

Ratings Committee Report – 2026
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This year, the Ratings Committee (RC) devoted substantial attention to questions involving the operation, interpretation, and continued refinement of the US Chess rating system. Much of the committee's work was tied to the continuing transition to the new Leago rating platform, which prompted further testing of the legacy and new systems and led to several clarifications and corrections involving rating initialization, established rating handling, and implementation details for foreign FIDE adjustments. The committee also revisited a possible change to the 2700 cap in the special rating formula, considered how best to handle players returning to competition after long periods of inactivity, and reviewed the implications of previously approved policy changes affecting FIDE rating adjustments. In addition, the RC carried out its routine diagnostic analyses of the rating pool to monitor longer-term trends in rating levels and distributional shape. What follows is a summary of the year's principal issues, actions taken, and recommendations.

Late last year, the RC considered whether the 2700 cap in the special rating formula should be raised to 2800. The argument for raising it was that a small number of very strong unrated players could plausibly have playing strength above 2700, so the existing ceiling might artificially suppress an appropriate provisional rating. The argument against changing it was that the cap applies only in the special formula for players with very few rated games, not in the standard formula, and therefore has only limited practical effect. It was also noted that highly rated FIDE players entering US Chess are generally unaffected, because their ratings are initialized in a way that moves them out of the special-formula category.

Testing and examples discussed among RC members suggested that raising the cap would affect very few cases and that the main observable impact came in unusual situations, including at least one clear case where a player's rating briefly rose to an implausibly high level after an anomalous result and later fell sharply. More broadly, RC members noted that ratings above 2500 can occasionally occur early on, but instances where the 2700 ceiling itself binds are rare. In light of the limited scope of the problem, the lack of evidence that the current cap is causing significant harm, and the risk of creating inflated provisional ratings in edge cases, the matter was reviewed and the decision was ultimately to keep the cap at 2700.

In connection with the transition to the new rating server, correspondence with the office identified an inconsistency in how FIDE ratings were converted to initialize US Chess ratings. During testing for the transition to the Leago server, an inconsistency was identified in how FIDE ratings were converted to initialize US Chess ratings: some parts of the code rounded the converted value to an integer, while others retained the full floating-point value. The result of the exchanges was that, although the practical effect on ratings was expected to be very small in most cases, the system should be made internally consistent by eliminating the unnecessary rounding and using the floating-point version uniformly. Because that approach was also the simplest to implement and aligned the old system with the Leago code already in testing, the change was applied retroactively in the rerate process so that prior affected FIDE adjustment events would be regenerated under the consistent method.

Additionally, during testing of the transition from the old ratings server to the Leago implementation, a divergence was identified in how established ratings were handled when historical game-count data was incomplete or inconsistent. The issue arose because the definition of an “established” rating changed from 20 games to 26 games, while some historical records showed players as established with fewer than 26 games, and some older supplement-based ratings had established status recorded without any accompanying game-count data at all. To bring the systems into alignment, the legacy code was adjusted so that when a player entered an event with an established pre-event rating but the resulting post-event game count was below 20, the post-event game count would be set to 26; this resolved the mismatches found in the affected small set of test events and helped standardize ratings lookup and initialization behavior across the old and new systems.

During follow-up on testing and implementation of foreign FIDE rating adjustments, it was confirmed that the Executive Board had approved in 2025 a change to replace the former opt-in/opt-out process with automatic updates for US Chess eligible members. The intent of the motion was to revise only the part of the rules describing which players are subject to FIDE-based adjustments, while leaving the remaining technical provisions of the rating system specifications unchanged. Revised language was then drafted to reflect the substance of the motion without inadvertently altering other existing provisions, and that draft is now awaiting

confirmation from the committee chair's Executive Board liaison before the specifications document is updated.

The committee also discussed how best to treat players who return to competitive chess after long periods of inactivity, recognizing that an old published rating may no longer reflect current playing strength even when it is based on many past games. One general approach under consideration is to reduce the effective game count underlying the returning player's rating, so that the rating can respond more quickly once play resumes, rather than continuing to behave as though it were based on a fully current and highly reliable history. In developing this idea, the committee has looked to the same principles already used in the rating system for combining external rating information into an initial rating, including time-based weighting to reflect staleness of rating sources. A tentative proposal along those lines has been outlined, but the committee has not yet settled on a final method and expects to continue evaluating the issue before making a recommendation. The committee expects to continue refining this proposal in the coming year.

Finally, the RC performed its usual diagnostic analyses to monitor trends in the rating pool. As in prior years, the analysis focused on established players who were active over the current and previous four years and who were 35–45 years old in the current year, while also reviewing broader cohort patterns. The updated results suggest that, after the recent reduction of the bonus-point threshold from B=14 to B=10 in two steps beginning in 2023, the central tendency of ratings for the principal monitoring group has shown a modest rebound from last year, though rating levels remain below the committee's long-term target of roughly matching late-1997 levels. At the same time, some concerns remain about broader distributional shape, including evidence of continued clustering at floor-like ratings and possible widening differences between the lower and upper ends of the pool. In light of the limited movement so far and the relatively recent (January 2025) implementation of the bonus-threshold changes, the committee recommends no further adjustment at this time and instead will continue to monitor rating levels and distributional patterns over the coming year.