

You have the right to call the arbiter!

This month's article addresses players more than arbiters.

I was recently in two School events, World and National, with many children aged from 6 to 18 with different levels of experience in chess tournaments. There were the "professional" ones, who have already travelled many times to various events and prepare for the tournaments very hard in advance, and the "amateurs" who might have been playing for the first time, are more relaxed, but a little bit scared at the same time by the new conditions. In such tournaments, we see different attitudes between the two groups of players and the people who accompany them (might be parents, guardians, coaches), especially in the way they respond to irregularities. For any incident that may happen during the game, the more experienced players will stop the clock with confidence, call the arbiter and explain what happened. The younger or less experienced players are often afraid to call the arbiter, perhaps they think they will not be heard or that they cannot properly express what they need, and it is often that they go out of the playing area disappointed and feeling that an injustice has taken place.

It is to these players that I wish to say "You have the right to call the arbiter!". We often think that arbiters are present in tournaments only to impose penalties for illegal moves and call fallen flags. However, this is only part of the arbiter's role. The arbiters are there to listen to the players and make sure they play their games in the best possible conditions. This includes avoiding disturbance by the opponent or external factors, tending to their needs, even answering questions on the Laws of Chess.

In both of my recent events, players claimed that the opponents made illegal moves or were disturbing them or other irregularities occurred. And they only spoke about this to their parents after the game was over. In such a situation, there is not much an arbiter can do.



All incidents need to be reported during the game and it is the arbiter's duty to listen to the players and try to help them in the best way possible. Especially regarding illegal moves, the scoresheet (if there is one) may be helpful to track the moves after the game has finished, but it is already too late for the arbiter to act accordingly.

My advice to players of all ages, levels and experience is to know that you have the right to call the arbiter and explain what troubles you. I would encourage parents, guardians and coaches to pass this message to the children that they accompany, that the arbiter is not there to punish, but also to listen to you and help you.

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