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BRONSTEIN, FISCHER AND A BIT OF HISTORY

If an independent observer were to ask a group of players the question "Bronstein or Fischer", the conversation would almost certainly turn to opinions about brilliant sacrifices, unexpected moves or spectacular attacks, in keeping with the character of these two great players.

If the same observer asked the same question of a group of arbiters, the conversation would turn to electronic clocks, time management and game rates.

Given that the author of this article is an arbiter (and that the site is dedicated to this group), it is only reasonable that we look at the latter circumstances. At the end of the last century, the proliferation of ever more powerful game programs made the use of game adjournments, which had been very common in previous decades, absolutely impossible. To give the reader some background, the last game that was postponed in a tournament in which the author was an arbiter dates back to 1994.

Therefore, once the adjournments were eliminated, the games had to be played in a single uninterrupted session. In order to avoid sessions becoming too long, the speed of play was gradually increased (from 16 moves per hour to 90 minutes for 40 moves - i.e. about 26 moves per hour). As a result, the players were often under a brutal time pressure. Any experienced arbiter will be able to tell you what these time constraints were like. To give some of my own examples, I remember a time pressure between 2 GMs of 2600+ with 2 minutes per player to make 16 moves, or a player (who became world champion) making 4 moves in 2 and a half seconds.

There were also cases where many games were continued just to take advantage of the opponent's time constraints, leading to the famous (and controversial) Article 10.2 (now included in Guideline III.5). All this ended with the systematic introduction of electronic clocks and the use of increments..... and back to Bronstein and Fischer :)

As is well known, these two great players independently proposed the use of electronic clocks to better control the time, and each proposed a different system to provide players with a certain amount of extra time. All were based on the principle that a player should always have enough time to make his next move.

Fischer proposed a system which, in a nutshell, always gave a player a certain (pre-set) amount of time to complete his next move. This system is called the "Fischer system" or "incremental mode". Bronstein, on the other hand, proposed a system in which each move was given a fixed maximum amount of extra time, in such a way that the main time was not reduced until the end of the extra time, but with the proviso that the unused time of the extra time was not saved. This system is called the "Bronstein System" or "Delay Mode".

ECU Arbiters Corner

The ECU Arbiters Council publishes monthly Arbiters' corner articles in the ECU E-Magazine.

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The "Delay Mode" is mainly used in tournaments under the control of the United States Federation, while the "Increment Mode" is mainly used in the rest of the world. It is important to note that within Delay Mode there are 2 different technical implementations, although the consequences of these 2 implementations are identical. In the first, called "American Delay", each watch shows the main time on the display while the central part shows the bonus time in a countdown (USCF reference). In the second, called "Bronstein Delay", the bonus time is added to the main time and the watch immediately starts counting down, returning to the base time if the time taken is less than the bonus time. Although in principle the two systems (Bronstein and Fischer) can be considered very similar, a detailed analysis allows us to identify some significant differences. All other things being equal (i.e. the same main time and the same extra time per move), games played in the delay mode are shorter than those played in the increment mode.



This is because there are generally a number of moves that are played automatically (moves in the opening, recaptures, check avoidance, etc) without using up the extra time, which, remember, does not accumulate in delay mode.

On the other hand, moves in increment mode have the characteristic that it is relatively easy to check the correct configuration and functioning of the clock with a simple mathematical operation. For this reason it is very common in tournaments for arbiters to periodically check the clock times by writing down the available times and performing this simple operation. In delay modes this is practically impossible to check immediately (as an exception, 2 games that were on the same move at the same time should have the same sum of player times). In these modes, the only way to check that the settings are correct is to look at the clock when the delay is active.

The use of the increment mode has a special feature; any repetition of moves results in a significant increase in the player's usable time (a repetition almost doubles the increment time). This is particularly important in time pressure games where there is little time on the clock (and few pieces on the board). In Delay Mode, repetitions have no meaning (except that players can use the delay time to "think"). This means that in Delay Mode a player will never have more time than he had at an earlier point in the game. Which time control is better, Delay Mode or Increment Mode, ultimately depends on personal preference and the specific requirements of the players and the event. Both time controls have their advantages and can be adapted to different playing styles and dynamics.

Advantages of Increment Mode:

1. accumulated thinking time: as mentioned above, increment mode allows players to accumulate additional thinking time as the game progresses. Each move they make gives them a predetermined amount of extra time. This can be advantageous for players who prefer to spend more time on complex positions or endgames.
2. Greater time control: Increment mode can provide more precise control over players' time management. Players can plan the time they spend on their moves, knowing that they will systematically gain a certain amount of time after each move.
3. In large events it is possible for the arbiters to monitor a large number of games in order to detect possible malfunctions or errors in the set-up.

Advantages of the delay mode:

1. In principle, as already indicated, the games are shorter (for the same number of moves) than those in incremental mode. This allows organisers to plan their competitions very precisely, without the risk of a game lasting much longer than planned.
2. Although it depends very much on the player, the ideal in Delay mode is to use up the increment time (again, not cumulatively) so that, in principle, there are (should be) no periods of furious "ping-pong" that sometimes occur in the games.
3. The use of extra time benefits players who time each move, not those who time the game as a whole. It is easier for players with depth of calculation to analyse some lines in depth and then check the calculated line very quickly.

Conclusion:

On a personal note, the author of these lines has been able to experience the Bronstein mode in at least 15 tournaments and the conclusions he has drawn are as follows:

- a) Game times can be set almost exactly.*
- b) For lower level players, the mode used has no particular effect on time management.*
- c) For higher level players the increment mode is preferable because it allows you to save time on the "automatic" moves and use it on the complex positions (as well as controlling the "repetitions" quite well).*