

An Open Letter to FIDE, from the Chess Federation of Canada regarding the Kovalyov incident at the World Cup.

September 17, 2017

Dear Mr. Makropoulos,

I would like to thank you for your September 15, response to Hal Bond's protest on behalf of Canadian chessplayer Anton Kovalyov on the incident at the World Cup. I would like to preface my remarks by saying that I respect you and all you've contributed to FIDE and the world of chess. I would also like to say that I understand that GM Zurab Azmaiparashvili has made huge contributions to chess organization and fundraising and I respect that as well. I am aware of an incident in a previous World Youth Chess Championship where he was a voice of reason and was instrumental in resolving a problematic situation in favour of a very young Canadian who had made an improper claim of threefold repetition. I would certainly not expect nor hope that this current World Cup incident will be that which the Grandmaster and President of the ECU will be remembered for.

The comments made by the president of FIDE, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov certainly gave hope that some measure of justice might be hoped for in this most unfortunate situation and that FIDE recognized the seriousness and implications of trying to minimize what happened to Mr. Kovalyov.

I would ask that we avoid the error of seizing upon some pretext to explain the unexplainable and the unconscionable act which took place. An organizer and member of the Appeals Committee intervened moments before a competition to distract and insult a Grandmaster who only a few moments before became aware that there might be a problem with the way he was dressed.



<https://ss.sport-express.ru/userfiles/materials/108/1080297/large.jpg>

I would like to point out this photograph dated September 7, 2017 where Zurab is himself pictured in shorts/capri pants at the same tournament in the presence of Magnus Carlsen. The photograph came from the Russian sports news site <https://www.sport-express.ru/chess/reviews/istoriya-kovaleva-kak-proigrat-turnir-zhizni-iz-za-otsutstviya-shtanov-1307659/> The picture appears to be a frame grab from

the youtube video at the following location which shows the whole incident in context.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0iBa18sGC0>

Any random check of coverage on sites like Chessbase.com shows that jeans and tee shirts are worn by many of the other Grandmasters. One example of this is Grandmaster Aronian's cat tee shirt, which I will not criticize, but which does seem to me to be no less problematic from a FIDE dress code perspective than Anton's attire. If it tries to reframe this episode as a question of a dress code which is vaguely formulated and sporadically enforced at this tournament FIDE will make itself look ridiculous and hypocritical to all independent observers. If Anton saw Zurab's shorts at that September 7th photo opportunity in the presence of both the current World Champion and Georgia's former Women's World Champion, and remembering that there were no warnings or complaints from Arbiters before or after any of the previous four games when he had worn those pants at this World Cup, Anton could be forgiven for not anticipating that there would be a problem if he wore them again for a fifth game.

The future for chess in Canada appeared quite bright based on the performance of Anton up until the moment when Anton was inhospitably abused over his attire. If the Chess Federation of Canada which has been a good citizen of FIDE since the day of its founding can expect this kind of treatment within FIDE for one of its top players, in his shining moment, the brightest moment of his chess career, with the world spotlight upon him, who is then safe? I am certain I don't need to point out that this has brought a great deal of unfavourable attention to chess and FIDE in the worldwide press coverage. Please do not stoop to explanations which attempt to justify the unjustifiable. We can accept the idea that there can be a dress code for chess competition. Given everything that has gone on before and during this World Cup, we cannot accept that a young Grandmaster deserves to be distracted and insulted moments before a game that is part of the qualification for the World Chess Championship, merely because the organizer doesn't like his pants.

If there is to be a dress policy it needs to be clearly enunciated before the tournament and should be enforced for all participants. If chess is going to make inroads in the demographic groups which advertisers crave we must avoid the appearance of ridiculousness which this situation invokes. It is a pity that instead of focusing on the chess that was played we are focusing on a pair of shorts.

I think that a sincere apology to grandmaster Kovalyov from grandmaster Azmaiparashvili for this incident without qualification or blaming the victim of this outburst would be the first step required to move forward from this unfortunate situation. As Hal Bond said in his letter about this incident "Mr Azmaiparashvili's behaviour in this case clearly violated the rules and norms of FIDE." Please do not send the message to the world at large that this is not the case and this behaviour is within the rules and norms of FIDE.

Respectfully,



Vladimir Drkulec

President, Chess Federation of Canada