

Checkmate! The World of Chess (2025)

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Letter from the CD

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to MUNE XIV! My name is Sam Aurora (they/them), and I can't wait to see everyone at Emory to discuss all the drama in the world of chess. First I would like to share a little bit about myself: I am a senior from Marietta, Georgia and I'm majoring in Mathematics and International Studies at Emory. This is my eighth year doing model UN, and my favorite part is hosting MUNE and ENMUNC (our high school conference). I've held nearly every role from CD to Chair, to even Secretary-General of our upcoming ENMUNC. Outside of Model UN, I work at Emory's Office of LGBT Life and I am an RA for upperclassmen.

I have been playing chess on and off since I was around 5 years old. I used to do tournaments when I was in elementary school, but I've seen it as a more social and casual activity since I got back into chess in high school. I mostly like playing over-the-board with friends, and I frequently use livestreams of chess tournaments as background noise (or distractions) or studying. As I've seen recaps of tournaments and tuned into livestreams, I have become enthralled by all the drama within the chess community. Seeing all the cheating scandals (specifically the Niemann anal beads), geopolitics, and FIDE's laughable disrespect for women's chess inspired me to host this committee. I hope that delegates enjoy tackling all of these dramatic problems that have made the "gentleman's game" seem not so gentlemanly.

Best,

Sam Aurora

Sensitivity Statement

You are expected to retain decorum throughout the committee and treat these issues with the seriousness they call for. While these topics are less serious than many MUN committees, but many of the issues in the chess world are tied up with women's rights, trans rights, and various cases of war and genocide that have made a serious impact on the lives of chess players and all residents of those countries.

You should treat your fellow delegates with respect. This includes not imitating accents during speaking time. Any appeal to or use of discrimination and harassment will not be tolerated. Delegates should not engage in racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, or any other form of discrimination, under any circumstances, including past behavior from the characters in the dossier. Undiplomatic behavior towards fellow delegates, including bullying, personal insults, and harassment, will also not be tolerated.

MUNE seeks to maintain a fair environment that allows delegates to shine and showcase their talents. As such, using pre-writing or similarly deceptive tactics, such as using AI in writing directives or crisis notes in our committee, will not be tolerated at this conference. Plagiarism of any kind is unacceptable at MUNE.

Committee Structure

This committee will not require any knowledge or skill about how to play chess. This weekend, delegates' knowledge of the world will be tested, beyond the confines of the chess board. Delegates will represent top chess players, and they will address a variety of issues in the real world through both collective actions in the front room, and through their crisis notes.

In the front room, players will collectively come to decisions about the actions, using the resources and power that the players and their sponsors have. While the players will not meet as a committee under FIDE, the Freestyle Chess Players Club, or any other organizations, players can assume that they will have open communication channels to other major chess organizations.

In the back room, players can leverage their resources to write to anyone in the real world with crisis notes. Some good candidates for notes might be writing to political leaders, sponsors, high-ranking FIDE members, other top chess players, or a PR team. Delegates will have a high degree of freedom to influence the world through their notes, but should remain mindful that this committee takes place in the real world. Since this is a committee that takes place in the real world, delegates are discouraged from attempting to use magic or fantasy elements, though creativity will be rewarded. Delegates will be expected to write notes to the backroom using a 2-notepad system.

Each committee session will represent the passage of a few months, and relevant information about changes to each player's rating, ranking, and sponsorships will be provided at the beginning of the session. Since the committee takes place in the present day, the first session will occur in the present day. As time passes, delegates' crisis notes will help drive the direction that the committee will go. Delegates can use their backrooms to influence tournaments through each cycle. For example, the first session will contain all the tournaments that decide the

qualifications for the 2026 Candidates, and delegates can use their backroom to affect who is able to qualify.



Background

History of Chess

Modern chess is a game of strategy that involves 2 players taking turns moving their 8 pieces and 8 pawns on an 8x8 board. Delegates should know the basic rules¹ of the game such as how the pieces move and what checkmate entails, but delegates do not need experience playing chess to do well in this committee, since this committee will not require delegates to play chess.

The game's rules and traditions have changed over its long history. Chess is a game that dates back to the ancient game of Chaturanga, which originated in 7th century India. Chaturanga was played on an 8x8 board like chess, but some rules were slightly different due to the pieces having slightly different designs and moves.²



Chess quickly spread outside of India, starting with an expansion to the Middle East with the Islamic conquest of Persia in the early 7th century. Chess also spread along the Silk Road, with artifacts being found from the 8th century across Central Asia, ranging from modern-day

¹ <https://www.chess.com/learn-how-to-play-chess>

² https://web.archive.org/web/20110716225216if_/http://www.thechesszone.com/history_of_chess

Afghanistan and Iran to China. Eventually, the game spread to Europe through the Catholic Church's crusades and through Muslim rule over Iberia until the 11th century.

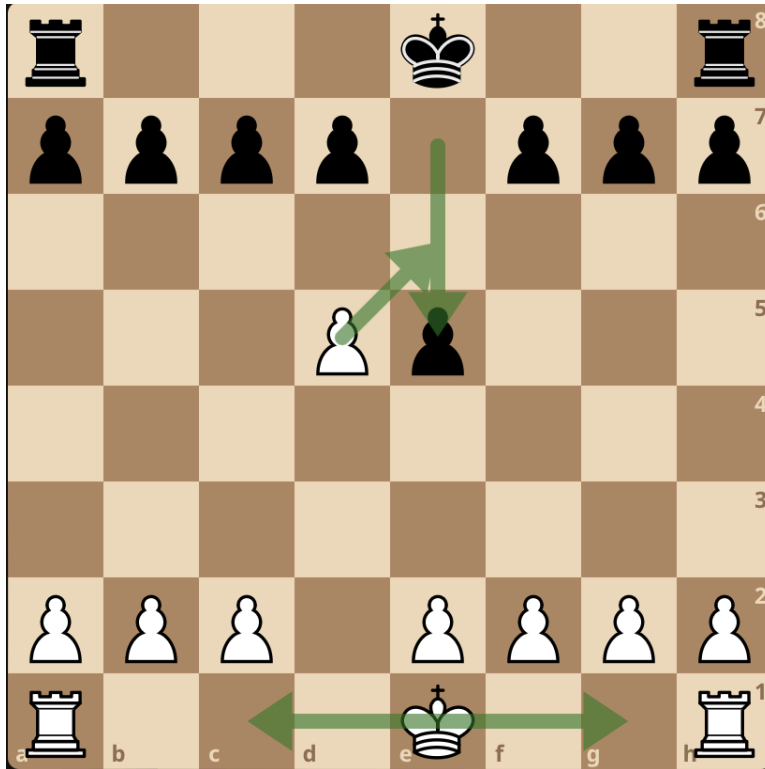
Different regions began to adopt slight variants in the rules, such as Spain's adoption of allowing pawns to move two squares on their first move.³ Various regions, including Spain, India, and Japan, each had different rules for the game. In the 15th century, the Spanish version of the game replaced an old piece with the modern queen. This change is theorized to reflect the power of Queen Isabella of Castile.⁴ The rules created in Spain tended to spread quickly both due to the developments in printing during the turn of the 16th century, in addition to the Spanish Alhambra decree, displacing tens of thousands of Jews in an act of religious persecution. Through this horrific act, the rules of Spanish chess spread around the world, helping to standardize rules that are much closer to the current ones..

