



MECA TD Handbook

MAINE CHESS ASSOCIATION
TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR
HANDBOOK

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Introduction

Thank you for your willingness to serve as a tournament director for the Maine Chess Association (MECA).

Chess helps promote intellectual growth by teaching creative problem solving, concentration, and critical thinking. It fosters positive self-esteem by encouraging and rewarding hard work. Chess has much to offer and we are grateful to scholastic chess organizers and directors for providing opportunities to students to be involved in the powerfully enriching activity of tournament chess.

Like the United States Chess Federation (US Chess), MECA presumes that its tournament directors have the competence, sound judgement, and absolute objectivity needed to arrive at fair and logical solutions to problems not specifically addressed in the Official Rules of Chess.

This Handbook is provided to give MECA tournament directors guidelines, suggestions, and helpful hints gleaned from many years of scholastic chess tournament organization and direction.

We hope you will find the information included in the MECA TD Handbook easy to use and helpful. The author assumes all responsibility for errors in this work and welcomes your feedback and suggestions. He can be reached at dcdeluca@yahoo.com.

Tournament Director Classifications

US Chess maintains five levels of tournament director certification:

- Club
- Local
- Senior
- Associate National
- National

For detailed information on the requirements, responsibilities, and limitations of US Chess tournament directors consult:

www.uschess.org/docs/forms/TDCertificationRules.pdf

In addition to these levels of certification, US Chess also recognizes the World Chess Federation (FIDE) titles of International Arbiter (IA) and FIDE Arbiter (FA) and administrates the application process for these titles for Senior, Associate National, and National Directors.

Within these US Chess certification levels, there are three roles that a tournament director may assume depending on the size and staffing of a particular tournament or event.

- Chief TD
- Co-Chief TD
- Assistant TD

There is also a Tournament Aide designation. Aides do not possess the authority to make pairings or enforce rules, and they do not need to be certified TDs.

Each of the above tournament director roles can serve as either a pairing director or a floor director. In many tournaments, particularly smaller scholastic tournaments, the Chief TD will function as both a pairing and floor director and may also be the primary organizer of the event responsible for securing the tournament's location, format, publicity, and other logistics.

The pairing director's responsibilities include:

- Receiving pre-registration and day-of-event registrations
- Collecting entry fees
- Verifying US Chess membership status, US Chess ID numbers, and ratings of players
- Entering player information into pairing software (It is highly recommended that you get a copy of the latest version of SwissSys pairing software and familiarize yourself with it by taking a seminar and assisting at a tournament where it is being used.)

- Pairing players in each round
- Entering results
- Upholding the *Official Rules of Chess*

The floor director's responsibilities include:

- Being a stable and available presence in the tournament room
- Making pre-tournament and pre-round announcements
- Supervising the commencement and progression of the rounds
- Responding to player inquiries and rule claims
- Verifying results
- Working closely with the pairing director
- Upholding the *Official Rules of Chess*

Guidelines for Running a Successful Tournament

There are many issues to consider when planning a tournament. Let's take a look at some of them.

Pre-Tournament Information and Publicity

You will want to decide on a date and time for your tournament well enough in advance to be able to get the word out to chess players. Whether you are advertising to a school, chess club, community, or wider audience, it's a good idea to get information about your tournament posted—both locally and online—well in advance of the date of the event in order to attract as many players as possible.

Tournament Format

The format of the tournament lets players know:

- What pairing system will be used (Swiss, Round Robin, Quad, Match, etc.)
- How many rounds will be played
- What the time control will be
- The number and type of sections available
- What prizes will be available

By far, the most popular pairing system is the Swiss system. For a detailed description of the Swiss system, see Rule 28 in the *Official Rules of Chess 6th Edition*. SwissSys pairing software will take care of applying pairing rules and come up with pairings for each round. For the first round, the software will order the field by rating, divide it in half and pair the first seed player with the player seeded in the middle of the field. For example, if there are ten players registered for a particular section, Player 1 will face Player 6, Player 2 will face player 7 etc. For subsequent rounds, players will be paired with other players in their score group. For

example, the algorithm will try to pair all the 1-point getters with each other, all the 0.5-point getters with each other, and all the 0-point getters with each other.

