

FIDE World Cup in Tbilisi is getting closer to the finish. One of the most important chess events attracted a lot of attention because of different reasons. First of all, for the first time in the history of the World Cup it was played by world champion Magnus Carlsen. The tournament was called “historic” by media because top 15 players of FIDE rating were all playing in Tbilisi. But still, Tbilisi World Cup became the most discussed subject in the chess world because of the incident which took place before the 3rd round. A lot was written about the incident regarding Anton Kovalyov and the dress code, but most of the articles were based on Mr. Kovalyov’s Facebook post or Mr. Azmaiparashvili’s response. That being said, to satisfy public’s growing fascination, we decided to interview people who witnessed the incident itself, as well as people who were directly involved in the tournament.

One story from different angles.

Organizing

Because there is a lot of fuss around the tournament, we asked our respondents several questions about its organization.

“Organization is excellent, it’s really a very nice hotel.” Grandmaster and commentator **Ivan Sokolov** told us. “I played a number of World Cups myself and in most of them playing hall and hotel was not on the same location, which is always a little bit unpleasant. It’s always better if the playing hall and the hotel is in the same place, especially if the hotel is as high level as this one, it allows players to do the best with their chess performance.”

Mr. Jorge Vega also shared his opinion about the tournament organization: “I can tell you I have been on a lot of big events,” he said “and this tournament is very well organized, tournament overall is excellent, media coverage is excellent, the hotel is excellent, what more could you ask for.”

We asked the arbiters, including the chief arbiter Tomasz Delega, Faiq Hasanov and Ashot Vardapetyan, how well is the tournament organized from arbiter’s point of view. “I think organization is on a very good level here, playing hall was really good and comfortable for the players.” Said Delega “In general, I think that this competition is really well prepared.”

Faiq Hasanov: “It’s always clear to the arbiters whether the tournament is organized well or not. Everything that is essential to a high level organization of the World Cup was all done well in Tbilisi.”

Ashot Vardapetyan: “Considering the fact that I have quite an experience specifically in the World Cups, I can say that organizers of this tournament have done their job well. I’m not saying this because I’m in Tbilisi and I have to praise the organizer, I am talking as a neutral person, who has experience specifically in such tournaments. We are located in a really good hotel, the playing hall is also good, all the necessary modern technologies are provided. Some people might think that we are located too far from the city center, some of them might have liked to have evening walks in the city center streets, but I think, for the tournament like this, where players need serious concentration, exactly this parting from the city center might help players to concentrate more on the game and show better results.”

Journalist Evgeny Surov has a different opinion about the location of The World Cup. “Only problem with organization of the tournament is the hotel, which is located nearly at the edge of the city.” Surov says “It’s bad, because a lot of the spectators who would have attended the tournaments if it was in the city center will not be able to attend and I know for a fact that there are many chess supporters in Georgia.”

FIDE press officer Anastasiya Karlovich:” First of all it’s not my first visit in Georgia, I’ve already been here on Men's Grand Prix event, which was held in Tbilisi and I have to say every time that everything was organized on a very high level. And the reason is that the president of chess federation Giorgi Giorgadze and the president of ECU GM Zurab Azmaiparashvili have a very big experience in organizing chess events. They both were chess players, so they know what chess players need and how to fulfill their wishes. This event is no exception, everything is organized on a very high level. Hotel and playing hall are very good. All the players I talked to said only good words about the organizing. Also we have the hotel and the playing hall at the same place, this saves a lot of time for the players and usually they appreciate it a lot. For me, as a FIDE press officer, it’s really important to have a good media center on such events. We have a great media center, which is well equipped with everything we need. So overall, I think everyone is really satisfied with everything, I did not hear any complaints. Talking about media coverage, organizers made fantastic live transmission, also we have few a lot of journalists who are covering the tournament daily also Georgian media is here every day, Georgian Broadcaster is also covering the tournament. Organizers have done a really great job I think that it’s a best covered World Cup ever”

So after talking to our respondents, we found out that all of them were satisfied by the organizers’ work quality. Now let’s talk about the dress code incident itself.