The most recent updates to chess's rules occurred during the standardization of international chess in the mid-19th century, since different regions had different specifics on newer moves. En passant had different variations from being disallowed, to being allowed for any number of turns, to the modern rule of only being allowed to capture on the first turn after a pawn passes another pawn by moving two squares. There were also various rules on castling with debates over whether castling through check was legal, and where the king and rook would move. Parts of Italy and Germany allowed free-castling before 1840, in which the king and rook could go to any square as long as the rook did not pass the king's original square. Some early versions of castling made the move take two turns. Even when the rules for en passant and castling were standardized, there were debates over positions in which they were allowed for one turn only could contribute to a draw by threefold repetition.⁵

³ <http://history.chess.free.fr/papers/Calvo%201998.pdf>

⁴ <https://new.uschess.org/news/evolution-modern-chess-rules-enter-queen-and-bishop>

⁵ <https://new.uschess.org/news/evolution-modern-chess-rules-en-passant>



History of Competitive Chess

Competitive chess primarily started with matches between two players, but in the 1850s, international chess tournaments started to grow as tournament organizers started inviting multiple players. Though the first tournaments used single-elimination knockout tournaments (the type of tournaments you see in typical sports playoffs), the volatility of this style led to tournaments switching to round-robin formats.⁶ In a round-robin, every player plays every other player, gaining 1 point for a win and 0.5 points for a draw. The overall winner is the player with the highest score. One issue with early chess tournaments that still persists is the inconsistency with tournament formats, from how matches are decided to how much time each player gets.⁷

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<https://en.chessbase.com/post/remembering-howard-staunton-on-the-172nd-anniversary-of-the-great-london-1851-tournament>

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/chess/The-time-element-and-competition>

Often long matches could last 2 days, and at the end of the day, players would write down their next move in a sealed envelope, but this solution is no longer feasible in the era of computers.

In these late 19th century chess tournaments, chess was solidified as a spectator sport despite games being very slow. In the first official world championship, which was independently organized, the winner was determined by whoever was the first player to win ten games. During each game, there was a large demonstration board in the room so that spectators could watch, and spectators were allowed to use “pocket Chess-boards for the purpose of following the game.”⁸

From 1886 until the present day, world championships were a competition between the reigning champion and a single challenger. In the first half of the 20th century, most title defenses were played with the winner being decided as the first player to 6 points or 8 points. A win counts for 1 point, a draw for 0.5 points, and a loss for 0 points. The challengers also had to raise a prize fund, usually \$10,000 (which is upwards of \$100,000 after inflation), in order for the champion to be required to face them.

FIDE (Fédération Internationale des Échecs or World Chess Federation) was founded in 1924 at the end of the first unofficial Chess Olympiad (a chess tournament that took place during the Paris 1924 Olympics) in an attempt to make an international player's union. The Chess Olympiad became a staple of the international chess circuit, being run approximately every two years since 1924, and allowing players to represent their country's team rather than having the winner be primarily determined by individual performance.

One of FIDE's main concerns was the impracticality of raising enough money to challenge the champions under the previous rules. FIDE created the title of FIDE champion in 1928, though the title had far less prestige than the world championship title. FIDE was unable to

⁸ https://www.chessarch.com/archive/1886.01.11_Steinitz-Zukertort/preliminaries.shtml

gain much influence over world championships until 1946, when the reigning champion died, undermining the champion-challenger system. In 1948, FIDE hosted a round robin tournament as the first FIDE World Chess Championship, featuring players from the USA, the USSR, and the Netherlands.

After 1948, FIDE adopted three-year world championship cycles. Each country would host their own tournaments, known as zonals. The top-performing players would compete in interzonal tournaments between multiple countries, and the best players from each of the interzonals would qualify for the Candidates tournament. The Candidates tournament would be a tournament of top players from the interzonals to determine the challenger for the World Championship. Beginning in 1951, the World Championship match between the reigning champion and the Candidates winner was played as a best of 24 match, with the reigning champion keeping the title in a 12-12 draw.

Though there were minor changes to the format, the FIDE World Championship Title was undisputed until the 1975 championship, when Bobby Fischer demanded a change in the rules for his title defense against Anatoly Karpov. Fischer demanded a system where they played in a first to 10 wins, with draws not counting, but if the score was 9-9, it was declared a tie. FIDE argued that this was unfair to the challenger, but Fischer refused to defend with any other system, so FIDE declared Karpov the 1975 world champion, while Fischer claimed that he was still champion, though he immediately retired, not playing any competitive chess games between the 1972 championship and his 1992 rematch against Boris Spassky.

During this era, FIDE had also become involved in Cold War tensions as the USSR and the West since much of its membership came from Western-aligned countries, while the USSR had the best players in the world. In the 1962 Candidates tournament, Fischer accused three

Soviet players of pre-arranging draws in order to conserve their energy against non-Soviet players, and his claims were found to be true decades later. The claims, unproven at the moment, led to animosity between Western and Soviet chess players. In other cases, the actions of FIDE caused a reaction from Soviet players. For example, grandmaster Gennadi Sosonko emigrated from the Soviet Union, and the USSR Chess Federation demanded that Sosonko was excluded from chess, but FIDE refused, resulting in a Soviet boycott of the 1974 Wijk aan Zee tournament, then called the Hoogovens chess tournament. The top 4 countries of the 1972 Olympiad (the USSR, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia) along with other Eastern Bloc and Arab countries boycotted the 1976 Chess Olympiad in Israel, leading to the unofficial Against Chess Olympiad in Libya being held at the same time. Since the height of the Cold War with Fischer and a litany of Soviet grandmasters, FIDE has found itself entrenched in drama, controversy, and criticisms.

In 1984, Karpov was faced by challenger Garry Kasparov. The championship was supposed to be determined by the first player to win six games, and Karpov led 5-0 after 27 games, including 22 draws. After 48 matches and 159 days, FIDE suspended the match without a winner at a score of 5-3, restarting the match in 1985. The second championship was a best of 24 games, so it could not continue indefinitely. Because the first championship and the gap were so long, the championship became heavily publicized and was considered to be an ideological battle between the old guard of the Soviet union, backed by Karpov, and new era of Soviet leadership, led by Gorbachev and represented at the chessboard by Kasparov.⁹ Kasparov won the match to become the youngest world champion yet.

In 1993, British grandmaster Nigel Short was set to face Kasparov in the world championship, but FIDE accepted a bid without consulting the players. The players were

⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20070529002521/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1604889,00.html>

frustrated by FIDE's corruption, the 1984 match being paused, and FIDE taking a cut of the prize pool, so Short and Kasparov separately agreed to play the 1993 World Championship without FIDE. Short and Kasparov founded the Professional Chess Association (PCA) to publicize their world championship, and they were able to secure over \$2 million for the prize pool.¹⁰ FIDE removed both players, and organized the 1993 World Chess Championship between the next highest-placing players in the Candidates Tournament, Karpov and Jan Timman. Though the Sultan of Oman promised a \$1.4 million prize fund, he refused to put up the money, leading the prize fund to only be \$700,000. A drastic decrease in the fund was particularly impactful because players usually have a large team of elite players who are hired to help prepare the contenders. Following the tournaments, both Kasparov and Karpov claimed to be the world chess champion.

The PCA hosted one championship cycle, much like the FIDE Candidates cycle, ultimately leading to Kasparov defending his title against Viswanathan "Vishy" Anand in 1995. Kasparov agreed to play IBM's supercomputer, Deep Blue, in a match in 1996 to test the strength of the computer, leading the PCA's lead sponsor, Intel, to withdraw their funding.¹¹ The PCA folded, leaving Kasparov unable to fund tournaments for a championship match. After negotiations for a championship fell through with two other grandmasters, Kasparov faced Vladimir Kramnik in 2000, losing the title of World Champion. Similarly, Karpov lost his FIDE Champion title in 1998 since he refused to play in the new knockout tournament style which limited his advantage as incumbent champion.

