



Top 10 Mistakes in Organizing Tournaments

Overview

A tournament based on individual competitors is one of the hardest types of events to organize, especially when the separation of divisions is based on weight, age, skill level, and gender. You could be managing hundreds of competitors and brackets. There's a good reason why many competitors dub poorly run tournaments "Organized Chaos".

Those of you who have been in the business of organizing such tournaments know very well the pitfalls of running these events. Perhaps you've already worked out some solutions to patch things up and get by. Maybe you have the "handle-problems-as-they-come-up" way of thinking. This report will give you ideas on areas where you could improve. With better planning, you can prevent issues before you have to deal with them. Learning from the mistakes of others is the least costly way to improve your own business. If you're just starting out, or you're thinking about going into the business of organizing tournaments, you have yet to fully understand the issues at hand. This report will be especially helpful to you.

Without further adieu, here are the top 10 mistakes in organizing of tournaments for individual competitors. They're listed here in no particular order, and explained in details with recommendations in the subsequent sections of this report:

1. Not using the Internet for registration and communication with competitors.
2. Not building relationships with the instructors and coaches of the competitors.
3. Not closing registration in time to generate brackets before the scheduled start.
4. Not preparing for bracket changes on the day of the event.
5. Not properly training referees and scorekeepers.
6. Not having a good microphone system and master of ceremonies (MC).
7. Not having a paper trail and backup plan for registrations and brackets.
8. Not posting the initial draws for public viewing at the event.
9. Not having the rules and policies clearly posted and distributed from the start.
10. Having too many divisions.

Detailed Review of Mistakes

Not Using the Internet for registration and communication with competitors

There is no more efficient way to collect registrations and communicate with your competitors than through the use of the Internet. When you have hundreds of potential competitors, it is imperative that you start using the Internet to collect registrations and disseminate information. If you don't use the Internet, not only do you increase the likelihood of misinformation being passed between you and your competitors, but you also increase your workload in processing registrations.

Most organizers have already caught on to the advantages of using the Internet, but many are not taking full advantage of what it can do for their tournaments. Are you using email only to collect registration forms and send out details, or are you using a complete website to display all event details and an online registration form with automated email confirmation? Do you only use the website only to display information, or are you being more efficient by offering both online registration and payment methods on your website? Are collected registrations only being kept in an email folder on your email client, or are they being fed into a useful database to assist with bracketing and compile reports?

The Internet is free to use, and it's leaps and bounds ahead of mail, fax, or in person registration. But you might not realize all it can do for you. You should use it to disseminate event details, collect online registrations into a database, collect payment for registration fees, send registration confirmations, publish your registration list, publish the initial draws, publish the competition results, and upsell items related to the event. Don't just use the Internet as a replacement for a flyer. It can do so much more for you.

Set up a URL and website for the event prior to advertising. The URL should be mentioned on all marketing material so that potential competitors and their coaches have somewhere to go for more information.

Not building relationships with instructors and coaches of competitors

If you build it, they will come...NOT! You can't just organize a tournament and expect the competitors to show up from the advertising alone. You must have existing relationships with their instructors and coaches. Athletes of any sporting discipline listen to what their instructors or coaches recommend. Often, the instructor or coach is the gateway to a competitor's participation in a tournament. Many times, it is the instructor or coach who initiates the recommendation. When an instructor or coach recommends your tournament to one member of his team, he will recommend it to all of them.

Don't spend most your marketing time on the potential competitors, because you will more efficiently reach your target competitor count by wooing their instructors and coaches. Get to know these people. Contact them when you're thinking of having an event and get their feedback on a reasonable date for competition. Ensure they get free admission to your events. Get their feedback on how to improve your tournaments. Keep the relationships alive and always listen to their feedback. It's very bad for business if you upset an instructor or coach to the point of his blacklisting your event.

Not closing registration in time to generate brackets before scheduled start

Competitors do not like to be kept waiting, especially if they have family and friends in the audience waiting to watch them compete. Coaches don't like to have unpredictability in match start times when they have multiple competitors to coach. People appreciate reliability and efficient use of their time. When you provide this, you enhance the competition experience for everyone at your tournament, which earns your events a good reputation.

It is very important that you set your foot down on the cut off time for accepting registrations. You can't keep waiting the competitors who registered on time for the sake of a few stragglers who want to squeeze into the brackets. Unless a division has only 1 or 2 competitors, you will need reasonable time to generate a bracket that is fair and will not change. Whether you generate brackets in 5 minutes or in 2 days, you need to decide on the time it takes you to complete the brackets and set your cut off date and time accordingly. When you let registrations slide in after the cut off time, not only are you not being unfair to those who registered on time, but you also give undue pressure on the person in charge of generating the brackets, and you set precedence for other competitors to expect this to be the norm at your events. A reasonable cut off time that works for most organizers is the day before competition, which will give you enough time to post initial draws and weed out objections to their brackets before the competitors check in.

