

General Tournament Rules of Freestyle Chess

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Preamble

Freestyle Chess is a live, online chess competition between humans who are allowed, within certain constraints, nearly unrestricted use of technical and human support to assist them in making their moves. Freestyle Chess adheres to an overarching "anything goes" philosophy that recognizes that a body of rules and procedures are needed to conduct orderly tournaments.

Freestyle Chess is similar to 'Advanced Chess', introduced by former world chess champion Garry Kasparov, and is also to some extent comparable with modern correspondence chess. Advanced Chess was invented for local live events with only incidental support by computers and no support from other humans; in contrast, powerful support from computers and humans are considered critical components of Freestyle Chess. In contrast to deeply analyzed correspondence games that usually require months to complete, Freestyle Chess is played at time controls similar to rapid chess, and thus play-intensity is much higher.

There is however one unifying motif which each of these chess competition formats share: they all endeavor to produce the highest-quality chess. Freestyle games frequently produce new opening theory, dazzling novelties and remarkable combinations.

The following rules define the rights, responsibilities and duties of the players and the tournament director.

§ 1 FIDE rules

Rules of chess promulgated by FIDE apply to Freestyle tournaments, except for any FIDE rules which are superseded by chess server-related or tournament-specific rules which are noted in this document. All players and participants are responsible for knowing the rules of chess.

§ 2 The Players

- (1) The words 'player' and 'players' in these rules apply only to *formally registered individual players* and *not* to so-called team members, other supporters or spectators. For the purposes of a Freestyle tournament a player may *not* be considered a unified entity consisting of multiple persons and/or machines. Freestyle chess is per definition by these rules not a team competition, but a competition player vs. player. *The registered player is the sole point of contact between a Freestyle team and the TD, without exceptions, and bears full responsibility in all matters involving the tournament.*
- (2) All players are required to register before the tournament, providing their full name, address, phone number where they can be immediately reached before and during games, and a valid email address. While players may use a nickname on the chess server, the tournament organizers may publish real player names and spotlight incidental personal details such as chess titles and past Freestyle performances for the purpose of tournament reports and publicity before, during and after the event.

- (3) Team members, other supporters and spectators have *no status* within the tournament and may not speak on behalf of or stand in place of a player. Any such individuals obstructing or interfering in the conduct of the tournament may be ejected from the tournament room.
- (4) It is prohibited for a player to register more than one account in a tournament or to use a second account belonging to someone else. Violating this rule shall result in disqualification from the tournament and being banned from future events.
- (5) It is prohibited for more than one player to use the same IP address over the course of a tournament except in very specific circumstances. The only exception: two separately registered players domiciled in the same house (e.g. married or roommates). In such a case the players are required to notify the TD of this arrangement not later than one week before the start of the tournament. A violation of this rule will lead to immediate disqualification of *all* colluding players.
- (6) Automatic engine play, even if technically possible in the tournament room, is not allowed. Players must transmit all moves manually via mouse-click or keyboard. Any player detected entering moves via automated means shall immediately forfeit his current game and be disqualified from the tournament.
- (7) Money prizes can only be won by and paid to registered players.

§ 3 The Tournament Director (TD)

- (1) The TD is tasked with running an orderly and fair tournament under FIDE and Freestyle rules in the "anything goes" spirit of the Preamble.
- (2) The TD is empowered to investigate and solve all problems that emerge before and during a tournament, and to interpret rules.
- (3) The TD is responsible for assuring that tournament rounds begin at scheduled times and that any unavoidable perturbations to the schedule are communicated to all the players.
- (4) The TD is responsible for starting the scheduled pairings by the server software. He is free to decide which tools will be used to determine the pairings. If the TD uses server software for pairings, results of the pairing-algorithm cannot be protested.
- (5) The TD shall follow the principle that tournament games should be decided on the chessboard. However, to protect the integrity of the tournament and to maintain order the TD is empowered to apply sanctions against players who are in violation of the specific FIDE or Freestyle tournament rules. These sanctions may be applicable to a particular game, the tournament, and/or in the most serious cases future tournaments.
- (6) The TD is responsible for investigating and arbitrating all disputes between players. The TD is bound to explain his rulings to disputing players, but he is not bound to discuss these decisions to uninvolved parties, though he may at his discretion in the interest of maintaining order. All TD decisions are final with no right of appeal.

- (7) The TD is authorized to use electronic means to determine and monitor each player's IP address.
- (8) The TD is required to maintain a record of all players who disconnect from the server during a tournament game. The TD may forfeit games or disqualify players from further participation in the tournament for repeated disconnects which are unrelated to the chess server (see rule §6), even if these disconnects are completely unintentional.
- (9) The TD is authorized to summarily and without warning disqualify any player caught cheating (i.e. violating explicit rules), attempting to cheat, or encouraging or soliciting others to cheat. In case of a cheating disqualification the TD shall give a detailed report to the tournament sponsors and organizers, but the TD and the organizers are not obliged to hold a public discussion about their decisions or inform the player and the public about all details given in the report. Deliberate cheating is the worst offense in Freestyle and bears the heaviest penalties.

