

A Players Guide to Matches without Arbiters.

General Advice

- It is important that clubs have a copy of the current Laws of Chess which can be consulted if a dispute arises. This will often stop a situation from escalating.
- If the League rules amend any of these Laws (eg Mobile Phone or default time) then a note of these alterations should be kept with the main Laws. Ideally any amendments should be indicated at the relevant place in the Laws of Chess
- If the problem cannot be solved on the night the game should continue (possibly under protest). This allows the decision making body to have more options*.
- Try to resolve the dispute if possible.
- Referring to the Laws of Chess and League Rules is often a good starting point.
- Players should try to remain calm and polite. It is easy to get angry but that never helps resolve the situation.
- Detail the dispute and note repetitions.
- Try to continue the game if at all possible. (It may be agreed that the opponent should be punished but not to the extent of losing.)
- Normally players are advised not to talk to the opponent but to seek the arbiter. Here speaking to the opponent is normally the first thing to do.
- Players having a dispute should try not to disturb other boards.
- It is advisable to continue a dispute outside the playing hall unless there are concerns about what may happen. 'Taking it outside' can be a euphemism for employing physical violence. It should not be in this case.

* With disputes it can be the case that the Appeals Committee will decide that a player was in breach of the Laws but not to the extent that it would default that player. A League can then be in the unfortunate position of having to award a win to the offender because the other player refused to continue the game. If a game is not concluded 0-0 is a more likely score than ½-½. This may not affect the match result but can affect tie breaks.

Team Captains

- Many Leagues allow the Captains to have at least some responsibility for ensuring that disputes on the night are resolved. It is important that team captains are aware of their powers.
- In these situations the Captains can be a useful means of mediation.
- A breach of the Laws can be pointed out to the opponent directly. However, this can lead to an escalation of the situation and should only be done with caution.
- In a FIDE rated event Captains can only act as arbiters if licenced by FIDE.

Possible Penalties

- The most common penalty is to add two minutes to the non-offenders time.
- The offender may have time deducted.

- The team may have points deducted.
- The offender may lose the game.
- The last of these would normally only occur for repeated offences or for a very major breach of the Laws.
- The team may be penalised points.

Digital Clocks

- Since many penalties will involve having to alter a clock setting as many club players as possible should be able to do this. Clock setting should not be left to team captains or even just one club official.
- It is always advisable to write down the clock times before doing any adjustment. If the resetting goes wrong, or is disputed, these times can be useful when having another attempt.

Common Situations 1 – Failure to Record

The opponent is not recording.

A player must always record if the game has an increment of 30 seconds per move or more. Otherwise a player can stop recording when their time goes below 5 minutes. This applies even if the time goes above 5 minutes later on in the same session.

(It is acceptable for a third party to keep score but this copy must not be visible to either player. It can be used in resolving draw claims.)

- Step 1. The opponent should ask the player to keep his score sheet up to date.
- Step 2. A captain should ask the player to keep the scoresheet up to date.

Penalties

- For a first offence this would normally only be a verbal warning and the scoresheet brought up to date on the player's own time.
- For a second offence the opponent would be given an additional two minutes
- For a third offence the opponent would be entitled to claim the game.
- The claim of a game is likely to be (hotly) disputed.
- See page 7 for procedures to follow.
- Technically recording in descriptive (P-K4) is not recording legally but league rules may allow this for elderly players. In Britain claiming a league match on these grounds is unlikely to succeed.

Common Situations 2 – Illegal Move

The Laws now have various situations which count as an illegal move.

The normal illegal move where a player moves a piece to a square that it cannot legally go to e.g moving a knight from b1 to d3, moving a piece whilst in check, moving into check, etc

The move must be completed by starting the opponent's clock before it counts as being illegal.

Others

Moving with two hands (usually in castling, capturing or promoting). Moving the piece with one hand and pressing the clock with the other is not allowed but does not count as an illegal move.

