

BUGHOUSE!

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What's Bughouse? How to play this crazy game

by Edward Scimia

Bughouse is a game played by two teams, usually consisting of two players each. On each team, one player will play white, while the other plays black on a board next to them, across from their opponents. Each individual game requires its own clock. Bughouse is traditionally played with blitz time controls, with each player having five minutes or less to make their moves.

The game begins when the clocks are started and each team's white player makes their first move. After this, the games continue as normal chess games, with the following major exceptions:

When a player captures a piece, they must pass it to their partner. For example: if a team's white player captures his opponent's rook (a black piece), he must pass it to his partner, who is playing black. If a pawn promotes and is then captured, it reverts back to being a pawn when it is passed.

On each player's turn, they may choose to either make a regular chess move on the board or place one of the pieces their partner has passed on the board. There are no restrictions on where pieces may be placed, with the exception that pawns cannot be placed on the first or eighth ranks.

The game ends when any player is checkmated or runs out of time on either board. That player's team loses the game. Keep in mind that a player is not checkmated if they have the potential to block a check by placing a piece there, even if they don't have a piece "in hand" yet; the possibility of their partner passing something to them is enough to keep the game going.

These rules make bughouse a fast and furious game filled with exciting combinations and amazing mates. A player who has several pieces in hand can quickly turn a game around, or checkmate a seemingly "safe" king. While you'll never get to place a piece on the board in the middle of a real chess game, the patterns and tactics that arise in bughouse can help develop your chess vision and creativity.

Bughouse strategy is quite complex, but there are **a few key points to remember**:

Material values are much closer between the various pieces in bughouse than in chess. Queens are still the most valuable pieces, but since every piece can be dropped just about anywhere on the board at any time, everything is dangerous! One popular "point" system for bughouse rates a pawn as 1 point, knights, bishops and rooks as 2, and a queen as 4.

Keeping a secure king is critical, as holes and unprotected squares around the king can quickly become occupied by enemy pieces. Once an opponent is placing pieces with check (especially knights), it can become impossible to use your own pieces in hand, leaving you virtually helpless to stop the onslaught. Communication is key! Teammates are allowed and encouraged to talk strategy during the game. This can help players understand whether or not they should make trades, or if they should be willing to sacrifice material to get a certain critical piece for their partner.

Sometimes, the best move in bughouse is **no move at all**. With an advantage on the clocks, a team may want to stall on one board in order to force their opponents to make a move on the other. The potential of the stall forces fast action during the game, as both sides struggle to maintain an advantage on the board and on the clock.

Despite how complex this may all sound, **bughouse is actually fairly simple** to play and can be a great diversion from serious chess. Find a few friends and try a couple games -- you'll soon find bughouse becoming a regular part of your chess routine.

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US Chess Bughouse Rules

1. Number of players- There are only two people on a team, no substitutions are allowed.
2. Number of games- Each team will play only two games per round, one for each player, against another team. There are multiple rounds.
3. Who plays- The team decides which player is to play white and which player is to play the black.
4. Time control- The time control is Game 5 minutes. Use 2 second delay when possible.
5. Bring a clock- Each player is responsible for providing a clock. If neither player, in an individual game, has a clock both players receive a forfeit loss for that game.
6. Touch move- A move completed when an opponent's hand has released the piece. This only applies to pieces on the board. Pieces off the board may be touched at any time but once the piece is placed on the board it must stay on the board.
7. Match conclusion- Each match is concluded as soon as one of the players on a team wins.
8. Illegal moves lose, if they are caught before the next move is made.

- If an opponent makes a move and starts the opponent's clock, they have forfeited the right to claim that illegal move.
- Before play begins both players should inspect the position of the pieces and the setting of the clock, since once each side has made a move all claims for correcting either are null and void. The only exception is if one or both players have more than five minutes on their clock, then the tournament director may reduce the time accordingly.
- Illegal moves, unnoticed by both players, cannot be corrected afterwards, nor can they become the basis for later making an illegal move claim. If the King and Queen are set up incorrectly when the game begins, then you may castle short on the queen side and castle long on the kingside. Once each side has made a move, incorrect setups must stay.

9. Passing pieces- When a piece is captured, the captured piece is passed to the partner only after the move is completed (opponent's clock is started).

10. Placing or moving pieces- A player has the option of either moving one of their pieces on their board or placing a piece their teammate has captured and passed to them.

