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# THE ECU ONLINE ARBITER (OA)



Corona-virus times have shown us that chess can still be played also in unfortunate times of closed borders and restrictions to travellers. Several events have been run online since the beginning of the pandemic and all of them required the presence of arbiters. However, as we arbiters have learned along the tournaments, being an arbiter in one online competition is by far different from being an arbiter in one over the board event.

In one online event, many of the possible occurrences of a classical game are just impossible. No touch-move complaint will take place or even illegal moves: the normal working of the platforms, in fact, makes those issues simply irrelevant. Illegal moves cannot be made, nor the touch-move rule makes any sense.

On the other hand, anti-cheating and fair play skills get more and more important in online chess, for the clear reason the players are using electronic devices hence the opportunity and the possibility of cheating are more than over the board.

Since the beginning, we realized that what we ask to an online arbiter is not what we need from a standard arbiter. Being more specific, the Arbiters' Council had discussed what skills any online arbiter should have and we focused on the following topics:

**- Languages:** communication skills are extremely important in online chess as a quick intervention of the arbiter may prevent many problems to arise, and as for any possible issue the players will have, they will ask the arbiter. Therefore, we considered as mandatory for an online arbiter at least a satisfactory level in English.

**- Personal computer use skills:** online chess is played through a computer, so to solve issues or even understand what is going on or it is possibly going on, the arbiter need to know how to use a personal computer and a basic user level is not enough. He/she will, in fact, need to be familiar with several tools like live conferences platforms, online chess platforms, arbiters' software, emails, social medias... In some cases he/she will need to learn quickly how to use something very new, hence, it is important that he has an informatics background knowledge.

**- Online chess platform:** they are the environment for online tournaments and any of them offers different features and functionalities. The arbiter has to know what the platform offers, how it offers it, what possible issues he/she has to face... The panorama is quite big and several platforms are available, so having a good knowledge of at least one is mandatory to make the job possible.

**- Anti-cheating:** this is for sure the biggest issue. In general, cheating is our biggest challenge, as arbiters. In case of online chess, it takes another perspective: the traditional prohibition of the use of electronic devices as first anti-cheating measure, in fact, obviously drops and several other actions have to be taken.

In case of online chess, in fact, the most important tool are the available game screening tools, either the ones provided by the platform, either the ones provided as external resources. The online arbiter has to know the principles of these tools, how they works and how to read their reports.

Starting from the awareness the field is new, but also that online chess will develop more and more at the highest level, the ECU board has decided to establish the title of Online Arbiter (OA) as a special certification, which will be mandatory to serve as arbiters in European Online Championships and, for other bodies, will certify that particular arbiter has some special skills for online tournaments and confirm the ability of an arbiter to work in online events and do his/her job remotely, by the internet.

The requirements for this certification, set by the Arbiters' Council basing on the abovementioned considerations, are:

- Valid arbiters license (FA or IA).
- Sufficient knowledge of English (conversational level).
- Sufficient skills to work on a personal computer (advanced user level).
- Sufficient knowledge of at least one platform for online chess.
- Deep understanding of fair play principles for online chess.
- Attendance one OA Seminar.
- Successful passing an exam set up by the ECU Arbiter's Council.

To start the issuance of such a certificate, the Arbiters' Council already began organizing the first OA Seminar, which will be on the following topics:

- online regulations for arbiters in ECU and fair play protection.
- managing the platform for online events.
- zoom call management (or other platform).
- results conversion and calculations.

After the Seminar, the Arbiters' Council will set up a special exam which will consist in two parts: a written, theoretical test, with five open questions from the above mentioned regulations, and one oral test where the arbiter will receive practical tasks to do, connected with a particular platform or tool.



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We believe that this step goes in the direction of setting up some quality standards for the arbiters in Europe and it will also be one important formative opportunity which proceeds in the same path started with the ECU/FIDE workshop for online arbiters which will give some homogeneous capability to the arbiters to act in this new events.

For more details about ECU Arbiters Council Activities visit the Arbiters Council Website.