

Cincinnati Scholastic Chess Online Tournaments

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

July 15, 2020

The series of online tournaments in May 2020, played on Chess.com, was the first online event that Cincinnati Scholastic Chess (CSC) conducted. As we gain experience in the online chess environment, we continue to learn more about how online tournaments work. This document presents our insights on matters directly affecting players, and we hope that all participants in CSC online tournaments — the players and their parents — will become familiar with it. Our goal is to minimize in future events the types of problems that we have experienced.

For convenience of reference the outline below identifies the topics covered:

I. Understanding the Components of an Event

- A. Websites
- B. Clubs and tournaments on chess.com
- C. The components illustrated

II. Internet Matters

- A. Connectivity
- B. Unstable connections
- C. Roaming after joining a tournament
- D. Policy regarding entry fees

III. Chess.com Matters

- A. Joining chess.com
- B. Chess.com ratings
- C. Joining the CSC Club
- D. Joining the event-specific club
- E. Chess.com tournaments
- F. Joining a tournament
- G. Tournament playing schedule
- H. First move
- I. Withdrawing
- J. Application of chess rules
- K. Fair play
- L. Chat

IV. Sandbagging

I. Understanding the Components of an Event

- A. *Websites:* www.chesscincinnati.com is the website for Cincinnati Scholastic Chess. This is where you find complete information on CSC Online events (as well as all other events that CSC conducts). This is also where you would register for a CSC event, using the online entry form and paying the entry fee with either a credit card or PayPal account. CSC online events typically comprise several individual tournaments; for example, a week-long event will normally have a different tournament every day. For such events it is necessary to register only once for the entire event. It is not necessary to register for each individual tournament, nor is it required that a player play in every tournament in an event. Once someone has registered for an event, there is nothing else that *needs* to be done on the CSC website for that event; however, we do post event-related information that might be of interest to participants, such as flyers, players' scores, and lists of trophy winners.

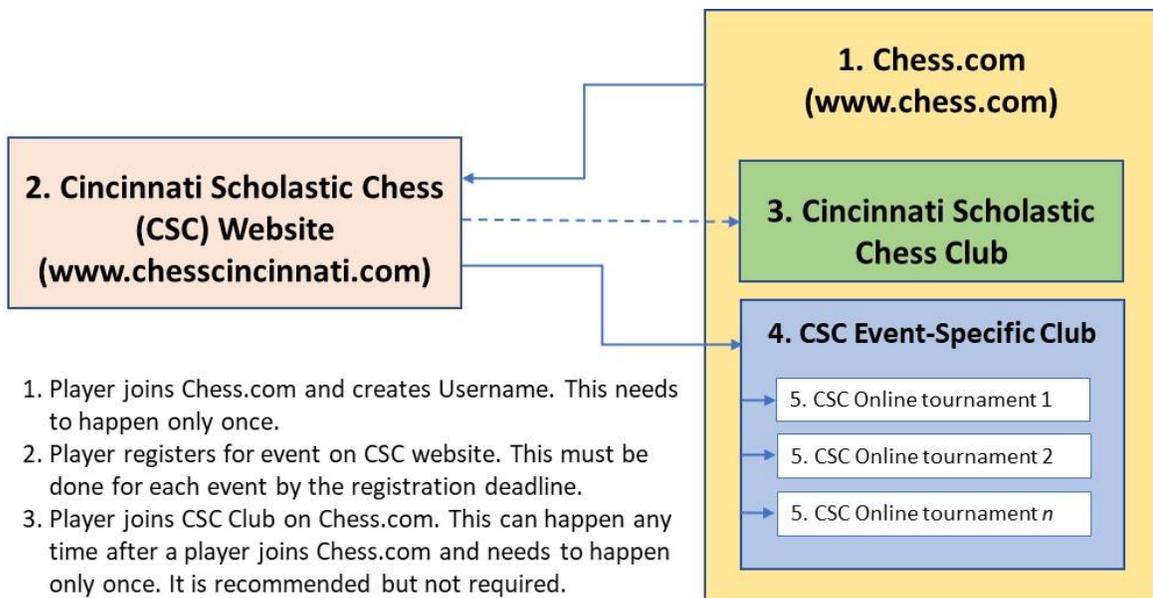
CSC chose www.chess.com as the platform on which the games are actually played. Chess.com is just one of several websites that support online chess, and these websites have different features. We recommend that players who have not played on chess.com (even if they have played on another site) play a few games on chess.com before competing in a tournament so as to become familiar with it. CSC has no control over how Chess.com operates; consequently, we sometimes encounter problems that we can't fix.

