of National Level (FIDE NA) license. FIDE confers Arbiters of National Level via paper-work/recommendations from US Chess. There are some hoops for the candidates to jump through on the US Chess side, the current version of which can be viewed [here](#). Candidates then must pay a FIDE fee that US Chess passes along to FIDE. Those FIDE NA license requirements are scheduled to be available in January at this

link. Note: Link subject to change without notice. **Housekeeping:**5C's TD TIP changed "standard" to "ratable:" "Examples of standard *ratable* time controls:"

Rule 15C has a revised TD TIP that deleted wording that is obsolete.

Rule 21E deleted a "See also" that is now invalid.

Rule 28D1 updated the links in the TD TIP regarding ratings conversions to US Chess from foreign countries.

The link in Chapter 10 rule 2B was updated.

There were some "See also" additions to Blitz rules 1a, 1b and 2b. The "See also" of each rule now refers the reader to more possible info in the classic chess rules in chapter 1.

A shoutout to Micah Smith for his help with these housekeeping chores.

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Just the Rules: Official Ratings

January 1, 2026

Just where is the line drawn? You know the one. The line that determines what rating you are assigned when you plop down your entry fee. The line that determines what section gold — or prize — you can earn. For the sake of fairness, that same line should not only apply to you, but to every other wood-pusher in the tournament. The monthly ratings supplement (or list) is the official ratings gold standard.

Official Ratings: The Basics

Now-a-days, US Chess publishes a monthly ratings supplement. Every month you are assigned an official rating based on your win-loss record (and a few other mathematical factors). So, if your official rating in the June supplement is 1532, then those digits are used for pairing and prize purposes in each and every event you push wood in until July rolls around. The July supplement would then typically reflect your new official rating based on your tournament results in June submitted to US Chess in the first three weeks of that month. If you took a vacation from competing in June, then your official rating stays the same (1532) for chess competitions you may enter in July.

Technical stuff: If your official rating in the December supplement is 1732, it stays 1732 until the next supplement (January) is published. It stays 1732 when you enter any December event. For example: Currently the official January 2026 supplement is being generated on December 17, 2025. So, it is typically the first three weeks of any month that determines the next month's official ratings. Why? Because it is not practically possible to generate and distribute supplements between the last day of the month and the first day of the next month.

Unofficial Ratings

Your official rating in the November ratings supplement is 1798. After a great tournament, the online event report puts your new rating at 1832. Your new post event rating of 1832! It is an unofficial rating. If you enter any further contests in November, you are still rated officially 1798. Any rating changes from events in the first three weeks of November will get reflected in the December official ratings publication.

Note : TDs can advertise which rating they will use for their customers. That announcement can allow a TD to use your latest available unofficial rating (or your previous month's official rating, or an average of all your event's ratings for the last three months, or etc., etc., etc.). Without an announcement, your current official rating is the gold standard.

Example 1:

In the July ratings supplement your official rating is 1602. In early July you push wood at a local tournament. At the end of it all your 1602 official rating moves down to 1592. A week later you sign up for an event with huge Class C section prizes. Your 1592 rating makes you the favorite to take home a big pot of gold.

When you arrive at the site you notice on the pre-registration list that you are still rated 1602. That puts you at the bottom end of wood-pushers in the hunt for Class B big bucks. What gives?

The TD explains: Your July rating is your official rating for that month. Unless advertised differently, TDs are required to use your official rating for the entire month of July. The event did not advertise otherwise. Your newer 1592 rating is an unofficial rating. The rule is pretty explicit; i.e. the TD can't use your lower (unofficial) rating for pairings and prizes for the entire month of July.

By the way, that regulation puts a roadblock up. A roadblock that stands in the way of sandbaggers. You know the ones. Strong players that lose rating points on purpose to qualify for the big bucks in weaker sections. While you earned your lower 1592 rating, a sandbagger would lose rating points intentionally to qualify for that same cash. TDs must not allow lower unofficial ratings to be used (see rules 28E1 – 28E2) unless advertised otherwise.

Example 2:

The State of Confusion Open in November is an event with multiple sections. Chess generals can play up one section for an extra \$20. You are officially rated 1793, the event's top Class B rating. At another earlier contest last week, you scored well enough to pick up 10 rating points — you are now rated unofficially 1803 (as per that tournament's online rating report). You made it to Class A!

