

Chapter 2 – Tournament Design

1. General. Tournament design is the organization of a tournament to include selection and timing of events.

2. Match Length.

2.a. All games are now to 11 points.

2.b. The Laws of Table Tennis permit matches of any odd number of games. The standard for USATT tournaments is either best of 5 or best of 7. Round robin events should normally be best of 5 games.

3. Use of Time & Tables Available. If you have only 4 tables and one day, you cannot run 30 events for 400 players.

3.a. Not all matches will be the same length. Over the course of a tournament, they will average out about as follows:

3.a.1. With most matches between players rated under 1800 plan 20 minutes for a best of 5 game match and 30 minutes for best of 7.

3.a.2. For matches between higher rated players plan 30 minutes for a best of 5 games and 45 minutes for a best of 7.

3.b. To determine the number of matches you can handle, multiply the number of tables by the matches per hour by the number of hours.

Example: 8 tables, 20 minutes per match (3 per hour), 12 hours (9 am – 9 p.m.).

8 (tables) x 3 x 12 = 288 matches for the day.

4. Scheduling Considerations. There are three elements to consider when developing a schedule. Unfortunately, they are usually incompatible with each other. The final schedule must be the best compromise among these objectives,

4.a. The schedule should minimize time wasted by players having to report too early or having to wait too long between matches. The schedule should not require a player to play back-to-back matches except in round robin events. Such matches may be unavoidable as the tournament proceeds.

4.b. It must make efficient use of tables and available playing time to permit a large entry in several events.

4.c. To enhance the competition and further the sport, it should provide for staging significant matches in an orderly manner for the enjoyment of spectators when the maximum number of spectators are present. The "finals program" normally

should include the finals of major events and also the semi-finals of the Championship (or Men's Singles) event. The finals program should normally last not more than 2 1/2 – 3 hours.

5. **Time Available.** Play at a one day tournament (Saturday) should begin at 9 am and all matches should be completed by 9 p.m. If a large number of out of town players are expected, it is better to start later (10 or 10:30) to enable players to drive in the morning. With the later starting time, those that must leave home after work Friday can arrive and get a reasonable night's rest in a hotel. Two day tournaments should start on Saturday the same as a one day tournament and should be completed not later than 5 p.m. on Sunday. These completion times are goals; actual times will be dictated by the circumstances that arise at the tournament. You can go a long way toward meeting the goals by scheduling events with those goals in mind.
6. **Scheduling Events.** Scheduling begins with the selection of events and starting times to be announced in the entry blank. The principal factors in developing and following a schedule are the number of tables, the time available, and, most difficult, scheduling around players that are successful in several events.
 - 6.a. The basic time required can be determined by allowing 20 minutes for a best of 5 game match and 30 minutes for a best of 7 match. It should be computed by round rather than total matches and it must be remembered that it is neither possible nor desirable to obtain 100% table use. 70% table usage is very high. Some tables should be available throughout the day(s) for practice. Players are normally allowed to practice on any table not being used for a match.
 - 6.b. To reduce conflicts in scheduling players successful in several events, it is appropriate to limit the number of events a player may enter. In a one day tournament, a reasonable limit is four singles and one doubles event. In a large tournament, the strength of the draw may reduce the problem without limiting events a player may enter. This should be estimated before preparing the entry blank and any restrictions announced in the entry blank if necessary.
 - 6.c. At many tournaments events are scheduled beginning with the lowest class and following progressively with the higher events. Other tournaments reverse this scheduling. A player seeded in Class C has the best chance of winning in that event. S/he also may be successful through several rounds of Class B and Class A. Letters are used here to avoid suggesting rating cutoffs for events.
 - 6.c.1. By scheduling in the order Championship, Class A, Class B, etc. it is possible to play several rounds of Class A and Class B before beginning the Class C event. This will eliminate many "C" players, reducing the probability of conflict. At the same time, it permits the "C" player to get well warmed up before playing the critical matches in Class C where s/he has the best chance of winning.
 - 6.c.2. Scheduling Championship first also has the advantage of having the finals early enough to have a good number of spectators and permits the

top players to leave early. This is a reasonable concession and the overall champion should not be expected to help take down tables and clean up.