The Dress Code Incident

We asked Ivan Sokolov what his thoughts were about the dress code incident. “I was always strongly supportive of the dress code. Why? Because if you are dressed like a street musician, you should expect to be paid like one. If you play chess for eight-nine days and get paid for example 15 000\$, you should be dressed accordingly. I was not physically present, so I don’t know in what sort of way the communication developed, but dress code certainly needs to be observed, it is essential for our sport. I know that budget for the tournament was almost two million dollars, so why would somebody invest this kind of money if you’re allowing players to play dressed like street musicians? When you are making the trip to the tournament, where you are expecting to stay for such a long time, then it is obvious that you should bring some normal wardrobe and definitely should not come to the tournament with only one shorts. There is a wrong impression that somebody has forced the Canadian player to leave the event, that much I know, because I did check it with the arbiters, as well as with Mr. Azmaiparashvili, so nobody has forced him to leave the tournament, this was his private decision. Even after his emotional decision to lose the first game, he still could have played the second one. Fischer gave Spassky one game, so he could also give it to Rodshtein, Mr. Kovalyov could go to the shop, buy a suit and come back like James Bond for the second game and play. So he did not need to leave, it was his decision. By the interviews that he was giving I was under the impression that his motivation was not very high, if somebody says that beating Anand is less important than getting back to the university and he is playing the World Cup, then I am afraid he is at the wrong place.”

We asked the same question to Mr. Delega, the chief arbiter of the tournament, who was part of that incident. He said: “Anton Kovalyov came to the playing hall about ten minutes before the round and this was the first time when I realized that he was wearing shorts, so I politely asked him to change his outfit before the game. I was really surprised when he told me that it was not possible, because he only had one pair of shorts and then, he asked me if I was sure with which color he was playing his game. He told me that he checked and thought he had the wrong color. I was really surprised because for me mixing the

colors was a bigger problem than his shorts, so I went to the computer to check if everything regarding pairing and colors was okay. I checked to be sure that pairing was correct and on my way back I saw Zurab talking to Kovalyov. So I did not make the final judgment regarding the dress code situation. I would like to say that my intention was not to forbid him to play, I was just really surprised by his answer, because it's really surprising that someone has travelled several thousand kilometers with one pair of shorts, but if he would have been ready to some kind of cooperation, he could have said something like - sorry for today, I am not well dressed for the game, tomorrow I will buy a new outfit, so please allow me to play this game. - I would accept it. After talking to Zurab, Kovalyov went out and did not come back for the game.” On our question if Mr. Kovalyov notified him about leaving the tournament Mr. Delega answered: “When he went out from the playing hall I still thought that he was joking about this one pair of shorts, so I thought he was going to his room to change the outfit and I was expecting him in the playing hall in the next 15 minutes. He didn't come, but even after this incident I thought that he would play the next game, because for him it was still possible to start fighting in the second game. Of course, not warning him until the third round was a mistake of arbiters supervising the game, but we have a lot of other jobs to do, especially me, so for the first two rounds I was concentrated on other things, that's why I did not react. If someone, one of my colleagues or any other person had told me about this of course I would have reacted earlier.”

Jorge Vega, President of Confederation of Chess for Americas, Member of Appeals Committee at FIDE World Cup 2017 says: “I was not in the playing hall when the incident happened, what I read on Facebook and online is practically one sided story. I am very sorry that this incident happened, however I believe that it is necessary to be really careful with the dignity of the tournament, because the behavior you will allow, will affect future sponsorship. I know Mr. Azmaiparashvili very well and I know that he has a very strong character and quite loud voice, but I am sure that it was not his intention to insult Mr. Kovalyov. I believe that Mr. Kovalyov's dressing style was not the one to be used in such kind of tournaments, we are not at the beach and this is not a junior tournament, so I believe it was a mistake for him to come here with only shorts. When you come to the tournament where all the top chess players are playing, even your opponents could get disappointed by playing a game against somebody dressed like that. I am sure that anything Mr. Azmaiparashvili told Mr. Kovalyov was not with the intention to insult him, but it was with the best intentions towards the tournament. I also want to add that it was arbiters' responsibility to warn Mr. Kovalyov in the first round.”

“I think that this story was a bit exaggerated. I don't think that this incident deserves that much attention and discussion.” International arbiter Faiq Hasanov said. “As much as I know, Mr. Azmaiparashvili admits that at some level he was wrong, but we have to consider the fact that he is the organizer and he saw a player wearing shorts in the playing hall. I did not hear his conversation with Mr. Kovalyov, I heard that he was rude towards Mr. Kovalyov and if that is right, I have to say that he was wrong. We know Mr. Azmaiparashvili, he is a bit impulsive and there was no need to be rude, but after all, what was he asking for? He was asking for order. Chess is an intellectual sport; spectators are coming to watch the games and they expect the players to be dressed accordingly.”

