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MANAGING INDIVIDUAL EVENTS TOURNAMENTS

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When one stops to think about it, forensics tournaments are truly remarkable events. Each year, across the country, thousands of speeches are delivered, evaluated, tabulated, and awarded. Hundreds of tournaments and thousands of critics spend dozens of weekends endeavoring to provide their students with an education quite unlike any that can be found on a university campus.

Individual events competition was the focus of the first college leagues. These leagues featured oratory competition and began as early as 1875 as the Northwestern Inter-state Collegiate Association.[1] Since that time, individual events tournaments and competition have increased dramatically in number. Klopf noted, for example, that by the middle 1960s, individual events tournaments accounted for approximately 25 percent of the total tournaments managed in the United States with debate tournaments being the remaining 75 percent.[2] Yet, by the early 1990s, Hunt and Inch reported that more than half of the top programs in the nation had turned their attention almost exclusively to individual events tournaments. In fact, for the top 50 programs, individual events competition was the single fastest growing segment of forensic participation.[3] Individual events tournaments are growing quickly, more and more are beginning to be run separately from debate, and they represent a tremendous number of competitors and programs.

With the growth of individual events tournaments in recent years, there is a need to explore the philosophies and assumptions of individual events tournament management. The intention of this paper is to offer a brief description and analysis of how individual events tournaments can be designed and managed. Because every tournament is different and because the particular situation of a given tournament is unique to the campus, available critics, available rooms, and program philosophy, it is impossible to specific a set of "rules" that a tournament director should use. Instead, tournament design and management are guided by principles and the hope of this author is to open a discussion about the basic decisions that every tournament director will make. To help illustrate these principles, I am using our 1993 high school invitational forensics tournament. While it is different from other tournaments in many respects, it shares many of the important principles of tournament design and operation.

I should begin, however, with a brief explanation of my biases and assumptions. First, I believe that individual events are an integral part of a student's forensic education. I am very concerned with the trend to separate programs and tournaments into debate and individual events. I recognize that specialization is necessary for competitive success and that the demands of combination tournaments make scheduling very difficult, but I am concerned about the degree of division that exists in our activity. Second, I am guided by a philosophy that places the educational value of forensics ahead of competitive accolades. While I understand the right of some to suggest that forensics is no more than a highly sophisticated game, it would bother me to believe that a significant portion of my career and my university's resources were spent teaching students to play a "game" like Monopoly. Third, I believe that computers make the process of managing a tournament much faster, easier, and more accurate. Although computers can be intimidating to many, they have changed tournament management for the better. Tournaments can be setup and double checked much more quickly, results can be determined instantaneously. There is much less room for error or manipulation. In short, there is almost no reason why an individual events tournament—or debate tournament—should be run manually any longer.

To aid in computer management, I wrote a software package several years ago to make the process more streamlined.[4] This package is called the Tournament Manager and has been used to run hundreds of tournaments. However, much of what any tournament software can do can also be done with the skillful use of database or spreadsheet software. Therefore, this paper will develop ideas for how computers can be used generally with some references to specialized software application.

I. Configuring the Tournament

Ultimately a tournament is successful because of the way it is configured. Tournament configuration is the basic design of the tournament. It needs to be adapted to the campus, forensics community, available critics, and expected entries. Often tournament directors make unrealistic assumptions about room or critic availability or travel time between rounds. The tournament configuration is vital if the tournament is to be a success.

A. Events

Probably the first decision a tournament manager will make–aside from the dates of the tournament–is the events that will be offered. This decision involves many competing goals, but two primary considerations are the educational value of the events and the needs of the forensics community. In the 1960s this was not much of a decision because, as Kelly noted, there were only two events offered at the average tournament.[5] Since then, however, the number of events offered has exploded to the point that 11 or more individual events offerings are fairly common. While Kelly is concerned that too many of the events are redundant, they can also be seen as refinements that tap into different skills and critical abilities. Which events a director decides to offer very much depend on how the tournament director perceives of the educational and competitive value of the events.

