

Section 3.06 CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS

Why and What?

Most organized tennis clubs offer their members the opportunity to compete annually in a tournament to determine the club's champions.

This typically involves competitions in Women's and Men's Singles, Doubles and Mixed Doubles. It also usually includes a Junior Championships for players who are eligible for Under 18 and Under 14 competition.

Some large clubs may also offer special events for players who are now in the Senior categories (Over 35 and older) as well as a variety of levels of play for the adult members (Open, A, B, C).

As with any type of club program, one of the primary objectives of the club tournament is to offer the members a competitive opportunity and a chance to meet other members of a similar playing calibre. Thus, it is well worthwhile for a club to stage a tournament and, if the size of the membership warrants it, offer as many different events as possible.

Although there are a number of different programs and events which a club could offer on an ongoing basis, this entry concentrates on the more typical "Club Championship".

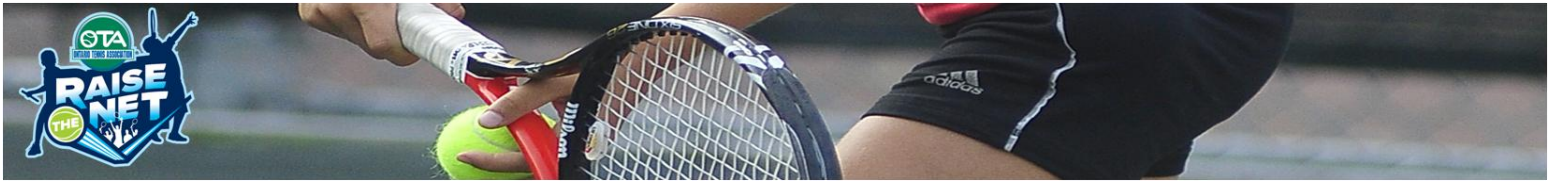
As noted above, the number of different events and playing classes you offer will be determined by the size and interest of your club's membership. However, our experience is that if you have something for everyone, and publicize the events well, you will have a strongly supported event. Given a situation that there is low participation in a particular event, players may then be given an option to be combined with another event.

Another important point to remember is that the club is there for all the members, not just the best players! Therefore, by offering something for everyone, you are likely going to minimize the complaints from your recreational players that "tournaments and leagues, which we don't play in, take up all of the courts".

Other ways of getting members involved can be to run a consolation event or even a double elimination draw in order to give players at least three matches or even to have a draw for partners in doubles with the top players being set aside from the rest to ensure that the "best" players do not team up together and thereby give all players a chance of doing well.

Publicity

The tournament can be publicized in a variety of ways. Traditionally, posters at the courts and notices in the club mailed or e-mailed newsletter or an activity calendar have proven to be effective.



Posters should include information on the events being offered, the dates for each event, the entry process and deadline, as well as other important information such as entry fees (if any) and the name and telephone number of the person organizing the tournament so that people know who to contact with questions.

Direct promotion and recruitment at other club events, such as social round robins, will also help raise interest. At times, a little arm twisting is all that is needed to get someone to enter.

However, running a good event one year is probably the best way to promote the next year's club tournament. If the members have enjoyed the event in the past, they will promote it to other members and actively seek out information on the dates for the current year's club tournament.

The entry process could be as simple as a sign up sheet if no entry fee is being charged. However, if there is a nominal entry fee, it is suggested that an entry form be used which must be completed and submitted, with the entry fee, by the designated deadline.

Draws and Seedings

Once entries are closed, it is important to prepare the draws and post them as quickly as possible.

The first step of preparing the draws is to establish who your seeded players will be. Seeding players can be one of the most difficult tasks of the club tournament as there is often no objective basis for establishing seeds. Invariably, people feel they are not properly seeded in the event. For this reason, we have suggested that ladder standings could be used to establish club tournament seeding. In the event the club does not operate ladders, a seeding committee should be established so seeding is done with the input of a number of knowledgeable club members. Consider having your club pro sit on this committee.

When establishing your seeds, remember you are allowed to seed up to one person, or team, for every four entries, up to a maximum of 16 seeds. Thus, if you were to have a 32 draw for a men's singles event, you could seed up to 8 players.

