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Rollerball

40-square ring (7×7 minus 3×3 centre)

BOARD

2

PLAYERS

ROLLERBALL

Rollerball is a chess variant invented by Jean-Louis Cazaux in 1999, entered in the Chess Variant Pages 40-squares contest. It is named after the 1975 science-fiction film about a violent ring-track sport. The game is played on a **40-square double-ring board** formed by taking a 7×7 grid and removing the 3×3 centre, leaving an outer ring and an inner ring. Each player has only 6 pieces.

THE BOARD

The board is a 7×7 grid (files a–g, ranks 1–7) with the centre 3×3 (c3–e5) removed, leaving 40 squares in two concentric rings:

- ♦ **Outer ring:** 24 squares – the perimeter of the 7×7 grid
- ♦ **Inner ring:** 16 squares – the perimeter of the 5×5 interior region surrounding the removed centre

The board has four natural zones: **South** (White’s starting side), **North** (Black’s starting side), **West**, and **East**. White plays first; play proceeds **mostly clockwise**.

STARTING POSITION

Each side starts with 6 pieces occupying two ranks at their home zone, arranged point-symmetrically (180° rotation) rather than mirrored – White’s arrangement is Black’s arrangement rotated, not reflected. Transcribed from the starting-position diagram at chessvariants.com/40.dir/rollerball/index.html:

SQUARE	PIECE
c7	Rook (Black)
d7	Bishop (Black)
e7	Pawn (Black)
c6	Rook (Black)
d6	King (Black)
e6	Pawn (Black)
c2	Pawn (White)
d2	King (White)
e2	Rook (White)
c1	Pawn (White)
d1	Bishop (White)
e1	Rook (White)

All other squares (including the full inner ring and the remainder of the outer ring) are empty at setup.

PIECES

Each side has: 1 King, 1 Bishop, 2 Rooks, 2 Pawns (6 pieces total).

KING

Moves and captures one square to any adjacent square (orthogonal or diagonal), as in standard chess. The King **may not move to a square where it can be captured**. The King is the only piece with fully symmetric movement.

ROOK

Slides any number of squares **forward** or **sideways** along its row or column. May also move **one square backward** (orthogonally only — no backward sliding). On the external ring, the Rook has **one rebound allowed on the corners** of the board. The source notes the Rook is especially powerful on b2 (and, by the board's rotational symmetry, a6, f7, g2), where it can deliver mate unassisted.

BISHOP

Slides diagonally **forward** any number of squares, with **one rebound allowed** on the external or internal ring sides. May also move **one square diagonally backward**. Does not slide diagonally backward beyond one square. The white diagonals form a secondary ring joining the mid-points of the external sides, where the Bishop is especially strong.

PAWN

Moves and captures **forward** (straight or diagonally). Promotes to Rook or Bishop upon reaching the starting square of the opponent's Pawns. Promotion to a Bishop on a dark square is not recommended (per the source).

WIN CONDITIONS

There are two ways to win:

- 1 Checkmate** the opponent's King.
- 2 King reaches the opponent's King starting square** — but only if it arrived there by travelling **clockwise**.

Draw: stalemate or three-fold repetition.

ATTRIBUTION

Rollerball by Jean-Louis Cazaux, invented 1999, entered in the 40-squares contest. Rules and starting-position diagram documented at chessvariants.com/40.dir/rollerball/index.html.