International arbiter Ashot Vardapetyan also shared his opinion about the dress code incident:” I really don't want to go into details of this incident, it is clear that this incident was bad for all sides. I want to say that from my point of view, what Mr. Kovalyov did was quite disrespectful towards the tournament, his claim, that he travelled 10,000 km with just one pair of shorts, not bringing anything else and with all of his luggage fitted in one backpack with a computer, was not serious. This fact indicates that he had no serious approach towards the tournament. I think that consequences were bad for everyone - including Mr. Kovalyov, the organizers and FIDE, which is responsible for this tournament. I also wanted to point

out that nobody told him that he could not play the game. I heard what chief arbiter told him, he told him that he was not following the dress code but Mr. Kovalyov's answer was that he had no other pants. After this Mr. Kovalyov raised a subject of the colors, claiming that he had to play with another color, arbiter decided that this was a bigger problem, so the conversation about the dress code was interrupted. Nothing was said about forbidding a player to play the game. Personally I think that Mr. Kovalyov had to apologize and tell the arbiter that this subject would be resolved for the next round and play the game. In this scenario this would have been the best solution for everyone. I can say that after Mr. Kovalyov left the playing hall, Mr. Azmaiparashvili was sure that he went to change his outfit, because no one could have imagined that a person really travelled 10,000 km and did not bring a pair of pants."

As we were looking for an opinion of a completely objective person, who had witnessed the incident, we asked the journalist Maria Emilianova about what had really happened in the playing hall. "I was in the playing hall when the incident happened, I did hear some of the sentences which Mr. Kovalyov mentioned in his Facebook post, but I'm not sure that I heard exactly the same phrases. I personally did not hear Mr. Azmaiparashvili say the sentence: "You are a gipsy." I did hear that he used a word gipsy and I think that it was a bit too harsh to use this word. But, I don't think that Mr. Azmaiparashvili sounded racist, I understood that the word was used to describe the way Mr. Kovalyov was dressed, that it was unacceptable for the high level event like this one. Of course he shouldn't have exploded next to the player, especially before the game, but I also understand that Mr. Azmaiparashvili is under a lot of pressure organizing this event. In my opinion Mr. Kovalyov also overreacted."

Journalist Evgeny Surov says: "Mr. Kovalyov was definitely wearing shorts for two rounds, problem is that nobody told him anything about it for those two days and they decided to talk to him 5 minutes before the game. I have to say that despite him wearing shorts he looked quite respectably. If you look at some of the players who played the tournament, you can see that they are wearing pants and formally, you can't argue with them about the dress code, but they don't look any better than Anton Kovalyov." We asked Mr. Sorov if this kind of outfit would be appropriate for the final round." I consider myself an observant journalist, but I did not notice his shorts until he defeated Anand. After defeating Anand I took an interview from him and that was the first time I noticed his outfit. To answer your question, that outfit would not look good for the final rounds, but I think that if he had won one more game, he would have gotten much more attention from the media and he would have bought a more appropriate outfit."

We also had a rather interesting conversation about this subject with FIDE press officer Anastasiya Karlovich:" I can say the official opinion of our organization, International Chess Federation strongly values all contributions that Mr. Azmaiparashvili has made for all these years and the fact that he is supporting chess so much and that he found a lot of money for the events. This incident took place, no one is ignoring that, what FIDE will do for sure is that we will analyze this incident and some decisions will be made regarding the dress code." Anastasiya Karlovich took an interview from Anton Kovalyov who was wearing the same outfit the day before the incident. We asked Ms. Karlovich about the interview and if she had noticed that Mr. Kovalyov was not following the dress code. "Of course I noticed it, I did not ask him a question about it because it was right after he defeated Anand and I was mostly focused on this, because it really was a sensation. Well, I was surprised when he said that his participation in the World Cup was not as important as his university. I believe, it is not good to say such things when you are taking part in the high level event like this one, especially in front of the organizers, because they worked really hard to make this event happen. I did not say anything about the dress code, because it's not my job to make warnings and I try to be careful with players, they are quite sensitive people." On our question, if she notified organizers or arbiters about Mr. Kovalyov's outfit or if she took any other action, FIDE press officer answered:" No, I did not notify anyone. This tournament was a competition between 128 players,

you should understand arbiters and organizers are really stressed at the first days, maybe some of them even saw it, but they thought that it was not really important at that moment. I believe that Mr. Azmaiparashvili was really shocked when he finally saw Mr. Kovalyov's outfit, I am sure he did not notice it before and I am sure that at that moment he did, he could not believe his eyes.