During the split, FIDE changed the format of the Candidates tournament. Beginning in 1997, the Candidates tournament was changed to a large single elimination knockout bracket instead of a round robin, increasing the volatility of the results and leading Kramnik to

¹⁰ https://liquipedia.net/chess/PCA_World_Chess_Championship/1993

¹¹ <https://en.chessbase.com/post/garry-kasparov-a-history-of-profesional-che>

prominently refusing to play in the event.¹² This tournament featured a larger pool of players, rapid tiebreakers for matches in the bracket, and shorter time controls for each game. As a result of both these changes, the split, and a refusal of some players to participate in 2004 because the Candidates tournament was in Libya, the FIDE World Championships were not as representative of the top players between 1998 and 2004 as it had been in the past. In response, the 2005 World Championship was a round-robin tournament with longer time controls, but it had eight players seeded in without using a qualifying tournament, making the tournament remain controversial.

Modern Competitive Chess

Kramnik and Topalov played a reunification match in 2006 for the title of being undisputed world champion. Since this match did not have a reigning defender, a tiebreaker procedure was implemented. If the score was tied after 12 classical games, the first tiebreaker would be a series of four 25+10 rapid games. If the score was still tied, the championship would be decided by two 5+10 blitz games. If the match was still tied, it would be determined by an armageddon, where white begins with more time than black, but black wins in the case of a draw. Kramnik won the match on the rapid tiebreaks, but the match was controversial and led to both players making disparaging statements about each other. Topalov accused Kramnik of cheating by using a computer and drew suspicion of Kramnik's bathroom usage, leading to FIDE restricting Kramnik's private bathroom access and leading to Topalov being awarded game 5 after Kramnik refused to play out of protest. This event, "toiletgate", was emblematic of the fact that despite the reunification of the titles, the drama surrounding FIDE would not end soon.

¹² [https://www.mark-weeks.com/chess/9798\\$cx.htm](https://www.mark-weeks.com/chess/9798$cx.htm)

Following the match, Topalov was also disallowed from competing in the following championship, because he was excluded from the 2005 World Cup as the reigning champion, and the 2005 World Cup (which used the format of the 1998-2004 Candidates tournament) was the qualifier for the 2007 Candidates tournament. The 2007 Candidates tournament had 16 players in a knockout style, and determined the 8 players that played in the 2007 championship tournament, which was a round-robin. Kramnik got 2nd place in the 2007 tournament to Anand. Because Kramnik was not given a proper defense in a challenger-champion match, the 2008 World Championship was a match between Kramnik and Anand, which Anand won. In 2007, FIDE hosted the World Cup, which used the knockout style of 2005, to compete in the 2010 World Championship. The winner of the world cup faced Topalov in an eight game match, in compensation for his exclusion from the previous world championship cycle, and the match's winner would face Anand in a traditional challenger-champion match.

Following unrest, claims of unfairness, low prize funds compared to the costs of hosting tournaments, and the unpopular 2004 championship in Libya, a new professional chess player's union was formed. The Association of Chess Professionals (ACP) formed in 2003, working to advocate for chess players. They hosted their own tours, and even hosted the World Rapid Championship (with the approval of FIDE). The ACP also advocated for women's tournaments to not coincide with open tournaments in 2009¹³, and worked with FIDE to create the anti-cheating committee in 2014.¹⁴ One of the goals of the organization, as a means to helping players earn a livelihood, was to attract spectators and sponsors to chess. Though the ACP was disbanded in 2023, it led to significant increases in the prize funds for chess players, and more thorough analysis of cheating in chess.

¹³ <https://en.chessbase.com/post/acp-to-fide-why-must-women-s-tournaments-collide-/82>

¹⁴ <https://old.fide.com/component/content/article/1-fide-news/7920-fideacp-anti-cheating-committee-meeting.html>

From the beginning of the 2012 World Championship's cycle, FIDE implemented many changes each cycle, much to the dismay of the ACP.¹⁵ The Candidates tournament remained a knockout tournament in 2011 (for the 2012 championship), before becoming an eight player double round robin for every iteration until present. However, the qualification process for the Candidates tournament has become increasingly complicated with each iteration of the tournament. Selection processes for the Candidates since the 2012 World Championship cycle have included the Chess World Cup, runners-up of previous World Championships, highest rated players, wildcards selected by the Candidates organizing committee, the FIDE Grand Prix series of tournaments, the FIDE Grand Swiss tournament, and the FIDE Circuit series of tournaments. Though the methods of qualification to the Candidates tournament have gotten more varied, the last decade has marked an increase in stability for the World Championship system, with fewer changes than occurred in the two decades prior.

One of the main trends over the last decade has been the decline of the real prize pools for Classical tournaments.¹⁶ While more money than ever is involved in the game, it largely comes from online tournaments and sponsorships from eSports teams that have recently become involved in chess. With smaller (real) prizes and less attention on classical chess, compared to blitz, rapid, and freestyle formats, FIDE has struggled to find hosts for the World Championship and Olympiad, along with other major tournaments. Only 2 countries bidded to host the World Championship and 1 for the Olympiad in 2024. The primary directive in this committee, especially for the first session, will be to ensure the preservation of classical chess tournaments, find ways to encourage cities to host, sponsors to increase the prize funds, and for classical chess players to continue participating in classical tournaments.

¹⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20081217162023/http://www.chesscenter.com/twic/acpgp161208.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.chess.com/news/view/fides-call-for-world-championship-bids-draws-reactions>

Most Recent Developments in the World of Chess

The Rise of Computers

One of the biggest developments in modern chess has been the creation of computer algorithms that can play chess. Early algorithms would analyze every move and see which side had more pieces and material if there was no checkmate on the board, but more advanced algorithms from the 1970s and 1980s were able to analyze other qualities that human players look at too. By 1988, a chess engine was able to defeat a grandmaster, and by 1997, a chess engine was able to beat world champion Garry Kasparov in a six game classical match.¹⁷ The impact of computers was wide-reaching. Computers enabled players to cheat with the assistance of a tool much better than any other players, made correspondence chess (chess played where each player has days to make a move, usually played by mail) less common, and assisted chess players with opening preparation. Computers revolutionized the strategies that were used in the game, with Stockfish, an open-source tool that analyzes chess positions, being regarded as the strongest engine.

The Chess Boom

In 2020, Netflix released the show “The Queen’s Gambit,” which became incredibly popular, following the story of a young woman who was a chess prodigy, vaguely inspired by the journeys of top grandmasters from the 1980s. In one month, the show was streamed by 62 million people, and Chess.com reported almost 3 million new accounts being created in that

¹⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/chess/Chess-and-artificial-intelligence>

month.¹⁸ Between October 2020 and April 2022, Chess.com experienced an increase in active accounts from 8 million to 17 million. Since 2020, chess has become increasingly popular as a spectator sport, with major events being live streamed on Twitch, usually in conjunction with either Chess.com or FIDE as the organizer, depending on whether the event was played virtually or over the board.¹⁹ Outside of major FIDE events, Chess.com hosts tournaments for top chess players, and frequently gets high view counts in its Pogchamps tournaments series, in which popular livestreamers with little to no chess experience are trained by comparatively famous chess players and compete in a tournament.

