

Hans Olaf Lahlum (Norwegen), Internationaler Schiedsrichter und Internationaler Organisator der FIDE, schickte mir am 26. Juni 2004 zum Thema „Handy“ die nachfolgende E-Mail:

Dear Chessfriend Knebel,

I hope you can understand my English. I can read German fairly well, but I am afraid my written German is insufficient for discussing as complex topics as the FIDE playing rules....

My name is Hans Olav Lahlum, and as you might know I am a 30 year old IA and IO from Norway. (If anything I am known within German chess as organiser of the Gausdal tournaments. I am also secretary in the Rules Commission of the Norwegian Chess Federation.)

As I noted your internet discussion about the mobil phone question, and as you asked for email reactions, I send you as short as possible my opinion about this. Due to ongoing time trouble I have to write in a hurry, so please excuse if I make myself unclear somewhere.

1) Formally I feel the decision from the FIDE-congress of 2003 problematic not to say dubious, as the FIDE playing rules should now be changed only every fourth year, and was not a question to be handled at the 2003 congress at all. Last time I checked it, even the playing rules at the FIDE webpage did not seem updated to include this change, who might directly affect the outcome of many games. This all the more becomes a problem as the change is a very controversial one, for the first time specifying a reaction against disturbances in the playing rules. (penalties for disturbances so far has been left for the tournament rules and/or the arbiter to handle, and so is still the case with all other disturbances.)

2) Moving on to my personal opinion about the actual question, I feel it totally against the spirit of chess to declare a game lost for player because her/his mobil phone is calling. Declaring a game lost for a player without a warning is a "chess death penalty" which should be used only against very serious chess crimes. (like for example when a player is discovered analysing her/his game position on a computer during the game.) Forgetting to switch off a mobil phone by comparison is an accident rather than a crime: It might true enough disturb the opponent and/or other present players, but a time penalty is the natural reaction against such disturbances. The player owing the mobil phone has not tried to cheat deliberately in any way, and will probably herself/himself be more disturbed than the opponent.... The new rule here is mixing the cards and missing the link between crime and punishment, as games might be declared lost for an accident having nothing to do with the actual game, nothing to do with chess, and not having disturbed the opponent at all. (Games are to be declared lost even if the player with the mobil phone and the arbiter are the only ones present in the playing local!)

Grave consequences can become all the more unfair as the players in the game are not only playing each other, but also competing with other players in the tournament: Imagine for example that you are about to win a championship with a large moneyprize after having finished your last game. But suddenly the other candidate wins ahead you, as she/he in a worse position is given the game win because the opponent's mobil phone is calling.

Is it fair for the player whose mobil phone called to lose her/his game because of that? I would say no, but this might be discussed.

Is it fair that you having made the best chess results of the tournament, still does not win it because of her/his mobil phone? Obviously not! As far as I can see, this rule is a try to avoid disturbances in the playing local. Which of course is an important goal. But risking to get unfair game results or even a wrong winner of the tournament, still is a much too high price to pay for avoiding such disturbances....

3) Less important, but still: There are many practical problems and questions left open about how to handle this new rule. While it is usually possible to find out which player that kicked down a board or yelled to his opponent, it might be almost impossible to establish for sure which mobil which is calling in a playing room with 200 players. And are games to be declared lost also for receiving an SMS-message resulting only in a very loud one second sound, making less noise than a player losing her/his pen on the floor? If not, how are we to decide what is a SMS and what is a phone call? What if

the call is coming in the door with the player on the way out, far away from all the players? (And what if the player claims that one of his competitors on the neighbourhood board switched on the Mobil phone?? It might very well happen so in a tight playing room. And who made the disturbance if the person calling actually is the opponent, leaving the local to make a call?)

4) About how I myself have handled this situation until now: I am using a yellow and a red card during my tournaments, the yellow being a strong warning and the red meaning the loss of the game and expelling from the playing local. If a Mobil phone is calling in the playing room the owner is given a yellow card, and if her/his opponent is disturbed in any way, the opponent is given extra time fully to compensate this. If the Mobil phone is calling for the same player later the same round, she/he gets a red card (fortunately I have never had to use this). The same cards are used against onlookers, team captains, arbiters (!) and all other persons present in the playing room, meaning that they get a strong warning the first time a Mobil is calling and are expelled from the playing room if it happens a second time.

We have now agreed in the Norwegian rules commission that while we are waiting for the FIDE playing rules to be updated in an regular way at the next congress, a calling Mobil phone in Norwegian chess tournaments first time still results only in a yellow card (and if necessary time compensation for the opponent). However, if the same happens again with the same player she/he will get a red card and lose the game, even if it is in a later round of the same tournament. Although having some principal second thoughts that this gives opponents in later rounds an undeserved advantage and that it might worst case still give a "wrong" winner of the tournament, I feel much better as the player still is given a warning before losing the game.

Trying to conclude: Declaring a tournament game lost for a player without a warning is an extreme reaction, which I have fortunately still not had to use during my 12 years as an arbiter. It should be used only against very serious chess crimes. As far as it is left for me to decide, forgetting to switch off a Mobil phone is by far not such a serious chess crime. I am fully open leaving the tournament rules and/or the arbiter the right to decide that a calling Mobil phone might lose the game under some circumstances. But as an arbiter I feel strongly against being forced to decide whatever being the circumstances that a Mobil making sound in a playing room should result in the loss of the game.

Best Wishes
IA & IO Hans Olav Lahlum (NOR)