If you want to squeeze in as many competitors as possible, streamline your bracketing process to shorten the time it takes to generate the initial draws, rather than make exceptions for stragglers. This way you can shorten the time between cut off and commencement without compromising the integrity of your brackets.

Not preparing for bracket changes on the day of the event

This is the mistake that most earns your tournament the description "Organized Chaos" among the competitors and coaches. Leave a bad impression because of this and for sure you will lose many competitors at your next tournament. It's a very simple correlation—the more changes you have on the

day of the event, the more likely you'll have mistakes on your brackets. Avoid as many changes as possible on the day of the event.

The best preventative action is to not have same day registration. When you permit same day registration, you increase your chances of making a mistake in the brackets by at least 10 fold. The smartest move is to close the collection of registrations at least one day in advance and publish the final registration list and initial draws online. Remember to offer a phone number or email for people to contact you for assistance. This way, you catch many of the mistakes and objections to match ups before the day of event. Publically announce a cut off time for submitting objections, which gives competitors fewer reasons to complain about how you processed their registrations after the event.

If you're running a small tournament, it might not be viable to turn away same day registrations. In this case, you must properly prepare for taking same-day registrations. Otherwise you will be caught in the worse scenario possible for a tournament—running brackets incorrectly! The bracketing process must be streamlined on the day of the event because you have very little time to prepare the brackets and a whole lot of distractions while you're doing them. The most effective way to take same-day registrations is to set up 3 separate desks for collecting registrations, generating brackets, and collecting queries and change requests. Ensure that the staff at these 3 desks strictly complies with the cut off times, so they can appropriately manage their priorities in processing competitors.

For the registration desk, you should employ two people. One person collects the completed forms and takes the payments, while the other weighs in the competitor and checks if the qualifications for the divisions have been met.

For the bracketing desk, make sure there are at least two dedicated people. One person does the reading aloud of the registration details (name, team, division, etc.) and manages the stack of paperwork, while the other enters the registrations into the bracketing system and generates the brackets. Hide the bracketing desk away from the competitors, coaches, and spectators. It is crucial that there is little distraction for these staff members because they handle one of the most important aspects of the tournament—the brackets.

For queries and other last minute changes, set up a query desk that has access to the complete the list of pre-registrations. Direct all questions to this desk and provide them with a means to collect change requests in writing.

It's important to have one or two runners who deliver paperwork back and forth among the registration desk, query desk, and bracketing desk. The runners can also be charged with communicating messages among the other staff members who are tied to their post.

Not properly training referees and scorekeepers

Don't make the mistake of assuming that all referees and scorekeepers are on the same page, even if they've all been in the sporting discipline for many years. You need solidarity on how the matches are regulated and scored and on how the competitors will be advanced on the brackets.

Make sure all the referees know the rules that you have posted for the event, and are willing to regulate matches according to those rules. Some referees are stubborn in their ways and may regulate the matches in the way they've always done without bothering to look at the rules of the event. You need to have them acknowledge that they understand and will enforce the specific set of rules for your event, regardless of how they've done it in the past. Don't forget to tell them how to determine a tie breaker and what signals to use.

Scorekeepers do not have to be as experienced in the sport discipline as the referees, but they must understand the scoring system and how to read the referee's signals. They also must understand how to advance a competitor on the bracket sheet. You'll be surprised how many people don't understand the basics of a bracket sheet, even something as simple as single elimination. Hold a mandatory meeting for scorekeepers. Train them on how a winner is determined, how competitors are advanced to the next round, and what to do during scenarios of disqualification. For single elimination, tell them how to determine the third place winner, whether by an extra match, by score, or by referee's decision. Require them to write legibly and sign their bracket sheets so that they can be reached for an explanation if questions arise regarding the results of a specific bracket.

Not having a good microphone system and master of ceremonies (MC)

You must have a good microphone system and master of ceremonies to communicate important details to the competitors, coaches, staff members, and spectators. Your event is going to be loud, and you will need a microphone system to find competitors and staff members, indicate the start of divisions, and make general announcements. A bad microphone system that clips, distorts, doesn't have enough volume, or has too much base is like having no microphone system at all. Do a sound check of the system at the venue before deciding on using it.

Find a master of ceremonies who has a clear and projecting voice to make all the announcements, and choose an easily accessible post for him. Have your staff come to him if they need any announcements made. Make sure he knows who can instruct him to make announcements, and where everyone else goes to make requests for announcements. He will be tied to his post for several hours, so schedule his time with breaks and decide who will be the backup announcer.

Not having a paper trail and backup plan for registrations and brackets

Computer systems help you become efficient at running a tournament, but you need a paper trail and backup plan in case the system goes down. Pre-registrations should be saved in a database and printed out as they arrive during the pre-registration period. Print several copies of the pre registration list and give them to the check-in desk, the query desk, and the bracketing desk on the day of the event. Do not count on printing the lists at the event in case something goes wrong with the computer or printer.