Magnus Carlsen's Dominance

In recent years, Magnus Carlsen has dominated the global chess scene, being the highest rated player since 2011, achieving the highest rating of all time in 2014. He was the world champion from 2013 to 2023, though he declined to defend his title in 2023 due to lack of motivation.²⁰ He also became the only player to simultaneously be the champion in classical, rapid, and blitz chess. Though Carlsen is generally respected, his dominance has led to a few issues. After he implicitly accused grandmaster Hans Niemann of cheating, Niemann was not invited to many invitational events, which make up a significant portion of the chess calendar. Furthermore, Carlsen's refusal to defend the classical title while being the highest rated player has discredited the merit of the title to some degree, which could influence the prize pool in the long run. The numerous world championships won and records broken by Carlsen have increased his influence over the chess world. However, his influence leaves FIDE vulnerable due to various conflicts between the organization and Carlsen.

¹⁸ <https://frontofficesports.com/how-world-champion-magnus-carlsen-rode-the-chess-boom/>

¹⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1460587/popular-chess-events-live-streams-worldwide-peak-viewers/>

²⁰ <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/magnus-carlsen-is-giving-up-the-world-title-but-the-carlsen-era-lives-on/>

Carlsen has achieved a high level of fame from his success in chess, while also becoming a critic of FIDE due to FIDE's criticisms of the Freestyle Chess Players Club, which Carlsen founded. Carlsen's fame clashed with FIDE's control over the game in December 2024 at the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championships. While Carlsen was playing in the World Rapid tournament, a tournament organizer told Carlsen he was in violation of the dress code, that he was being fined, he had to immediately change out of his jeans. Carlsen refused to immediately change, with his offer to wear more formal clothes the following day being rejected, and he was forced to resign his games. After he felt he was targeted by the rarely-enforced dress code, he withdrew from the World Rapid tournament, and withdrew from the World Blitz tournament that would begin in 2 days, declaring that "I am at full war with FIDE."²¹

However, after Deputy President of FIDE Vishwanathan Anand met with Carlsen and changed the dress code rules so that Carlsen could participate wearing jeans. Carlsen re-entered the World Blitz Tournament, but after "jeansgate," he still continued to bend the rules at the Blitz Championship. In the final, after 7 games with a tied score between Carlsen and grandmaster Ian Nepomniatchi, Carlsen unprecedentedly offered to split the title with Nepo. The FIDE arbiters approved this decision, despite it going against the tiebreaking rules for the event which should eventually culminate in a single winner. Commentators and chess personalities, including many top Grandmasters, accused Carlsen of using his high degree of influence, especially following Jeansgate, to force FIDE to accept this agreement between Carlsen and Nepo.

More recently, Carlsen auctioned the jeans he wore to the rapid tournament for \$36,000, and he became a fashion model for a company that makes jeans. Carlsen's influence has made

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<https://www.chess.com/news/view/breaking-magnus-carlsen-makes-u-turn-confirms-world-blitz-championship-participation>

FIDE appear weak, and FIDE is at its most vulnerable state since the split world championship. Players have a lot of power to undermine FIDE and reform this chess world in their favor.

Primary Current Issues

Monetization

In addition to protecting the integrity of the game, this committee also needs to address the monetization of chess. Chess's newfound popularity, along with the growing number of top players, has heightened the need to monetize the sport for top players. In order for top players to continue being full-time chess players, they need to find ways to enhance their income. The most common solutions are chess sponsorships, which drive players to compete in more marketable formats (primarily rapid chess) than classical chess, or to begin streaming, which not all players have the skills to be successful in.

Generally, wealthier players have an advantage in chess due to having better access to resources, much like any other hobby or sports. However, some players have gotten an advantage by using their influence to schedule tournaments for their benefit. While this is not match-fixing or an issue regarding cheating, there are still concerns about parity between players. This trend has been especially concerning in recent years. Many top players, including Sergei Karjakin, Ding Liren, Gukesh Dommaraju, and Alireza Firouzja, have organized tournaments (or had a close friend organize a tournament) that appear to be for the explicit purpose of exploiting the way Candidates qualifications work, in order to improve their chances of making it to the Candidates. Though delegates in this committee do not need to know the specific (and frankly, esoteric) paths to qualification to tournaments, delegates should understand the impact that

having connections to organize tournaments can have on the competitive chess scene. Creating events like this, including venues, a prize fund, and recruiting titled players, is not an accessible process for all top players.

Recently, chess's popularity on streaming platforms has allowed it to be admitted to the 2025 Esports World Cup in Saudi Arabia, where top players competed for \$1.5 million, the largest prize pool in the history of chess, excluding the world championships and FIDE world cups, as OTB events.²² Top Esports organizations have started signing top players in response to the game's inclusion at the eSports World Cup, but they have less importance in chess than other Esports due to the recency of their involvement.

With this development, there are fears that classical, over-the-board chess could become less popular. The faster time controls of online chess like the format in the Esports World Cup, allow for the game to reach a wider audience and be streamed more easily. A plurality of FIDE classical OTB games use 90+30 time control with an extra 30 minutes at move 40 (90+30 means each player starts with 90 minutes on the clock and gains 30 seconds per move, losing if time runs out). However, the Esports World Cup uses 10+0 time control, making the game much shorter.²³ Other online rapid events which use similar time controls have also become popular.

The shorter games attract sponsors and viewers, while decreasing the number of draws. However, the quality of play is decreased, with each game involving more blunders and mistakes. Some players are not happy about this decrease in the quality of the game, which leads to it being more gamified rather than tactical.²⁴

In this committee, players will need to find ways to balance the interest behind chess which drives sponsorships and viewership with the quality of the game, and keeping players

²² <https://esportsinsider.com/2024/12/chess-esports-world-cup-2025-magnus-carlsen>

²³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/11/sport/chess-esports-world-cup-spt>

²⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/11/sport/chess-esports-world-cup-spt>

happy. Many top players appreciate the money from sponsorships, but the shorter time controls have increased the volatility of games, while also steering away from tradition. Specifically, one of the first issues that delegates will have to address in the committee is a way to ensure that there is a bid to host the Candidates in Spring 2026 and the following World Championship, along with other top tournaments like the Olympiad and the Women's World Championship, and that these classical tournaments can secure high viewership from chess fans.

Cheating

One of the issues that this committee has to address is ensuring that the chess community is the issue of fairness and limiting cheating within the chess community. High level chess players are often accused of cheating in the modern era due to the easy accessibility of computers which can make better moves than any human player. While most accusations of cheating occur in online chess, where players do not see each other face-to-face, there have been some high-profile incidents from over-the-board (OTB) games.

Cheating in online chess usually involves opening a computer engine in another window or tab. This type of cheating is generally not easily detectable due to the lack of monitoring players, but chess.com has algorithms that can inspect the use of such engines to cheat. When players frequently make many of the best moves, even when they might seem unintuitive, they can be discovered as cheaters. Players have been found cheating at all levels, though generally the highest-profile incidents are in tournaments with large prize pools rather than players who cheat online only to improve their rating.

One recent cheating scandal was in the Chess.com PogChamps tournaments which featured popular streamers who are not chess professionals. One streamer, DrLupo, was caught

cheating using computer assistance against the highest rated streamer in the pool, WolfeyVGC. DrLupo overcame an improbable deficit, facing a higher rated player after he had lost a queen²⁵, in an event that had a \$100,000 prize pool. DrLupo denied cheating initially, until chess.com closed his account. Though the tournament was not prestigious, the high viewer count exposed many casual viewers to how prevalent cheating is in modern chess, especially for online games.

