

League Guide to the Laws of Chess

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I promised some time ago to write a guide to the Laws of Chess for the Notts League. This is nothing to do with how the pieces move, but more to cover all those problems that may arise in a league chess match.

(a) Keeping a game score

Article 8 refers

8.1 Each player is required to record his own moves and those of his opponent in the correct manner, move after move, as clearly and legibly as possible, in the algebraic notation on the scoresheet provided for the competition. It is forbidden to write the moves in advance, unless the player is claiming a draw according to Article 9.2 or 9.3. A player may reply to his opponent's move before recording it. He must record his previous move before making another.

The key element of this law is that you must write your game down move by move. There are no exceptions unless time trouble intervenes which I'll cover next. FIDE only recognises algebraic notation – there is no penalty locally for using English descriptive. You cannot write your moves down in advance; your scoresheet should be legible – not a rule I've ever seen enforced.

8.4 If a player has less than five minutes left on his clock at some stage in a period... then he is not obliged to meet the requirements of Article 8.1. Immediately after one flag has fallen the player must update his scoresheet completely before moving a piece on the chessboard.

So if you are in time trouble you don't have to maintain a scoresheet if you have less than five minutes on your clock. Once a flag has fallen you must get your scoresheet up to date. In practice in a Notts League match you'd be expected to make up your scoresheet in your own time; normal procedure and courtesy is to do that using your opponent's scoresheet. That is covered in Article 8.5b, which I'm not going to quote in full. This part of the law also covers what happens if both players are in time-trouble. Once one flag has fallen the clocks should be stopped and the scoresheets brought up to date, reconstructing on a second chessboard if necessary.

Remember as well that you must continue to keep a score after the first time control in the Notts League; only when you have less than five minutes on the clock right at the end can you stop scoring.

(b) Claiming a draw by three time repetition

This is covered in Article 9:

9.2 the game is drawn, upon a correct claim by the player having the move, when the same position, for at least the third time (not necessarily by a repetition of moves)

a) is about to appear, if he first writes his move on his scoresheet and declares to the arbiter his intention to make the move, or

b) has just appeared and the player claiming the draw has the move.

So to claim a draw under this rule you must firstly write the move on your scoresheet in advance and indicate to your opponent that you will play this move which will lead to a third repetition. Do not make the move at the board; this renders the claim invalid (article 9.4). There are no arbiters present at League matches so what you should do is set up another board to check the validity of the claim. If the claim is correct, the game is drawn. If the claim is incorrect there is a penalty; this basically is adding three minutes to the opponent's clock and deducting up to three minutes from the claimant's clock. If the claimant is in time trouble the time deducted varies – I suggest you read this up yourselves; rather complicated and unlikely to occur in practice.

(c) Illegal moves

Covered in Article 7.4. If a player makes an illegal move, his opponent is awarded two minutes extra time in the first two instances; for a third illegal move by the same player the game is lost.

(d) The chess clock

Use of the clock is covered under Article 6. Firstly please note that under 6.8 – the players must handle the chess clock properly. It is forbidden to punch it forcibly, to pick it up or to knock it over. Article 6.9 is very important in League play. A flag is considered to have fallen when either player has made a valid claim to that effect. So to win on time you must make a claim to that effect and show that your opponent's flag has fallen

(e) Conduct of players

Article 12 refers. Item 12.2 bars mobile phones, I always ask players to turn off phones before the start of a match and Article 13.7 tells us that players in other games are not to speak about or otherwise interfere in a game. So please remember you must not tell players they have lost/won on time, have reached the time control or anything else. This is interference.

(f) Quickplay finish

This is the one that causes the most problems. In chess tournaments with an arbiter present the ruling on claiming a draw in a quickplay finish is given in Article 10. Of course there is no arbiter present at league matches so we must rely on the Appendices to the Laws. Here's what Appendix D says:

Where games are played as in Article 10, a player may claim a draw when he has less than two minutes left on his clock and before his flag falls. This concludes the game.

He may claim on the basis

a) that his opponent cannot win by normal means. and/or

b) that his opponent has been making no effort to win by normal means.

In (a) the player must write down the final position and his opponent verify it.

In (b) the player must write down the final position and submit an up-to-date scoresheet which must be completed before play

has ceased. The opponent shall verify both the scoresheet and the final position. The claim shall be referred to an arbiter whose decision shall be the final one.

What I would say about this is that a player with a time advantage has every right to endeavour to win the game. If you get into time trouble it isn't the responsibility of an arbiter to bail you out. Last season I played a well-known local player. My position after 35 moves was clearly equal but he was some 45 minutes ahead on the clock. In the following 15 minutes I was short of time, adopted a clearly faulty plan and lost – due entirely to the time factor. On the other hand a game involving two other players had an ending with pawn chains completely blocking the board. Both sides had bishops (of opposite

colour) stuck behind the pawn chains. The kings couldn't infiltrate so the player ahead on time thought it would be a marvellous idea to win by a flag fall – so he marched his king from h1 to a3 and then, like the Duke of York, it set off in the opposite direction. Fortunately common sense prevailed and the game was drawn, though a claim under this appendix would have sufficed when his opponent got down to the last two minutes.

The ECF has published guidance on interpreting the laws relating to the quickplay finish. See:

http://www.englishchess.org.uk/organisation/fide/guidance-quickplay_nov06.htm