After reading FIDE president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov's comment about this subject, where he says that Mr. Kovalyov was not notified before the game that the players cannot play in shorts, we got curious if someone had to notify the players about the dress code on the technical meeting. So we asked this question to FIDE Chief Executive Officer Geoffrey Borg: "What we notify the players about is that they are supposed to be aware of all the regulations. We don't go through every single aspect of the regulations. When players sign the agreement they are acknowledging the player's obligations as well. If somebody needed a guideline, of course, they could approach the chief arbiter. Players and the officials are both responsible for the ultimate appearance and the ultimate presentation of chess, so the organizers will put in place the rules and guidelines and players are expected to observe them."

Fide Regulations

After the dress code incident which occurred on the FIDE World Cup, there has been a lot of discussion about FIDE regulations regarding dress code. Part of the chess community thinks that regulations have to be more precise about this subject, but there are people who think that existing regulations are clear and there is no need to change them. We asked our respondents about the FIDE regulations and importance of the dress code for chess in general.

Journalist Maria Emilianova: "Dress code is definitely really important for chess. I can even show you examples of my work as a photographer. It's clear, that when players don't follow the dress code it doesn't look like a professional sport. I'm sure that photographers can do a lot more promoting chess if the players follow the dress code. This regulation is really outdated and they are not clear enough. For me Mr. Kovalyov looked really ridiculous in this tournament. This tournament has a huge prize fund, it has a lot of media attention, a lot of international journalists are travelling here and even they are trying to follow the dress code. There is no clear dress code from FIDE, but it doesn't mean that we can use it as an excuse."

Grandmaster and commentator **Ivan Sokolov**: "You cannot describe everything in the dress code regulations, someone can come to the game wearing a swimsuit and say that it is not prohibited by the regulations, but if you have at least average intelligence level, I think that you should understand what the dress code means. As for Mr. Kovalyov, I don't think that it was unclear for him, I just think that he did not care, but after all, it seems like we will have to make regulations more precise."

FIDE press officer Anastasiya Karlovich: "I don't believe that the fact that it was not written in regulations that shorts are not allowed, means that you can wear shorts on high level events like this one. It's up to the arbiter to decide whether your outfit meets the dress code requirements or not. It's not written that players cannot play the game wearing swimsuits but does this give players right to play in swimsuits? Of course not! So somehow, it's up to the arbiter to make these decisions."

Chief arbiter Tomasz Delega: "I think the dress code is really important, sometimes players can't even imagine how important it is for the organizers and sponsors. When sponsors invest money in chess tournaments, they expect something back and it should be at least well-dressed players who look professional. In my opinion, it also depends on the level of the tournament, I think that wearing suits

should be required for high level tournaments, for the middle level tournaments should be casual clothes. I think we should respect sponsors and this will also help promote chess in the media. I understand that players would like to have more clear regulations, sometimes as an arbiter, even I need clearer regulations, not only regarding a dress code, but in general. But in my opinion, it's not possible to write clear regulations for all possible situations that can occur during chess tournaments."

Journalist Evgeny Surov:" I think that dress code regulations should be more precise and it should not be depended on organizers' taste. For example, today in Tbilisi Mr. Azmaiparashvili did not like the way Mr. Kovalyov was dressed, tomorrow, on some other tournament, maybe someone will not like other player's outfit, but in their opinion they might be dressed well, so regulations should be clear and precise. I completely agree with Mr. Zurab Azmaiparashvili when he is saying that if we want sponsors to invest in chess, then the chess players should be dressed accordingly, so let's make sure that we have regulations where it is clear what "accordingly" means. I hope that this incident will make FIDE improve their regulations. "

Faiq Hasanov Deputy Chief Arbiter:" I think that following the dress code is really important for popularization of chess. Problem with current regulation is that it is not specified what you can wear and what you cannot. I think that FIDE regulations towards the dress code must change and it has to become clearer for the players."

