

Text by: IA Geert Bailleul, secretary of the ECU Arbiters' Council

The “Bruges Masters Tournament” organized as the Belgian Chess Championship.

Impressions after the first over the board tournament in Belgium since the start of Corona pandemic.



Every year around August 15th the Royal Chess Club of Bruges organizes the international tournament “Bruges Masters”.

Around 220 players are participating every year. Due to corona pandemic which started in the first week of March, all other big tournaments in Belgium which are organised in April, May, June, July and August were cancelled. Among them the Belgian Chess Championship 2020 which would have been organised by the chess club of Brasschaat at the beginning of July.

For that reason the Belgian Chess Federation asked the organizers of the “Bruges Masters” to organize the tournament as Belgian Chess Championship 2020.

I would like to sum up some impression about the influence of the Corona pandemic on the organisation of an over the board tournament, more specifically.

There is no doubt that the Corona pandemic has an enormous influence worldwide on the organization of chess tournaments.

Every country has imposed his own rules which has to be implemented by the organizers of chess tournaments.

The organizers of “the Bruges Masters” had to take in account several measures to ensure the safety of the players, the arbiters and the volunteers.

In the article, written by Tania Karali and edited by myself, which was published in July ECU Magazine, we summed up all measures that can be taken.

All measures which were mentioned in the article were implemented during the tournament. Special attention was paid to players belonging to a risk group. We gave them the possibility to play on two boards.

I will give you a brief summary of the most important measures which we implemented for the organisation of “the Bruges Masters” (Belgian Chess Championship 2020):

- when entering the playing venue every player had to disinfect his hands thoroughly.
- there was a heat camera which measured the temperature upon entering. (photo on the page 13)
- every player had to wear a mouth mask during the entire duration of the games.
- they had to remain seated throughout the game
- leaving the table was only allowed to go to the toilet or to get something to drink or to eat. It was not allowed to leave the table for smoking.
- it was not allowed to walk between the table to have a quick look at other chess boards.
- shaking hands before the start of the game was not allowed
- players belonging to the risk group could play on 2 separate boards (photo on the page 13)
- all boards, clocks, tables and pieces were thoroughly disinfected after the game.
- 1,5 meter between the tables.
- analysing the game was not allowed, no analysis room was provided; after the game the players had to leave the building
- No visitors were allowed in the playing venue.

The players were very pleased that, after more than 5 months, they could finally play on a chessboard instead of behind a computer. A lot of them seemed to be desperate to play on a chessboard again. They longed greatly to play standard games again!

Because of the Corona pandemic the number of players who could participate was limited, also depending on the size of the playing venue. After a small number of days, from the moment the organizers announced the start of registrations, all available places were taken.

The players were eager to participate at an over the board tournament again. For sure it is obvious that online tournaments will never replace on the board tournaments. Chess players have to be able to touch pieces; they have to be in a playing venue together with other chess players; they have to feel the tension of time trouble again; at home, behind a computer, they miss the social contact with other people; they have to feel and to endure the tension and the special atmosphere of an chess tournament. I have to admit that all players followed the measures very well. They were well aware that all these measures were necessary for their own health and for the health of the other participants. It needs discipline from all the players to follow the agreements which has been made, especially when this agreements are going against human automatisms. The most common complaint was that it is not comfortable at all to wear the mouth mask during several hours. Breathing seems to be more difficult; warm air is constantly being breathed out causing fumes on the glasses. Sometimes it is more difficult to understand each other which makes communication less good. Some players even told me that it was more difficult the recognize the players and to see expressions on their faces.



Players belonging to the risk group could play on 2 separate boards and there was a heat camera

Despite all that it happened rarely that the arbiters had to make a remark to the players for not wearing their mouth mask.

The fact that walking around and having a quick look at other chess boards was not allowed, was difficult for some players to comply with. I can assume that it may be difficult to have to sit in a chair for several hours without being allowed to stretch the legs every now and then.

Also when your opponent is not after the board when the game starts, is annoying because the player who is present has to stay sitting after his board.



Shaking hands

Also the not-shaking of hands before the start of the round was for most of the players a big change. Chess players are so used to shake hands, it has become some kind of an automatism. Sometimes they shook hands, realising to late that it was not allowed.

Organisation:

At the end of the tournament the organizers were very often congratulated on the organization of the tournament especially by the players themselves.

Even the press gave us more attention than usual because it was a "Corona-Belgian-Chess-Championship-edition". Summary: playing chess online is fun, playing chess over the board is heavenly!

Special thanks to IA Luc Cornet, who is responsible for the national tournaments in the Belgian Chess Federation, for rereading the article before publishing.

Finally...

ECU Arbiters Council is very interested in your experience with organizing an over the board chess tournament during this Corona pandemic.

Please feel free to send us a brief report. IA Geert Bailleul
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