- B. *Clubs and tournaments on chess.com:* Before anyone can play on Chess.com, he or she must join Chess.com. For details on how to do this, see III.A below (it's pretty simple). However, Chess.com is huge, with thousands of games going on all the time with players all over the world. Within the Chess.com website we have defined a "neighborhood" where CSC play will take place. There are two clubs that matter:
- *Cincinnati Scholastic Chess:* This is a "permanent" place for our community. It is not necessary that players join this club, but it has these advantages: (1) It is a convenient way to disseminate news that is of interest to the CSC community. (2) Members can play other members and know that their opponent is a scholastic player more or less local to Cincinnati, and who could be a friend or at least someone they know from tournament play. See III.C for details on how to join.
 - *Event-specific club:* This is a "temporary" place created specifically for purposes of running a particular event. In order to play in any event tournament, a player must join the club for that event. A player can join this

club any time after he or she has registered for the event, and we urge players to join sooner rather than later to avoid a last-minute rush and potential problems. See III.D for details on how to join.

- *Tournament:* If an event comprises multiple tournaments (or sections), a chess.com *tournament* is created for each individual tournament. (What would be a section in an over-the-board tournament is called a tournament on Chess.com.) In over-the-board terms, think of it this way: Joining the *event-specific club* is like entering the building where the tournament will be played. Joining a chess.com *tournament* is like entering the room within that building where your particular section will play its games. See III.E and III.F for further details.

C. *The components illustrated:* The diagram below is an attempt to show how these components relate in a flow-chart sort of fashion. The notes explain the several actions that must be taken, in the order shown, in order for someone to play in a CSC Online event and on which website those actions need to be done.



1. Player joins Chess.com and creates Username. This needs to happen only once.
2. Player registers for event on CSC website. This must be done for each event by the registration deadline.
3. Player joins CSC Club on Chess.com. This can happen any time after a player joins Chess.com and needs to happen only once. It is recommended but not required.
4. Player joins event-specific club. This must happen for each event after a player registers for that event and before the event begins.*
5. Player joins the specific Chess.com tournament designated for his or her section. This should happen within one hour before the tournament begins.*

*A player may join a tournament after it has begun but will not be paired until the next round and will score zero for any round(s) missed.

II. Internet Matters

With online chess tournaments, as with any other online activity, we are at the mercy of the Internet. There is nothing we (CSC) can do to eliminate or fix Internet-related problems. Anyone choosing to enter an online tournament should be aware that there is a risk that his or her participation might be impaired, interrupted or terminated due to a condition that is completely out of our control. Our experience suggests that Internet problems are relatively infrequent, and we believe that some that have occurred can be prevented or alleviated.

- A. *Connectivity:* If no Internet connection can be established, the cause might be unavailability of the Chess.com server or something unique to the user's Internet service, or something else. In any case, no connection means no participation for as long as the situation persists. Clearly if one player is having difficulty connecting while numerous other players have successfully connected, the problem would appear to relate specifically to that player's connection.
- B. *Unstable connections:* An unstable connection is one which a player is able initially to establish but then is interrupted at some point. An unstable connection does not necessarily prevent a player from rejoining the tournament; however, if it happens while a game is in progress, it will likely cause Chess.com to treat the game as if the player who lost the connection resigned unless the connection is quickly restored. For further details, see the Appendix: Chess.com Rules for Abandonment. For some ideas about what to do with unstable connections, see the Chess.com Help menu and search for "disconnect."
- C. *Roaming after joining a tournament:* We've had some issues with players not getting paired for a round even though they joined the tournament. This might result if a player "roams" away from the playing area at the critical time when a round starts: Chess.com will treat the absent player as he or she disconnected or withdrew. We believe that a player must be in the "Live Chess" area to get paired (i.e., not merely logged in to Chess.com). The "Live Chess" area has a URL starting with: <https://www.chess.com/live/>. Even if you are logged in on Chess.com but are on some other part of the website at the wrong time, you might be left out of the pairings. We recommend that players join the tournament well before the tournament starting time and minimize roaming around the site. In the last five minutes before the tournament starts players should check their internet connection and make sure that they are still on the player list for their tournament. Please be careful to be in the Live Chess area at the time pairings are made for any round.
- D. *Policy regarding entry fees:* Entry fees will not be refunded in whole or in part due to any loss of connection.