From an educational point of view, different events help develop different skills and abilities. Limited preparation events such as impromptu or extemporaneous develop a student's ability to think and organize ideas and information quickly. These events require that the student be conversant in a number of areas and that the student is well read. Platform speeches such as persuasion or informative, allow the student to develop deeper lines of analysis and argument. These speeches, because they are prepared months in advance of competition, help the student to polish the style and delivery of the speech. Unlike the limited preparation events, these events require students to pursue a single topic in great depth as opposed to many different topics more superficially. Interpretation events provide students with yet another competitive option that stresses different types of skills and abilities. Events such as dramatic interpretation or programmed oral interpretation give students the chance to explore the work of one or more authors, develop a program from their reading, and present a theme and interpretation to their work. While some might criticize interpretation as being nothing more than acting, the interpretive events through the use of introduction, theme, and characterization can provide the student with a rhetorical and critical competitive opportunity.

Besides the educational role played by event selection, the needs of the forensic community should also be considered. The forensic community is comprised of the group of schools for whom the tournament is designed—the programs expected to enter the tournament. The regional culture of the community is an important consideration when deciding which events to offer. If the majority of attending programs are motivated toward success at the National Forensic Association Individual Events tournament, then offering those events makes sense. If none of the attending programs have interest outside of the region, then offering more experimental or "fun" events might make more sense. Many tournaments tend to parallel national tournament models such as the American Forensic Association National Individual Events Tournament, NFA Individual Events Tournament, or *Pi Kappa Delta* National Tournament. Other tournament directors decide to offer different experimental events such as discussion, critical interpretation, or argument analysis. These factors depend on what the community is interested in and will support. The typical range of events at tournaments in our region, for instance, are the American Forensic Association National Individual Events

Tournament list: Impromptu, Extemporaneous, Persuasion, After Dinner Speaking, Informative, After Dinner Speaking, Communication Analysis, Prose, Poetry, Programmed Oral Interpretation, Dramatic Interpretation, and Dramatic Duo.

Of course the director has latitude over what combination of events to offer. More events provide students with more opportunities to compete, but more events can also lead to more rooms and judges being needed. More events can also separate the students into sub-groups such as "interpers" and "non-interpers" if the tournament's distribution of events allows specialization into only one of the areas. Fewer events can force students to cross-enter, but fewer events provide less chances for students to participate in different events. It can be a difficult choice.

Our high school tournament, for example, serves as a state qualification tournament in individual events. Therefore, it is necessary to offer all of the events that are offered at state. In 1993 these events were: Extemporaneous, Expository, Dramatic Interpretation, Dual Interpretation, Oratory, Humorous Interpretation, Interpretative Reading, and Impromptu. I hope and believe that all of these events are educational, but with our tournament, the needs of the forensic community were paramount because of the role played by the tournament as part of a larger group of schools and tournaments.

B. Event Rules

The second element of design is a decision about event rules. The national tournaments have done much to standardize individual events offerings and rules for good or bad. Pratt, for instance, noted that the AFA and NIET have standardized rules, conflict patterns, and events such that most offerings at most tournaments reflect the national influence.[6] While this has done much to generate a more uniform understanding of events and rules, it has also had the effect of making deviation from the rules more difficult because contestants or critics will attempt to apply national standards to an event that may have been modified. Such standardization may also create a presumption against experimentation because the attending programs will have developed expectations for what will be offered.

The tournament director needs to decide if the national rules are appropriate or should be modified. For instance, the Lewis & Clark tournament for years has not used the standard seven minute extemporaneous speeches but instead limits the speeches to six minutes followed by a one minute question from the critic. In our own tournament, we had the students submit for criticism their communication analysis manuscript. After receiving written comments, they presented their speeches orally in two subsequent rounds. If, however, the director decides against using the standard regional or national rules, the invitation should make the changes exceptionally clear or confusion will result.

Our invitation, for example, read:

a) Extemporaneous

Thirty minutes before speaking, three topics will be posted. The contestant will select one and prepare a speech. Speakers are limited to the use of one 4x6 note card. Time signals must

be given by the judge. The topic area is current events since November 1, 1991. Time limit: 7 minutes.

b) Expository

A speech which describes, clarifies, or explains an object, process, idea or concept. Visual aids may be used. The speech must be the original work of the competitor with no more than 150 words of quoted material. The speech should be delivered extemporaneously with or without the use of notes. Time limit: 8 minutes.

c) Dramatic Interpretation

A memorized serious presentation. The program may be one or more selections from published prose, poetry, drama, radio, television, or recording. Excessive acting should be avoided and will be penalized. Time limit: 8 minutes.

