

Laws of Chess – A Part

Illegal Moves

The Laws of chess now specifies several ‘actions’ that are to be considered as illegal moves. **A combination of any three illegal moves normally results in the loss of the game to the player committing them.** I say normally because there are situations where a third illegal move means that the game will end in a draw. These are discussed later. The first and second illegal moves have a two-minute penalty (one minute in blitz). The two minutes is awarded to the opponent. It is important to note that for a move to count the player must press the clock. An opponent who claims before the clock is pressed has very kindly, stopped the offence from having been committed and the player can correct their error without penalty.

What offences are classified as illegal moves?

The first is the normal definition where a piece is moved to a square which is not allowed by the definition of its move. Common examples of this would be:

- a) a knight moving two squares diagonally;
- b) a bishop moving to a square of a different colour;
- c) a rook or queen jumping over another piece on its way to its destination square;
- d) moving a piece which exposes its king to check;
- e) making a move which leaves its king in check;
- f) castling out of check;
- g) castling through check;
- h) castling with a king or rook that has already moved;
- i) capturing the opponent’s king (usually in blitz).

A second type of illegal move is to use two hands to make a move. Examples of this would be:

- a) capturing using two hands;
- b) castling using two hands;
- c) promoting using two hands.

Note that moving with one hand and pressing the clock with the other is an illegal action but does not count as an illegal move.

A third type also concerns promotion. In this case the promotion is not completed. The pawn is moved to the far side of the board and the clock is pressed before the pawn is replaced. This counts not only as an illegal move but also the pawn must be replaced by a queen. The player is not allowed to promote to another piece.

The fourth action which counts as an illegal move is to press the clock without having made a move. Pressing the clock without moving can cause some problems in a few cases.

- i. Possibly the most common of these is where the opponent makes an illegal move, and the player restarts his clock. This is not a problem in Standard or Rapid games but in Blitz it can be argued that by doing this the player has accepted the opponent’s illegal move by making an illegal move of his own. The opponent can then either reply to the non-move or claim that an illegal move has been made.
- ii. In Standard or Rapid games, a player may return to the board and see their clock running and, missing the opponent’s reply, assume that they forgot to press their clock. In situations like this where the clock has been pressed ‘accidentally’ the player will be deemed to have made an illegal move unless they can convince the arbiter otherwise.

The fifth action which counts as an illegal move is to use two hands to make their move or capture. Provided they have not pressed their clock, a player can negate the using two hands offence by

restoring the position to what it was before making the move or capture and then repeating the repositioning using only one hand.

Even if the clock is pressed only one hand is considered to have been used in the following situations:

- a) in capturing, the player removes the captured piece with the same hand as they moved their own piece but puts it in his other hand to place it at the side of the board.
- b) in promotion, the player lifts a queen (or whatever) with one hand but transfers it to the hand moving the pawn without the queen having touched the promotion square before the transfer of hands took place.

When does a third illegal move not lose?

A third illegal move does not always lose. The game will be declared drawn in the following circumstances:

- a) if checkmate is impossible for the opponent to achieve e.g. they only have a lone king;
- b) in the case of using two hands, when the move leads directly (or by a series of forced moves) to checkmate or stalemate;
- c) In the case of failing to exchange the pawn for another piece on promotion the same conditions as in (b) apply.

The following are examples of drawn games following a third illegal move:

1. a) White plays Kxg7 but uses both hands. Black is left with a King and white squared bishop and white just has a King and Queen. It is impossible to get mate with king and bishop. If the white queen is replaced by a rook, or even simply removed the game is drawn too. But if instead of a queen White had a bishop, knight or pawn the game would be a win for Black. Indeed, the knight or pawn anywhere and a black squared bishop would give Black the win, but a white squared bishop would be a draw.
2. b) & c) White uses two hands to promote to a queen or simply presses their clock without completing the promotion. Black has King g8, pawns f7, g7 & h7 and a rook h3. White has King d6, rook c2 and pawn promoted to c8. In both cases the White move is illegal but, in both cases, the pawn must be promoted to a queen which would give checkmate (as it is back rank mate) so the outcome is a draw. But notice if the Black rook was on e3 instead then it could block the checkmate so the result would be a win for Black as Qxe8 checkmate is not a forced move even if it is the only logical move.
3. b) White plays 1 Bxg5+ using both hands. This too is a draw as the only legal moves are 1 ... fxc5+ (forced as only way to escape check) 2 Kh3 (again forced as the only way to escape check for white) and no matter what Black plays White has no legal third move. Notice that in all cases the result would be the same if White's flag had fallen after making the move.

Win on Time

In India, Carlsen with king and bishop won against king bishop and three pawns when his opponent, Alireza Firouzja exceeded his time. The result surprised several players who expected a draw to be given as Carlsen did not have mating material. Indeed, Firouzja seemed to query the arbiter's positioning of the two kings in the centre on black squares, the method used by DGT boards to indicate a black win. Carlsen too seemed surprised by the result. This often-used phrase (mating material) is not used in the Law 6.9 which is the relevant section "... However, the game is drawn if the position is such that the opponent cannot checkmate the player's king by any possible series of legal moves."

This is very similar to the situations which arose before digital clocks with increments became popular. A player would have to claim a draw before their flag fell or lose. Such claims are not possible with increments. If a flag falls and it is possible for that player to be mated, no matter how unlikely that is, the player loses.