

Text by:
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Why do we need experience?

Many times, when debating on the arbiters' assignment, we hear speaking about experience, and what we normally hear is that "we need experienced arbiters". On another side, I recently happened to read that the number of FAs and IAs is over five thousand, thus requiring some kind of "rotation" to allow more people to be involved in top-level events, even though they are not so experienced, or that we need to increase the number of privileged paths to enter top-level events to be more inclusive.

My personal position, of course, is that the first sentence is the correct one and we should focus more and more on experience. Hence a question arises: why do we need experience?

From the point of view of some young arbiters (not speaking about age, but working years) the arguments are more or less as following: fresh new people have some better enthusiasm, the Laws of Chess are not such a long text and after a good seminar almost anyone can handle them with appropriate confidence, applying such rules to a particular game doesn't require a long curriculum, but mostly a good knowledge.

I also understand the fascination of such arguments of young ambitious generations of arbiters who can follow some world or European championships on social media and think that, well, maybe they can do even better than us "old dinosaurs" who are actually doing the job.

To reply to such arguments, I would like to start from a tournament I was Chief Arbiter of this year, namely the European Club Cup and the European Club Cup for Women 2023, that happened in Dürres, Albania.

The European Club Cup is a flagship event for the European Chess Union, probably the most prestigious tournament which is coronated by the presence of several World Champions (five, this year) fighting for their clubs. This year the event was also a record edition, featuring more than one hundred teams in the two tournaments.

Being the Chief Arbiter of a championship that features such numbers (and such level) is a great acknowledgment for any arbiter but also a significant responsibility. Imagine for some reason severe mistakes were to happen during the event, heavily affecting the results, or norm possibilities or, again, the final standing itself. A wrong decision on a threefold repetition claim, or on a flag fall, potentially changes a match result, and if the player is fighting for a norm or a medal, also the final results.

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The job starts long before, cooperating with the organiser in creating the arbiters' list and setting up the venue taking into consideration the players' needs and the organiser himself needs (and the arbiters' need).

Arbiters Corner

Why do we need experience?

In this edition of the ECU E-Magazine, IA Marco Biagioli answers the question why arbiters need experience and shares his experiences as the Chief Arbiter of the recently finished European Chess Club Cup 2023.

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The Chief Arbiter keeps cooperating during the registration process, getting the information from the organiser and conveying the to the pairings officer, having always an eye to the numbers and their influence on the spaces, on the stationery need, on the arbiters' team, on the fair play organisation and on the people movement inside the hall.

During the tournament any side issues (noises from outside, players feeling bad, logistic problems including planes arriving late or sudden transportation problems) will affect the tournament; of course, the organiser is in charge of arranging transportation, finding the doctor or bringing some equipment, but everything will ultimately require the attention of the Chief Arbiter to minimise the impact of such events on the games.



Imagine you will ask the pairings officer to publish the pairings for the first round and only then realise one team haven't come yet. The Chief Arbiter won't deal with the transportation but if the pairings generated a BYE, a norm or a title may be lost. Imagine you will start the tournament and only then think the fair play checks are not well organised and generate a long line at the entrance, thus delaying every round. The Chief Arbiter won't go and scan people at the way in, but maybe he had to arrange the scan process better. Imagine in a morning there is major internet breakdown, or some captains are feeling not well, or there is another external problem that affects their possibility to give a team line-up. In this case the Chief Arbiter can do small, but maybe can think to extend the deadline or arrange contacts in order to ensure teams to cooperate. Imagine a 2700+ GM is calling you for a flag fall, an illegal move, a pieces-displacement case, a threefold repetition claim (all these things happened). You might know the theoretical solution, but will you have enough confidence to enforce it?

If you ask me, in all these situations, ten years ago, and 150 tournaments ago, when I already was a FA, I would have probably taken a different decision, and most probably not a correct one.

During the tournament I had to take a decision over all the cases I described. The way I decided always came from my previous experiences. During my arbiter's career I was in more than 250 tournaments at any level (from World top-professional events to club tournaments), and as an arbiter I saw so many accidents and situation to know that some new, unprecedented case can always happen. At no point I will think I know any possible accident, but I have acquired enough experience to know the most valuable part of the Laws of Chess is the following: *"the Laws of Chess cannot cover all possible situations that may arise during a game, nor can they regulate all administrative questions. Where cases are not precisely regulated by an Article of the Laws, it should be possible to reach a correct decision by studying analogous situations which are*

discussed in the Laws. The Laws assume that arbiters have the necessary competence, sound judgement and absolute objectivity. Too detailed a rule might deprive the arbiter of his freedom of judgement and thus prevent him from finding the solution to a problem dictated by fairness, logic and special factors".

But how can we deny that to *"reach a correct decision by studying analogous situations which are discussed in the Laws"* can only come from previous experiences and already take decisions on similar cases? For the same reason, I can easily cooperate with the pairings officer and with the fair play arbiters because in the past I have been pairings officer and fair play officer myself, and I can understand the special need of the teams' event, because I have served as a team captain.

Finally, all these previous experiences gave me the ability to make a more conscious decision, and I believe a better decision.

And this is the answer to our question, "why we need experience?". If you think about it, in the end we need it because the Laws of Chess preface says so, and to understand that the Laws of Chess preface is what we should really know to be good arbiters.

One final remark: the European Club Cup and European Club Cup for Women 2023 was a great success, one of the most exciting experience of my career, but the merit goes to the fantastic arbiters' team that you can see on the first page (photo by Niki Riga), to the best Deputy you can work with, Mr Alon Shulman, to the very active and organised second Deputy Igor Vujačić, to the Sector Arbiter Agim Shemshiji appointed on place to supervise a third playing hall, to the invaluable Pairings and Fair Play Officer Tania Karali and to the great, great colleagues who worked with no rest to make this tournament a success.