

USING THE MOVE COUNTER: RIGHT OR WRONG?

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

Are we, as arbiters, allowed to activate the move counter in the chess clock or not?

I will compare two different opinions from two very experienced International Arbiters, in particular IA Javier Perez Llera and IA Marco Biagioli. In a next article I will try to make some conclusions by other experienced arbiters.

The relevant articles in "the Laws of Chess" according to this subject which will be discussed are:

6.3.1 When using a chess clock, each player must complete a minimum number of moves or all moves in an allotted period of time including any additional amount of time with each move. All these must be specified in advance.

6.3.2 The time saved by a player during one period is added to his time available for the next period, where applicable.

6.4 Immediately after a flag falls, the requirements of Article 6.3.1 must be checked.

12.6 The arbiter must not intervene in a game except in cases described by the Laws of Chess. He shall not indicate the number of moves completed, except in applying Article 8.5 when at least one flag has fallen. The arbiter shall refrain from informing a player that his opponent has completed a move or that the player has not pressed his clock.

First of all I will give the floor to IA Javier Perez Llera, member of the Spanish Arbiters' Commission, who is against the use of the move counter. This is his opinion:

"The current standard rate of play for FIDE competitions is 90 minutes for the first 40 moves followed by 30 minutes for the rest of the game with an addition of 30 seconds per move starting from move one (FIDE Handbook, C.07)



The program available in the most important electronic clocks has a special characteristic. If the move counter is activated the clock automatically adds the time (30 minutes) available for the second period when a player makes his 40th move .

In my opinion this is a malfunction of the clocks (or wrong setup, as you like). In this article I will explain some reasons supporting my opinion. In the described circumstances we must think about two possibilities.

The first one is that the move made was really the 40th move.

Opinion of
IA Javier
Perez Llera



Arbiters' corner



In this case, the player receives the full information that the first control has been fulfilled. This information is against the Laws of chess. The article 12.6 of the Laws of Chess forbids that the higher authority in the game (the arbiter) informs the players about the number of moves completed. Why should the clock inform about it? You must remember that the control isn't the number of moves made, it is the time. The article 6.4 (Laws of Chess) says that we need to do the check of the moves completed when the flag falls (when the time finished...). The control isn't a "number of moves control", it is a "time control".

The second possibility (more complex) occurs when the move made wasn't the 40th move. This may occur by some problems with a bad configuration of the clocks, a wrong initial position of the push buttons, some wrong taps on the clocks and others (every arbiter can give several examples).

In these cases it could be necessary to change the move counter to reflect the correct number of the moves (disturbing the related game and the adjacent games...), but in some cases the arbiter doesn't know the problem and it is only expressed exactly at the moment to add the time. For example, a double pushing of the clocks without moving (to relocate a position or because a player push the adjacent clock or others reasons...) has as consequence on the increment of 30 seconds for both the players (a minor problem) and the increment of the move counter. Especially, we can have more problems in games involving juniors and low-rated players. Usually, the professional players have a correct score sheet and they exactly know the number of moves made. Currently, some colleagues think that the clock (using the move counter) isn't a "time counter", it's a "pushing counter".



Conclusion by IA Javier Perez Llera

In my opinion, we must not use the move counter to add the time of the 2nd period (doing the manual setup of the clock to add the time when the time of the first control finished)..

Even more I believe that this working way of the clocks should be forbidden, because:
 a) it is clearly against the rules
 b) the problems can be worse than the advantages."

However, according to IA Marco Biagioli, member of ECU Arbiters' Council and Secretary of Italian Arbiters' Commission, for sure arbiters can use the move counter. This is his opinion:

"First of all, I think we should consider that the first reason to say we can use the move counter is that no rule forbids or prevents it. Usually, colleagues who think the use of the move counter is not allowed refer to art. 6.4 which quotes a fallen flag. But the case is very different from the ordinary situation in which the flag doesn't fall at all and the players pass the time control by making the 40th move and just continue to play.

In this normal circumstance, the applicable art. is 6.3 (Laws of Chess) which states exactly the opposite: "the time saved by a player during one period is added to his time available for the next period, where applicable". It is totally obvious that, if the move counter is not in use there's no time saved because the available time for the second period starts to down count only after the main time is totally expired.

Some years ago there was some proposal to introduce a specific use to prevent the use of the move counter, but it was rejected. Some other colleagues think that the move counter shouldn't be used because of the information given when the additional time is added to the main one, which is supposed to be an "unfair" information to the player about the number of the moves. But in fact, the move counter is eventually a push counter so there's no information in it except the number of time the players pressed the clock.

In case they used the clock properly, this information is the same coming from the score sheet, so no additional "unfair" or forbidden information is added. In case the clock was wrongly used, then no information again is given.



This second opportunity reveals that the arbiters didn't made their job checking the clocks periodically if they didn't realise there were something bad in the score sheet comparing to the displayed time. And here we come to the last objection: If there is something wrong and the arbiters don't realise it, the use of the move counter make the things more complicated than not using it, or, in other words, the move counter creates problems.

Opinion of
IA Marco
Biagioli



Photo from
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Having it in mind that every problem which is not discovered by the arbiters by checking the clocks periodically reveals a bad job of them, and not by the clocks, in my experience there are more problems without the move counter, starting from the consideration that its use has become something common through the years and then the players expect it to be used. This means they would require the assistance of the arbiters every time they reach the 40th move and the increment is not given. This also means several handling problems for the arbiters, having to rule to such claims exactly in the most critical moment of the games, when their attention may be required elsewhere.

However, as the move counter is not in use, the clocks reaches the finish of the main time and just keeps going to the second period, only displaying a flag for few moves (better, few pressures).

This means that the players can continue to play even if the game is finished (with the loss of the player who didn't fulfil the time control), because they don't notice the flag to have fallen or because they secretly agreed on them, and after few moves no one will be able to find out what happened. Of course, when there is a time trouble the arbiters should check it, but we cannot be sure all the game are controlled, especially if the number of the arbiters is not enough, comparing to the number of the ongoing games. It is really much easier to check periodically the clock and be sure they weren't improperly used than to check all the ongoing games at the same time. For all this reasons I definitely think we can use the move counter and in certain circumstances (for example junior tournaments and championships) we should use it."



A word by Geert Bailleul

I would like to thank both colleagues for expressing their opinion regarding this subject. I also would like to open the discussion to all other arbiters. For sure it will be interesting to know what's the opinion of our colleagues in Europe. So feel free to react and express your own opinion. Don't hesitate to send me your opinion by e-mail!
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