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My experience as a Fair Play Officer at the World Junior (U-20) Championship in Sardinia

In this article I would like to shed a light on my experience as a Fair Play Officer at the World U-20 Youth Championship which took place in Cala Gonone, Sardinia.

The whole Fair-Play issue has raised its ugly head only recently with the great increase of computer power and cellphone power. When I started my arbitering career in 1982, Fair-Play challenges were basically limited to intercepting players who were talking to each other during game. No one suspected a player would sneak out of tournament hall to browse the new edition of the Chess Informant.

When I was informed about my duty and doing it for the first time I had to devise a strategy.

The first question I asked myself was what is the threat. In order to formulate a defense we need to know which attack are we need to fend against.

The concept was that it is unlikely for a lone FP violator to orchestrate a violation alone. In this day and age trying to smuggle a cellphone to a tournament hall is like trying to smuggle contraband to an airport. Most chances it would be detected.

What we were worried about are transmitters. Small devices who might be attempted to be smuggled inside the tournament hall, to be used for communication with a person outside of the tournament hall who can relay computer moves to the player.

Transmitters are small and could be attempted to be concealed in a shoe, a bra, a belt, or other dark places. All those places while scanned would beep because of the metal.

We were equipped with only 2 hand held metal detectors so that increased the challenge. In a perfect world we would have been happy with a tight sealed playing zone with one entrance, occupied full time during the round and completely locked before and after.

Palmasera resort in Cala Gonone where all players stayed and played is a great place. Nice rooms, friendly staff, Good food and pristine beaches. However it's not a military base and can't become one. We had to compensate for that. As part of the FP operation, we were assisted by Professor Kenneth Reagan, the oracle of FP violation detection.

Prof. Regan analyses the games of each round and uses million algorithms to try and determine if there is any suspicion with the player's play. Of course, if we would have an unrated player beating Grandmasters at ease, we would not need the assistance of the honorable professor. However, there are more minute performance algorithms which in some cases would trigger a red flag and we need to know about it and on the spot.

ECU Arbiters Council

The ECU Arbiters Council publishes monthly articles in the ECU newsletter. All the articles can be found on the ECU Arbiters Council webpage.

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I would now elaborate a bit more about what we did, the measures conducted by our team:

1. We tried to limit the playing zone as much as possible to obtain maximum control of all players during game.
2. Toilets were checked constantly.
3. There were ventilation windows in toilets, we made sure no one had access to the area on the other side of those windows.
4. The team would circle the playing venue making sure no one attempts to get too close. Especially individuals with cellphones with apps containing chess positions.
5. Live board transmission had a 15 minute delay.
6. Every player/visitor were scanned prior to entry.
7. We had 2 lines, one for boys, one for girls with 2 gender appropriate checkers positioned on each line.
8. Boys were not allowed to bring in backpacks at all. Ladies were allowed small ladies bag.
9. No person other than players/arbiters/ staff was allowed in tournament hall during the round.
10. Players after finishing their games were politely requested to leave and were not allowed to re-enter.
11. In each round, 3 boys and 3 girls were randomly selected for another post game screening. After me being given the list, I would discreetly relay the names of the selected players to the respective arbiters. Arbiters were requested to escort those selected players to me after they finish their games. Those screenings were conducted in a special private room.



12. Do the screenings in pairs if possible so you always have a witness for any irregularity which might occur, and for any statements/admissions by the player.
13. When entering the checking room the player would be instructed to put all belongings on the table. Those items should be inspected too. Best if the player does not beep at all. That's the easy check.
14. The playing zone was clearly marked and toilets were controlled monitoring too frequent visits and too long visits.
15. Those too frequent toilet visitors were sometimes checked entering/ leaving the toilet.



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Conclusion:

Performing a Fair-Play position is not for everyone. Hard to say how many chess arbiters would like it but you should try it at least once. It has the somewhat advantage for you are not manacled to a game/match/ sector and can technically move around. On the other hand you must operate as a policeman and be always on the lookout.

Don't be discouraged if you believe there was FP violation and you failed to discover it.

It's a long stretch battle against a rogue minority but we have a huge integral advantage.