Even accomplished grandmasters have been found to cheat in online chess tournaments. During the chess.com Professional Rapid Online (PRO) Chess League in 2020, grandmaster Tigran L. Petrosian cheated against the eighth highest rated player in the world, Wesley So, and posted a viral forum post denying the allegations once he was discovered.²⁶ Petrosian cheated despite peaking as a top 100 chess player a few years prior. After Petrosian was discovered cheating in the event with a \$50,000 prize pool, he was ultimately banned permanently from chess.com and the PRO Chess League.

Cheating in over-the-board chess is rarer than cheating in online chess due to the difficulty of accessing a computer while being watched by other people. Nonetheless, chess players cheat by using a smart device, frequently in the bathroom, or being signalled by other people who do have access to a smart device.

The earliest high-profile confirmed cheating case which did not directly involve a player directly accessing a chess engine or texting another player using a mobile device was a scandal that took place at the FIDE Olympiad in 2010.²⁷ Three French players cheated by using the fact that the game was being broadcast live. One player watched the game at home and used a chess engine to analyze the game, and sent text messages to the team coach, Arnaud Hauchard.

²⁵ <https://www.si.com/esports/news/drlupo-cheating-pogchamps-explainer>

²⁶ <https://en.chessbase.com/post/cheating-controversy-at-prochessleague>

²⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12853229>

Hauchard would then sit at a table in the venue, which represented which square that the player at the board would play. All three players were banned for under 3 years.

The most prominent chess-cheating case, other than toiletgate, was a scandal between grandmasters Magnus Carlsen and Hans Niemann. Magnus Carlsen accused Niemann of cheating against him at the 2022 Sinquefeld Cup, and in an unprecedented move, refused to play Niemann in classical OTB chess since then. Magnus Carlsen did not specify how Niemann allegedly cheated, but online theories varied from having an insider from Carlsen's preparation team leak the opening preparation to Niemann inserting a vibrating device into his body to reveal moves.²⁸ Niemann had previously admitted to cheating in online events until 2019, when he was only 16 years old. Upon a chess.com investigation, he had been found cheating in online events more recently, up until 2020, which undermined his credibility. However, chess.com found no evidence of Niemann cheating in OTB tournaments, including Niemann's victory at the 2022 Sinquefeld Cup against Carlsen.²⁹ Niemann was originally banned from chess.com, but after the dismissal of a \$100 million defamation lawsuit against Carlsen and chess.com, Niemann was unbanned from the platform.

The lawsuit has had wide-ranging implications, from undermining trust in Chess.com to chess fans painting Niemann as a villain or heel for his litigious nature. The value of the lawsuit also shows chess's capacity to grow, as no single tournament has had close to a \$100 million prize pool. Some players, like grandmaster Daniil Dubov, have also continued to believe Niemann is a cheater and refused to play him, or only play him under conditions like requiring him to pass a polygraph test about his cheating allegations.

²⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-66921563>

²⁹ <https://www.chess.com/blog/CHESScom/hans-niemann-report>

Cheating has become a major issue recently, with the number of cheating incidents increasing over the last few years. This committee should find ways to limit cheating in order to ensure the integrity of the game. However, the committee also needs to be mindful of the monetary costs and the comfort of players while making their decisions. Furthermore, players should decide on how harsh the punishment for cheating should be, and if online and over-the-board chess should share bans for cheating.

Other Current Issues

The Role of Chess.com

Online chess is dominated by Chess.com. Other websites such as FIDE's Online Arena, the original online chess server Internet Chess Club, and the open source Lichess all have a significant pool of players, including beginners and titled players. However, Chess.com still sees over three times the number of visitors of Lichess, which is the second largest chess website, and both websites are significantly larger than any other existing competitors.

Chess.com has also acquired some of the largest competitors to its dominance in the online chess sphere. Chess.com has bought the Play Magnus Group and ChessBomb. The Play Magnus group began as an online chess app that allowed users to play against a bot which played like Magnus Carlsen. Play Magnus had acquired Chessable, one of the premier websites with courses to help people learn how to play chess, a few years prior to being bought by Chess.com. Play Magnus also owned iChess, a popular online chess server, Aimchess, a chess analytics website, and had merged with chess24, the largest website that covered large chess events.³⁰

³⁰ <https://www.chess.com/news/view/chesscom-acquires-pmg>

ChessBomb was a tool that conducted live coverage and analysis of high level games before being bought by Chess.com.³¹

Chess.com has few other competitors, with the only other major chess competitors being Lichess as a server and Chessbase as a chess news platform. Chess.com sees more popularity across the world than the other websites, except in Russia, where Chess.com is banned for condemning the brutal invasion of Ukraine.

Beyond a general aversion to monopolization, Chess.com has some concerning qualities compared to its competitors. While Lichess and Chessbase offer their services for free, Chess.com employs a *freemium* model, which removes limits to users on game analyses, puzzles, and lessons with the cost of a monthly subscription. Furthermore, Lichess is an open source website unlike Chess.com, and Lichess is ad-free. Chess.com has also attempted to create a new chess engine, Torch, to replace Stockfish as the top engine. While Stockfish is open-source and publicly accessible, Torch is not, despite using tools from other open-source databases. Currently, Torch is the second best engine behind Stockfish, but if Chess.com became accessible in developing a better engine, the best chess engine would not have its source code publicly accessible for improvements by the wider community, and the engine would not be usable outside of Chess.com.³²

In this committee, delegates should consider how Chess.com's near-monopoly over the game online influences top-level play and the adoption of the game. While Chess.com supports high level tournaments and can provide centralized coverage that makes the game easier to follow for fans, the freemium model might turn some fans away. Delegates might consider

³¹ <https://www.chess.com/news/view/chessbomb-joins-chess-com-to-power-top-event-coverage>

³² <https://www.chess.com/news/view/chessbomb-joins-chess-com-to-power-top-event-coverage>

working with Chess.com in order to share in their profitable business, or trying to pressure Chess.com into a more open model which could expand the number of visitors they get.

Delegates also should weigh the role of online chess as a whole, considering the increasing number of tournaments that are played online, which lowers the costs to compete by cutting out travel. However, online chess can also make cheating easier, and sometimes has issues with disconnections or players' clocks becoming desynchronized. All of these issues have already impacted online tournaments with large prize pools. Delegates should consider the advantages and disadvantages of hosting major tournaments, or qualifiers for major over the board tournaments, using online chess servers.

FIDE's Monopoly Attempts

While Chess.com attempts to maintain a monopoly on online chess, FIDE tries to keep a monopoly on over the board chess. One of the most prominent examples can be seen in FIDE's past during the 1993-2006 split titles, where FIDE organized a new world championship without Kasparov or Short due to the match they organized with the PCA. The monopolization of FIDE has made a small group of world champions and contenders speak out against FIDE and call for the urgent need to reform or replace the organization. Kasparov and Shirov spoke out against the organization while the PCA was active for their policies in organizing the world championship. However, more recently, players have had issues with FIDE from the stagnant prize funds to the dress codes.³³

Despite top players' discontent with FIDE, there has been no attempt to create a new organization to replace FIDE as the primary organizer of classical chess since the PCA, which

³³ <https://en.chessbase.com/post/the-dress-code-dilemma>

had a much smaller scope than FIDE. While the ACP existed to attempt to negotiate on behalf of players, FIDE's leadership and policies saw comparatively little change. The only major international chess organization which organizes tournaments globally is the Freestyle Chess Players Club (FCPC).