d) Dual Interpretation

A program of one or more selections of published prose, poetry, or drama. The presentation must be from a script. Excessive acting is to be penalized. The two contestants should have script, character and audience interaction. Time limit: 8 minutes.

e) Oratory

All speeches must be the original work of the student and shall not have been used in competition prior to September 1, 1991. A maximum of 150 quoted words is permitted. Delivery must be from memory. A copy of the speech must be available. Time limit: 8 minutes.

f) Humorous Interpretation

A memorized program that must be of a humorous nature. The program may be one or more selections from published prose, poetry, drama, radio, television, or recording. Acting should be kept to a minimum. Time limit: 8 minutes.

g) Interpretive Reading

The format will be a thematically integrated program of two or more selections in which both published prose and poetry are required as presentation requirement; each selection from a different author with the speaker using an introduction and transition(s) in which the authors, titles, and theme will be stated. A manuscript is required. Time limit: 8 minutes.

h) Impromptu

> The speaker will wait outside the room until it is her/his turn to speak and will remain in the room when finished. Contestants may not use or prepare any notes during preparation or speaking time. Contestants have six minutes to choose one of three topics, organize thoughts, and speak on the chosen topic. The topic the speaker chooses must be stated as part of the introduction. Time Limit: Preparation time and speaking time shall be a total of 6 minutes.

The invitation should be as explicit as is reasonably possible and should minimally include the maximum allowable time for the speech.

C. Divisions

The third element of design is divisions. Should the events be broken into experience-based divisions? Divisions are useful from an educational standpoint because beginning students placed in competition against very experienced or national-caliber students could easily become demoralized or quit after successive embarrassing defeats. Allowing beginning students to participate in a novice division provides a "safe" place to learn how to present different types of speeches. Some tournaments divide the competition even further to allow intermediate students to participate in a Junior division. Yet, other tournament directors prefer an open division tournament so that young speakers have the chance to see top speakers.

Offering several divisions gives more students a chance for competitive success in an environment that will not intimidate beginners. However, if a pool of student entries is over divisioned, then so few students may be participating in a given division that there is little chance to see others. For example, if there are eighteen students in Dramatic Interpretation and these are divided into Open, Junior, and Novice, conceivably each division may have only six students and some divisions may have even fewer than that. While a round of six people is appropriate, if these six people compete against each other for three rounds, they will not have had the opportunity to see others compete, hear a diversity of speeches, and the value of winning an award is diminished because half of the entries will receive a first, second, or third.

Providing too many divisions can also over-burden the tournament. It is possible for a tournament to offer ten or twelve events with three divisions each and end up with thirty different events with very few entries in each. Not only would this fail to provide much diversity in competition but it may penalize students hoping to use success at the tournament toward an at-large qualification at a national tournament which may require six or more entries in a division. Again, the decision to divide and how much to divide depends on what the educational goals of the director are balanced with the competitive and educational needs of the forensics community.

As a rule of thumb, however, fewer events and divisions mean more efficient utilization of rooms and judges. More events, on the other hand, serves to distribute more awards and provide younger speakers with opportunities for success. In any case, the tournament invitation should define what the divisions are and how they are determined. Otherwise, unscrupulous entrants may move senior speakers to lower divisions in the hope of winning more awards.

Our invitation read as follows:

All individual events are offered in Junior and Senior divisions. Junior division is for contestants who are freshmen, sophomores, or in their first year of competition. Senior division is open to anyone, but must include juniors or seniors in other than their first year of competition.

Different organizations have different rules regarding divisions and if the tournament director is attempting to emulate a national model, the national definition for divisions should be followed. Our invitation used the state high school definition.

D. Conflict Patterns, Double Entries, and Rounds

The fourth element of design concerns conflict patterns, double entries, and number of rounds. These are all logistical issues that affect how a tournament is managed and how long it will run. They are also educational issues because they affect how many opportunities students have to present a speech and what variety of audience and competition they will have. Conflict patterns are the different patterns of events that students may elect to enter. For example, if all the events of a tournament were offered simultaneously, students would be able to enter very few events. If, instead, these events were divided in half and each half was offered at different times, then students would have more opportunities to compete in a variety of events. The division of events into flights that will occur at different times in a tournament schedule is called a conflict pattern.