The decisions of how many rounds will be played and what the time control will be go together. Common scholastic round-time control pairs are: 4 Round G/30, G/45, or G/60 with a five-second delay or increment. There are also some scholastic leagues that play after school and use a 2 Round G/25 time control with success. Digital clock with time delay and time increment capabilities are now the preferred clock over analog clocks or digital clocks without such features. Clocks with delay (a certain amount of time is counted down before a player's main time begins to elapse) and clocks with increment (a certain amount of time is added after a player make a move) are considered identical according to the *Official Rules of Chess*. Digital clocks can be quite expensive to purchase for a club or tournament with some high-end models running close to \$100 apiece. I have had very good luck with and recommend the LEAP Compact Digital Chess Clock available at Amazon.com for less than \$20.

Some directors prefer to offer sections divided by grade i.e., K-2, 3-5, 6-8, high school. After much experimentation over the years, I have settled on the following section breakdown and time controls for most of my primarily scholastic tournaments: U400: 4 Round G/30;d5 (scholastic players only), U800: 4 Round G/30;d5, U1200: 4 Round G/45;d5, U1600: 3 Round G/60;d5, and Open 3 Round G/60;d5. Offering a wide range of sections like this allows each player a choice. Players can always "play up" meaning enter a section higher than their current published rating (but not the other way around) or choose the section that matches their rating and strength. If some sections do not have a sufficient number of players to make at least a Quad, or if there are an odd numbers of players in two sections, sections can be merged using the "move player" function in SwissSys.

Prizes for these types of tournaments can be cash for the Open and U1600 sections and either trophies or chess books and equipment for the U1200 and lower sections.

This format is only a suggestion and I would encourage you to see what works best for you and the players you are catering to.

US Chess Membership

To participate in a rated chess tournament, a player needs to be a member of the United States Chess Federation. Purchasing US Chess membership is easy and relatively inexpensive. For a list of membership rates based on age please see:

<https://secure2.uschess.org/webstore/member.php>

One of the features of the TD/Affiliate Support Area of the uschess.org site is the ability for tournament directors to purchase memberships at a reduced rate. This allows the TD to make \$3 per membership if they so desire. Required information for individuals to purchase a membership is name, address, and date of birth (if purchasing a Scholastic, Youth, or

Young Adult Membership). Tournament directors also need to supply a sponsoring affiliate. Affiliate membership is currently \$40 per year and allows the TD to purchase memberships for players in the name of the affiliate school or club. For small tournaments, offering on-site purchase of US Chess memberships administered by the director may be a relatively easy service to provide. However, as the number of players increases, the task of keeping track of dozens of dates of birth and addresses becomes more and more onerous. Since it is very easy these days to purchase US Chess memberships on a phone or laptop from virtually anywhere at any time, I think it is very reasonable to require that all players have a current membership at the time they register for the tournament.

Entering Player Information into Pairing Software

For each and every player I enter into pairing software, I verify current US Chess membership status, US Chess ID number, and current published rating. The tournament director has the responsibility of producing valid pairings for each round and this requires an accurate rating. I have found that the most consistently fair method of assigning a rating to a player is to use the player's current published rating. My issue with using a rating other than a player's current published rating is that a tournament may not be rated for some time after it is played or tournaments may be rated out of chronological order. These factors could lead to a player's rating changing during the course of the tournament I am directing. In order to provide consistency and fairness, a point in time has to be chosen from which to indicate a player's rating. That point is the publication date and time of a player's official published rating.

