

NEWS, INFORMATION, TOURNAMENTS AND REPORTS

COMPUTER CHESS WITH FIDE APPROVAL?!?

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At the 63rd FIDE Congress in Manila in June a decision was taken by FIDE to regularize the participation of chess programs in human chess tournaments and to provide for programs to have ratings on the ELO scale. Below, we copy from the June 1992 issue of the *ICCA Journal*.

1. Computers may only play in tournaments if the computer manufacturer has paid a standard registration fee to FIDE.
2. If a tournament organizer allows the participation of a computer which does not conform to point 1 above then the tournament will not be recognized (and rated) by FIDE.
3. Computers will have a separate FIDE rating list and will be counted for rating purposes.
4. Humans participating in tournaments with computers will not be allowed to refuse to play against the computers."

Some more details have become available since and we now can comment. Superficially the decision represents an important milestone in the history of computer chess. Hitherto, computers could only participate in: (a) events which were completely invitational (so that all the human participants would know and accept that they had to play against computers); or (b) the tournament regulations permitted any of the human participants to sign a document stating that they would not agree to be paired against a computer. Under the new FIDE ruling any "registered" computer is treated much like a human player. The other participants may not refuse to be paired against it and the computer's rating will be counted for the purposes of the human players' rating adjustments and for title norms.

Since June it has become clear that this initiative may turn out to be ill-considered. Serious problems are caused by the level of registration fees which the computer or software manufacturers are required to pay to FIDE. One can understand that FIDE might take the view that computer manufacturers have a lot of money and therefore it is reasonable for them to make some contribution to FIDE funds. On the other hand, some of the strongest chess software is written by individuals or teams who have absolutely no prospect of being able to pay FIDE's registration fees for their programs, while some chess-computer manufacturers already make a substantial financial contribution to world chess by sponsoring tournaments and, in some cases, subsidising their national chess federations. As a representative of one prominent chess-computer manufacturer said to me: "We already subsidize our national federation. We already give a lot of money in sponsorship to tournaments in many countries so that our products can participate. Why should we pay a third time for the same thing? We simply will not do it. If the situation is changed we will withdraw all of our sponsorship and there will be fewer tournaments. Is this what FIDE wants?"

Of course this is not what FIDE wants. FIDE simply did not realise the problems they were creating by imposing this tax on computer programs.

The ICCA wholeheartedly supports FIDE's acceptance of computers in human chess tournaments, but not in the way announced at Manila. We feel that if a registration fee of any kind is to be levied on computer programs, then the size of the fee should vary according to the circumstances. In particular, two points should be borne in mind by FIDE:

1. The maximum registration fee payable by a company (or programmer or programming team) should be related to the total sales turnover of its chess products. This would mean that for an amateur programmer the fee would be zero (or something nominal such as 100 Swiss Francs per annum).
2. If a company, programmer or team is already providing sponsorship for chess tournaments then the total amount of that sponsorship per annum should be deducted from the maximum (turnover-related) registration fee. This would mean that chess-computer manufacturers who already provide generous sponsorship would not have to pay any additional fee to register their products.

We shall urge FIDE to consider making these amendments to its registration scheme before the adverse effects of its decision have the effect of reducing the support which chess-computer manufacturers and others in the business currently provide.



Photo by Jos Uiterwijk

AGAIN MANY ANNOUNCEMENTS BY OUR PRESIDENT.
David Levy (r) with his sponsors at the AST 4th Computer Olympiad, London, August 1992.