



International Braille Chess Association

Congress

Hotel "Rzeszow" (**) J. Pilsudskiego 44, Rzeszow, Poland**

August 23, 2025, 10:00

FACING REALITY FOR A FAIR AND BRIGHT FUTURE

Background

A lot has happened since IBCA was founded in 1958. From the beginning IBCA, despite aiming aspiring to be a global organization, in reality it for decades was dominated by European countries. The exceptions were non-Russian players representing Soviet Union and, to the mid of the 1980s players from USA. After the downfall of Soviet Union in 1991, however, IBCA welcomed the independent republics that formerly played under Soviet flag. It meant that more countries from Asia joined our chess family, and later Asian countries that never belonged to the Soviet Union joined IBCA. India deserves special mention as it from a modest start in the second part of the 1990s developed to one of our most active members.

When Delfin Burdio became president in 1992, more countries from America started to take part, and we also welcomed South Africa. But not until 1996, by the Olympiad in Brazil, followed by the Olympiad in India 2012, IBCA Olympiad's were played outside Europe. Although IBCA related activities are multiplying with a growing number of players taking part in online events, IBCA needs to strengthen chess on all continents, first of all in Africa, Asia, and America, but also in many formerly very active European countries that now struggle with drastically decreasing number of players. Moreover, we have to recognize that the number of blind players is low in Europe, whereas it is significantly higher on the other continents. As IBCA for decades has neglected to carry through vision tests of the players, gradually more players that see better than allowed according to IBCA rules have been dear members of the IBCA family. Although countries as Ukraine and Romania have brought this development for discussions at IBCA congresses, we have to admit that all boards after the presidency of Aren Bestman have neglected to tackle this development.

Thanks to a congress decision in 2023, pushed by countries from America, IBCA now has carried through test of the strongest players in some IBCA events. According to these still scant number of tests, we have reason to suppose that many of our strongest players see more than our statue allows. In this context the IBCA board underlines that it would be absurd to accuse these players of cheating. IBCA gladly welcomed these players and no or few questions were asked. On the contrary, IBCA long ago should have started a serious discussion of how we can face a positive

reality that leads to a low number of blind players in Europe, thanks to advances in health care. Instead, IBCA boards supported by a majority congresses the last 25 years, have avoided the need to reflect on questions such as whether different categories of players would be a fruitful idea. We dare to say that in Europe a culture has developed in which players with gradually better vision have been included and who now dominates our tournaments, continental as well as global. An informal system of acceptance has become the norm, and players and member countries have followed it. This neglect has led to a lack of transparency, and we do not exclude that players who have been welcomed by their home federations as well as of IBCA nevertheless would have sensed that they rather should have been denied membership in our chess family. A destructive development has accelerated to the disadvantage for our entire chess community.

Blind players who have understood that their opponents probably see better than the IBCA norm allows had little choice than to "accept it." Off the record some of those who have tried to protest have told members of the current board that they have felt silenced.

But we would also say that low vision players who have followed the informal culture that mostly has evolved in Europe and who have complied to the definition of low vision of their home country have good reason to be critical as well. They have not avoided to be assessed according to IBCA regulations, as for decades no tests have been carried through in the European and global events. Nevertheless, these players might have sensed the bad eye from other players. Many blind and low vision players have good reason to be critical to the above-described development. Moreover, it might have been possible to earlier stop this development if more countries, primarily from America would have had their say on IBCA congresses. That many countries could take part in the discussions at the congress in 2023 thanks to online access and that it was at that congress the decision to test more players was taken was hardly a coincidence.

IBCA started out as a mainly European organization with a lot of players who had become blind after the Second World War, it now has become a much more heterogeneous organization with new problems, but also many more possibilities. Some of these issues and possible solutions will be the topic of the following text.

Transparency, fare play and mutual respect

Facing the above-mentioned challenges, it is important to look for solutions that would stand the test of time. Although Europe was the first continent seeing a rapid improvement of how much the visually impaired players could see, improving economy and advances in healthcare probably will have a major positive impact on chess among visually impaired worldwide as well. But we have to build on transparency and fare play. Only then players with diverging presuppositions can feel recognized as respected players.

But how should IBCA then handle the current situation? To begin with, kicking out many of our chess friends who for years have taken part in IBCA events, although they see too much would be immoral. Moreover, it would seriously reduce IBCA, which probably would mean lower capacity to support our blind players as well.

An interesting solution would be that all players play blindfold. But it would mean that the B3 and B4 players¹ would play under drastically different conditions than they normally do. Thus, we would have to consider problems regardin fare play.

Another option would be to play tournaments in two classes, one for B1 and B2 players and one for B3 and B4 players. Although such models would be applicable on continental level, it would risk making the B1-B2 class too small in the global championships. A cure to that problem would be if we could be sure that many of the B1 and B2 players from Africa, America and Asia would take part in the global events. But for many years we have seen few players from these continents in our global championships. Of course, that is something that the IBCA works at changing, but so far, we have been unsuccessful in this regard. Moreover, the global team tournaments would be expensive for the member countries if they had to send two teams instead of one.

An attempt to secure fare plays and simultaneously secure IBCA as a vital and growing organization would be to play the tournaments in one group as we do in the global events today. But

the players would be classified into B1, B2, B3 and B4, or equivalent categories of preference. if that would be better. The player who wins the tournament becomes the champion, but the best B1-B2 player would also be crowned.

The teams in the global team competitions would also play in one group, but teams with at least 50% B1-B2 players, would be crowned according to the pattern mentioned regarding the individual tournaments. As for the regulations for the global team competitions we have to consider how many rounds the B1-B2 players would have played in order to qualify for the extra medals.

new regulation that secures fare play and transparency.

Further steps

By facing reality and starting a process in which we together try to form a system of fare play that also strengthens IBCA is an important leap in itself. But changes should be done slowly in a democratic process that gives our member countries and IBCA officials good possibilities to discuss different options.

The first step was to let the executive board consider this document and the drafted proposals of modification of statute. Now these documents are submitted to the member countries and all IBCA officials. We welcome reactions from the member-countries and the discussion and decisions at the congress in Poland August 23rd. But latest at a congress in 2027 IBCA should have a carefully thought through regulation that secures fare play in the modern context. In order to open for different attempts of organizing tournaments, we suggest the following modification of statute:

13.2 Eligibility Criteria

Vision impairment arises for a variety of reasons – genetics, prenatal developmental Tissues, or from illness or trauma.

Vision impairment occurs when there is damage to one or more of the components of the vision system, which can include:

- impairment of the eye structure/receptors
- impairment of the optic nerve/optic pathways
- impairment of the visual cortex

Chess players are required to submit a fully completed ‘Medical form’

Definition of Visual Classes

The determination of visual class will be based upon the eye with better visual acuity, whilst wearing best optical correction using spectacles or contact lenses, and/or visual fields which include central and peripheral zones.

The definition of Blind player –

Visual acuity ranging from LogMAR 1.4 to 1.0 (inclusive) and/or visual field constricted to a diameter of less than 40 degrees. But the IBCA Congress or the executive board have the right to include players with better vision as long as it is based on discussions of the IBCA congress.

The IBCA board further notes that the strongest B1 players in IBCA history had their heydays 20-40 years back in time. This highlights the need of supporting coaching of the B1 and B2 players. This has been a prime concern for the IBCA board and other IBCA officials, but a lot remains to be done.

The IBCA board welcomes feedback on this document as a part of a constructive process for a bright future of IBCA.