Players, coaches, and parents will often provide incorrect ratings when they enter a tournament. As tournament directors, it is our responsibility to verify a player's current published rating by visiting the Player Search page in the US Chess Member Services Area:

<http://www.uschess.org/datapage/player-search.php>

Tiebreaks

The first thing to realize about tiebreaks is that they are only needed for non-dividable prizes like trophies, books, and equipment etc. If a tournament or tournament section is offering cash prizes, tiebreaks are really not needed as the cash prize can be divided and the title (State High School Champion, for example) can be shared by calling all winners co-champions. Some directors and organizers want a clear winner at the conclusion of the tournament and therefore use tiebreaks to determine who can claim first, second, and third place, etc., amongst equal point getters.

The *Official Rules of Chess* states that, unless otherwise specified in pre-tournament announcements, players can expect the following hierarchy of tiebreak systems:

- 1. Modified Median
- 2. Solkoff

- 3. Cumulative
- 4. Cumulative of Opposition

It is therefore highly recommended to use this list of tiebreaks in this specific order to avoid any confusion.

The Median system calculates tiebreak scores by summing the final scores of opponents then disregarding the highest and lowest of these scores.

The Modified Median system sums the tied players' opponents' scores with the lowest-opponents' scores disregarded for those tied players with plus scores (over 50% of the possible maximum score) and the highest-opponents' scores disregarded for those tied players with minus scores (under 50% of the possible maximum score). For tied players with exactly even scores, (an even score is exactly one half of the possible maximum score) their highest- and lowest-scoring opponents' scores are excluded. That was a mouthful! Luckily for us, SwissSys effortlessly calculates and displays this (an any other) tiebreak score with the click of a mouse.

The Solkoff system is identical to the Medium system except that no opponents' scores are disregarded.

Cumulative is another term for running score. To calculate a player's Cumulative tiebreak score, sum the player's scores after each round. If, for example, Player A wins her first three games and then loses her fourth, her running score would look like this: 1, 2, 3, 3. Her Cumulative tiebreak score would therefore be 9. Another player, (Player B), with an equal tournament score of three points, arrived at his score in the following way: 0, 1, 2, 3. Player B's Cumulative tiebreak score would be 6. Although both players scored three points in the tournament, based on the Cumulative tiebreak system Player A would receive the non-dividable prize for first place and Player B would receive the non-dividable prize for second place. Remember, both players are considered co-champions and if the prize was money, (a dividable prize), there would be no need to calculate tiebreaks at all.

Cumulative of Opposition calculates a tiebreak score for a player by summing that player's opponents' Cumulative tiebreak scores.

There are many other tiebreaking systems available to the director. None are perfect. As I have said above, sticking to the hierarchy recommended in the *Official Rules of Chess* is the clearest and simplest way to handle tiebreaks.

Round Times

Starting rounds at specific, pre-tournament published times is desirable for most high-level Open tournaments. In my experience however, this is not the most efficient way to handle scholastic tournaments with large numbers of novice and lower-rated players. What often occurs in beginners' tournaments is players finish at wildly different times. For example, in

the first round of a U400 scholastic section of a tournament that I recently directed with a time control of G/30;d5, the first game ended within a few minutes while the last games to finish used nearly all the allotted thinking time and finished about an hour later. If we allowed 30 minutes' break after the conclusion of the last game, the players of the first game (and their parents and coaches) would be waiting a full 90 minutes between rounds. I have had good luck with the policy of starting subsequent rounds as soon as possible and being flexible enough to allow those players who had long games in the previous round to take a break before beginning their next games.

Prizes

The *Official Rules of Chess* divides prizes into two groups: monetary and non-monetary. Offering cash prizes does make awarding prizes easier and avoids having to worry about tiebreaks but cash prizes may not be appropriate for some events. There are myriad ways prizes can be offered. I'd like to share some considerations about prizes and what has worked well for me over the years regarding the awarding of prizes.

