

## The Trials and Trouble of Tournaments

By the time you read this the summer chess season will be well on its way and we will be approaching the changeover to fall. This means the Illinois Open, followed by the Forest City Open, the Midwest Class, and then the Illinois Class. However, as a long time TD [tournament director] and a sometimes organizer I think it is time that the average chess player know what all goes into organizing and running a chess tournament.

### THE ANGST OF ORGANIZING

We have all played in tournaments either in school, in a club, or in a weekend event. A lot goes on before hand just for the event to occur. The scheduling, site selection, prize fund, entry fee, and tournament staff all have to be worked out ahead of time. Problems can occur in any of these areas, and usually in more than one of them. Typically the biggest problem for any tournament (and sometimes for regular clubs) is the site.

In the old days of chess [60s & early 70s] a free site was common and easy to come by. There were churches, Legion halls, park districts, colleges, schools, and libraries that were eager and willing to have chess at their sites. Now however a free site is the exception rather than the rule. Added to this is the expectation for the bigger and better tournaments to be at a hotel site and you begin to get an idea of the problems of finding a site for a chess tournament.

The problems begin with the high cost of a hotel site and finding an open date at the hotel. From March until the end of October hotels are frequently used for weddings, wedding receptions, and proms. Hotels are happy renting out space for these events as not only do they get money from the space rental, but also get nice dollars from beverage and food sales. Needless to say you do not see many catered chess tournaments. The winter months in northern states like Illinois have the problem with uncertain weather. Unless you are planning 2 years in advance don't even think about the weekends before Christmas for a hotel

site. This space is grabbed up for office parties faster than a patzer grabbing a poisoned pawn. However, a site can be found if you look hard and plan well in advance for your tournament.

Once you have found a site you then have to work to get a decent date, which will not always be the date you would most like. Obviously you do not want to run

a tournament directly in opposition to another tournament. It would be stupid to think of running a 2-day tournament over Memorial Day weekend opposite the Chicago Open. You just have to hope that there is no other major tournament within 2 weeks of your event. Experience has shown that tournaments run within 2 weeks of each other tend to have an adverse effect on both tournaments. Once you have a date (hopefully not in conflict with another tournament) you then have to plunk down a nice size deposit, and expect to pay the rest on the day of the tournament.

You now have one of your biggest expenses figured out, but there are still other expenses to be considered. You have the tournament directors, flyers, advertising, and the TLA to pay for still. Most import of all there is the prize fund that will be paid out. You must figure out a prize fund that will attract enough players to play in your event. The entry fee the players pay must cover the expenses of the site, the prize fund, and all the other expenses that you will incur in organizing a chess tournament. Neither a \$1000 entry fee for a \$10 prize fund nor a \$10 entry fee for a \$1000 prize fund will work. The USCF in the past recommended the top prize be 10 times the entry fee. Experience and inflation have shown this figure to be grossly overstated. It is true that the giant tournaments will offer 10 times or more than the entry fee, but that is not the common tournament that players often see. Usually you need between four and seven times the entry fee to get a player interested in a tournament. There are exceptions to this such as one-day events and trophy tournaments. This is a very precarious balancing act between the prize fund and the entry fee. It also makes running a guaranteed (prize fund) event a really risky venture. Of course the problem with not guaranteeing an event is that the players will be real unhappy if the prize fund is drastically reduced. This isn't a problem for a one time event, but if you hope to repeat the tournament in future years it could detract from the tournament.

Typically an organizer hopes to repeat a tournament in future years. This means that the site must fulfill certain expectations that the players will have. The site must not be too hard for the players to find. There should be eating establishments onsite and nearby, particularly fast food joints. The site itself should have decent lighting, be relatively clean, and provide some space or area that can be used for skittles. It is also useful if there is some form of public transportation near or to the site. This will often increase the turn out for your event. The organizer is doing the tournament in the hope of making a profit. However, the organizer must plan on the possibility that the tournament will lose money. This may discourage the organizer from

running the event again, or it may be tried for multiple years. An example is the Chicago International, which after 3 years of being run was discontinued due to losing money in more than one year.

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The final problem for the organizer is the actual running of the tournament. This includes advance entries, at site entries, the round times, and the actual tournament itself. This means that the organizer needs to plan for taking entries, and find a TD to run the event. Usually you have some sort of time restrictions for the use of your site. So you have to set the round times and the time controls within these bounds. The problem is that the TD will have to deal with these restrictions when running the actual tournament.

