



FIDE ETHICS AND DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

The First Instance Chamber of the Ethics & Disciplinary Commission (hereafter called “the EDC Chamber”), sitting in the following composition –

Chairperson	:	Mr Ali Nihat Yazici
Members	:	Mr Khaled Arfa
		Mr Ravindra Dongre

during an exchange of correspondence and online meetings, made the following –

DECISION

Case no: 9/2025 “Alleged sandbagging at chess competitions.”

INTRODUCTION

1. The EDC Chamber **notes** its establishment by the EDC Chairperson on 10th June 2025.
2. The EDC Chamber **notes** the report of the FIDE Fair Play Commission (“FPL”) received by the EDC on the 22nd of May 2025, representing a complaint of the alleged violation of the FIDE Code of Ethics (“the Code of Ethics”) by **Mr Li Haoyu** (“the Respondent”) (FIDE ID 8601488), more specifically an alleged violation of Art. 11.7 (e) (ii) of the Ethics Code.
3. The EDC Chamber **notes** that the Respondent was given the opportunity to respond to the complaint by way of notice dated 10th June 2025. The Respondent did not respond to the EDC Chamber’s inquiries or use the opportunity given to submit a defensive statement in the proceedings before the EDC Chamber. Accordingly, the allegations set forth in the FPL report remain uncontested.
4. The EDC Chamber **notes** the following reports, documents, and e-mails received as part of the case file: The complaint letter to FIDE FPL by the Chinese Chess Association (13th September 2024), Arbiter Report (26th August 2024), The Respondent’s response to the FIDE FPL (20th March 2025), The Report of Prof. Dr. Regan to the FIDE FPL IP (“Investigatory Panel”) (23rd January 2025), The inquiry of FIDE FPL IP to the Respondent with the positions he could not answer, Report of the FIDE FPL IP (6th April 2025).



FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Parties and Development of the Complaint

5. The EDC Chamber **notes** the subject matter of the complaint and defense(s):
 - 5.1. The Respondent is **Mr Li Haoyu** (born in 1989).
 - 5.2. The Complainant is the FPL.
 - 5.3. In the same letter sent by CCA (Chinese Chess Association) to FIDE FPL, it was stated that the Respondent did not score any points against any of his opponents in the two tournaments he participated in, which concluded in August 2024, and that his ELO rating dropped from 2379 to 1979.
 - 5.4. In the same letter, the CCA asked the FIDE FPL to step in, initiate an investigation, and implement the necessary measures.
 - 5.5. According to the Arbiter's report of the 4th "Binhai Cup" China International Chess Open, the tournament was completed on 24th August at the Binhai No. 1 Hotel, Binhai New Area, Tianjin City, China. The Respondent competed in Group A (players with an ELO rating above 2000), lost all games against his opponents, and scored one point by receiving a bye. The same report states that in all of the games he lost, the Respondent had a substantial amount of time remaining on his clock but failed to use it; that only two of his opponents had a higher ELO rating than him; and that the result he obtained was inexplicable in light of his ELO rating.

FPL Investigation & Defenses Provided by Respondent

- 5.6. Upon receiving the complaint, FPL launched an investigation into the matter. An investigatory panel (IP) consisting of Dr. Salomeja Zaksaitė (LTU), FM Aras Vardanyan (LTU), and IA Kausar Bauyrzhan (KAZ) was composed.
- 5.7. The FPL IP sent multiple emails to the Respondent:
 - 5.7.1. On 18th December 2024, the FPL IP sent an email requesting an explanation regarding certain moves made by the Respondent in specific positions from the games the Case is based on.
 - 5.7.2. The Respondent replied to this email by providing, in his view, a response regarding each position, stating that he tried to perform at his best in every game and that there was no reason for him to deliberately lose ELO points. On 29th January 2025, the FPL IP posed a question regarding the Respondent's time usage in all the positions he lost. The same email also included time records and the number of remaining moves in lost positions, as extracted from the arbiter's report.



