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When in doubt, who do you ask?

Being an arbiter is not a solitary journey, it is more of a team effort. We cooperate in tournaments, share experience, get together in seminars and workshops. An arbiter is a member of a pack, not a lone wolf.

So, what happens when an arbiter faces a situation where they need to make a decision or reply to a question to clarify regulations?

If the arbiter is well-rounded, keeps up with the regulations or has faced a similar case in the past, it is quite easy to handle it. On the other hand, when it comes to less experienced arbiters (no shame there, we've all been through it!), it usually comes down to two scenarios: a) they ask a more experienced arbiter or b) they check the regulations to find the answer by themselves.

In my experience, the most common scenario is (a), ask someone else, get an answer, solve the matter quickly. (Spoiler alert: the more experienced arbiter usually checks the regulations before replying...)

Scenario (b) is much more rare to occur. I find that less experienced arbiters are a little intimidated by the regulations, have no idea where to start looking or have convinced themselves that they would not understand the text, even if they tried, so they just choose the easier option (scenario (a)). It is a pity, because we are talking about the same regulations that they were taught in the Arbiters' Seminars they have already attended (**Important note here: one seminar is never enough. Make it a habit to attend a seminar once a year to freshen your memory and hear interesting incidents from actual events**).

True, it is one thing to discuss selected part of the regulations with a lecturer's guidance and another to search the whole handbook to find what you need.

However, the FIDE Handbook is not as "chaotic" as some arbiters may feel. It is very well structured in various sections and, after spending a little time with the table of contents, it will be a lot easier to know where to look. Another indispensable tool is the Arbiters' Manual, where you will find literally anything an arbiter may need, plus bonus explanations to clarify obscure points. Both documents are updated following changes in regulations. This can be done at any moment and there is usually a time reference, indicating which regulation is in effect during which period (most times the old regulations are still there bearing the time reference that makes them no longer valid).

Certainly, there is always room for improvement. I am not arguing that the format is the best possible, nor that it cannot be optimised. What I would like to see, for example, in the near future, is a table of the specific changes that were announced for every part of the regulations, not just the new document. Arbiters cannot be expected to go through the documents by themselves to see if they can identify the differences...

ECU Arbiters Council

ECU Arbiters Council publishes all the information about the Council's work on the Official website:
<http://arbiters.europechess.org/>

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What would be even more helpful would be that these changes were presented in a clear way on the relevant FIDE Commission's website (Rules, Qualification, Pairings, Fair Play) and gathered all together on the FIDE Arbiters' Commission website, considering they all affect arbiters in their every day work.

To sum up, I'm not advocating in favour of asking colleagues or checking the regulations. I am favouring of doing both, provided that any arbiter of any level of experience would be able to check the regulations by themselves and confirm with other arbiters their understanding of them.

And remember:
The ECU Arbiters' Council is always willing to answer your questions, doubts, requests to clarify regulations, opinions on any matter that you may wish to discuss. Feel free to email us at ecuarbiterscouncil@gmail.com

Useful links
FIDE Handbook:
<https://handbook.fide.com/>

Arbiters' Manual 2022:
<https://arbiters.fide.com/wp-content/uploads/Publications/Manual/ARBManual2022.pdf>