I have seen monetary and non-monetary prizes offered to:

- Top scoring players
- Top scoring players in a particular Under- section i.e., top two players in the U1600 section
- Top scorers in a particular class i.e., top Class A, top Class B etc. (US Chess maintains a class system based on rating. For example, a Class A player has a rating between 1800 and 1999 inclusive, a Class B player has a rating between 1600 and 1799 inclusive etc.)
- Top scoring players in a particular grade or grade range (For example, a prize for the top scoring player in grades 2-4.)
- Top scoring female players
- Top scoring unrated players
- Players who have shown the greatest post-tournament ratings increase since the previous year's edition of the same tournament
- All players in a particular section (For example, all players in the U400 scholastic section of a tournament may receive participation medals.)
- Etc., etc.

I have typically offered monetary prizes for Open, U1800, and U1600 sections of my tournaments and book and equipment prizes for the lower sections. For sections of tournaments with very young players, I find that offering medals to all participants goes a long way towards motivating participation in upcoming events. I have used Crown Awards for all my trophies and medals for many years now and have been extremely satisfied. They have an online selection and engraving process that virtually eliminates mistakes when ordering trophies. You can check out their interactive website here:

<https://www.crownawards.com/>

Offering Class prizes can be problematic and I would not recommend this prize structure. The following typical scenario shared by FIDE Arbiter and Associate National Director Alex Relyea illustrates this point well. Let's say there is an U2000 section that has place prizes and a Class B prize. Let's further say that there are a number of players rated between 1400-1500 who finish with 2.0 points out of a possible 5, too low to win a place prize and that the only Class B player in the tournament scores 0/5. That player will still get the Class B prize while those lower rated with higher scores go away empty handed. From this you can see why I offer Under- prizes (i.e., those prizes with no lower limit like U1800, U1200, etc.) rather than Class prizes.

Standard Operating Procedures for the Scholastic Floor TD

There are a number of recommended standard operating procedures unique to running scholastic tournaments and tournaments for novices. These SOPs have been arrived at (sometimes the hard way) through many years' experience directing scholastic tournaments.

The floor TD for a scholastic chess tournament or a tournament for novices is more often than not faced with a significant number of players who may not have a good grasp of how all the pieces move and capture not to mention the rules of the game. There are some key practices that can help the tournament run as smoothly as possible.

Pre-Tournament and Pre-Round Announcements

It's important for the floor TD to set the tone of the tournament with a few clear, succinct statements at the commencement of the tournament and at the beginning of each round.

- Help put players (and their parents and coaches) at ease by introducing yourself, welcoming them to the tournament, and thanking them for coming.
- Describe the format of the tournament including how many rounds will be played, the time control, and the fact that, unless a player receives a bye, each player will play in each round.
- Ask for a show of hands if this event is a player's first rated chess tournament. This will give you an idea of the level of experience in the room and how detailed you need to be explaining information such as player number, board number, results, standings, etc.
- Explain the following basic rules of tournament chess:
 - *Touch-move, touch-take* (If you touch your piece and it has a legal move, you are required to move it. If you touch your opponent's piece and it can be legally captured, you are required to capture it.)

- *If your opponent makes an illegal move, it's your responsibility to bring it to his or her attention. Capturing your opponent's King is an illegal move.* (Some directors prefer, when an illegal move is made, that the student who is making the claim raise his or her hand and let the director adjudicate the claim. What I find is that nine times out of ten after one player notices that an illegal move has been made, players can, on their own, reset the position before the illegal move was made and continue the game. The standard penalty of adding two minutes to the opponent's clock for making an illegal move is almost never applicable in these situations because a novice scholastic player is unlikely to be aware of that claim.)
- *White on the right, White on one, Queen on her color* (To avoid issues as games progress, it's an excellent idea to not only state these three rules—there is a white square on the right-hand corner of the board, the first rank is on White's side of the board and that the white Queen is on a light square and the black Queen is on a dark square—but to also visually scan the boards to assure that they are set up correctly.)
- *Please do not comment on games in progress* (This rule is not only for players, but for coaches, parents, and spectators as well. What I often say is that it is sometimes difficult to watch a game proceed with one of the Kings in check for many moves at a time or Knights moving in straight lines but that it is up to the players—not spectators or anyone else—to notice illegal moves.)
- *Please raise your hand if you have any questions or concerns* (Let's face it: chess has many complicated rules—rules that certified tournament directors can sometimes disagree on. We want all players to be comfortable enough to be able to raise their hands and ask the director a question. Sometimes, the question may be as simple as, "May I go to the restroom?")
- *Describe players' responsibility regarding the pairing sheet* (Please see the next heading The Pairing Sheet.)
- When the players are ready, instruct them to shake each other's hands, wish each other good game, and have the player with the black pieces start White's clock.

