

Arbiters' Letter to the FIDE Council and Management Board regarding Fair Play

The Fair Play Commission (FPL) has three main roles:

- A regulator; e.g. it defines the Anti-Cheating measures for certain levels of tournament
- An investigator; e.g. if someone is accused of cheating, an IP is formed and reported to EDC if necessary
- Providing training and titles to fair play personnel

The first and second competency is being discharged well by FPL insofar as can be observed. The third competency was the most recent addition, and in the opinion of the signatories, was not justified by any serious breaches of the Fair Play regulations at any level of event organised by FIDE. This additional competency has caused significant problems.

There is no doubt that ensuring fair play is an important aspect of tournaments. Articles 11.3.3, 12.2.1 and 12.2.7 of the FIDE Laws of Chess make it explicit that arbiters are responsible for application of fair play matters during tournaments. The FIDE Laws of Chess are subject to the approval of the FIDE General Assembly, and cannot be overridden by decisions of other FIDE organs.

The competency previously fell to an "Anti-Cheating Arbiter" at mass-participation tournaments; or at limited-field top-level tournaments, it was part of the duties of the normal arbiters at the tournament. These were abolished and replaced with Fair Play Officers. This self-aggrandisement took the role away from arbiters and bestowed it upon only a select number of the Commission. This was justified in the 2021 FIDE Congress as being an important way of remunerating FPL personnel who were otherwise working voluntarily.

The result of this is that significant hostility and animosity between personnel has built up. To concentrate only on examples from recent major events:

At the Olympiad:

- One arbiter who arrived in sunglasses was prevented from wearing them for fair play reasons.
- One arbiter went through the frame, and his belt beeped. He was asked to remove the belt, and be re-scanned.
- Five results were overturned by the Fair Play Commission for trivial offences (e.g. possession of an analogue watch, a vape and an unopened sim card package), one of which was appealed, and the result was overturned. This behaviour only stopped after the intervention of the FIDE President.
- A Fair Play decision was appealed and the Chief Arbiter was in favour of the Appeals Committee overturning the decision, which they did.
- The Fair Play team were in possession of their mobile phones and radios, and were using them in close proximity to the players and others. On occasion, they used these devices to take photographs of things arbiters were doing, and reporting them to FIDE to complain about their behaviour. For example, they reported one Sector Arbiter who was "watching games on his computer", when he was actually using the Chess Claim Tool to rule on a draw by repetition case.

- There were complaints from captains, and from others at the FIDE General Assembly about the nature of the way Fair Play was being performed.

At the World Rapid & Blitz:

- All arbiters were due to be scanned for electronic devices in case they spoke to players from the same country, until the Chief Arbiter refused to acquiesce to this requirement.
- After winning her game 1-0, a player underwent a post-game scan, which detected a wireless earphone in their bag. The Fair Play team, without consulting the Chief Arbiter, proposed an unusual 0-0 result, arguing the device was not used for cheating and informed the player who won, that they had in fact lost. The player then attempted to appeal before the Chief Arbiter had even made a decision, highlighting confusion over roles. The Chief Arbiter ultimately ruled 0-1, following standard practice when an undeclared device is found. The Fair Play Officer considered appealing but did not.

And so, division within the community of arbiters and fair play officers exists. People who are both arbiters and fair play officers have been caught in the middle. The overall mood of tournaments has been significantly worsened by the split, and the results as evidenced by Budapest and New York were hardly the ends to justify the means.

We believe that arbiter and fair play matters should be conducted by one team, but we now have two teams with divided responsibilities. We believe the current format should be abruptly brought to a halt and revert back to having arbiters and anti-cheating arbiters who are all arbiters and all work as one team under one Chief Arbiter.

We do not belittle the experience acquired by the current anti-cheating principals but their future role should be restructured to an advisory entity to be consulted upon request but under the helm of the tournament principals (CA, DCA). This includes research and investigation into possible new ways of cheating, but it should not be extended to include their own system of Seminars, training and titles. Their role should be one where they may be consulted on fair play matters by the chess community; in much the same way that the Technical Commission are available for consultation on technical matters involving pairings and tie-breaks.

The undersigned call for the following changes:

1. The following regulations should be removed from the FIDE Handbook:
 - https://handbook.fide.com/files/handbook/FPL_Title_Regulations_2024.pdf
 - https://handbook.fide.com/files/handbook/FPL_Title_Regulations.pdf
 - https://handbook.fide.com/files/handbook/FPL_Forms.pdf
 - https://handbook.fide.com/files/handbook/FPL_Financial_Regulations_2024.pdf
 - https://handbook.fide.com/files/handbook/FPL_Appointment_Regulations_2024.pdf
 - https://handbook.fide.com/files/handbook/FPL_CA_FPO_Division_of_Tasks.pdf
2. The remaining Fair Play regulations should be amended to remove references to Fair Play Officers and Fair Play Experts.
3. The Fair Play Commission may organise workshops demonstrating new technology to arbiters, players and others within the chess community. However, the Seminars awarding titles should cease with immediate effect.

4. Arbiter regulations should be amended to include Fair Play Arbiters within their framework, e.g. in terms of appointments and the arbiter stipend regulations.

One objection may be that people have paid to attend the Seminar on the basis of potential future appointments. However, Seminars are organised with the intention of communicating information and allowing the attendee to improve their knowledge. This education remains valid. FIDE regularly awards titles to FIDE Arbiters and International Arbiters via Seminars, and these bestow no rights at all to potential appointments to FIDE events. There is no correlation between passing a Seminar and getting appointments or remuneration.

Please note that this letter will be made public in 6 weeks if any of the above changes are not made and implemented.

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