Most national tournaments offer three conflict patterns. Although such a division presents students with a large range of possible events they could enter, adding conflict patterns adds time to the tournament. If the tournament is an "Individual Events Only" tournament, three conflict patterns could be managed in two days assuming that there are three rounds of competition for each pattern. However, if debate is added to the tournament, the schedule may need to cover three days. Most regional tournaments compromise and offer two patterns of events.

A related question concerning conflict patterns is "How many events should a single participant be allowed to enter?" This is an important concern for many reasons. From an educational point of view, the more speeches a student has prepared, the more the student learns about different speaking techniques and situations. Also, the more speeches a student enters, the more "bang-for-the-buck" the program gets. Therefore, if a tournament has three conflict patterns, a student who is allowed to double-enter could enter six different speeches. If the student could triple-enter, up to nine speeches could be entered and so on.

The side-effect of allowing students to enter multiple events is that the tournament grows much larger. Instead of having 100 students participating in 100 events, three conflict patterns and triple-entry in each pattern means that the tournament director has to have rooms and judges for up to 900 entries. Again, a director needs to balance the size of tournament against the facilities and critics available in the hope of designing a tournament that maximizes the facilities, resources, and educational opportunities.

Finally, the director should decide how many rounds of competition are appropriate. Is one round sufficient? Two? There is no clear answer to this question. Most tournaments provide students with three rounds of competition so that students have a chance to learn from mistakes and get exposure to as many other contestants and critics as possible. Some tournaments provide only two rounds of competition followed by a semi-final round that is open for everyone to watch and learn from, followed by a final round. Additionally, most tournaments offer a final round where between four and six of the best students compete for the top places in the tournament.

Our tournament used the following pattern:

Pattern A	**Pattern B**
Extemporaneous	Impromptu
Expository	Oratory
Dramatic Interpretation	Humorous Interpretation
Dual Interpretation	Interpretive Reading

In any case, the conflict patterns should be developed to allow students the maximum amount of participation possible. Therefore, because interpreters tend to enter multiple interpretation events, these events should not all be grouped in one of the patterns. If they are distributed among the patterns, then a student who double enters could enter all the interpretation events offered. Because impromptu speakers also tend to speak in extemporaneous speaking, the two events should be in different patterns. Orators tend to present informatives, therefore, the two events should not appear in the same pattern. As a rule of thumb, the limited preparation events should be evenly distributed among all the conflict patterns as should the platform and interpretive events.

Conflict patterns, double entries, and the number of rounds are all logistical issues that affect not only how the tournament is managed but the opportunity for students to compete in a diversity of events and rounds. The more a tournament allows a student to enter, the more chance for critique, practice, and exposure the student has. On the other side of the coin, double and triple entries mean that contestants do not often have the opportunity to listen to other speeches and the chance for oral critiques by the critic is almost lost. Ultimately, a director must decide how long the tournament can run and how much competition is appropriate for the contestants.

E. Ballots

Once the director has chosen the events and patterns for the tournament, ballots need to be developed. There are many ways to approach ballots. Minimally, there needs to be space for contestant code, contestant name, rank, rate, and comments. Some ballots are specific to the event and focus the comments to concerns specific to interpretation, prepared, or semi-prepared events. The director can decide how specific or general to make the ballots. However, the director does need to decide how many ranks and rates are to be given in each round.

Ranks are the rank-order list of contestants. In other words, the best speaker receives a "1," the next best speaker gets a "2" and so on. But how many ranks should be available? The problem arises that if the best speaker receives a "1" and the worst speaker in a six person panel receives a "6," the last speaker will have received the equivalent of a "death blow" because the "6" in most cases will prevent the contestant from making the elimination rounds. Additionally, a "1" to "number of speakers" ranking system gives an advantage to speakers in small panels because the worst speaker in a small panel could receive a high rank.

Another approach to ranking has been to rank speakers from 1 to 4 or 1 to 5. If speakers receive a 4 or 5, they may still have a chance to make the elimination rounds. The problem with this system, however, is that more speakers will be tied in ranks at the end of competition which will require the director to decide how to break the finalists from the preliminary contestants. Usually, ties are broken based on cumulative ratings.