§ 4 Tournament Start

- (1) The tournament organizer will inform all players of the client software version to be used in the tournament announcement document. It is the obligation of all players to obtain, install, and have in operation the specified version prior to the start of the first round of play. Disadvantages or technical problems which originate from not having the correct client shall be decided against the player who does not comply with this requirement, and may include a time penalty or a game forfeiture as the TD determines.
- (2) Players shall be present at the designated tournament site thirty minutes before the start of the first round. The location of the virtual tournament room shall be provided in the tournament announcement.
- (3) Players shall remain connected to the tournament site until the TD has recognized them as among the registered players. After a player sees that he is on the tournament roster he may leave the tournament site or log out, but is required to be present at the tournament site at least five minutes before the scheduled start time of the first round. Players cannot count on being included in the tournament roster until this has been positively affirmed by the TD.
- (4) All clock times mentioned in tournament announcements and by the TD refer to the *server time*. Unless specifically noted otherwise, this will be either Central European Time (CET) or Central European Summer Time (CEST), i.e. local time in Germany. The players are always responsible for correctly converting server time to their local time and complying with the posted tournament schedule.

§ 5 Beginning of a round and latecomers

- (1) Participants are required to be in the tournament room and ready to start their games at least five minutes before the scheduled time. A round may not start before the scheduled time.

- (2) Normally, any player who is not present in the tournament room when a round starts will instantly and automatically forfeit that game, while his opponent registers a win. If both players are not present, both shall receive zero scores. Exceptions to this rule are possible according to §5.3.
- (3) If server functionality permits, the TD shall start games involving late-arriving player(s) with time penalties as the TD deems appropriate. Time penalties shall always be preferred instead of forfeited games as noted in rule §5.2, but are contingent on the chess server being able to start games with mismatched time controls.
- (4) If the imposition of time penalties instead of forfeited games is possible in a given tournament, this shall be announced by the tournament organizers before the start of a tournament. However, in the absence of any such statement, rule §5.2 applies by default.
- (5) If time penalties are permitted in a tournament per rule §5.3, the maximum tardiness that shall be permitted in any game is thirty minutes, after which the tardy player automatically forfeits the game.

§ 6 Internet connections, disconnections and server crashes

- (1) There are three points of failure in online play: the player's connection to his Internet Service Provider (ISP), the ISP's connection to the chess server, and the chess server itself. All players are responsible for having a stable connection to the chess server, therefore they are liable for everything that happens to their connection *except* a server crash, a disruptive event which is readily identifiable to everyone involved with the tournament. Note, this means that should a player's ISP fail, that player is at risk of time penalties, game forfeiture and potentially even tournament disqualification even though his ISP's reliability is outside of his direct control.
- (2) In the event a player suffers a disconnection from the chess server and the server does not reconnect automatically, he shall be informed via email or phone by the TD and be given ten minutes from the time of notification to return to and continue his game. If the player has not returned after ten minutes (though having been informed by the TD) he shall forfeit the game. Alternately, if a player suffers three disconnections during a game, even if he returns from the first two disconnects in less than ten minutes, he shall automatically forfeit the game immediately at the instant of the third disconnect, with a win granted to his opponent, whatever the situation on the chessboard. The TD is the only person who may issue rulings relating to the ten minute period. As there currently does not exist a "disconnection stopwatch" players will need to make some allowances; the TD's decisions must be accepted in the spirit of this rule.
- (3) Players are forbidden to disconnect voluntarily while their game is in progress. If a player feels he should disconnect for any valid reason, he must first ask the TD and wait for his decision.

- (4) Players are forbidden to claim automatic wins on disconnects (in case the server offers such a function). If a player claims an automatic win on disconnect, the TD will most likely score a loss for the player who claimed the win and post a win for his opponent. In the event of technical problems *a/ways* consult with the TD first.
- (5) The TD shall decide how to resolve or resume a game in which the server has automatically flagged a player. This can happen if there is a time-out during a loss of connection.
- (6) A player with two or more disconnections per game in 75% or more of his games shall be disqualified from the tournament by the TD after round 4 or any round thereafter where the 75% threshold is met or exceeded. (Automatic server reconnects do not count in this calculation.) Players at imminent risk of disqualification shall be notified by the TD of their jeopardy, who shall keep track of all disconnecting players per rule §2.8. Games involving players disqualified for this or any other reason shall always count in the final tournament score.
- (7) In the event of a server crash during play, all players shall persistently attempt to log on to the tournament site for a period of thirty minutes. If the server is still inaccessible after thirty minutes, the TD shall give instructions to players via an external chat room. The URL of this chat room shall be announced before the start of the tournament.
- (8) The TD is the only person with the authority to decide how to resume the tournament in the event of a server crash. All games that finished before the server crash will remain valid. If unfinished games can be automatically resumed by the server, then this will be the preferred solution, with the players determining among themselves what adjustments, if any, must be made to their respective game clocks. However, if unfinished games cannot be automatically resumed by the server then the TD shall direct players to restart completely new games. Players must recognize that worst-case server crashes sometimes result in one player getting a miracle reprieve and the other player seeing a certain win suddenly evaporate. Players must accept these hazards as "fortunes of war".
- (9) Server crashes, however they are resolved, usually result in modifications to the daily game schedule. The TD will announce these changes on the server if possible, but if the crash is protracted and the remainder of the day's schedule must be postponed the TD shall advise all players regarding the status of the tournament via external chat room and/or email as soon as possible.