Since you aim to improve your game by facing off with other Class A competitors, you enter the Confusion's Class A section. When you show up you notice that you must pay the \$20 "play up" fee to essay

games in that section. Why?

The TDs believe you are still rated officially 1793. Your latest, but unofficial, rating can't be used unless they advertised otherwise — and they did not advertise otherwise. Your choices are to play in the Class B section or pay the \$20 “play up” fee into the Class A section. TDs are not required to honor your unofficial 1803 rating; however, ask them to do so anyhow. There is not much of a downside, plus most TDs are accommodating when honoring unofficial higher ratings.

For more detailed information check out rules 28C – 28H3.

Mike Nolan contributed to this column.

***Sidebar:** This is column number 100! I am amazed. I hope you enjoyed them. I have had a lot of fun writing them. I am looking forward to column number 200.*

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives. Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on “One Move at a Time”, “The Chess Angle” and Tim’s interview hosted by Kathy Lin (Columbus Chess Academy).

Just the Rules: Roll Your Eyes Moments

February 5, 2026

You reach a moment in your contest that needs a TD. A survey of the playing area reveals no chess official in sight — not in the room, not in the hall, not in the TD room, etc. You stop the clocks and go on a hunt for help. The TD has vanished. When you return to your game you notice the TD is now settling a dispute at another board. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

You tell the TD that you are withdrawing. You are instructed to use the withdrawal sign-up sheet. Hey, you already told the TD. You don't need to do extra paperwork too. You get paired the next round anyhow. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

It is time for round one to start. You pre-entered the tournament and arrived in plenty of time before the start of the first game. Due to the long line of at-the-door entries at the site, round one is delayed. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

You show up for the State of Confusion Open and realize you left all your equipment at home. That's OK, your opponents will have theirs. Your opening game adversary has no equipment either — they thought all the equipment was provided by the organizer. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

You make a claim during time pressure. It is your move. The TD promptly comes to your board. She listens to both sides of the case being made. In the meantime, neither you, your opponent, nor the TD stops your timer. Your chess clock runs out of time. Your opponent claims a win. You lose on time. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

You are all set to start your next round game. At the posted time no pairings appear — what gives? There is still a contest going on from the last round?! After the TD announced the start of last round's games one wood-pusher arrived 45 minutes later. His seated opponent was a good sport and waited for them to arrive before starting their clock. The game is a tough back-and-forth. Due to that contest's late start, it is now holding up the beginning of the next round for everyone else. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

You park yourself at your board awaiting the arrival of your opponent. After a one hour "no show" you claim your point. When you go to note your victory on the results sheet, you notice your alleged

opponent already claimed the victory. It turns out you were seated at the wrong board the whole time. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

You win an exciting back and forth contest. Both you and your opponent quickly adjourn to the fast-food joint down the street to analyze the ins and outs of the game and enjoy a bite or two of food. You both then head back to the event. When the pairings go up for the next round. You can't find your name. With your victory you should be in the two-point score group. Then you discover your pairing in the one-point score group. Huh? The TD points out that you never reported the results of your last round game. They did try to find you but, alas, you were hidden in a fast-food establishment away from the site. It's a "roll your eyes moment."

Do you have a "roll your eyes moment" tale to tell?

Want more? Past columns can be found [here](#) or by searching the Chess Life Online archives. Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on "One Move at a Time", "The Chess Angle" and his interview hosted by Kathy Lin (Columbus Chess Academy).

Just the Rules: Short Quiz Time!

March 2, 2026

1. Whose Pick Is It Anyway?

You arrive at your board before the game has started. Your opponent, playing white, has set up their equipment. The set and board are the standard chess warriors we have all come to know and love. The only issue is that their timer occupies your left side of the playing arena — your opponent's right side. Since you were assigned to lead the black pieces, you point out that you can choose the placement of the game clock; i.e., on your right-hand side of the board. Your opponent protests. Your adversary points out that since they set up the equipment first, they get to choose the clock placement. Time for some TD intervention:

A. The TD allows your opponent to place the clock anywhere they want for this contest. They set up the equipment first, so they get to choose. **B.** The TD allows you to set up the clock on your right-hand side of the board. **C.** The TD tells you two to work it out between yourselves. **D.** Any of the above is correct.