III. Chess.com Matters

There are some Chess.com matters that players simply should be aware of; we can't change them, but they are not problems. Other matters are or can be problems if they occur, but a player who is aware of them can prevent them from occurring. In either case, we have no control over them, and if they occur, we cannot fix or change them.

- A. *Joining chess.com:* It is free to set up a basic membership account (higher-level memberships are available for a fee). Setting up a basic account is easy and quick. It involves providing only the following:
- A username (This need not be, and usually is not, your real name. Think about how you want to identify yourself online — have some fun with it.)
 - An email address
 - A password to use when you log in
 - A general indication of your chess skill level
- B. *Chess.com ratings:* Chess.com calculates its own ratings for its members. These Chess.com ratings are used to determine eligibility for tournaments and for pairings, and they are recalculated and posted every time a member completes a game. There is no connection between Chess.com ratings and USCF ratings (although it is possible under certain circumstances to have Chess.com tournaments rated also by the USCF). Chess.com (just like the USCF) calculates different ratings depending on the time control of the games played: Bullet (time control of less than three minutes), Blitz (time control of three minutes to ten minutes), and Rapid (time control of more than ten minutes).

Chess.com assigns an initial rating to a player when he or she joins Chess.com. These arbitrary initial ratings correspond to the skill level selected when setting up the membership account as follows:

- New to chess = 800
 - Beginner = 1000
 - Intermediate = 1200
 - Advanced = 1400
 - Expert = 1600
- C. *Joining the CSC Club:* A player may request to join the CSC Club as follows:
- Go to www.chess.com and click on “Connect” and then “Clubs”.
 - In the search bar that comes up, type in “Cincinnati Scholastic Chess” and click on the search icon. This will bring up a list of clubs related to Cincinnati Scholastic Chess.

- Select the “Cincinnati Scholastic Chess” club. This brings up a page with a “Log in to Join” button.
- Click on “Log in to join”.
- When logged in, click on “Join” to bring up a new screen.
- Click on the “Submit” button. (You can type in a message if you wish, but this is not necessary.) When the administrator receives your request to join, he will either accept it or reject it.

Alternatively, when the club administrator notices that someone has joined an event-specific club but is not a member of the CSC Club, he can send an invitation to the player, which the player then accepts. In this case the player does not need to submit a request to join the CSC Club.

D. *Joining the event-specific club:* In order to play in CSC online tournament, a player must join the club created individually for the tournament, for example, “CSC Online June Series”. (Before a player can do this, he or she must first join Chess.com and register for the event on www.chessincinnati.com.) Joining the event-specific club can happen in two ways: (1) The club administrator sends an invitation to a player, which the player then accepts. (2) A player submits a request to join, to which the administrator then responds. When a player registers for an event, the email confirmation of the registration will include a link for submitting a request to join. To join:

- Click on this link to bring up a new screen.
- Click on “Log in to join”.
- When logged in, click on “Join” to bring up a new screen.
- Click on the “Submit” button. (You can type in a message if you wish, but this is not necessary.)

E. *Chess.com tournaments:* In online chess any distinct group of players playing multiple rounds among themselves constitutes a tournament. Several tournaments can have the same structure: time control, number of rounds, starting time, and pulling players from the same defined pool, such as an event-specific club.

For online play, a player can play only in a tournament for which he or she qualifies by rating, and the rating used in every case is the rating pertinent to the tournament’s time control. For example, a player with a blitz rating of 784 is entering a Blitz tournament. If the sections are defined as U600, 600-899, 900-1199, 1200 and over, the player could play *only* in the 600-899 section. However,

if the sections were defined as U600, U900, U1200 and Open, he or she could play in the U900, U1200 or Open section.