Promoting without replacing the pawn with another piece. If this is done then the pawn must be replaced with a queen.

Starting the opponent's clock without making a move. (There are some situations where this may not count as an illegal move but are arguable e.g. where a player returns to the board, fails to notice the opponent's move and assumes he forgot to press the clock after moving.)

- For a first illegal move the penalty is two minutes awarded to the opponent.
- For a second illegal move by the same player the penalty is the loss of the game.

Note that it is important that there is proof of a first illegal move for a claim of the second one to be successful.

Common Situations 3 – Pressing the Clock with the Wrong Hand

The clock should only be pressed with the hand used to make the move. The Laws of Chess do not allow both hands to be used in this way. Note that this is an offence but is not an illegal move.

- This can occur when either player is short of time. Either the player short of time will do it to try to save valuable seconds or the opponent will do it to give the player less time. Both of these are serious offences and should be pointed out.
- A player might use both hands but not gain any time from doing so (occasionally this can be a slower process than using one hand). In a case like this a quiet word at the end of the game is often the best solution.
- This is usually an awkward situation to deal with as one of the players is short of time. Pointing out the offence can use up precious seconds.
- Proving it happened can be very difficult. It is often not even done consciously, the player just gets wrapped up in the situation.
- Witnesses as to the severity may be needed.
- The best course of action is to pause the clock and point out the problem. If it continues then extra time should be claimed.
- Unfortunately in these situations following the correct course of action is not intuitive.
- It is possible to request extra time be added even after a flag fall. Obviously this may be contested. If the player making the request does so without previously highlighting the problem then it does weaken the justification in making the request.

Common Situations 4 – Being distracted

There are a large number of ways a player can be distracted. Not all are down to the opponent.

- External Noise
- Internal Noise
- Poor Playing Conditions

External Noise

- There are two forms here, temporary and consistent.
- For a one off distraction it is possible to be given extra time.
- For a noise lasting for a few minutes it would be reasonable to pause the game.
- For a permanent loud noise it may be necessary to abandon the match. If the teams cannot agree on a course of action then go to second last slide.

Internal Noise

- The home club is responsible for ensuring that the best playing conditions are achieved. At every match there will be some disturbance. However this should be minimised. If it is continuous or very frequent the opposing captain should be asked to do something. If the request is refused or attempted unsuccessfully then it should be logged. The League should be informed of any such complaints. For a one-off there may be no punishment but for repeat offences there may be.

Poor Playing Conditions

- This includes bad lighting, poor temperature, cramped conditions.
- Again a complaint should be made on the night. If before play then a board might be moved to a brighter spot or further from a radiator.
- If not a one off then the League should be informed.

Opponents can distract a player in various ways too. Playing good moves does not count!

- Continually talking
- Coughing/sniffing
- J'adoubing (on your time)
- Distracting body movements
- Suspicion that cheating is taking place.

Talking

- If the player keeps talking to you that is very serious. If it continues after a warning then both captains have to be involved.
- Again each incident should be logged.
- If possible the game should continue but in these circumstances one or other player may become argumentative/aggressive.
- Talking to team-mates, even if it cannot be heard, can be distracting as the opponent may be concerned that advice is being given or sought.

Coughing/sniffing

- This is difficult even with an arbiter present. A polite request can be made requesting the player to minimise the coughing.
- If the player is coughing over the opponent then that should be stopped.

- If it continues then, for health reasons, that is a case where the game could be stopped prematurely.
- Frequently leaving the board/playing hall.

J'adoube (adjusting the pieces)

A player should only adjust the pieces on their own time. Adjusting on the opponent's time is a clear distraction. Some players will habitually stop their clock and only then centre the pieces. Again occurrences of this should be logged.

- Players who needlessly adjust on their own time are also causing a distraction but here proof is more difficult.
- It has been known for a player to turn all knights to a certain orientation each move, with the opponent turning them back on his move. In these circumstances both captains are advised to instruct their players not to touch the opponent's other than to centre them on the square.