As a rule, the rankings should go no higher than the expected smallest panel. Therefore, if the smallest likely panel is 4 then ballot ranks should be from 1 to 4. I prefer a ranking system of 1 to 5 because very few tournaments schedule rounds of 4 speakers and the 1 to 5 system reduces the number of ties.

Ratings are the critic's measure of quality. Unfortunately, different critics have very different views of quality and the same speech may receive a perfect quality rating in one round and an 80% rating in the next. Ratings are very subjective measures of performance. For the most part ratings are used only to break ties in ranks when the contestants are advanced to the elimination rounds.

Most individual events ballots have rating scales from 1 to 25 where 25 is perfect and 1 is the worst. Other ballots have ratings from 1 to 100. The smaller scale of 1 to 25 compresses critic differences and may yield a less random distribution of scores. However, I think the director of a tournament should use what is standard in the region. If the director decides otherwise for whatever reasons, the different rating scales should be made very clear to critics who may tend to revert to what they believe to be standard. The result is that the critic may award a 25 (they are used to this being the best score) on a ballot where 100 is the best score.

All of the preceding issues are technical issues concerning how a ballot will be tabulated by the tournament staff. But the director needs to consider additionally the role to be played by the ballot as an educational device. Ideally, beyond the critic awarding a contestant a rank and a rate, the ballot should provide the contestant with feedback and criticism sufficient to help the contestant improve the speech and understand why the speech was not awarded perfect marks. If tournaments had unlimited time and resources, a written and an oral critique would probably be the most beneficial for the student because an oral critique allows the student to interact with the critic to understand strengths and weaknesses in a presentation better. But, when tournament time constraints and double entries do not allow for oral critiques, the written ballot needs to be as complete as possible and address as many significant points as possible.

Traditionally, individual events ballots have had space only for ranks, rates, contestant code and name, judge name, and comments. The comment

space was typically the left over space on the bottom of the ballot with instructions to use the back as needed. The problem with such ballots is that the space is typically limited and unstructured space made for ambiguous or highly generalized criticism. Often ballots are printed on note cards or half-sheets of paper with almost no instruction provided for the critic beyond what the ranks and rates mean.

Whatever ballot design a director selects, two variables should be considered. First, more writing space is better than less for critic comments. Preston noted that "when given less space to write, critics will provide less feedback to the students, even when urged to write on the back of the ballots."[7] The second consideration is whether to provide criteria-referenced ballots. Criteria referencing means that dimensions for evaluation are printed on the ballot for the critic to use as part of the evaluation process. Such criteria may include: Was the topic clear? Did the speech follow a coherent organizational pattern? Was the support sufficient and strong?[8] Bartanen found that ballot criteria have the effect of encouraging more specific and direct comments by the critics. She said: "If more and varied relevant comments are an indicator of better critiques, then use of criteria referenced ballot forms has the potential to improve a significant proportion of tournament ballots."[9] While such ballots have the potential to improve to quality of tournament feedback, a tournament director needs to be careful to answer the question of "Whose criteria?" For instance, is the tournament director implying through the use of a certain set of criteria that there is a right and wrong way to interpret something or deliver an oratory? Does such standardization of evaluative forms mean that the student's opportunity for creativity and experimentation is lost? Using criteria as a guideline, however, as opposed to a rule seems a reasonable way to provide the students with structured and useful feedback.

E. Schedule

The tournament schedule depends on the events offered, the number of rooms and critics available in each round, and how many speeches will happen in each round. The success of a tournament depends on the workability of the schedule. If the schedule does not allow for sufficient time for the events, the tournament will not run well. If time were not a factor, then the role of the schedule would be less important, but time is a very important factor.

First, the tournament director needs to decide whether the tournament will offer debate in addition to individual events or individual events only. This decision will affect how long the tournament will run because the more rounds needed, the more time will be required. Combination tournaments give students and faculty alike the opportunity to explore a diversity of forensic events, but the tradeoff is time.

Second, the tournament director needs to decide how long the tournament will run. A two day tournament, obviously, places greater time constraints on the director than a three day tournament. However, the decision to hold a three day tournament means that students are out of class longer, forensic educators who work all week long will end up working all weekend as well, and programs will spend additional money housing and feeding their students. A three day tournament gives the tournament director a tremendous amount of freedom with the schedule and allows for amenities such as a student and