§ 7 Player accessibility, communication with the TD

- (1) Players must be accessible by the TD at all times during games in progress and are required to respond to his questions and requests instantly. If a player fails to respond to the TD after three attempts to contact him in the space of five minutes and the game does not proceed, the TD shall record this event as a loss of connection, with all rules pertaining to disconnects applying (see §6).

- (2) Players shall discuss all contentious matters directly with the TD and not in general chat. Discussions regarding controversial situations and TD rulings shall be conducted in private chat, not in general chat, particularly while any tournament games are still in progress.

§ 8 Special rules governing play

- (1) Players are prohibited to offer a draw before the 30th move. Only three kinds of draws as defined by the FIDE rules (lack of material to checkmate, stalemates, threefold repetitions) may occur prior to move 30. Starting with the 30th move, either player may offer a draw to their opponent at their discretion, but if the draw offer is refused the same offering player may not offer to draw again within the next ten moves. The purpose of this rule is two-fold: a) to inspire all players to battle out their games, and b) to preclude repetitive and annoying draw offers. Any reported and verified violation of this rule shall result in the violating player receiving one warning and thereafter immediately forfeiting the game if the violation is repeated in the same game.
- (2) Players are encouraged to let games be decided on the board. Players facing objectively certain defeat should resign and not play until mate. Players engaged in an obvious draw should agree to draw rather than play on pointlessly. The objective of these admonitions is for the games that Freestyle players leave for posterity to reflect something more elevated than amateur or purely computer competitions (cf. the Preamble).
- (3) Erroneous moves ('fingerfehler' or 'mouse slips') may never be taken back. Move accuracy is as much a part of Freestyle as it is in championship-level tournament chess. It is improper behavior for a player committing such an error to influence in any way his opponent to resign, draw, or offer any other favorable treatment. Players deemed by the TD to fail to meet this standard of conduct will receive one and only one warning during the entire tournament according to rule §9.2.

§ 9 Player behavior

- (1) Players are expected to complete every one of their games during the tournament. Players shall not enter the tournament if they intend to drop out before the end of the tournament, skip rounds or put forth less than a full effort if they perform poorly and/or are out of the running for prizes: such behavior dilutes the integrity of the tournament and often results in adverse consequences for other competitors. If exceptional circumstances compel a player to withdraw, he must inform the tournament director by e-mail at least one hour prior to the start of a new round and persuasively explain the unforeseen event that forces an early exit. Violation of this rule shall result in exclusion from future tournaments.
- (2) Players are expected to control their emotions and behave in a civil and respectful manner toward the TD, sponsors, hosts, fellow competitors and spectators of Freestyle tournaments. Players deemed by the TD to fail to meet this standard of conduct will receive one and only one warning during the entire tournament. Should a warned player continue to bring discredit to the tournament or its participants, it shall result in the player a) forfeiting any unfinished game in progress, b) being

disqualified from the balance of the tournament, c) being asked to immediately leave the tournament site, and d) being banned from future tournaments for two years.

- (3) It is absolutely forbidden for two or more players to "fix" game outcomes in any way in order to achieve a financial or strategic advantage at the expense of one or more other players, or for a player to solicit a particular game outcome from another player before the contest has been fairly played and decided.
- (4) Multiple-account, multiple-player strategies. Using multiple accounts by one or more players with the idea of advantageously redeploying human or technical resources from one round to the next has been discussed and noted in practice since the beginnings of Freestyle chess. Such strategies seek to employ game theory in order to maximize the statistical likelihood of a prize-winning tournament finish. All such forms of collaboration between different player accounts violate the spirit of fair player vs. player competition and also tend to promote game-fixing as an almost logical concluding step of an effective 'multiple account strategy', even though the players involved may originally not have intended to break any rules. Accordingly,
 - a) it is each player's responsibility and duty to care only for the success of his own player account and not aid or support any other player at any time during a tournament.
 - b) if the TD has a reasonable suspicion that a player is collaborating with another player in order to realize or attempt to realize an advantage in the competition, the TD shall issue a disqualification warning to all players he believes to be involved.
 - c) if the TD has dispositive evidence that one or more players are collaborating he shall disqualify all players involved from the tournament without issuing a warning and ban them from future tournaments.

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