- 5.7.3. When no response was received, the FPL IP reiterated its questions to the Respondent on 12th March 2025, highlighting the time that had elapsed since the initial inquiry.
- 5.7.4. In his response dated 14th March 2025, the Respondent stated that his time usage was part of his playing style, that he made quick moves to preserve time for critical positions, and that his poor results were not due to time management. On the contrary, he claimed that he used time to put pressure on his opponents and explained the poor results by asserting that, as with any player, he sometimes simply played poorly.
- 5.7.5. On 15th March 2025, the FPL IP sent an email requesting the Respondent to clarify his statement:
- "My strategy has always been to apply pressure on my opponents through time management, a tactic employed by many top chess players, such as Ding Liren in the World Championship match."*
- 5.7.6. In his response dated 20th March 2025, the Respondent stated that his time-related strategy was aimed at putting pressure on his opponents, causing them to feel tense and make mistakes. He further explained that in the games he lost, his opponents were able to take advantage of this situation and convert it into a win.
- 5.7.7. The FPL IP requested statistical information on the matter from Prof. Dr. Regan. In his report dated 23rd January 2025, Dr. Regan stated that the IPR figures performance exhibited by the Respondent was extremely weak, supporting this conclusion with statistical data. Dr. Regan assessed the results obtained by the Respondent in both the first and second tournaments and characterized them as a "markedly weak performance" from a statistical standpoint.
- 5.7.8. The EDC Chamber **notes** that Prof. Regan is a mathematician and scientist and serves as an expert on the FIDE FPL Commission, utilizing statistical methods to assess whether the moves played in games align with the general playing characteristics and strength of the players.



Complaint Background

6. The EDC Chamber **notes** the proceedings before and recommendations of the FPL IP:
 - 6.1. The EDC Chamber **notes** that the FPL IP did not refer to or use Prof. Regan's report as an argument in the conclusions section of their reports.
 - 6.2. In its report dated 6th April 2025, the FPL IP noted that the Respondent's ELO rating dropped from 2379 to 1979 within one year and highlighted the notably poor results he obtained in the aforementioned tournaments.
 - 6.3. The FPL IP underlines in their report that the present case is comparable to four precedents in international sports law: Skënderbeu, CAS 2016/A/4650; Pakruojis, CAS 2015/A/4351; BC Arsenal v. Russian Basketball Federation, CAS 2019/A/6636; and Badminton World Federation's London Olympics case.
 - 6.4. The FPL IP underlines in their report that in the Pakruojis case, the very notion of "presumed fixing" was introduced for the first time in CAS practice. In this case, CAS stated that it is entirely in line with the applicable disciplinary regulation to hold a player responsible for presumed match manipulation when the finding of actual match manipulation is not possible.
 - 6.5. The FPL IP underlines in their report that in the case of Skënderbeu, a similar "notion"—indirect "fixing"—was adopted. In this case, the panel found "indirect fixing" proven, with no direct culpability needed to be established.
 - 6.6. FPL IP shows another example of CAS, in the case of an appeal filed by BC Arsenal against the Russian Basketball Federation, which was dismissed.
 - 6.7. The FPL IP concluded their report with comfortable satisfaction that the Respondent did not play his games with due respect. Consequently, FPL IP underlines that the Respondent is found culpable for violating **Article 6.21 of the Ethics and Disciplinary Code**, "*breach of principles of fair play; improperly affecting the outcome of a chess competition.*" FPL IP requests no less than a 6-month suspension for the Respondent.

The Respondent's Position

7. The EDC Chamber **notes** that the Respondent did not respond to the EDC Chamber's inquiries or use the opportunity given to submit a defensive statement in the proceedings before the EDC Chamber. Accordingly, the facts supplied in the FPL report remain uncontroverted.



ADMISSIBILITY

8. FIDE EDC **notes** that to satisfy the admissibility criteria, the complaint must meet the minimum requirements in Article 5 of the EDC Code.
- 8.1. The FPL is a FIDE organ, and its investigatory panel (FPL IP) is authorized to conduct investigations on cheating cases. Therefore, the FPL IP has the necessary standing to submit a report to the FIDE EDC (see Article 5.2(d)).
- 8.2. “The 4th Binhai Cup China International Chess Open (Group A) Tournament” was an international chess event registered in FIDE rating calculations with the tournament number of 383740. Therefore, the matter has an international sphere for compliance with the requirements of Art. 5.1(a)-(e) of the EDC Code.
- 8.3. For these reasons mentioned in 7.1–7.3 above, the jurisdiction of the EDC Chamber in the present matter and admissibility of the complaint against the Respondents are confirmed.
- 8.4. EDC Chamber unanimously **finds** that the case is admissible according to the EDC Code and EDC Procedural Rules.