- F. *Joining a tournament:* After joining the event-specific club, a player can join a tournament on Chess.com up to one hour before its starting time by going to Play > Live Chess > Tournaments. (A direct link to the tournament list can also be generated once the tournament is set up, and this will sometimes be distributed to the players via the Club News, notes, Home page, or email.)
- At the top of the list of tournaments should be any CSC Online tournaments (with names starting with “CSC”) for which you registered.
 - Click on the tournament for which you are eligible by rating (according to the rating pertinent to the tournament’s time control).
 - Click on the “Join” button. If you do not see a “Join” button, you are not eligible to enter that tournament. Check your rating to confirm what tournament(s) you can join.

Strive to join the tournament at least five minutes ahead of the starting time. Chess.com will pair the first round exactly at the set starting time; players who enter late will not be paired until the next round starts and will score zero for any round(s) missed. Be aware also that if you join a tournament and then navigate to a different page or website, or if your connection is interrupted, Chess.com might treat you as though you have disconnected or withdrawn from the tournament. Minimizing the Live Chess window rather than leaving it might prevent this. In any case, it is prudent always to confirm soon before the tournament starts that you are still listed as entered for the tournament of your choice (refresh the page to be sure); if you are not, join the tournament again.

- G. *Tournament playing schedule:* Except for the starting time of round 1, there is no fixed schedule for an online tournament. Chess.com pairs each round as soon as the last game in the previous round ends. Players who finish their game earlier might get a short break between rounds (short as in perhaps a few minutes), but they are advised to stay present and alert for the start of the next round. A player can tell on Chess.com how many games are still in progress at any time, and from this can get a clue as to when to be ready to play again.
- H. *First move:* A player must make his or her first move within a time period determined by Chess.com in order to confirm that the game is in progress. The time period varies according to the game’s time control. For details, see Appendix: Chess.com Rules for Abandonment.

I. *Withdrawing:* A player may withdraw from a tournament intentionally at any time. A player who wants to withdraw should be careful to do so before the next round is paired. When a player clicks the X to withdraw, Chess.com displays the prompt “Do you want to withdraw from this tournament?” to confirm the withdrawal.

A player who withdraws before the tournament begins may re-enter it but may need to close Chess.com or log out in order to see the “Join” button for that tournament again. Under some circumstances Chess.com will withdraw a player who did not intend to withdraw. For details, see the Appendix: Chess.com Rules for Abandonment.

J. *Application of chess rules:* Some rules of chess apply differently to online chess from how they apply to over-the-board chess. For example:

- Players are not required to record the moves of the game. (Chess.com records every game played.)
- Chess.com does not permit a player to make an illegal move, so there can be no illegal move claims.
- There can be no “touch move” claims. A player’s move is determined and completed simultaneously when he or she releases the piece moved on the square to which it was moved. As long as the cursor remains engaged with a piece, a player can move it to multiple squares before releasing it on a square. If a player moves a piece away from a square, then back to the same square, and only then releases it, no move has been made, and the player is free to move any piece that can legally be moved.
- Chess.com recognizes checkmate, stalemate, three-fold repetition of position, and mutual insufficient mating material immediately when they occur and ends the game at that point.
- If a player’s time expires and the opponent has insufficient mating material, Chess.com immediately scores the game as a draw.
- No half-point byes are allowed. Players are expected to play every round unless they withdraw.

K. *Fair play:* We, CSC, wish to reassure everyone explicitly of our commitment to fair play. All standards of ethics and sportsmanship that apply to over-the-board chess apply equally to online chess, and we expect all players at all times to compete honestly, fairly and courteously.

Computer help and other assistance, such as from a book or another person, during games are prohibited. Chess.com includes a functionality that analyzes games played for the quality of play. If this analysis determines that the quality of play is incongruent with a player's rating, which suggests that the player was either receiving some sort of assistance to win or trying intentionally to lose, the player may be flagged for potential unfair play. The tournament director also examines games and results.

Players flagged for fair play violations are not eligible for prizes and are subject to other disciplinary actions by CSC or Chess.com or both.