The Pairing Sheet

Before you begin your pre-tournament and pre-round announcements, you should already be in possession of the current round's pairing sheet either by printing it yourself, if you are serving as the pairing director, or by receiving it from the pairing director. The pairing sheet is a most critical document as it contains the names, colors, board numbers,

pairings, and results for each round. Two tournament-director practices that are used at large scholastic events at the national level that would be worthwhile for us to adopt are:

- Verifying that the correct players are sitting at the correct boards and playing with the correct colors (The extra time that it takes to carry out this procedure is well worth the effort as it will help to eliminate players being seated at the incorrect board or playing with the incorrect color.)
- After a game has finished, players will remain seated at their board with their hands raised (In this way the director can approach the board and verify the names, colors, board number, and result of the game. Often, after a game has finished, players will leave the tournament room without marking the results of their games on the pairing sheet or they may mark an incorrect result.)
- At the conclusion of each round, results should be carefully entered into the pairing software program and double checked for accuracy. One mis-entered result will render subsequent round pairings and the US Chess crosstable of the event incorrect.

Posting Results

As the tournament progresses, players appreciate being able to see their current standings and the standings of other players in the tournament. After entering results and pairing the next round, I make a point of printing the current standings and displaying it near the current round's pairing sheet.

Compensation

The effective organization and direction of chess tournaments is time consuming and takes lots of work. While many tournament directors do this work voluntarily without expecting compensation, it should not be assumed that the director will work for free. Considering the many hours organizers and directors spend before, during, and after a tournament an appropriate compensation would be somewhere between \$2 and \$4 per player. Think about it: a fifty-player tournament involves many hours of preparation before the tournament begins (fielding e-mails, text messages, and phone calls from players, coaches, and parents, pre-registering players, and verifying their US Chess ID numbers and ratings). On the day of the tournament, the director is often the first person on site in the morning and last person to leave in the evening. After the tournament, the director's job is not yet done as results need to be entered, validated, and paid for (US Chess charges directors 0.25 cents per rated game) in the US Chess TD/Affiliate Support Area. Appropriate compensation of tournament directors, equitable to scholastic sports referees for example, will promote a higher quality service to the chess community.

Resources

Over the years, the author has returned to these helpful resources:

- Information for Tournament Directors page at uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/content/blogcategory/342/668/>
- The Forums page at uschess.org: <http://www.uschess.org/forums/>
- The SwissSys Software page: <http://www.swissys.com/index.html>

US Chess TD/Affiliate Support Area

US Chess maintains the TD/Affiliate Support Area at:

https://secure2.uschess.org/TD_Affil/TD_login.php

The TD/Affiliate Support Area is an online resource that allows tournament directors and affiliates to perform many tasks including:

- Purchasing memberships
- Submitting tournament ratings reports
- Member name corrections
- Searching for certified tournament directors
- Creating board numbers
- And many other functions

Club TD Application

So, are you ready to become a US Chess Certified Club Tournament Director? I hope so! Here's the application you will fill out and submit via e-mail to tdcert-group@uschess.org:

<http://www.uschess.org/docs/forms/Club%20TD%20Application.pdf>

The application is easy and requires only that the applicant be a member of US Chess in good standing, have access to a copy of the current edition of *The Official Rules of Chess*, and agree to conform to the rules and their spirit.

I look forward to working with you for the benefit of scholastic chess in Maine!