- 6.c.3. Senior and junior events should normally be scheduled at the same time. No one is eligible for both, reducing one area of scheduling conflict.
 - 6.c.4. In a one day tournament, schedule doubles early. Each round of doubles cuts the field in half, making them available for other events. With many events playing at the same time it is often hard to find all four players available.
 - 6.d. Entry blank schedule. Events should be announced in the entry blank at the earliest time they can be played. It is seldom possible when preparing the entry blank to accurately guess the number of entries in each event. By announcing the earliest time play can begin in an event, players will arrive in time to play. If later times are announced and play progresses faster than planned, players may not be available to play to an advanced schedule. Naturally you cannot default them before the scheduled time. You should make a conscientious effort to estimate event starting times, not schedule everything for 9 a.m.
 - 6.e. Revising the time schedule. When the draw is made it will be possible to refine the schedule of events. If the draw is held a week early a revised schedule should be provided in a written or E-mail acknowledgment of entries. At other tournaments the revised schedule should be written on the wall and desk copies of the draw sheets and announced as appropriate.
7. **Tournament Format.** The format for a tournament or events in a tournament can be knockout (single or double elimination), round robin, Swiss, or a combination of these formats. It can also include, or be exclusively, team competition.
- 7.a. Single elimination is the most common format in sanctioned tournaments. It is simple to set up and run and has the fewest number of matches for a given number of entries. The number of matches is one less than the number of entries; e.g. 32 entries require 31 matches. The top players are seeded to preclude their meeting in early rounds. This format takes the shortest time to run and is favored by many top players.
 - 7.b. Double elimination is a practical format to determine a winner and runner-up where there is insufficient information on which to base seeding. The number of matches is one less than twice the number of entries; 32 entries require 62 or 63 matches. This format is practical where few events are being held, the number of entries is small, and the players are primarily novices or unrated players. This format is not often used in sanctioned tournaments.
 - 7.c. Round robin is a format in which each player plays every other player in the event or in a group of players. It is very popular with most players, particularly lower rated players. The smaller the group size, the fewer matches required. The number

of matches required depends on the size of the groups. For details see Chapter 7.

- 7.d. The Swiss System can be used to find a winner in fewer rounds than a round robin by successively pairing players with similar records so the top players eliminate each other until only one player is undefeated. This format is seldom used in sanctioned tournaments and is not covered in this Guide.
- 7.e. A combination of elimination and round robin formats is often the best way to conduct an event. The combined format can be done two ways:
 - 7.e.1. Single elimination followed by round robin. Conduct a normal elimination format down to the semi-finalists and then play these four as a round robin. This maximizes play among the top players. The disadvantage is the absence and suspense of a "final" match. The winner may have been decided before the last match is played.
 - 7.e.2. Round robin followed by single elimination. Where an event is too large to hold a full round robin you can play in round robin groups with the winners advancing to successive round robin groups or single elimination stages. 32 entries requires 48 round robin matches (8 groups of 4 players) and 7 elimination matches for a total of 55 matches. This is becoming the most popular format for US tournaments.
- 8. **Rating Doubles.** It has become popular in many tournaments to limit the total rating of the players in a doubles pair. This event can be run in two different ways, depending on your goals. In either case, you need to estimate the rating levels of players expected to enter. The entry blank must specify the rating cut-off for the pair and (if desired) the maximum rating for either player.
 - 8.a. Leave the individual player rating open. This enables a novice or low rated player to get the "chance of a lifetime" playing with a champion. e.g. in an Under 3800 doubles event, a player rated 1050 could team with a player rated 2649.
 - 8.b. Specify a rating for the higher player. This will provide better balanced teams but eliminates the top players and probably the bottom players from competing. Some players resent the top players coming down to take prizes in a rating event. This should be used only if there is also a Championship Doubles or two levels of rating doubles that would permit the higher rated players to participate. The normal cut-off for the higher player is one half the combined rating +200; e.g. in the 3800 doubles, all players must be below 2100 ($3800/2 = 1900 + 200 = 2100$).
- 9. **Round Robin Formats.** See Chapter 7. Round Robin Competition.
- 10. **Sample Team Formats.** See Chapter 8, Team Competition.
- 11. **Time Scheduling.** In designing your tournament consider the planning concepts for time scheduling as shown in Chapter 9. Small tournaments do not need to be time scheduled and normally can run faster by calling matches from the control desk.

Understanding the concept of time scheduling will enable you to get a better idea of time required for each event and enable you to prepare your entry blank to reflect the proper scheduling.

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