



2.09 Organising Leagues and Competitions

Sports competitions can take many forms: they can be county leagues, tournaments or friendly matches. Whatever the sport, or level of skill, people tend to be naturally competitive. The best sporting competitions are safe, fun and suitable for the participants.

These guidelines are based on the experience of sporting organisations all over the country and will help you to structure competitive opportunities within your organisation.

What type of competition?

Before you start organising consider the various forms of competition and decide which one best suits your circumstances.

The kind of competition will depend on:

- + number of players
- + level of skill
- + if it is restricted to organisation members (a closed competition) or open so others can compete (an open competition)
- + if the participants are adults or children
- + if the competitors have special needs or considerations such as disabilities.

Knowing what you want from the competition is vital to making it successful and enjoyable. Defining your objectives will help you decide the best type of competition to organise and run.

Types of competition

Leagues

Each team gains a set number of points per game (usually 2 or 3 for a win, 1 for a draw, 0 for a defeat). A traditional league has a home and away match for each team involved.

When producing fixture lists, try to plan home and away matches some time apart to maintain interest and avoid matches in holiday periods. Try to avoid ground congestion by ensuring that A and B teams are not playing at home on the same day. Always double check fixture lists before issuing them to ensure that they are correct.

To make sure that your league tables work well, there are various checks to consider.

If your league table works well the following should be true:

- + total number of matches won = total number of matches lost
- + total of all matches = even number
- + total of all matches drawn = even number
- + total of all matches played = total of all won, drawn and lost
- + matches played by a team = matches won, drawn and lost
- + total goals/sets for = total goals/sets against.

After normal league fixtures have finished, play-offs can help maintain interest until the very end of the season. They can be used to determine promotion and relegation and can provide some very competitive matches.

Play-offs can be:

- + Based on single games in which the team that finished highest gets home advantage.
- + On a two leg aggregate score basis. The higher placed team in the league is at home in the second leg.
- + On a 'best of three' basis, which starts with a match on the home ground of the lower-placed team, played to a conclusion. The second match takes place at the other team's home venue, as does the third deciding fixture, if both teams have won a match. Aggregate scores are disregarded. This has the advantage that every team has at least one home fixture and every match is competitive.

Knockout competitions

Knockout competitions are ideal when a large number of teams or competitors are involved. In a completely open competition team names are literally put into a hat. Alternatively, the best teams can be given byes or seeded. It is only possible to have a competitor final if the number of entries is divisible by two. If there is a shortage you will need to make up the number with byes. If there are seeds give them byes in the early stages. This will save energy for later matches and prevent weaker teams being forced to face the best opposition too early. To add interest you can give a 'wild card' to a tournament organiser so they can invite a player or team that has not qualified by the normal route.

Tournaments and rallies

Rallies and tournaments often take place over a short period, frequently a single day or weekend, and involve a relatively large number of players or teams. Tournaments can be organised on a knockout basis, but if you want everybody to have more than one match then you can organise a consolation tournament for teams and players who are knocked out in the first round. Try to arrange for neutral officials to be present, as well as officials from the competing teams or clubs. This helps in the event of a shortage of players.

Seeding is a way of keeping better players and teams apart. Place your seeds at regular intervals, for example if four players have been seeded, they would each be placed in one quarter of the draw and could then be expected to reach the semi-finals. Base your seeding on previous results.

Handicap competitions

Handicap events can provide interesting and unexpected competition. Examples of successful handicaps are in golf, where the stronger player gives the weaker a number of shots; tennis, where the stronger player concedes a number of points per game; and horse racing, where the stronger horses carry more weight. Remember, the aim is not for the strongest player to win but the one who can, on the day, exceed expectations. When organising handicap competitions try to make the teams or partnerships equal, rather than have specific handicaps for each individual match. This makes the competition easier for people to follow and more realistic for the players.

Ladders

Ladders are simple: players/teams just go up or down on a chart depending on the results of their games with higher ranked players/teams. The system has drawbacks: some players retain their position by not playing matches, and it takes a long time to rise up a ladder.

Managing your competitions

If you are organising a tournament or sports event for other people you may want to consider the points outlined in the table below.

Administrative tasks

- + Who will check that entry fees have been paid?
- + Who will manage the event, set out the competition rules, organise venues and book facilities?
- + Who will keep track of the match results; is a secretary required?
- + Are plans in place to manage the match officials and to make fee payments or any other expenses?
- + Are prizes available?

Event and hospitality management

- + Who will coordinate the event; notify players of team selection, replacements and start times?
- + Who will take decisions if the unexpected or unwelcome occurs? Consider rulings about what to do if teams fail to turn up, if ineligible players appear on the field or the referees don't appear.
- + Who will present prizes and thank the organisers and event sponsors?
- + Have refreshments and hospitality been arranged for players and officials?
- + Are plans in place to welcome and manage the media if they are attending the event?

Health and safety

- + Has the equipment been checked for safety?
- + Have the playing facilities been checked to ensure they meet the necessary technical standards and are they safe and free from obstructions?
- + Is first aid available on the day?

Facilities and equipment

- + Have all the venues been booked in advance?
- + Are plans in place to ensure that equipment will be provided at the right place at the right time?
- + Has suitable accommodation been identified for players or visitors?

Further help

Your national governing body, or local authority sports development officer, will be able to help you with planning competitions and organising teams, and can put you in contact with league and fixtures secretaries.



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