Freestyle chess (also known as Chess960, Chess 9LX, or Fischer random chess) is a variant of chess in which the pieces on the back rank are shuffled from the original setup, in order to place more emphasis on tactics and calculation than opening memorization. Though freestyle chess tournaments had been organized by various groups for nearly 20 years, FIDE first hosted the World Fischer Random Chess Championship, which primarily used rapid times controls instead of classical, in 2019, with a second edition in 2022. The events were won by America grandmasters Wesley So and Hikaru Nakamura respectively. The 2024 edition was cancelled due to the lack of a sponsor, but Magnus Carlsen and investor Jan Henric Buettner hosted an invitational tournament the same month the 2024 tournament would have happened. The Freestyle Chess G.O.A.T. Challenge, won by Carlsen, featured a rapid round robin in order to develop seeding (the placements for each player within the bracket) for a single elimination knockout bracket with two-game classical matches, and faster games to serve as a tiebreaker.

The tournament was a success, with high view counts and leading to a \$12 million sponsorship from a venture capital firm. Players like Carlsen also noted that they enjoyed the classical time controls more than the rapid controls used in the FIDE tournaments. Ultimately, this led to the 2025 Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour being hosted by Carlsen and Buettner, with the winner of a series of tournaments in 2025 being crowned the Freestyle World Champion. However, FIDE drew an issue with the tournament crowning a world champion, despite FIDE's own tournament being cancelled, claiming that only FIDE had the right to declare someone as

the world champion.³⁴ Carlsen and Nakamura both stated that FIDE had threatened players with disqualification from the classical World Championship cycle if they participated in the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour, though FIDE denies those claims.³⁵ However, following the 2025 tour, FIDE has made participants in the upcoming FIDE World Championship cycle agree to not participate in any world championships not organized by FIDE, or they would be forced to withdraw from two world championship cycles. In response, the FCPC changed the title of the winner to the Freestyle Chess Champion for 2025.

FIDE has tried to prevent players from participating in other organizations like the PCA and FCPC to compete in global over the board tournaments. While FIDE is trying to maintain its monopoly on over the board chess, delegates need to consider the benefits of having a single central organization versus giving players the freedom to take advantage of other groups that might be more receptive to players. FIDE's unification of the system allows for a calendar with fewer conflicts (except for major women's tournaments overlapping with open tournaments), and can allow for a lower barrier to entry with fewer organizations that players need to be a member of. However, other organizations might be more receptive to feedback and have less corruption than FIDE.

Chess Bans

Chess organizations have their own disciplinary proceedings to suspend and ban players for their behavior. The ability to ban and suspend players is necessary in the case of cheating scandals, such as Niemann's ban from Chess.com prior to the settlement of his lawsuit. However,

³⁴ <https://en.chessbase.com/post/fide-statement-regarding-the-freestyle-chess-project>

³⁵

<https://www.livemint.com/sports/news/cvs-fide-chess-controversy-looking-beyond-jeans-incident-is-it-a-pr-battle-11735410153128.html>

Chess.com and FIDE have also taken to enforcing bans based on other reasons, primarily unethical behavior from players outside of the board. In some cases, chess players can be banned from individual tournaments, Hans Niemann, who was banned from the prestigious St. Louis Chess club for destruction of property in a hotel room.³⁶ Even high ranking grandmasters such as Baadur Jobava (racism leading to year-long Chess.com ban)³⁷ and Christopher Yoo (sexual harassment leading to 2-month FIDE ban) were susceptible to temporary bans for their inexcusable behavior.

Beyond a temporary ban from playing chess, FIDE has revoked titles from four players. Two former grandmasters had their titles revoked for cheating using electronic devices, while one was banned for reporting fake tournament results to inflate his rating. The most recent title revocation was Latvian former International Master Andrejs Strebkovs being banned for 12 years and having his title revoked due to sexual harassment in 2025.³⁸ Though Strebkovs's victims were chess players and students, he argued that FIDE had overstepped since his actions were not directly related to chess, and Latvia concluded that his actions were not a crime. Generally, players were supportive of banning Strebkovs and revoking his title due to the nature of his actions, but this recent ban was FIDE's first title revoked for conduct that is not directly related to chess.

Strebkovs's ban is the longest ban issued by FIDE since they began publicly announcing their disciplinary committee's decisions, and Chess.com rarely issues permanent bans except for repeat cheating offenses.³⁹ While punishments are largely necessary in order to stop unacceptable conduct like in the above cases, FIDE and Chess.com are not very well equipped to investigate

³⁶ <https://x.com/HansMokeNiemann/status/1753551780686815310>

³⁷ <https://x.com/chesscom/status/1622703818638065667>

³⁸ <https://www.chess.com/news/view/andrejs-strebkovs-stripped-of-im-title-by-fide>

³⁹ <https://ethics.fide.com/decisions/>

issues other than cheating in chess. FIDE's 2014 presidential election was marked with irregularities as incumbent president and Russian oligarch Kirsan Ilyumzhinov sought reelection, with his primary challenger being Kasparov. Kasparov was banned from holding FIDE positions for two years for buying the votes of 10 countries, but FIDE cleared Ilyumzhinov of silencing the mics of Kasparov supporters and refusing to verify the authenticity of a record number of proxy votes for Ilyumzhinov. It is important to note that Ilyumzhinov was later sanctioned by the USA due to his involvement in the Syrian regime, which led to FIDE's bank account being closed and Ilyumzhinov being barred from running in 2018.

Delegates in this committee should also consider recommendations for FIDE's disciplinary committee and Chess.com's team on their system of bans and punishments to ensure that treatment is equitable.

Geopolitics

Chess also has become increasingly politicized over recent years, with geopolitics adding to the complex internal politics. While most delegates in FIDE General Assemblies generally spoke in favor of keeping politics out of chess (despite a history of geopolitics impacting chess), FIDE voted to ban Russia and Belarus following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.⁴⁰ This followed calls from the International Olympic Committee to remove Russia from sports competitions.

FIDE also banned grandmasters Sergey Karjakin and Sergey Shipov due to their public statements of support for the invasion of Ukraine.⁴¹ The 2022 Chess Olympiad, which was set to be held in Moscow, was moved to Chennai, India. Other chess players were banned from

⁴⁰ <https://en.chessbase.com/post/fide-council-condemns-russia-military-action>

⁴¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/21/sergey-karjakin-banned-chess-fide-russia-invasion-ukraine>

competing in team competitions or under the Russian flag, but they could compete in individual events under a neutral FIDE flag. Though originally, the ban was more controversial as the first ban of its kind in chess, as the war escalated, the ban garnered more support from delegates to the FIDE general assembly along with top players, notably including Garry Kasparov.

Arguments against the ban included the ideas that Russian chess players were not culpable for the war crimes in Ukraine, and that FIDE should not be involved in politics. Proponents of the ban stated that the war was integral to the chess world because Russian forces killed 34 Ukrainian chess players.⁴²

The ban on Russia was accepted by most delegates in the FIDE general assembly, but it set a precedent for FIDE removing countries for genocide and human rights violations. Grandmaster Enamul Razib referenced the ban on Russia when calling for FIDE to ban Israel from chess events for the genocide in Palestine.⁴³ Though many players, including top 25 grandmaster Jan-Kyzysztov Duda, have made statements about Israel before Russia was banned, FIDE's willingness to involve themselves in politics has heightened the calls to ban Israel from FIDE events.

Calls to ban other nations based on their human rights record have been less common due to those countries' lower involvement in chess. Russia has 185 grandmasters, the most of any country, while Israel has 49 grandmasters, the 12th highest number, despite its smaller population. Other countries that are commonly criticized for their human rights violations have a significantly lower number of chess players who are strong enough to compete in international competitions.