2. Looking For Help in All the Wrong Places.

Pieces are being slammed onto the playing field with the force of Thor's hammer. Each chess general has five minutes to enter the winner's circle. You sloppily continue to scribble down both your and your opponent's maneuvers — despite the fact that, at this point, you are not required to. Your adversary is noting nothing on her scoresheet — instead her dad, spectating off to the side, is notating the game for her. You ask him to stop. He refuses, saying, "My daughter needs a copy of the game for later analysis." He continues to keep notation for her. A couple of moves later he makes a claim using the scoresheet as proof. Time for TD intervention:

A. The TD allows the parent to notate and warns him that the score cannot be used in any claim. **B.** The TD tells the parent to stop taking notation for his daughter. **C.** The TD removes the dad from the playing area. **D.** Any of the above is a ruling the TD has the authority to make.

3. You Are So Beautiful to Me.

Before the first pawn or piece is deployed, you call the TD over to your board. You claim your opponent's board and pieces are not regulation. Your counterpart points out that he is essaying the black

pieces, as per the pairings, and can choose the equipment. While the board is made up of bright, flowing, light-lime-and-rouge-red squares, the chess armies are also unexpected colors. His black pieces are really light blue. Your white army is bright yellow-green (chartreuse). What should the TD do?

A. The TD notes that while the board and pieces are regulation sizes, their colors make them non-standard and a distraction. The equipment needs to be replaced. **B.** Your opponent is allowed to use his equipment. **C.** The TD allows the board but disallows the pieces. **D.** The TD allows the pieces and disallows the board.

SOLUTIONS

1. Rule 29A1 in chapter four (Equipment Standards) in the current rulebook applies here. Why? You were not late for the game. You came before the start of the round. You may choose where to set up the chess clock. Here **Option B** is correct.

2. Your rival's dad is a spectator. The dynamic duo of Rule 20M1 (Spectators have no special privileges) and 20M5 (Spectators cannot make claims) applies here. Those two regulations essentially give the TD the authority to go in just about any direction—A, B, or C could all apply. So, **Option D** (any of the above...) is the correct answer. On a personal note, I would lean towards option A. The claim will be denied if the daughter makes the same claim as her dad. Why? There is no score (proof) to back her up. IMHO a good warning and explanation to dad is something of a win-win here.

3. We are again back into Chapter four (Equipment Standards). **Option A** is the right way to go.

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives. Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on “One Move at a Time”, “The Chess Angle” and his interview hosted by Kathy Lin (Columbus Chess Academy).

Just the Rules: Surprise, Surprise, Surprise

April 1, 2026

When expectations meet reality on the tournament scene, be prepared to be astounded, amazed and surprised.

Surprise, Surprise, Surprise! — Pairings

When you check the pairings, you see you have been assigned to be the general of the black army for the third time in a row. It is well-established that wood-pushers at these events are only assigned to lead the same-colored chess army no more than two times in a row, not three times in a row. Buried among the regulations is a rule (29E5f and its variation) that sanctions a triple-play on color assignment. Sometimes there is no other way to pair a score group. Interestingly, players often don't gripe about being in charge of the white pieces three times in a row. While legal, the three-peat can be avoided if the TD sets up their software package to avoid it.

Surprise, Surprise, Surprise! — Adjournments

When was the last time you were involved in an adjourned game? When was the last time you witnessed a TD adjourn any game? An entire rule (18) is devoted to this process; yet, it remains a fairly forgotten and obscure practice. Adjournments now-a-days have been relegated to games that would otherwise hold up the entire tournament. Games with increment time controls or contests with short times between rounds are a couple of examples. A move gets sealed in an envelope, not made OTB, for the TD to hold until the game resumes at a later time. Just the Rules: Adjournment Rules of Thumb | US Chess.org covers the details.

Surprise, Surprise, Surprise! — Appeals

You are pretty sure the TD tripped over themselves in the ruling they just made in your game. You immediately appeal that decision to the chief TD. The chief upholds the ruling. What's left for you to do? You can ask for an appeals committee to hear you out (rule 21H4). The downside is that getting together unbiased committee members to serve as judge and jury is a lengthy process that may also mess up round starting times. An alternative is to engage a Special Referee to hear the case — typically via phone. That contact list for those referees is available to US Chess Affiliates in their online area. Or, you could just appeal directly to US Chess (rule 21L1). There is a

mostly refundable fee (the fee is kept for frivolous appeals) involved in that process. Just the Rules: Is the On-Site Appeals Committee Still Relevant? | US Chess.org can detail your options.

