Tournament management

Designing your tournament

This document takes you through the decisions you need to make in designing your tournament. You will need to advise players of these decisions in due course – see the companion document Keeping Players Informed.

Other companion documents discuss your options for calculating the number of places your tournament can offer, and determining your placegetters.

How many sections?

One overall winner

If your tournament committee wants there to be a single winner of your competition (for example a club handicap championship), you need to divide the players into blocks, not sections or divisions. The range of allowed handicaps should be the same for each block, and the range should be large enough to include all competitors. All players in each block must have at least a chance of playing a game against any one of the other players in the event.

Different handicap sections/ divisions

Often tournaments consist of more than one event or section[1]. For example, a club might run two events concurrently (say over the same weekend), with one event for one handicap range, and the other event for a different, non-overlapping, handicap range. Each section may consist of one or more blocks. The handicap range for eligibility to be in any block of the section should be the same. Each section or event is then a separate competition with its own winner. It does not make sense for there to be a single winner covering more than one section - players in different sections will not have played each other during the tournament.

Generally the tournament notice gives an indication of the intended handicap range for each section, with a proviso that it may be varied when entries are known. This means you can adjust the handicap ranges for your sections to obtain a suitable number of players and rounds of play. You may also wish to set a target number of participants to suit the time and courts you have available.

Designing play within a section / division

Options you may consider are:

1. round robin within a single block
2. round robin in multiple blocks leading to a play-off or knock-out
3. a straight knock-out

Single and multi-block round-robin events and knock-out events are considered to be fair because:

- If all competitors have equal ability, they all have the same chance of winning.
- If competitors have different abilities, the best player has the best chance of winning.

In the round robin format, all rounds in the block stage must be of the same type. That means that if a round in one block consists of single games, then all rounds in all blocks must consist of

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[1] In croquet, the words "section" and "event" are often used synonymously, whereas "section" and "block" have completely different meanings. "Division" is also used to refer to a handicap grouping. Divisions were once formally defined, but the term is now used more flexibly (eg Division 4 in AC may be used to refer to handicaps 18-20 or 16-20).

single games. If a round in one block consists of best-of-three matches, then all matches in all rounds in all blocks must be best-of-three matches. Best-of-three matches are arguably better in terms of ensuring that the best player wins, but for club tournaments single games are generally preferred as they are more manageable.

1. Single block round robin format

This format is the fairest because every player in the whole event plays every other player, and the chances that the best player will win the event is greater than for any other format. Choose this format if you can.

In deciding if this format is feasible, you need to take account of your participant numbers and your time and court constraints.

The single block round robin requires a lot of resources and possibly also sitting out time. For example, a 12-competitor event requires 11 rounds of play with 6 matches per round – a total of 66 matches. If your club has two courts, only four matches can be played per round (assuming double-banking), so for every two rounds (12 matches) you would need three sessions of play – a total of 17 sessions altogether. For a GC event, you would probably be able to run 7 sessions per day. Your event would take three days to complete, with four players sitting out each session.

2. Multiple block events followed by play-off or knock-out

This format has the best balance of fairness and feasibility, with a good balance between fairness and resources required. This is the format used in most croquet tournaments in Australia: competitors are divided into one or more blocks, with each block using the round-robin format.

Taking our previous example with 12 competitors, less playing time is required if they are divided into two blocks. Each block of 6 would require 5 rounds of play with 3 matches per round – a total of 30 matches. If you are limited to two courts, four players would still need to sit out each session, but it would be feasible to complete both block round robins in only 8 sessions of play. One more round would be needed for the play-off between block winners (or two more rounds for a play-off involving block winners and runners-up). In a GC competition, this could easily be achieved in a single weekend.

The companion document "Deciding Placegetters" provides guidance on selecting the players to participate in a play-off or knock-out after a multiple block event.

3. Straight knock-out format

This is not recommended for club tournaments. It has the advantage of requiring the least resources (amount of time and number of courts), but it is not as fair as the single and multi-block round-robin formats, because the best player does not have as good a chance of winning. It also has the disadvantage that half the players will be knocked out after one round, which provides less opportunity for the players.

In elite events, players who do not reach the knock-out or who are defeated in the knock-out phase before the final are usually offered more chances to play in a Plate competition (for those who don't reach the knock-out) and X Y Z play-offs which determine placings from 3 to 16.

This website focuses on arrangements for club tournaments. If you are dealing with an elite event, please check the guidance in the WCF and ACA Tournament Regulations.