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Future of chess competitions



About 13 years ago I was teaching at an arbiter seminar for the first time. I was 16 and I was brought into the 'craft' because times were changing and 'new blood' was needed.

Why? During the years leading to that point, the job of an arbiter changed drastically. A great arbiter used to be recognised by excellent manual pairing skills with cards and by carrying a tiny screwdriver for setting analogue clocks with broken knobs.

But then computers came along, equipped with 'magical' programs that could pair all the players with a few simple clicks. How frustrating it must have been, if you spent years honing your pairing skills to perfection and now having every little girl accomplish the same thing with near zero effort?!

And not just pairings; digital clocks with confusing settings appeared next to chess boards and soon after, electronic boards with wires replaced the familiar plastic sets. A new era of chess events was upon us.

New technology kickstarted the modern image of chess. It gave us databases, engines, online commentary for games which are transmitted live and ultimately made chess more attractive and accessible. Everything changed. This meant a new wave of players were drawn to chess.

And a new wave of arbiters as well! The newbies and those who welcomed this change. Lucky enough to have those experienced long standing members of the arbiter world alongside us.

And now, here we go again! Recently online mega-platforms have appeared and developed into unprecedented dimensions, covid forced everybody to stay locked-up at home, watch Netflix and play chess. Overcoming a crisis always brings new possibilities. Motivates you to acquire new skills and gives you an incentive to question the old ways and explore new tools that are available to you.

What an exciting time to be alive! If you are a chess arbiter at least. Let's close our eyes and imagine a possible future of online competitions.

Hybrid and online chess can make chess accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world. Everybody now has an option to play a rated game with someone on the other side of the world with no need to travel.

But let's take it a step further, what if you are just running late? Could you start playing your game on a phone and join your friends in the playing venue when you get there? Could we let players record their games via an online platform on their smartphones instead of deciphering their scribbles on a piece of paper?

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No need for expensive equipment and all the games would be recorded and transmitted live.

People now use their phones to manage their lives, to pay for stuff, to play around in virtual words and to do pretty much anything. And we can be part of that, we can let players check in to our tournaments by scanning QR codes, we can send them rules in a form of app, where they can collect points, instead of listening to a technical meeting. Wouldn't that be a good way to bring a new wave of players in today's world?

I wouldn't implement it for the World Championships just yet, but 99% of chess events don't include professionals. Let's have fun with those! Start with an open mind. Let's find new ways to do old things, because there are no limits to what we can do in this new era.

I am excited to see who will be the next to join our forces.

Jiřina Prokopov



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