About Fischer Random Chess

Allow me to go back in time for a moment.
Chess 960 has its origins in the 18th century at that time called “Schuffle Chess”. Although this form of chess traditionally fascinated chess players for the idea that one had to play the game without the preparation of a certain opening and thus relied on one's own chess skills from the start, it remained a niche activity in the chess world for a long time.
“Shuffle chess” (later also called random chess) is the precursor of Chess960 and was first mentioned as early as 1792. Mr. Van Zuylen van Nijevelt (1743-1826) was probably the first to come up with the idea of this variant, a form of chess with a symmetrical basic setup established by drawing lots. He disliked openings “with all those annoying, recurring patterns” and therefore came up with the idea of having the arrangement of the pieces determined by lot. That produces an infinite number of different positions, with the result that nobody can study them in advance, he said. Van Nijevelt's nephew, the squire Elias van der Hoeven (1778-1854), a Dutch envoy, further developed “Schuffle chess”.
In 1996, former world chess champion Robert (Bobby) Fischer introduces for the first time Fischer Random Chess (FRC), also known as Chess960 (it refers to the 960 distinct possible starting positions) or Free Style Chess, now a day the more used term.

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The literature on FRC is very scarce and often extremely superficial.

It’s a chess variant that randomizes the starting position of the pieces on the back rank. Fischer’s goal was to reduce the emphasis on opening preparation and to encourage creativity in play. FRC uses the same board and pieces as classical chess, but the starting position of the pieces on the players' home ranks is randomized, following certain rules. The random setup makes gaining an advantage through the memorization of openings unfeasible. Players instead must rely on their skill and especially on their creativity.

Theoretically, in FRC, 960 starting positions can be used. They are all legal. However, it might be necessary to exclude some positions before the start of the tournament. The “normal” starting position in classical chess is also one of the 960 starting positions in FRC, namely 518, or even 534 which is the normal starting position with king and queen swapped. This excluded positions should be mentioned in the tournament regulations.

In 2008, FIDE added FRC to an appendix of the Laws of Chess. In 2020, during the FIDE general assembly in Abu Dhabi, FRC was approved as s an official World Championship title. The first world championship officially sanctioned by FIDE, the FIDE World FRC Championship 2019, brought additional prominence to the variant.

It was won by Wesley So. In 2022, Hikaru Nakamura became the new champion. According to experienced players, the first advice to give to new FRC players is to realise that the first move of a game can already be critical. Unlike standard chess, you will notice that a lot of games are already decided in the first moves. It’s also very important for new FRC players to know as soon as possible and, above all, remember well the different castling rules.

In short, just like in standard chess, it's all about developing pieces, occupying centre and king security but you sometimes have to play moves for this that you wouldn't play in standard chess or less quickly in the opening.

Magnus Carlsen has clearly jumped on that bandwagon too. With the Freestyle Chess G.O.A.T. challenge in 2024, the very first top tournament featuring classic Chess960 chess was organised.
From the arbiters point of view a tournament (or round) in FRC is much like a classical tournament. However, the responsibilities of the arbiter is considerably more demanding. Especially castling, with some very important castling rules, is a tricky moment as there are a certain number of different rules for castling. I can refer to the Guidelines II. Chess960 Rules in the FIDE Laws of Chess.