## TROUBLES AND DECISIONS FOR THE TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR

The TD is usually the person hiding behind the computer as it chums out pairings and wall charts. This is the person who is responsible for seeing that the tournament runs smoothly. Frankly a tournament never runs 100% to perfection. The most common fault is starting the first round late. This is usually due to late entries at the site, as there is almost no TD or organizer willing to turn away a player from a tournament. There are steps to try to prevent this, but they are not always successful. Strictly enforcing entry deadlines with an added cash penalty can work. Most often additional time is allotted between the first round and the end of registration. However, I have seen

tournaments with a hour between the end of registration and the starting round begin late! Once a tournament is running late it can be difficult to catch up. A desperate solution to this problem is to cut time off for one round, and then go to the announced time controls.

You will also probably have to deal with one or more players who need a delayed start to a game, so they can get something to eat.

However, there is a whole list of other problems and items that the TD usually needs to take care of at a tournament. The USCF will provide a list if you ask, and I believe it also comes in the "TD Kit sold in the catalog. You should ask for the list for a "Well Run Tournament". Let me give you my list of things a TD needs for running a good smooth tournament.

The first item is the set up of the tournament site. This mostly means numbering the boards and getting set up for registration ahead of time. However, it can include how the tables and chairs are placed, and a plan for where certain items will be posted. You will also want

money collection. You may also want to arrange a cut off time beyond which you won't take late entries without a bye. Next of course will be making the pairings for the first round. Usually this means printing out what the computer generates, although there are a few of us dinosaurs who sometimes do pairings by hand.

Once the pairings are posted and the players have found their boards you will want to make announcements. It is best if you make a list of the announcements you want to make. Otherwise it is real easy to forget one or two items. Typically these include the time of the next round, the location of washrooms, a reminder of the time controls including any time deduction from the clocks, features of the site [no smoking, restaurant, etc.], change (usually reduction) in the prize fund, and when accelerated pairings are being used. You will typically end up repeating some of these announcements before each round. Additional announcements include when prizes will be paid, special late starts for individual games, a thank you to the players for attending, early or late start of the next round, and where & when the next tournament will be held. I guarantee that if you do not announce the location of the washrooms you will be asked. Also, even if you announce the round times

and post numerous signs someone will ask when the next round is at I will admit that this is usually just to ensure the amount of time to grab a bite to eat It is useful, but not necessary, for the TD to know something about eateries in the area of where the tournament is held.

You will of course want to post wall charts for the players to see how everybody is doing, and the rating of their opponent. Also, you may want to post more than 1 set of pairings to make it easier for players to find their games, possibly an alphabetical set. Make sure to remind players to notify you if they are going to withdraw from the tournament. I'm sure you will agree that it is no fun being paired against someone who has left. Do not forget that players can and will forget to mark a result.

I would like to point out that it is the responsibility of both players to make sure that the result of the game is posted on the pairing sheet. The TD does have the right to double forfeit the players when no result has been posted. Also, this would mean that the players will not be paired for the next round! Usually the TD will ask other players or check the score sheets that have been turned in for the result. This is why it is important that at least one score sheet from the game is turned in to the TD. There should be a collection box or a specified spot for players to turn in score sheets.

During the tournament questions can arise, especially about pairings. The TD should be knowledgeable about pairings and the computer pairing system that is being used. Also, it is always useful for the TD to have a copy of the rulebook on hand. It is much easier to show a player that rule number xyz says that this is how things are to be done. If you are using any of the optional rules you definitely should announce them at the beginning of the tournament Often it is best to have written copies of these rules if you intend to make us of them. An example of an alternate rule is the use of accelerated pairings.

Finally there is the end of the tournament to consider dealing with. If you are going to be mailing any prizes you must be certain of the winner's addresses. It is best to have a sign in sheet for a potential winner to leave their name, address, & maybe phone or e-mail. If you are paying prizes immediately after the

tournament, then you have to be prepared to deal with that. Often it is best to wait for all results before you begin paying out prizes. If there is any error in paying prizes you may be the one responsible. Even when I pay a prize with a check I always get the winner to sign something to show that they have received their prize. I find that the registration cards I use [old time pairing cards] come in handy for this purpose. After all this is done there is still the matter of the "tear down" of the site. You will need time to pack up any equipment & extra supplies that you brought along. You will want to clean up the site at least a little, as the less trouble your group (of chess players) cause the more kindly the site management will be towards you in the future. In regards to this it is often better to use masking tape than scotch tape for anything you post on the walls. If you have a lot of items to clean up and pack up you can sometimes get some of the players to help out.

I hope I haven't left out anything that could be useful to the novice organizer or TD. I hope I haven't scared off anyone from running or organizing a chess event. Hopefully the players will have a better understanding and appreciation for what goes into making a tournament go on. After all it's not all pawns and payments there are plenty of potential headaches at even a small tournament. Don't even ask me about all the insanity and problems that occur at the big tournaments like the Chicago or National Open.

Best "Tournament Chess" Regards

**Larry S. Cohen**  
**ICA President**