Distracting body movements

- Twitches and the like are difficult to legislate against and may have to be tolerated in the absence of an arbiter.
- Hands that hover over pieces, even if it that player's move, are a distraction and a complaint may be made.
- An opponent who constantly stands is best ignored. There is nothing in the Laws which says that a player must be seated. Unless by standing the player is either intimidating or blocking light it would be difficult to support a complaint.

Suspicion that cheating is taking place

Cheating, especially deliberate cheating is very rare. However the suspicion of cheating is becoming a significant problem.

- Players should not discuss a game in any way. Even asking "How's your game going?" could lead to advice being given when the reply is "Good" and the reaction is a puzzled look.
- If an opponent complains about a player talking to team-mates then that player should try to avoid doing so, even if offended by the suggestion.
- Mobile phones are a major source of mistrust. At one time the noise of them ringing was the distraction. Nowadays it is the possibility of analysing the game on them using a chess engine. Phones, and other devices, should be switched off completely (not silent nor airplane modes). Any player with a phone on risks being accused of cheating.
- Many players are genuinely worried that their opponent might be tempted to put the position into their phones.
- A player who is often away from the board can worry the opponent by that action. If the player is frequently outside it can be for a variety of reasons, including illness and a smoking habit. A player who is victim of either of these afflictions may wish to alert their opponent beforehand.
- A player should not normally leave the playing hall when it is their move. That is clearly against the Laws of Chess.

- It is not unusual for a player to press the clock on a different board. This distracts players on the adjacent board rather than the opponent.
- The clocks on the adjacent board may be reset, especially if the offence is not noted immediately.
- Very unusual, but there have been cases, a player can regularly press the adjacent clock. In these cases relocating one of the boards may be necessary.

Common Situations 5 – Not being Allowed to Stop the Clock

Not being allowed by the opponent to press the clock after moving is an offence. However, many players do not understand that it is not illegal to make a reply move before the player's clock has been started.

- A player who keeps their hand on the clock after pressing it is liable to be punished, especially if this prevents the opponent from correctly stopping his clock.

Common Situations 6 – Disputed Board Order

Leagues normally have rules regarding board orders. In some cases these are quite specific, in others more vague.

- If one team feels that the other is trying to take an advantage by playing out of order then in the first instance the opposition should be informed of the concern.
- If no resolution can be reached then the match can be played and the League authorities informed and asked to make a decision.
- Such games might count for rating/grading but the result be reversed in the match score or penalty points imposed.

Unusual Situations

- **Power Failure** (insufficient light)
- **Fire Alarm**
- If either of these happen then the clocks should be paused. In the case of a fire alarm the players should leave the building. It may be advisable to leave scoresheets behind as this reduces the chances of being accused of using an engine to analyse. This is especially true if the delay is likely to be minimal. If the scoresheets are subsequently destroyed in the fire then you probably have more to worry about than that anyway!
- Physical violence threatened or carried out.
- This is extremely rare but has happened. If an assault is alleged the police should be informed. Police action may delay the League being able to respond. On the other hand if an attack is alleged and the police are not called then the League may wonder why.
- It has been known for players to be banned from further league involvement or from a club's premises for a period of time.

Claiming a Win because of the Opponent's Behaviour

Claim for repeated violations

The claim of a game is likely to be (hotly) disputed. If the opponent's do not accept the claim then:-

- The claimant should indicate on his scoresheet each occasion that the Law was broken.
- The claimant should try to have the situation confirmed by a member of the opposition (Team Captain or depute).
- The game should continue if possible and under protest.
- The opposition should be aware that the claim of a win will be made.
- The game should then be sent to the League following its dispute procedure.
- Proper documentation should be submitted including supporting evidence. A complete scoresheet should be provided if possible. If not the position when the dispute arose and the final position can both be submitted.