In general, it is suggested you seed as many people as the rules allow, providing you have a rationale for the seeding. There are two reasons for this. To begin with, assuming you can develop a sound rationale for seeding the maximum allowed number, you are not being fair to these players if you do not seed them. You run the risk of having one of these players being drawn against another seed in the first round. In this case, neither the seeded player nor the player who should potentially have been seeded, is likely to be very pleased. Small problems like this lead to a bad feeling about the event and a poor participation level the next year.

The second reason for seeding the maximum number allowed is that when running any form of competition, you have a responsibility to ensure that the rules are adhered to and applied consistently. You can never be wrong by following the proper rules of competition. In the case



where one of the competitors lodges some form of complaint about the event, you know you will be able to justify your actions.

The same principles apply to preparing the actual draw. There have been many changes over the past twenty years with respect to the placing of seeded players in a draw and the process for making a draw. We would suggest anyone who is organizing a competition consult the "Rules of the Court", the official rule book of tennis, for the specific details on the process of placing seeds and making draws. Again, you cannot be wrong if it has been done by the book.

If your club does not have a copy of the "Rules of the Court", it can be purchased by contacting the OTA office. Every club should have one copy, if only to answer questions from members or settle the occasional dispute in a league or tournament match.

Running the Event

Clubs may or may not charge an entry fee to enter the club tournament. When one is charged, it is typically nominal and usually only to cover the cost of prizes and trophies for the event.

Therefore, it is common for club tournaments to require that players provide their own balls. The common system is for both players to bring a can of new balls to the match. One can is used for the match. At the end of the match, the new can is given to the winner to use in the next round and the opponent keeps the used can.

Another common practice for club tournaments is to post the draw sheets and with them a deadline by which each round of the tournament has to be finished. It is then the responsibility of the players to contact their opponents and arrange a suitable time to play the match.

While this system looks good on paper, experience has shown that it is a rare club tournament where it has actually worked well. Invariably, the players have problems finding a mutually acceptable time to play and the event drags on well beyond the originally scheduled deadline. All it takes is one match to be held up to cause the entire draw to grind to a halt.

Recently, we have encountered more and more clubs who are adopting a more formal process for running their club tournament. At these clubs, matches are prescheduled by the organizers and players are informed of their scheduled match times. Depending on the size of the draw and the tightness of the schedule, the organizers may be able to allow some flexibility in the initial scheduling. However, once the match time has been determined, players either arrive on time or are defaulted.

This may seem drastic but it is far fairer to the majority of the competitors than allowing one or two people to hold up an entire tournament. It also allows for the entire event to be completed in a reasonable amount of time and can lead to the tournament becoming an "event" at the club which attracts other members as spectators. The fact that the tournament does not drag on forever and it has become an event for spectators will be appreciated by the members who are



playing in the tournament as well as those who never enter the event.

We urge every club who runs a club tournament to try this approach once. Most clubs who have tried the more formal process agree that it is a great improvement over the "arrange your own match" system.

For clubs which do use this formal system, we would suggest each different type of event be staged separately. By this, we mean that Mens' and Ladies' Singles (all classes) not be staged at the same time as Mens' or Ladies' Doubles (all classes). Likewise, Mixed Doubles (all classes) should also be staged at a separate time. Anyone who has ever tried to schedule a tournament where all events are being played at the same time and players are entered in two or three different events will understand the problems and complexities that arise. For those of you who have never had this experience, we suggest you accept our advice and avoid it.

As players are usually restricted from entering an event in more than one class (for example, players who are playing in A are usually not allowed to also play B or Over 35), there should not be a problem running all of your singles events simultaneously.

In general, one weekend dedicated to each of singles, doubles and mixed doubles seems to work for clubs who use this format. If your draws are very large, or you have only a few courts, you might also need some of the weekday evenings prior to the weekend, as well. On the other hand, if you have a smaller draw size or a greater number of available courts and time permits, you may choose to run a consolation event for first round losers. This will ensure everyone at least two matches in the tournament.

In determining how much time you will need, we suggest you budget 1.5 hours per match and never schedule someone to play in two consecutive time slots.

Finals Day

There are clubs which have a rich tradition of making club championship finals day a special social event, which many members attend. At these events, members who are not playing can take on the role of officials or just be spectators. It can be a social event with refreshments or the club can even hold a special banquet and dance to close out the day. When reaching the finals of a club championship is something special, it encourages members to participate in the events.

As a final note, we wanted to remind all member clubs that the OTA staff are available at the office during business hours to answer any questions you might have about running a tournament. Please feel free to contact the OTA office anytime.