- L. *Chat:* Our intention in all our CSC Online events is to follow the Official Rules for over-the-board chess as closely as possible. With respect to online chat, the pertinent rules are found under Rule 20 Conduct of Players and Spectators, but in addition to the rules, this is a matter of conventional chess etiquette and courtesy. Rules 20I and 20J specify that talking about a game in progress with one's opponent or anyone else is improper; and while online chat is not audible, Rule 20G would still apply to any chat interaction that qualifies as distracting or annoying due to its frequency or content.

The principles underlying these rules apply equally to the club chat as well as to any chat related to a particular game in progress. We expect all chat interaction to comply with the following specific guidelines:

- Do not chat with your opponent about your game in progress except as necessary in the circumstances of your game. Because Chess.com has icons for offering or accepting a draw and resigning, does not permit illegal moves (thus preventing a check to go unnoticed), prevents any ambiguous piece placement, and automatically recognizes certain draws (stalemate, insufficient mating material, repetition of position), there might actually be no circumstances that *require* communicating by chat. However, it is totally acceptable to say "hello", "good luck" and the like just before beginning your game, and "good game", "thank you" and the like when your game ends.
- Do not comment to anyone (other than your opponent as specified above) about your game in progress, and do not comment to anyone at all about any other game in progress.
- Do not ever seek or give advice to anyone regarding any game in progress.
- Do not send to anyone whose game is in progress any comments unrelated to any game in progress, as these comments can be grounds for a claim of distracting or annoying behavior.

- Do not ever make comments to anyone that are bullying, intimidating, “trash talk”, accusatory, disrespectful, or rude in any other way. All such comments are unacceptable.

If you have an issue with your opponent about anything, including chat interaction, the proper thing to do is to bring it to the tournament director’s attention. It is likely that you will not be able to do this until your game is over, and by then your chat log will have disappeared. Accordingly, we recommend, if inappropriate comments were sent to you in chat, that you copy the full chat into another application (for example, Word or notepad) to document it. That documentation can then be sent to the tournament director for his review and action.

For players: Playing without chat messages

A player can disengage from the chat function either for a particular game or generally. For a particular game, in the upper right of the chat window is a small icon that looks like a chat bubble with an “x” in it. Clicking on this icon will ensure that there is no more chat allowed in the game, and will remove the previous chat from the screen. Be aware that there is no way to undo this — chat will be disabled for the rest of the game.

To disable chat for all games, go into the Live Chess and Daily Chess settings and set the “Game Chat” option to “friends only” or “nobody” to limit who can chat with you in your games, then click “Save” to put the new setting into effect. There are separate settings for Live Chess and Daily Chess.

For parents: Safe Mode

If you want to prevent your child from receiving social interactions on Chess.com, you can enable Safe Mode to disable all messages, chat and comments. To do this, click on “Settings” in the lower left of any screen on Chess.com. In the Settings menu, click on “Privacy”. In the Privacy menu you will see “Safe Mode”. To turn on Safe Mode, toggle the switch so that it’s green, and click “Save”.

IV. Sandbagging

Manipulating one’s rating by intentionally losing games is called sandbagging. The purpose of sandbagging is to achieving a lower rating so that the player qualifies to play in a tournament with a lower rating ceiling than he or she would otherwise be eligible for, with the idea that in the lower tournament the competition will be weaker and therefore the player is likely to win more games — and therefore have improved chances of winning a prize. Regrettably, it is very easy to sandbag in online chess.

For example, suppose a player has entered an event with an Open tournament (a tournament with no rating ceiling, where the strongest players play) and an U1000 tournament (a tournament restricted to players rated less than 1000). This player is rated 1010, which makes him ineligible for the U1000 tournament. He decides that he wants to be a “top dog” in the U1000 tournament rather than a “bottom dog” in the Open tournament. Therefore, before joining the tournament, he starts an unrelated online game and resigns after only a move or two, losing rating points. If he loses fewer than eleven points, he starts and resigns another game. He repeats this as often as necessary to get his rating below 1000 — and then he joins the U1000 tournament.