FINDINGS AND JURISDICTION

9. After considering and deliberating, the EDC Chamber **made** the following conclusions before determining a suitable sanction:
- 9.1. The EDC Chamber **observes** and **finds** that Prof. Regan's statistical report and its findings shall not be considered in its assessment, as the report was not used in the allegations put forward in the FPL IP's reports as an argument.
- 9.2. The EDC Chamber **finds** it contrary to the ordinary course of events that the Respondent lost all of his games against rated opponents in two tournaments in August 2024 without scoring even half a point.
- 9.3. In its evaluation, the EDC Chamber **finds** that in the games lost by the Respondent, although there was ample time remaining on the clock, the moves played were inconsistent with the normal course of events.
- 9.4. The EDC Chamber **acknowledges** that in the sport of chess, a player may perform very poorly during a tournament for various reasons, may experience a series of losses, and such poor results may further negatively affect their overall performance. However, in this tournament, the Chamber concludes that this cannot be the case.



- 9.5. The EDC Chamber **finds** that the defense submitted by the Respondent to the FPL IP is illogical, that the Respondent had ample time remaining in the lost positions, and that the only plausible explanation for losing all games in two consecutive tournaments is intentional defeat.
- 9.6. The majority of EDC Chamber **finds** beyond any reasonable doubt that the Respondent committed cheating through the method of sandbagging based on the academic references, CAS decisions, and the detailed analyses and examinations presented in the FPL IP report.
- 9.7. The EDC Panel member, **Mr. Khaled Arfa**, is of dissenting opinion with respect to the conclusion in para 9.6. His position is based on the following reasoning presented in inverse logical order:
- 9.7.6. Mr. Arfa concludes that the standard of comfortable satisfaction is not met and, therefore, the Respondent should be declared not guilty.
- 9.7.5. This conclusion rests upon the application of a fundamental legal principle: the benefit of the doubt must always favor the accused. In this case, the Respondent had not played chess for ten years, and the only claims about his intentions are speculative and unsupported by solid evidence. Such circumstances give rise to a clear and material doubt, which must be resolved in the Respondent's favor.
- 9.7.4. Additionally, Professor Regan's report—often cited in this matter—explicitly states that his statistical model is not validated for use in situations such as this. He writes, "*My model has not been validated for use on the lower extreme of the bell curve*" and "*the IPR figures (on non-book moves) are not for judgment,*" making it clear that his system cannot form a sound basis for determining guilt.
- 9.7.3. The accusation that the Respondent intentionally decreased his ELO rating to gain access to tournaments restricted to lower-rated players is entirely speculative. It is not substantiated by any concrete, corroborated evidence and remains mere conjecture.
- 9.7.2. Furthermore, the Respondent has adequately explained his use of time during the games in question. He admitted that playing rapidly was a strategic choice intended to confuse his opponents—a strategy that ultimately failed. Importantly, rapid play is not prohibited by any rule and thus cannot be



construed as misconduct or used to infer guilt.

9.7.1. Finally, the fact that the Respondent lost all his games is not, in itself, indicative of wrongdoing. It is readily explained by the fact that he had not played competitive chess from September 2012 to September 2022—a ten-year absence clearly recorded in his FIDE history and confirmed in Professor Regan’s analysis. This lengthy break from chess fully accounts for the decline in his performance. The EDC Chamber **finds** that no aggravating or mitigating factors were presented for the Respondent.

Suitable sanction

10. Accordingly, and considering all of the above, the EDC Chamber by **majority (2-1) decides** as follows:

10.7. The Respondent, **Mr. Li Haoyu**, is found **guilty** of breach of Article 11.7 (e-ii) of the FIDE Code of Ethics.

10.8. Mr. Haoyu is sanctioned to a worldwide ban of **6 months** from participating as a player in any FIDE-rated chess competition. The ban will be effective from the day of this decision.

11. The Respondent is referred to Chapter 7 of the EDC Procedural Rules and advised that this decision may be appealed to the EDC Appeal Chamber by giving written notice of such appeal to the EDC Chairperson (ethics@fide.com) within 21 days from the date upon which this decision is received. The notice of appeal must clearly state all the grounds for the appeal. An appeal lodgment fee of **500 EUROS** must at the same time be paid to the FIDE Financial Department. Failing the due exercise of this right of appeal, the EDC Chamber’s decision will become final.

12. The EDC Chamber **requests** the FIDE Secretariat to promptly communicate the decision to the Respondent, **Mr. Li Haoyu**, and to publish the decision on the FIDE website in due course.

DATED ON THIS 31st July 2025

CHAMBER CHAIRPERSON
FIDE ETHICS & DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION