

# SO YOU WANT TO RUN A CHESS TOURNAMENT?

*by Jonathan Berry. Revised December, 2012*

## **Why?**

Whatever your motivation, the fact is that if everyone waited for somebody else, there would be zero chess tournaments in Canada every year instead of about 500. You may have gained so much pleasure from chess that you want to share it with others. You may be attracted by the novelty. You may be a young person eager to gain useful experience in the real world. Or you may run a tournament because nobody else will.

This is a short course on how to organize and direct a tournament. You will learn more as you do more. Bon Voyage!

## **PLAN AHEAD**

First, decide what kind of event you want. High School, Junior, Women's, Senior, Team, Open, or one of your own invention. Each requires a slightly different approach. Here we deal with the Open Swiss, the most popular kind of tournament.

You'll need a place to play, a site. For a modest venture - this is, after all, your first tournament - you will likely be able to get a free site if you ask around. Talk to libraries, community centres, student associations, schools. Even a hotel might give you a small room if you expect players from out of town.

The site should be well-lit, quiet, well-ventilated, and have about 20 square feet of floor space per player. It must be equipped with tables and chairs. Individual tables for each game are best. Next best is 8-foot banquet tables with 3 games per table.

Once you have a site, set the dates for the event at least three months in advance. The good things in life come slowly. Given time, a chess tournament will ripen.

Schedule. You must decide how long the tournament is to be. Your whole tournament might consist of three rounds on one Saturday, a Tornado. More popular is to have a four- or five-round event over a weekend. Chess players are gluttons for punishment. Back in olden times we used to have six rounds in two days. That was before the days of the SPCC.

Budget. Income must equal expenses. Income includes entry fees and perhaps profits from sales. Expenses include rent, rating fee, stamps, supplies and pay. A few years ago one of the provincial associations had to add a clause to their constitution that TDs must be paid. It wasn't to fight exploitation - TDs were refusing to take pay. How much depends on local custom, but it shouldn't be less than \$1 per player.

Announcement. People must know about your tournament if they are to attend. You need to make up an announcement, like the one for our fictitious Haileybury Open Tournament. The numbers in the announcement correspond to the comments below:

Your tournament must have a name. If somebody else has used the one you like, try something exotic like "Bobby Fischer Memorial". Be sure that the word CHESS is prominent in the announcement.

Dates

Site

The Swiss system of pairings is the most popular. Simpler is the Round Robin, but if more than six players want to compete for the championship, you will not be able to use it for a one weekend event. If you're expecting more than 20 players, consider dividing the event into two or more sections. Not every player will then have a chance at the championship, but all will get more equal competition.

Schedule

Time Control: The games must be played fast enough so that you can start the next round on time. All games from the previous round must be finished before the next round starts.

Entry fee: If players are used to paying \$5 to play, they will think \$17 is too much. If they're used to \$30, they'll think your \$17 isn't worthwhile. \$17 is not a lot to pay for a fun weekend. \$17 might be good for 5 hours at a pinball arcade or at a movie. Have you dined out recently? How about renting a tennis court for an hour? What's more, the players can win back most of the money in the form of prizes. To an experienced player, \$17 is not too much. However, a first-time player pays more - when you consider the CFC membership fee - for a pleasure he's not so sure about. Thus the reduction for him. The late fee of \$3 is not necessary if you're only expecting 12 players. But if you've ever had over 100 players register at the site and had your first round delayed for 30 minutes, you would be in favour of an even higher late fee!

CFC membership is another bargain that people might complain about if they're used to playing chess without it. An alternative is to have a Novice section for those who have never been CFC members, giving memberships as prizes.

Prizes. The top players usually prefer money to trophies. You can turn a chess clock into a trophy by buying an engraved plate at your local trophy shop. A chess clock is useful to the recipient, catches the eye, and makes sure that one more player in your next event has a clock. If he already has a clock, he can easily remove the plaque and sell his trophy to another player. A player who brings something home from your tournament is more likely to show up to the next one. The prize needn't be expensive.

For example, a certificate could be given down to "5th Unrated". Pre-printed tournament awards are available from the CFC.

Food and coffee. The nearer the better! Coffee is especially popular and could be a money maker.

Information. Some people will phone you to ask questions that are answered on the sheet, right in front of their eyes. Be patient.

Bring chess sets and clocks. But you should not discourage the potential entrant who does not own a chess clock.

## **ADVERTISING**

If you plan far enough in advance, you can get a free ad in the Coming Events section of Canadian Chess News, the CFC web publication. The deadline date is the 4th of the month for an issue to be mailed about the 4th of the following month. Events must be 100% CFC rated (with the exception of a novice section where at least 50% of the prizes are CFC memberships) for the ad to be run free. Rate sheet available for larger ads.

If you get your ad in CCN on time, the brunt of your advertising effort will be to bring out the local novice players. Type up the announcement. The word CHESS and drawings of chess pieces should be prominent. Add an introductory paragraph like:

Do you play Chess? Novice or expert, you're welcome to play in the 1978 Haileybury Open Chess Tournament. Anybody can win.

Get a hundred copies printed and post them in libraries, store windows, community centres.

Write to radio stations and newspapers. Send a news release:

### **HAILEYBURY OPEN CHESS TOURNEY**

The 1990 Haileybury Open Chess Tournament will be held Saturday and Sunday, February 4-5 at the Nikola Tesla Recreation Centre. Anybody can play, so dust off your brain and come on down. For information, phone Isaac Upon at 555-0909.

Append a copy of the tournament announcement. The news release should be double-spaced and must be short. The people at the radio station will be glad to help you publicize your tournament, but not to edit your announcement to the allotted time.

## **SUPPLIES**

You may need the following: pencils, marking pens, a computer with SwissSys installed (get your activation code from the CFC office), registration forms, pairing cards, scoresheets, posting sheets, result charts, tournament and membership report forms, and as many chess sets and clocks as you can scrounge.

## **REGISTRATION**

If there may be more than 20 entries at the site, you will need two people to take registration.

To speed it up, use Registration Forms. Each player should be given a form as he lines up to be registered. By the time he gets to you, you may only have to sign your name and take his money, although sometimes a player will want to discuss which section he should enter and how much money he should pay. At any rate, he will have written his e-mail and postal addresses, which alone will save you a lot of time. Note: some poor souls don't understand that their (e-)mail may not reach them if they don't provide an address. It doesn't hurt to remind them!

If a player does not have a membership, charge him another year's dues, except when the player has a recent receipt from another organizer. Just to make sure there's no misidentification, later note the players for whom there is no CFC#.

Most organizers do not accept cheques at the site.

## **TOURNAMENT REPORT FORM**

You can use either a Tournament Report Form or a Result Chart to post the scores after each round.

## **PAPERWORK**

While the players are happily (you hope!) engrossed in their games, you can fill in the Result Charts and prepare the Membership Report Forms. To fill out the Membership Report Form, go through your Registration Forms and transfer the pertinent information. By the time the last game is finished, you will only have to fill in one result and the paperwork can be dropped in the mail to the CFC. Don't delay!

Don't redraw the crosstable in finish order. You don't even need to copy the results to the Tournament Report Form - a photocopy of the Result Charts is fine. The only excuse for late reporting is that you couldn't find a copying machine. And don't expect us to believe that!

Mail Membership Report Forms, Crosstables and your Tournament Report, together with a cheque for the appropriate amount (memberships collected plus rating fees), to the CFC Office.