

Promoting Local Tournaments

By Michael Wetzel

If you attend or direct a sanctioned tournament, chances are good it's of the 1- or 2-star variety.

These tournaments usually attract the same nucleus of players, year in and year out. But just because the tournament is small in scale doesn't mean it can't be rich in quality and tradition.

Regardless of the size, your top-rated players come in with plenty of accolades beside their names, i.e. current state champion; former junior team member of his/her native country; formerly top 50 in the nation; or even the tournament defending champion. And some players, regardless of skill level, travel great distances to attend the event.

These are easy, built-in hooks to promote your tournament.

In preparing a short and precise press release or public service announcement about your event, you might want to lead with your star player or number of players attending.

Local newspapers and radio stations usually will publish a short announcement about the tournament at no cost.

Look in the telephone book or search the Internet for contact people at your local media outlets.

Here's a made-up press release example:

For immediate release:

North Alabama Table Tennis Championships

Four-time Alabama singles champion Adam Brown of Birmingham will be among the 48 players competing for the \$200 first-place check in the North Alabama Table Tennis Championship on Jan. 15.

Brown is expected to draw stiff competition from former USA World Team member Todd Sweeris of Maryland and 10-time Tennessee Champ Larry Thoman. Players from six states are expected to compete in the tournament at the Huntsville Civic Center.

The USATT-sanctioned tournament offers more than \$500 in prize money and 15 trophies.

The North Alabama Table Tennis Club and the city of Huntsville Parks and Recreation Department are the tournament hosts.

For more information, contact Michael Wetzel at 555-5555 or email him at mikepong@yahoo.com.

Be sure to spell correctly and have another person proofread the release before distributing it. Typos and poorly structured sentences are a bad first impression to make upon the media.

While there is no magic formula for promoting your tournament, here are some simple suggestions to help get the community involved.

- Invite a local dignitary or celebrity – the mayor, councilman, a retired pro athlete, local high school star quarterback, etc. – to hand out the awards.
- List the tournament as a charity fundraiser with a portion of the proceeds going to a local agency. That agency will help promote your event through its newsletter, mailings, etc.
- But most of all, remember the reason the tournament is being conducted. Even if it is a club fundraiser, be sure you promote the Olympic sport of table tennis in your message. Without the players, there would be no tournament.

It is tempting to run an open event and take all entrants and their entry fees to pad the club's coffers. However, when the number of tables and tournament staff can't sufficiently handle the volume of players, the tournament tends to be ragged and run late.

Nobody wants to drive for hours to a poorly directed tournament that runs into the late evening. Most likely, your club's next event will have difficulty attracting many players.

It is much wiser to limit your number of entrants. Remember to show the same respect to all players regardless of rating. Keep the entry fee affordable and tables busy.

Have a club member with marketing skills help obtain sponsors who can offer door prizes to the players. Put happy players back in their cars at an earlier hour, and they will be looking forward to your next event.

Those players' word of mouth will promote your tournament for you.

And don't forget to study the USATT tournament guide. The book does a comprehensive job of addressing tournament operation issues, especially time management involving number of tables versus number of entrants and events. Longtime tournament player/director/official/umpire Wendell Dillon has compiled a wealth of information in the guide.