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TO BE OR NOT TO BE (ILLEGAL)? THAT IS THE QUESTION!

Some of the changes in FIDE Laws of Chess occurred in the last two years, brought big news for us Arbiters.

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irst, since July 2017, moving a piece with two hands is considered and penalised as an illegal move; and second, since January 2018, illegal moves in Rapid and Blitz games are penalised as in a standard games (with the only difference that in Blitz that the penalty is reduced to one minute). These two changes, which seem to be not so relevant, bring some funny events during games, especially during Rapid and Blitz games, always the ones in which strange things might happen.

Let us now focus on two facts really happened during the European Rapid and Blitz Championship 2018 in Skopje and the European Youth Rapid and Blitz Championship 2018 in Oradea. In Skopje, in a game between two 2600+ grandmasters, one made a move (a capture) with two hands, but did not complete it. Although they were both going short of time, the player realised the move, if completed, would have been penalised hence he did not stop the clock and passed few seconds to find a solution. Then he took back his move, reinstating the previous position, and eventually captured the same piece as before acting regularly with only one hand and stopped the clock.

His opponent protested because of breaching of art. 7.5.4 and claimed one minute (it was running the Blitz) for the illegal move, plus some penalty for the actions taken by the player who took back the move and made it again thus "disturbing" him. Now the question is: was that legal or illegal?

Of course it was legal! In fact it is clear that, if the player stopped the clock, it would result in an illegal move according to 7.5.4, but actually, he did not. Hence the move was not completed. The player found the only solution to avoid the penalty: since no one can be compelled to complete an illegal move which can always be taken back to make a legal one, he reinstated the position and then made the only possible legal move, the one respecting articles 4.1 and 4.3, the capture of the touched opponent's piece with his touched piece. In Oradea, this time in Rapid, but in the final stage, at a certain point a player made and completed an illegal move. I was ready to stop the game and I also was already moving my arm to do that, but his opponent was really quicker than me: he made a move, stopped the clock hence completing his move and the game continued.

Arbiters' doubts

International Arbiter and member of ECU Arbiters Council, Marco Biagioli, gives the opinion on practical situations Arbiters are facing during the events.

What is legal and what is illegal?



ARBITERS CORNER

Again, what to do? Was that move legal or illegal? No doubt it was illegal, but... Remember article A.4.2!

A.4.2 states "if the arbiter observes an action taken under Article 7.5.1, 7.5.2, 7.5.3 or 7.5.4, he shall act according to Article 7.5.5, provided the opponent has not made his next move... If the opponent does not claim and the arbiter does not intervene, the illegal move shall stand and the game shall continue".

This statement follows the old Rapid rule "no claim, no illegal move", but according to the new obligation for the Arbiter to penalise illegal moves without any claim if he sees them.

However, still he can make it only if no subsequent move has been made. Therefore there is yet the opportunity that a player, moving quicker than the can Arbiter intervene and not claiming for an illegal move, let that illegal move stand as it happened in this case.

In fact, the fast reaction of the opponent prevented me to make anything (it was really fast!), hence the game continued and the move did stand.

These two funny episodes show us that Rapid/Blitz games are eventually the real benchmark of the working of a rule: if it is consistent to whatever might happen in a Blitz game, then it works!