⁴² <https://www.chess.com/news/view/fide-votes-to-maintain-russian-belarusian-sanctions>

⁴³ <https://www.thedailystar.net/chess/news/protest-against-the-israeli-government-3708506>

Women in Chess

The majority of players who participated in FIDE are men, but women have been encouraged to participate in chess since early in the sport. There is no evidence of a biological difference between women and men in chess, but most top players are men.⁴⁴ Only three women (Maia Chiburdanidze, Judit Polgar, and Hou Yifan) have ever been in the top 100 chess players by rating, and currently there are 0 women in the top 100. Less than 50 women have achieved the grandmaster title, out of about 2000 total grandmasters.

The lack of achievement of women in chess is largely attributed to sexism. Other than unfounded claims that men have a biological advantage in chess, there are three primary arguments about women having fewer strong chess players. First, girls tend to leave chess around the ages of 12-13 because of the lack of other girls in chess making it hard to find a social network.⁴⁵ Women also are held back by cultural expectations for them being lower, undermining their drive to succeed or demoralizing them from continuing to compete.⁴⁶ Finally, explicit sexism has made the chess world intolerable for many women and girls, driving them away from chess.⁴⁷ Top grandmasters such as Garry Kasparov, Nigel Short, and Bobby Fischer have made sexist claims about women's ability to compete in chess.

The problems regarding the creation of a social network can be solved, and the amount of sexism can be reduced with women's only tournaments and circuits. Women's tournaments have less prestige and lower prizes than open tournaments, but they are crucial for encouraging the participation of women in all kinds of chess. Most women do not exclusively compete in

⁴⁴ <https://slate.com/technology/2020/12/why-are-the-best-chess-players-men.html>

⁴⁵ <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2020/11/11/queens-gambit-a-real-life-chess-champion-on-netflixs-new-hit>

⁴⁶ <https://www.chess.com/news/view/gender-bias-chess-parents-mentors-shortchange-girls-potential>

⁴⁷

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/dateline/article/this-sports-popularity-is-surging-but-girls-are-being-left-behind/4axiv46x9>

women's tournaments, so women's tournaments do increase women's participation in open tournaments as well.

Other popular issues related to women's chess include sponsorship deals and inclusion of trans players. Sponsorship deals have been hard to find for women's chess, FIDE came under fire for accepting a sponsorship from a breast enlargement company in 2021.⁴⁸ Delegates could find a way to provide funding for women's chess while still upholding their dignity.

FIDE banned transgender women from competing in women's chess in 2023, which was met with much controversy. Beyond the implications for transgender women, various people also took the ban as a statement on all women's supposed biological capacity to play chess being lower than men's, despite the reasons for women's chess existing being social. Multiple chess federations including the USA, Germany, and France pushed back against the decision, but FIDE did not reverse course. However, in 2024, FIDE approved a transgender French player, Yosha Iglesias, winning the Woman International Master title after she met the requirements.⁴⁹ While FIDE's ban is discriminatory, they have done little to enforce the policy. Delegates may choose to address this ban in order to make women's chess more inclusive.

While chess is experiencing a sharp increase in popularity, delegates need to ensure that the celebrity status of top male players does not leave the women's field even further behind. Delegates should address ways to ensure that chess is inclusive, while also noting that encouraging women to participate more can potentially further bolster both popularity and profits.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/oct/01/fide-sparks-anger-with-gross-breast-enlargement-sponsor-for-women-chess>

⁴⁹ <https://x.com/IglesiasYosha/status/1784885138448408692>

State of the Committee

The first committee session will occur on October 2, 2025, so delegates will be able to use any recent developments in the real-world. Each committee session will take place a few months after the previous session. If any major updates in the real world occur between this background guide being published and October 2, they will be included in the first crisis update.

This committee represents many top players, all of whom have some degree of dissatisfaction with the world of chess. All of the current issues in the previous section provide ways that delegates can use their resources to improve the state of the chess world. With the rise of computers and multiple online tournaments with prize pools approaching OTB prizes, this committee will need to find a way to ensure that tournaments remain popular as the purest form of chess. They will need to find a way to ensure that upcoming major tournaments like the Candidates, Olympiad, and World Championship gain the attention and monetary backing that they need, while fans are encouraged to watch classical tournaments.

The committee also must address the issue of monetization of chess tournaments, since the most prestigious tournaments have recently seen stagnant rewards, despite ever-increasing popularity. For competitive play to remain financially viable, Chess needs sponsors. However, the sponsors may try to steer the chess community away from classical OTB chess in favor of quicker, more watchable alternatives. This committee must decide which they prize more: flourishing finances or maintaining integrity of the game.

From a wider perspective, players must also ensure that tournaments are structured in a way that is fair and doesn't allow for corruption. Famous players shouldn't be able to help their ratings or gain tournament invites due to their wealth or connections with tournament organizers.

Tournaments need to not be accessible to only players with fewer resources and connections, but also to women. Women are underrepresented among top chess players due to the unhealthy environment that the chess community has fostered around them. Women do not get enough attention from chess schools and programs to help develop chess players of the future, and the top women are undermined by open league tournaments coinciding with women's-only tournaments, both for online and OTB tournaments.

Most discontent from top players is directed towards the largest chess organizations, FIDE for OTB chess, and Chess.com for online chess. This committee should address the structural concerns within these organizations that make them less responsive to top players, especially concerning monetary issues. These organizations also are currently the main way that the chess community can ban players, whether for cheating or political reasons. This committee should consider how they can use their influence as top players to change the world of chess.

Questions to Consider

- ❖ How can the committee preserve the integrity of chess by limiting cheating?
- ❖ Where does the committee stand on the balance between sponsorships/viewership and the quality of games?
- ❖ How can chess remain equitable and accessible despite gaps in the access to resources?
- ❖ How should competitive chess adapt to the changing landscape of live streaming and mainstream popularity?
- ❖ How can delegates influence major organizations like FIDE or Chess.com to adopt more player-friendly policies?
- ❖ Should more tournaments be played online or in-person?





- ❖ How should players address FIDE's demands that they cannot compete in any world championships that are not organized by FIDE?
- ❖ How should chess address inadequacies and inconsistencies in their system of addressing cheating and/or unsportsmanlike behavior?
- ❖ To what degree should FIDE be involved in politics?
- ❖ How can this committee support women's participation in chess at all levels?

Character Dossier

Will flesh out





1. Magnus Carlsen 🇳🇴: Magnus Carlsen is a Norwegian grandmaster, the highest rated chess player, and an 18 time world chess champion (5 times in classical chess). Magnus Carlsen has set plenty of records for his chess playing abilities, and is frequently regarded as the greatest chess player of all time. Carlsen also owns chess apps Take Take Take and Play Magnus.
2. Hans Niemann 🇺🇸: Hans Niemann is an American grandmaster and top 20 chess player by rating. Niemann is notable for being accused of cheating in the 2022 Sinquefeld cup by Magnus Carlsen, and he was in conflict with Chess.com over his past of cheating online. Due to this conflict, Niemann has fewer connections with other top players, but is mentored by Vladimir Kramnik, the former world champion.
3. Vishy Anand 🇮🇳: Viswanathan "Vishy" Anand is an Indian grandmaster and former World Champion. He is still a top 20 player, a unique feat for a player above the age of 50. Anand also has served as the Deputy President of FIDE since 2022. He had to step

back from competing in the Freestyle Grand Slam Tour due to conflicts between FIDE and the Freestyle Chess Players Club.

