

Text by:
IA Tania Karali



Let's talk Hybrid – Moving further

We have written before about Hybrid chess being the closest solution to OTB conditions, when travelling is not an option. In this article we will move one step further and speak about the Millennium chess boards, which are especially designed to eliminate the use of a virtual chessboard during a game.

On February 5th, an exhibition team match was organised between members of the ECU Board and players from the Berlin Chess Association, where every team had 4 players. The purpose of this match was to try the Millennium boards that their manufacturer, Millennium 2000 GmbH, had donated to ECU. The ECU Board was represented by GM Adrian Mikhalchishin, Sarkhan Gashimov, Gunnar Bjornsson and IM Eva Repkova and the Berlin Chess Association by FM Dr. Joachim Wintzer, Ralf Schnabel, Juergen Brustkern and Ralf Gebert-Vangeel.

Every player had in front of them a Millennium board, a laptop and a ChessLink module. A module is a small device that serves to connect the board and the player's laptop via a USB cable and needs to be connected to a power source at all time. The set up is individual for each player, meaning that the boards are not connected to each other or the arbiter's computer, as in OTB events.

The idea behind these boards is simple:

- the match (or individual game) is set on an online platform (tornelo was chosen for this match)
- the player makes a move only on the physical board
- the move is transmitted via the platform and indicated on the opponent's board by LEDs

- the opponent sees the initial and final square of the piece the player moved
- the opponent copies the move on his physical board
- the opponents continues with making his own move

The simplicity of this way of playing is that the players only need to use the physical board for playing and not a virtual one, whereas in a "classic" hybrid match they would need to move on the virtual board first and then copy the moves to the physical one. Thus, they avoid confusion and can focus on their game on the physical board only. Of course, the computer is still needed as it provides the clocks and the controls to start the game, offer a draw or resign.

The Millennium chess boards also offer various settings for the brightness of the LEDs and the speed of transmission. A disadvantage that we noticed during the match is that each player needs a sufficient amount of time to copy the opponent's move, before they can make their own (making a move before transferring the opponent's move is considered illegal by the board). An increment of at least 30 seconds after each move is recommended for that purpose. Overall, it was an interesting experience for both teams.

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In this article, international chess arbiter Tania Karali speaks about the Millennium chess boards, which are especially designed to eliminate the use of a virtual chessboard during a game.

The boards were used in the match between ECU Board members and representatives of Berlin Chess Association in early February.