Sandbagging violates the rules* and ethics of chess, is disrespectful and unfair to the player’s opponents, and is dishonest. In a word, sandbagging is cheating.

With the objective of protecting our events from sandbaggers, we have implemented the following policy:

- (a) A player’s chess.com rating for his or her first tournament in any CSC Online event will be subject to review for sandbagging, and CSC will assign a floor rating to the player as it deems appropriate in its sole discretion.
- (b) For subsequent tournaments in the same event, each player’s chess.com rating at the end of a CSC Online tournament will be that player’s “floor” rating for the next tournament in that event. The player can play only in the lowest section for which his or her “floor” rating qualifies him or her, or in any *higher* section.
- (c) This policy will apply separately to each type of rating (Rapid, Blitz or Bullet).
- (d) When CSC finds evidence of sandbagging by any player registered for a CSC Online event, that player will be subject to disciplinary actions, which may include any or all of the following: loss of points scored, ineligibility for any prize, expulsion from the tournament or event, and exclusion from future CSC events.

*Pertinent rules (*U.S. Chess Federation Official Rules of Chess*, 7th Edition, 2019) are summarized below:

20A. Conduct of players. Players shall participate in the spirit of fair play and good sportsmanship, and must observe the US Chess Code of Ethics.

US Chess Code of Ethics, Standards of Conduct. 6. ... The following is a list of examples of actions or behavior that are considered unethical ...

6(c): Deliberately losing a game for payment, or to lower one’s rating, or for any other reason; or attempting to induce another player to do so. Deliberately failing to play at one’s best in a game, in any manner inconsistent with the principles of good sportsmanship, honesty, or fair play.

20L. Manipulating results. Collusion to fix or throw games, whether before or during the game, in order to manipulate prize money, title norms, ratings, or for any other purpose is illegal

APPENDIX: Chess.com Rules for Abandonment (from the chess.com website)

First move timer

When a new game starts, you have a certain amount of time to make your first move, or the game is considered to be abandoned. If you don't make your first move in 5 seconds, a timer will appear. How much time you have depends on the time controls of the game:

- Bullet: 10 seconds to make a move
- Blitz: 15 seconds
- Rapid: 55 seconds

If you don't make a move when the timer runs out, the game will be counted as a loss for you by abandonment.

Disconnect timer

Another way a game can be ruled as abandoned is if you disconnect for too long. How long you can stay disconnected before the game ends is based on the time controls. The rule is, if you're disconnected, you have 10% of the base time plus 40 x increment, with a minimum of 30 seconds and a maximum of 3 minutes to reconnect. If you can't reconnect in this amount of time, the game will be ended.

Examples:

Bullet 1 | 0 — The base time is 1 minute plus no increment is 1 minute, times 10% equals 6 seconds. Since the minimum is 30 seconds, you'd have 30 seconds to reconnect.

Blitz 5 | 5 -- The base time is 5 minutes (300 seconds), plus 40 x 5 seconds increment is 500 seconds. Multiply by 10% and that's 50 seconds to reconnect.

Blitz 10 | 0 -- The base time is 10 minutes (600 seconds) plus no increment, times 10% is 60 seconds to reconnect

Rapid 15 | 10 -- The base time is 15 minutes (900 seconds) plus 40 x 10 seconds, which totals 1300 seconds. 10% of that is 2 minutes 10 seconds to reconnect.

The formula for any disconnect timer, where B=base time and i=increment: $(B + 40i) \times 0.1$.

Long move timer

The last and little known way to time out is if you are still connected, but take a very long time to make one move.

This can only happen before 10 moves are made in the game. After 10 moves, you can use as much time as you like on any move, but before ten moves are made if you use more than 50% of the main time on one move, you will be considered to have abandoned the game.

Examples:

Bullet 2 | 1: Half of 2 minutes is 1 minute, so if you took more than 1:00 on a single move before the tenth move, you would be considered to have abandoned the game.

Blitz 5 | 5: Half of 5 minutes is 2:30, so if you took more than 2:30 on a single move before the tenth move, you would be considered to have abandoned the game.

Rapid 15 | 10: Half of 15 minutes is 7:30, so if you took more than 7:30 on a single move before the tenth move, you would be considered to have abandoned the game.