Ashot Vardapetyan, Deputy Chief Arbiter: "I believe that regulations must be changed and become more precise. I also want to say that the dress code is not connected to the arbiters, it's not our responsibility. With the new regulations, it has to be clear who is responsible and how."

FIDE Chief Executive Officer Geoffrey Borg:" Regulations are clear, the main important point is that if you say dignified appearance, some people may interpret dignified differently according to the individuals' country and their culture, but if you look further inside the FIDE handbook, of course, you will find specific regulations and guidelines."

Mr.Kovalyov claims that he was wearing shorts while playing The World Cup 2015 in Baku. We asked a question regarding Mr.Kovalyov's claim to the Chief arbiter of The World Cup 2015, Mr. Faiq Hasanov. "It's not the truth. I can ensure you that he was not wearing shorts at Baku World Cup. In Baku the dress code was controlled by the security. I am absolutely sure that he was not wearing shorts while playing Baku World Cup."

It has become a subject of discussion whether it was possible for Mr. Kovalyov to appeal, while Mr. Azmaiparashvili is the chairman of the appeals committee. So we asked this question to the member of the appeals committee Mr. Jorge Vega:" If there is a complaint, of course, everybody will be heard equally and decisions will be made, nobody can pressure the commission. Totally fair decision will be made in case Mr. Kovalyov files an appeal. I can ensure you that Mr. Azmaiparashvili's post would not affect the decision."

We had an opportunity to have a short interview regarding the incident with one of its main character Mr. Zurab Azmaiparashvili. "When I first saw Mr. Kovalyov wearing shorts in the playing hall I was really surprised." Azmaiparashvili said: "As we know, Mr. Kovalyov was playing previous rounds wearing that same outfit, but nobody gave him a warning. If people who knew about the violation could not make a decision themselves, then at least they had to notify the organizers. Taking into account that I was not notified about the violation of the dress code before, I was definitely surprised, so I addressed the player and asked him to change his outfit, because his outfit was unacceptable for this tournament. I also told him that he was violating FIDE regulations. I was really shocked by Mr. Kovalyov's answer, that he did

not see anything wrong with his dressing style. I, as a former chess player admit that it was not a best decision on my part to address the player right before the game, but as an organizer I did what I had to do to protect the dignity of the tournament. If someone had notified me before the 3rd round, the problem would have been resolved beforehand.” We asked Mr. Azmaiparashvili whether Mr. Kovalyov was forced to leave the tournament or not. “Of course not, nobody had forced him, it was his private decision to leave the tournament and I have to say, it was really unexpected for me.” We asked Mr. Azmaiparashvili to share his opinion about the FIDE regulations regarding the dress code. “The regulations were written in the last century, at that time chess was considered as gentlemen’s game and the regulations are in some way relying on the players’ dignity. Unfortunately, in the 21st century, when the gentlemen’s institution is almost gone, this formulation of the regulations does not work. I believe that FIDE regulations about this subject are quite outdated and they must become clearer and more precise.”

We also asked Mr. Azmaiparashvili if his post as a chairman of appeals committee would affect committee’s decision, if Mr.Kovalyov would file an appeal against him. Azmaiparashvili said:” If there was an appeal filed against me, I can ensure you that my post would not affect the decision. There are two completely objective members of the appeals committee, who would discuss the subject and of course, I would never take part in that discussion.”

As Mr.Kovalyov claims, he was wearing shorts while playing The World Cup 2015 in Baku, but the Chief arbiter of that tournament Mr. Faiq Hasanov ensures us that it is not true. We asked Mr. Azmaiparashvili if he knows anything about this subject.” Mr. Kovalyov is correct. I have seen the proof of him playing The World Cup 2015 in Baku wearing shorts. As Mr. Kovalyov claims, he asked for permission to the organizers in Baku. I wonder why did not he do the same here in Tbilisi? Although, I have to say that we would not give him a permission to play such a high level tournament in shorts.”

We also tried to contact GM Anton Kovalyov, but despite our best effort we could not reach him.

Overall, despite this incident every respondent we interviewed was quite happy with the organization of the tournament. Tournament was full of surprises and remarkable games, but it still caught most of the attention from the dress code incident. We tried to cover every angle of the story and brought to light the thoughts and points of view of different people associated with the tournament. All we can do now is to entrust the chess community to further discuss the subject and come to conclusions.