Surprise, Surprise, Surprise! — Expectations.

Expectations are one thing; reality is something else. One item that can be out of sync with the chapter five expectation of a quiet wood-pushing venue is the inevitable site noise level. At a hotel, and other sites, management can (and does) rent out unused space. In the ballroom next to the playing area a hotel can rent out floor space to a loud celebration, a music contest, Jazzercise class... Chess organizers have no control over neighborhood noise — they are at the site owner's mercy. TDs and organizers do have control over the noise level created by chess players — analyzing, socializing, etc.

What rules have you been surprised by in the past?

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives. Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on “One Move at a Time”, “The Chess Angle” and his interview hosted by Kathy Lin (Columbus Chess Academy).

Just the Rules: Rulebook Wanna Be(s)

May 6, 2026

Getting a new rule into the rulebook — or revising an old time rule — can take different paths before they are considered by the Delegates at their annual meeting. Changes can be proposed as motions at the Membership meeting, on the advanced Delegates' Meeting agenda, or live, at their meeting, by a Delegate. Some rules take a lot of debate, some do not. In the end the Delegates give the new wording a thumbs up, thumbs down, or a thumb that is parallel with the floor (undecided).

A few columns ago we took a look some of the rules changes the 2025 Delegates debated. Once the smoke cleared, a few of those rules got sent off to the Rules Committee for another look see. The committee will report back to the 2026 Delegates about its own thumbs up or down. The Delegates will then give those proposals a second pass-or-fail go around. Those rules have not passed yet, but they might at the 2026 meeting and will go into effect in 2027.

And, what are those proposed adjustments, you ask? Take a peek at these summations:

From the World of Blitz Chess Comes a Proposal for a New Rule 7e:

Current Rule: 7e. An illegal move doesn't negate a player's right to claim on time, provided it is made prior to an opponent's claim of an illegal move. If the claims are simultaneous, the player who made the illegal move loses.

Proposed New Rule: 7e. A player whose opponent's time has expired can claim a win on time if the player's last completed move was a legal move. A player who completes an illegal move cannot claim a win on time unless and until the opponent determines a subsequent move. If it is not possible to establish whether the opponent determined a move before or after the player claimed a win on time, or if they both happened simultaneously, the player who completed the illegal move loses, provided the opponent has sufficient mating material as defined in rule 7c

TJ Says: Making an illegal move right as time is just about to expire can cause a lot of confusion. The opponent's time may expire before they can claim the illegality. In short, it is considered a dirty trick. One that needs fixing.

**

Standard Equipment

Current Rule: The last sentence of 39A (Choice of equipment) reads: The Director is the final arbiter to whether the equipment in question is standard.

Proposed New Wording: Change the last sentence of 39A (Choice of equipment) to: The Director is the final arbiter to whether the equipment in question is standard, except that no player shall be required to play on a board that has a symbol on a square.

TJ Says: This one has been around in several failed rule changes so far. Objections to those provided boards with a picture on one, or all, of the corner squares generated this current version. If this passes, then some method of replacing, upon request, picture-bearing boards with non-picture-bearing boards would be needed.

Piece Adjustments

Current Rule: 10A. Adjustment of pieces. A player who is on the move and first expresses the intention to adjust (e.g., by saying j'adoube or I adjust) may adjust one or more pieces on their squares.

The Proposed Change is to add a sentence to rule 10A: Adjusting of the opponents' pieces can only be done on the immediate move after said piece (or pawn) has been moved.

TJ Says: *This change is aimed at the opponent that continues to adjust all the pieces on every move.*

Scorekeeping

Current Rule: Rule 15A. Manner of keeping score. In the course of play each player is required to record the game (both the player's and the opponent's moves), move after move, as clearly and legibly as possible, on the scoresheet prescribed for the competition. Algebraic notation is standard, but descriptive or computer notation is permitted. The player must first make the move and then record it on the scoresheet. The scoresheet shall be visible to the arbiter (tournament directors) and the opponent throughout the game.