- A captured piece may be placed on any unoccupied square on the board, with the exception that a pawn may not be placed on the first or last rank.
- Pieces may be placed to create or interpose check or checkmate.
- A promoted pawn, which has been captured, reverts to a pawn and not the promoted piece.

11. Displaying captured pieces- A player may not attempt to hide pieces captured by their partner from the opponent. The first attempt will be a warning and the second attempt will result in forfeiture of the game.

12. Communicating allowed- Partners may verbally communicate throughout a game. It is legal for one partner to make move suggestions to the other partner. It is illegal and grounds for forfeiting the match if one partner physically moves one of their partner's pieces.

13. Clock Hand- Each player must push the clock button with the same hand they use to move their pieces. Exception: only during castling may a player use both hands. When capturing only one hand may be used. The first infraction will get a warning, the second a one minute penalty and the third will result in the loss of the game.

14. Touching a Clock- Except for pushing the clock button neither player should touch the clock except:

- To straighten it;
- If either player knocks over the clock his opponent gets one minute added to their clock;
- If your opponent's clock does not begin you may push their side down and repunch your side; however, if this procedure is unsatisfactory, please call for a director;
- Each player must always be allowed to push the clock after their move is made. Neither player should keep their hand on or hover over the clock.

15. Define a win- A game is won by the player:

- who has mated their opponent's king;

- If the checking piece is not a knight or is not in contact (on an adjacent square) with the defending king and the defending player does not have any material to block the check, the defending player may wait until his or her partner supplies a piece provided their time does not run out.
 - whose opponent resigns;
 - whose opponent's flag falls first, at any time before the game is otherwise ended, provided he/she points it out and neutralizes the clock while their own flag is still up;
 - who, after an illegal move, takes the opponent's king or stops the clock;
- An illegal move doesn't negate a player's right to claim on time, provided he/she does so prior to their opponent's claim of an illegal move. If the claims are simultaneous, the player who made the illegal move loses.

16. Defining a draw- A game is a draw:

- By agreement between the teams during the game only.
- If the flag of one player falls after the flag of the other player has already fallen and a win has not been claimed, unless either side mates before noticing both flags down. Announced checkmate nullifies any later time claims.

17. Replacing pieces- If a player accidentally displaces one or more pieces, he shall replace them on his own time. If it is necessary, his opponent may start the opponent's clock without making a move in order to make sure that the culprit uses his own time while replacing the pieces. Finally, it is unsportsmanlike to knock over any pieces then punch the clock. For the first offense the player will get a warning (unless this causes his flag to fall, in which case the opponent will get one extra minute added to his clock). For a second offense a one minute add-on for the opponent will be imposed. For a third offense the offender shall forfeit the game. Thereafter, the tournament director may use other penalties or expel a player from the event for repeated offenses.

18. Dispute between players- In case of a dispute either player may stop both clocks while the tournament director is being summoned. In any unclear situation the tournament director will consider the testimony of both players and any reliable witnesses before rendering his decision. If a player wishes to appeal the decision of a tournament director, the player must first appeal to the section chief then, if necessary, the player may appeal to the Chief floor director, whose decision in all cases is final.

19. TD touching the clock- The tournament director shall not pick up the clock; except in the case of a dispute.

20. Observer conduct- Spectators and players of another match are not to speak or otherwise interfere in a game. If a spectator interferes in any way, such as by calling attention to the flag fall or an illegal move, the tournament director may cancel the game and rule that a new game be played in its stead, and he may also expel the offending party from the playing room. The tournament director should also be silent about illegal moves, flag falls, etc. (unless there is an agreement with the players, before the game, to call them) as this is entirely the responsibility of the players.

21. Replacing a promoted pawn- If a player promotes a pawn they must leave the pawn on the board and clearly indicate to their opponent to what piece the pawn is being promoted too. The promoted pawn will be laid on it's side to indicate that it is a promoted pawn.

22. Replacement clock- Only a tournament director may determine if a clock is defective and change clocks.

23. Player behavior- Excessive banging of pieces or clock will not be tolerated and the offending player may be penalized with loss of time.

24. Insufficient Losing Chances- Insufficient losing chances claims cannot be made in Bughouse games.

25. Rules Not Covered Above- The Official Rules of Chess, 7th edition, shall be used to resolve any situation not covered by these rules.