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Knocking down pieces in time trouble

Time trouble is part of the game. In many cases players in acute time trouble knock down pieces and don't fix them before pressing the clock. Some players are very meticulous to fix any displacement in their own time while others are not. Arbiters intervention is to be determined in case to case basis. I wish to share an incident which took place not long ago. I was DCA at an ECU team event.

Usually DCAs are not inspecting individual matches, but the incident happened to be the last game of the round, so I was a witness which made matters easier.

The player with the white pieces had an inferior position and in severe time trouble. She was literally living on increment. At one point she probably lost concentration. I saw that happen a million times. A player concentrates on his problematic position and forgets the clock. Then she suddenly realizes she had only a couple of seconds left. Now it's survival mode, you see the panic, you must make a move, any move, and slam the clock. With 2-3 seconds on her clock she reaches for her rook, grabs it in her hand, attempts to move it ... and the rook flies off her hand to the side of the board. I see her dilemma, she has to make a decision in a split second, she reaches for her fallen rook but probably realizes she would not make it - **she pauses the clock**. I asked the player **"Why did you pause the clock"**? The player could not really give an answer. She claimed she didn't know how much time she had and when pressed harder kind of admitted that she wanted to allow herself time to place the rook in its intended square.

Now to the Laws of Chess

For dealing with that case there are 4 relevant articles, 6.11.4 (violation + penalty), 7.4.1 (violation), 7.4.3 (penalty). I informed the player that based on her statement and me viewing the event – She did not have any valid reason to pause the clock and therefore she had violated article 6.11.4 and is subject to one of the penalties prescribed in article 12.9. I also informed the player she is in violation of article 7.4.1 because she failed to place her rook appropriately on a square prior to pausing her clock.

Article 12.9 is a toolbox of penalties ranging from the lightest penalty which is a warning, all the way to the most severe penalty which is expulsion from the tournament. In order to assess the enormity of the violation I was looking for the intent of the player's actions and for mitigating and aggravating circumstances. The intent was easy – The player paused the clock in order to avoid loss on time. Article 6.9 stipulates that *"... if a player does not complete the prescribed number of moves in the allotted time, the game is lost by that player."*

Aggravating circumstances (3 violations):

- Pausing the chessclock without a valid reason (violation of article 6.11.4)
- Displacing pieces without placing them back on his own time (violation of article 7.4.1)
- Not completing her move before pausing the clock.

Mitigating circumstances : NONE

Penalty

The time allotted to a player is a key factor of the game. It's the player's responsibility to allow herself enough time to make her moves during the allotted time because if she fails to do so she will lose the game virtually regardless of the position.

Therefore the decision was - The player lost the game

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