Proposed Rule: Add a sentence at the end of 15A: Scorekeeping is not required in time controls that are quick rated but not dual rated.

New Rule: The following section shall be added to the end of Chapter 11, Blitz Chess: 19). Scorekeeping is not required.

***TJ Says:** These changes would cement the words needed to spell out the current practice which is now absent from the rules.*

Chapter 9: Official US Chess Correspondence Chess Rules

***New Chapter 9:** A US Chess staffer is the current Correspondence Chess Director. He is not a Delegate. I am; so, as a favor I sponsored his procedural and technical motion on all the changes (too long to list here) in Chapter 9. My last email with him indicated that he planned to be at the 2026 convention to answer the Delegates' questions that zeroed in on the proposed changes to rule 5a. He has a fix for those Delegates that have concerns about their opponent not replying to a move in the allotted time and the penalty involved.*

Proposed Change to Rule 5 (bolded) currently being reviewed by the Rules Committee: 5. The following time controls are allowable for US Chess CC events:

- a. 30 days reflection time for each 10 moves, **with a maximum of 10 days for any one move.** You may carry unused time over from one time period into the next time period.
- b. A set number of days per move, with a minimum of at least 3 days.

c. International Correspondence Chess Federation (ICCF) (www.iccf.com) time controls in accordance with ICCF rule 2.4.1 Time Allowed and Penalties and Tournament Announcements.

***TJ Says:** This is an overhaul of the correspondence rules that are out of date.*

Do you have any favorites here? I suspect a whole new set of different rulebook changes will be coming before the Delegates at their 2026 meeting. We can look at them later.

Want more? Past columns can be found here or by searching the Chess Life Online archives. Plus, listen to Tim when he was a guest on “One Move at a Time”, “The Chess Angle” and his interview hosted by Kathy Lin (Columbus Chess Academy).

Just the Rules: Quizamania Is Runnin' Wild

June 2, 2026

1. DGT and Scoresheets

You and your opponent are essaying a game 60 with a five-second delay (G60/5) on a DGT board in a US Chess rated contest. In those last few hurried minutes, you make a claim correctly. To no one's surprise, your opposition disagrees with your words. Of course, you stopped notating while your time was just about to run out; however, since it is a DGT board, the game data is being recorded by the board. What will the TD rule?

A. The TD upholds your claim. **B.** Your opponent's score is incomplete so it can't be used. **C.** You forfeit for making a false claim. **D.** Your claim is denied. You need your accurate scoresheet to make a claim.

2. Observable Illegal Move

It's the last five minutes of a sudden death time control. Your contest is one of the last ones still in the tournament room, and the TD is observing the game. Your opponent has three minutes left before their flag falls, and you have only 30 seconds left before your time runs out. You are pressing hard with active, complicated moves. Your pieces are flying around at lightning speed. You see your chance. You throw a check at your adversary with your bishop and press your clock. Your opponent ignores your check and instead places your monarch in check with their rook. Before they can press their clock, they notice their king is in check. They rescind their rook move plus hastily deal with your checking maneuver, all before pressing the game timer. Their rook has no role in escaping your check, so the game continues. But in short order, your flag falls. You complain to the TD for ignoring the illegal move plus not adding time to your clock. How does the TD respond to your complaint?

A. Your flag fell, so you lose. The illegal move is not relevant because there was no claim. **B.** The game is a draw. The illegal move is not relevant because there was no claim. **C.** The TD restarts the game from the corrected illegal move position, adding time to your clock. **D.** The TD restarts the game from the corrected illegal move position. No time is added to your clock.

3. Intent To Move Versus Actual Move

You pick up your queen and plop it down. It rests between two squares, d4 and d3. Its location is mostly on one piece of real estate: d4. After you press your clock, you wiggle her majesty over to d3 — the square you intended for her to rest upon. Your opponent stops the clocks and summons a TD. He claims since your royal highness mostly occupied the d4-square, that should be where she is placed, despite your intention to place her on d3. He further claims that you never said “adjust” before sliding your piece off of d4 and onto d3. The TD sees that your queen is currently on d3. You claim that was the move you had in mind. All that happened is that you slightly misplaced her majesty. What does the TD do?