4. Judit Polgár : Judit Polgár is a Hungarian Chess Grandmaster, widely considered to be the best woman to play chess. Polgár comes from a prominent chess family, with her parents raising her and her siblings to all become great chess players. The Judit Polgar Chess Foundation has been used to help teach children chess, and it is part of the Hungarian National Curriculum.
5. Vladimir Kramnik : Vladimir Kramnik is a Russian grandmaster and former world champion, who reunited the split world championships. Kramnik accused hundreds of high rated players, including child prodigies and established grandmasters, of cheating on Chess.com with little evidence. He was later banned from Chess.com for playing on another grandmasters account, and he has become a controversial figure in the chess community. He grew up in an artistic household, with his mother being a musician and his father a painter.
6. Hikaru Nakamura : Hikaru Nakamura is an American grandmaster and one of the most popular chess livestreamers. Hikaru is consistently a top 10 player by rating in classical chess, and is generally considered to be the second best player in rapid and blitz chess. Hikaru also won the last Freestyle/Fischer Random Chess event hosted by FIDE.
7. Gukesh Dommaraju : Gukesh is an Indian grandmaster and the current World Champion, and he is the youngest person to ever win the world championship. Gukesh D. has become a celebrity in India, receiving praise from multiple celebrities and politicians for being the first Indian world champion since Anand.

8. Ding Liren 🇨🇳: Ding Liren is a Chinese Grandmaster who was the world champion from 2023 to 2024. Ding previously was the #2 ranked classical player and the #1 ranked rapid player in the world, and he formerly held the longest unbeaten streak in classical chess. He also holds a degree in law from one of China's top universities, while most other top players do not have other degrees or occupations.
9. Ian "Nepo" Nepomniatchi 🇷🇺: Ian Nepomniatchi is a Russian grandmaster who challenged Magnus and Ding for the world championship in 2021 and 2023 respectively. He is the highest ranked Russian player and formerly the 2nd highest rated player in the world. Nepo also wrote an open letter to Putin with other grandmasters denouncing the invasion of Ukraine. He also holds a journalism degree from Russian State Social University.
10. Fabiano Caruana 🇺🇸: Fabiano Caruana is an Italian and American (dual citizen) grandmaster who played in Italy until 2015, and America since then. He has the third highest peak rating of any chess player, after Magnus and Kasparov. Fabiano also hosts a weekly podcast (C-Squared) to make chess more interesting and accessible to a general audience. As the winner of the 2024 FIDE Circuit, he was the first player to qualify to the 2026 Candidates tournament to decide who will be Gukesh's next challenger for the world championship.
11. Alireza Firouzja 🇫🇷: Alireza Firouzja is a French grandmaster who was an Iranian citizen until 2019, and a French citizen since 2021. He switched affiliations after Iran prevented its players from competing in the 2019 World Blitz and Rapid Championships in order to prevent Iranians from playing Israeli players. He is studying to become a fashion designer in Paris, while continuing to compete as a top 10 chess player, who peaked at the 2nd

highest rated player in 2021. He is the youngest player to break 2800 Elo, a feat which only 15 people have ever done.

12. Anish Giri : Anish Giri is a Dutch Grandmaster of Indian and Nepalese descent, who formerly lived in Russia and Japan. When he became a grandmaster in 2009, he held the record at the time for being the youngest person to ever become grandmaster. Giri frequently published articles in Chess magazines, posts chess courses online, and uploads game analyses to his medium-sized YouTube channel. By winning the FIDE 2025 Grand Swiss, Anish Giri was the second player to qualify for the 2026 Candidates tournament.
13. Hou Yifan : Hou Yifan is a Chinese grandmaster who is the highest rated woman in the world, and the youngest woman to become a grandmaster. She also became the youngest professor at China's Shenzhen University after she got her master's degree from Oxford University, whereas most chess players are not able to compete in chess at the top level while getting an education. Since 2019, she has mostly competed in online events rather than over-the-board chess.
14. Jan-Krzysztof Duda : Jan-Krzysztof Duda (pronunciation: Yan Kshish-tov Dooda) is a Polish grandmaster and consistent top competitor, frequently ranked in the top 20 players. Duda broke Carlsen's longest unbeaten streak in chess. Duda earned the Golden Cross of Merit, one of the highest civilian awards in Poland. Duda also notably refused to handshake certain Russian and Israeli players for their support of their country's actions in Ukraine and Palestine. Duda also holds a degree in physical education, specifically for chess education.
15. Nodirbek Abdusattorov : Nodirbek Abdusattorov is a young Uzbek grandmaster. He was the 4th highest rated player in the world in 2024, and became the youngest world

champion after winning the World Blitz Championship in 2021. Nobirbek is the highest rated player in Uzbekistan, which is quickly becoming one of the strongest countries in chess, with multiple young and highly rated grandmasters. Nodirbek is also an ambassador for Aloqa, a major banking and financial company in Uzbekistan.

16. Shakhriyar Mamedyarov : Shakhriyar Mamedyarov is a longstanding Azerbaijani grandmaster. He is a former World Rapid Champion, and he has the 6th highest peak rating in classical chess at 2820. He has been rated over 2700 for 19 years straight, one of the most impressive careers by longevity. He was taught both chess and boxing by his father, who is a former professional boxer.
17. Garry Kasparov : Garry Kasparov is a Russian grandmaster, currently representing Croatia. Kasparov had the highest FIDE rating in history until Carlsen surpassed him, and Kasparov was the world champion from 1985 until 2000. Outside of his numerous chess achievements, he has been an outspoken political figure against Putin and the chairman of the Human Rights Foundation non-profit.
18. Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa (“Pragg”) : Pragg is a young Indian grandmaster and is currently the highest rated player in India, a very competitive position with the strength of India’s chess scene. His sister is also one of the best women chess players in the world, and they are the only pair of siblings to both be grandmasters.
19. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (“MVL”) : MVL is a French grandmaster who is known for being particularly strong in speed chess. He is the former World Blitz champion, and he held the highest blitz and rapid ratings in 2019. In classical chess, he is a very strong grandmaster, with the 7th highest peak rating in history. He also holds a degree in

mathematics from École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, one of the top schools in Europe.

20. Levon Aronian 🇺🇸: Levon Aronian is an Armenian-born grandmaster who has represented the United States since 2021. He has the 4th highest rating in history after Carlsen, Kasparov, and Caruana. He is a former champion in many non-classical Chess Championships, and Armenia awarded him many honors for his chess skills. Aronian switched his federation from Armenia to the United States following the new Armenian regime discontinuing financial support for his chess training. His late wife, Arianne Caoili, was an advisor to the former prime minister of Armenia, Karen Karapetyan.
21. Arjun Erigasi 🇮🇳: Arjun Erigaisi is a young Indian grandmaster who was the first Indian to pass Anand's rating since 1986. He was the highest rated player in India for most of 2024 and 2025. He studied data science in college before dropping out to focus on chess. Unlike the other young Indian supergrandmasters, Erigaisi rarely gets invited to invitational tournaments, giving him fewer opportunities to compete in the largest events.
22. Nigel Short 🇬🇧: Nigel Short is a British grandmaster and the only British player to ever win the Candidates, competing against Kasparov in 1993. Short was Vice President of FIDE until 2022, when he resigned following an ethics violation for undermining the authority of the US Virgin Islands Chess Federation. He currently serves as the FIDE Director of Chess Development, in which he focuses on building chess infrastructure in countries that do not have much capacity.
23. Wesley So 🇵🇭: Wesley So is a Philippines-born American grandmaster, who is the 5th highest rated player in history after he achieved a rating of 2822 in 2017. In 2019, he won the first FIDE Fischer Random Chess Championship, without losing a game to Carlsen or

Nepomniatchi in the finals and semifinals. He was a strong player in his youth despite his family not supporting him playing chess and eventually estranging him. He considers Lotis Key, a Filipino-American actress, to be his adoptive mother.



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