

Fischer Timings/Increments for Leicestershire League and Cup Competitions

1. Background

Fischer timings have been used in the Leicestershire league for more than 5 years. For the 2016/17 season the time limit is 75¹ minutes for the whole game, plus 10 seconds per move². Where Fischer timings are not used the time limit is 90³ minutes for the whole game.

In the County Championships, the time limit is 80 minutes for the whole game, plus 10 seconds per move.

In the Harrod and Wylie cups, the time limit is 20 minutes for the whole game, plus 10 seconds per move. Where Fischer timings are not used the time limit is 30 minutes for the whole game.

At present, the home team decides whether to play using Fischer timings.

This paper considers whether Fischer timings should be used for all games.

2. Are Increments better than standard time limits?

Fischer timed games have a number of advantages:

- i) The game is decided by the chess skill of the players rather than how fast they can move in an undignified frantic time scramble at the end of the game. If a player has a clearly winning position then 10 second increments give enough time to realise it. Similarly, if the position is a simple draw then the defending player will be able to keep making the moves to demonstrate this.
- ii) Increments should increase the quality of play, in particular during the endgame.
- iii) Potential disputes from players claiming a draw under the notorious 2 minute rules used in quickplay finishes are avoided.

Fischer timings are used in nearly all leading chess leagues and tournaments, including:

Elite events: World Championship match, Candidates tournament, World Cup, London Classic

International events: Gibraltar Masters, British Championship, Hastings

Other British events: 4NCL, Scarborough, Blackpool

Rapid: World Rapid championships, 4NCL Rapidplay

The disadvantage of Fischer timings is the lack of a guaranteed finishing time. However, when the increment is just 10 seconds, games will not be excessively long. A 90 move game played on the current 75+10 time limit will take a maximum of 3 hours, and a 120 move game a maximum of 3 hours 10 minutes.

From a search of 7 million games on Chessbase, only 0.6% were more than 90 moves, and just 0.05% in excess of 120 moves.

The advantages of using Fischer timings seem to significantly outweigh this small disadvantage.

¹ 65 minutes when playing the short time control

² The same time limits apply for the Chapman and Birstall cups

³ 80 minutes when playing the short time control

3. Clubs with strict 10pm finish times

Some clubs (e.g. Shepshed) have to be out of their venue promptly at 10pm and so play the short time control with no increments i.e. all moves in 80 minutes. To enable all matches to be played using Fischer timings, the following time limit is proposed:

All moves in 70 minutes, plus 5 seconds per move

For a game of 120 moves, this would result in a total time of 80 minutes, the same as for the current short time control.

In the extremely rare event where a game is still going on after 120 moves⁴, the clocks should be stopped, 2 minutes added to each side, and the increments switched off. The game would then be played to a finish. In this final phase only, players would be able to claim a draw under the 2 minute rule.

For Harrod and Wylie Cup the normal playing time for the 2 games is only around 2 hours, and the chance of a game going beyond 10pm is so remote that all games should be played at the normal time limit of 20 minutes plus 10 seconds per move.

4. Clubs without digital clocks

Where digital clocks are not available, the alternative time control of 90 minutes for the whole game shall be used, or 80 minutes where the shorter time control is being used.

5. Proposals

Proposal 1: Where digital clocks are available, all games should be played with Fischer timings.

Proposal 2: For league games, the existing time limit of all moves in 75 minutes plus 10 seconds per move shall be retained⁵, except for clubs playing the shorter time control.

Proposal 3: For the shorter time control, the time limit shall be all moves in 70 minutes plus 5 seconds per move⁶. For games in excess of 120 moves, the provision set out in section 3 shall apply.

Proposal 4: In the Harrod and Wylie Cups, the time limit shall be all moves in 20 minutes plus 10 seconds per move⁷.

Martin Burrows, 11 February 2017

⁴ This can be deduced from the actual time and the clock times. Each player will have received 80 minutes by move 120 so with a start time of 7.15pm, the total time on the two clocks will be the number of minutes left to 9.55pm. For example, if one player has 3 minutes left, the other has 4 and the time is 9.48pm then you must have reached move 120.

⁵ Where digital clocks are not available the time limit will be all moves in 90 minutes

⁶ Where digital clocks are not available the time limit will be all moves in 80 minutes

⁷ Where digital clocks are not available the time limit will be all moves in 30 minutes