A. You need to make another move with any other piece. **B.** Your queen’s final placement is on d4. **C.** Your queen’s final resting place is on d3. **D.** You are allowed to make any move to any square with your queen.

4. Mating Material

It was a tough endgame. After a huge trade-off of material, your opponent has a pawn rushing down the board, with a king’s entourage in tow, aiming to become a queen. Your king is stranded all alone in a quest to stop that pawn. Your counterpart’s time runs out before they can complete their pawn upgrade. Aah... the victory is yours. But then your opponent claims the game is a draw?! How does the TD settle this dispute?

A. You lose: You don’t have mating material. **B.** You win: Your opponent’s flag fell first. **C.** The game is a draw: You don’t have mating material. **D.** The game continues.

Solutions

1. D is the solution. You need your scoresheet to make claims for tournaments governed by US Chess rules. Well, you don’t need one in Blitz. If the event was FIDE-rated, the DGT data could be used. As a practical matter, most US Chess TDs don’t know how to access the DGT data. The wording of the “scoresheet” rules do not yet match the available technology in US Chess law as well as FIDE’s rules do. My suggestion is that, if a DGT board is in use at a US Chess event, that the pre-event publicity list whether DGT data can or cannot be used for claims. Chris Bird contributed his expertise to help yours truly understand the differences between US Chess and FIDE rules regarding verification of a claim.

2. You made no claim of an illegal move, so the TD is only a witness

and could not step in (11D1). Answer A is correct.

3. TDs can't read minds. You did not indicate that you were adjusting the queen's position. Your intentions don't match your observable actions (the queen mostly resting on d4). The queen's final destination is on d4, as that is the square it mostly occupied. The correct solution is B.

4. Rule 14 E makes this an easy call. C is the correct solution.

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Just the Rules: Rule 21L1's Journey Is Not Over

July 1, 2026

Our rulebook is a huge document filled with a ton of rules that the typical wood-pusher rarely has contact with. Some of those regulations simply act as aspirin for the inevitable procedural headache. When aspirin offers no relief, it is time to kick it up a notch. It is time to contact US Chess. Rule 21L1 (the procedure for appealing to US Chess) is the relief you are looking for. 21L1 has been around in some form since Tim Redman's 1987 third edition of the rulebook.

What kind of appeals get zipped on over to our mother organization? Typically, alleged rules misapplications plus possible ethical miscues. Most appeals involve perceived unfair treatment. The appeal generally gets routed to the Rules Committee, TDAC (Tournament Director and Arbiters Committee), or the Ethics Committee for processing.

There are some hoops to jump through to report those typical concerns. After the evidence has been collected and voiced it needs to show up at the US Chess office. How long after any incident do you have to pass that paperwork along to US Chess? Redman's third edition, Bill Goichberg's fourth edition, and my three editions (5-6-7) hitched a seven-day time limit to that paperwork ... until the 2022-2023 update. Suddenly that seven-day limit shot up to a ten-day limit. Huh? How did that happen? The Delegates did not approve that increase... or did they?

Well, inadvertently the ten-day limit was mentioned as an aside in a motion that addressed a different issue entirely (tardy submissions). The motion, that passed, fixed the difficulty with tardy appeals being submitted past the deadline. Now, overdue filings have to be accompanied by a reasonable explanation for the tardiness. Let's take a peek:

DM-01: Delegate Motion

The Delegates resolve to amend Rule 21L1, in the following manner:

"21L1. Procedure. Appeals in writing must be postmarked within **ten days** of the end of the tournament to the US Chess office. Appeals submitted after the **ten-day** deadline may be considered at the discretion of the committee hearing the appeal, ** ****provided an acceptable explanation of the delay was given."**

Note the added wording in red after the comma in the last sentence. That is what the motion was all about: tardiness. But if you check out the bolded deadline references, they have been changed from the standard seven days to ten days. That change was not intended, but it went unnoticed.

When the rules were updated, a simple copy-paste of the approved wording included the inadvertent deadline change from seven to ten days.

That oopsie got noticed when TDs taking their exams had one particular answer marked as incorrect. The exam question's correct answer was still keyed to the seven-day language, instead of the new ten-day deadline. The exam's new key currently counts the ten-day submission limit as correct.

Since I am a Delegate at this year's convention, I will introduce a motion to fix that deadline slippage and return it to the intended seven-day deadline.

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