If you are taking same day registrations, make sure competitors fills out a printed registration form and then have the data copied into the computer system, instead of entering the data directly into the computer system.

Print out 3 copies of each bracket as they're being generated. Send one copy to the mats, post one on the wall, and keep one at the bracketing desk. If a bracket is being re-generated because of last minute changes, make sure you have a runner collect all copies of the old bracket sheets before replacing them. Immediately destroy the old copies before they are mistaken for the final copy.

Take a stack of blank bracket sheets to the event. Make sure these are printed before the day of the event. Do not count on printing them at the event in case something goes wrong with the computer or printer.

Ensure that the scorekeepers legibly record all that's happening with matches directly onto the bracket sheets, so you can interpret the results afterwards. Have a runner frequently go to the mats to collect completed bracket sheets from the scorekeepers and take them back to the bracketing desk.

Appoint someone who understands how to bracket competitors at the bracketing desk. Even if you are using a software program to generate the brackets, the person in charge of generating the brackets must understand how to load competitors into blank bracket sheets in case the computer system breaks down. The role of generating the brackets is a very important position, so identify backup staff members at the event who also understand how to load brackets.

Not posting the initial draws for public viewing at the event

Posting the initial draws on the wall at the event is a very good way to prevent many of the questions that would otherwise tie up your staff. If you close registration before the day of the event, print out all the bracket sheets with the initial draws before you arrive at the event. Post the bracket sheets in a conspicuous place on the wall at the event. If possible, post two copies in two places to prevent the crowding of viewers in one place.

If you are collecting same-day registration, make sure you close registration for a division in time to allow for the printing and posting of the brackets in that division. Even if you plan to run the brackets immediately after you generate them, ensure that the protocol for processing new brackets includes the posting of it on the wall.

Not having the rules and policies clearly posted and distributed

Prevent a good chunk of the disputes from competitors, coaches, and spectators by clearly posting the rules and policies on the event website, on the registration confirmation, and on the wall of the event. This means that you must decide on the rules and policies before you start soliciting for competitors. Do not make up the rules as you go along. If someone complains about the rules or policies at the event or after the event, you can tell them that everything was disclosed prior to their participation.

Clearly write out your refund policy. What happens if he doesn't make weight? What happens if a competitor doesn't show up when called to the mat for his match? What happens when he can't compete because of injury or other reasons? What happens if there is no one else in his division? Does he get any portion refunded? Does he get credit at your next tournament?

Clearly write out the rules of conduct, scoring protocol, handling of tie breakers, illegal techniques, and conditions of disqualification. If you plan to move competitors into different brackets when there are not enough registrants for a match, then clearly publish the evaluation protocol for moving the competitors.

Having too many divisions

Competitors want to know ahead of time what they are signing up for, so choose the breakdown of the divisions carefully. If you have too many divisions, you will end up merging lots of divisions just to create matches. It's better to have fewer divisions that you split up later than it is to have too many divisions that you merge later.

The kids divisions are probably the hardest to choose because of the variation in weights and ages. Although parents and coaches may disapprove of such a wide range of ages, weights, and skills for the kids divisions, it's less upsetting for them to know the range up front than it is to find out later that the divisions have been merged. Get feedback from instructors and coaches about which criteria is the most important for separation. Find out if you should give priority for separation of age, weight, or skill level.

If you are merging divisions after the close of registration, clearly indicate this on the bracket sheets and announce it to everyone in the affected divisions as early as possible to weed out the objections before you run the brackets. Ensure that you allow plenty of time in the bracketing process to account for the merging of divisions.

STRONGVON Helps You Avoid the Mistakes

True Integration

The STRONGVON Tournament Management System is the most comprehensive way to manage your tournaments from one single user interface. Most other systems provide only online registration tools. Others provide only bracketing features. Our system provides you with software tools to do both at a fraction of the cost for custom solutions. Whether you use it to help you with setting up an event website, setting up online registration, doing the brackets, or all of the above, the system's unrivaled modularity allows you get exactly what you need from it.

Website and Online Registration

The system was designed specifically for tournaments, making it easy for event promoters to immediately get up and running with a comprehensive registration site without the cost of expensive consultants. Its advanced tools give you a powerful solution at a fraction of the cost of a custom programming project. With our system, there is no need to get a quotation from web programmers, and no requirement to understand complicated Internet concepts. The architecture of the system is flexible enough for you to create an online registration form that conforms to your requirement, yet easy enough to mask the complexities of creating a registration website.

Powerful Bracketing Tools

The system manages all bracketing functions in a single software application, eradicating the need for creating brackets using pencil and paper, or piecing together multiple software programs. Adding or moving competitors to and from brackets is very easy on the system. You need only to make a change in one place, and all affected brackets are instantaneously updated. We make it easy for you to cross reference between the registration details and the placements within the brackets. Each competitor can be assigned to multiple brackets with a single registration entry. Mix and match single elimination, double elimination, round robin, and custom match ups, all in a single event. Have the system automatically load brackets where teammates are separated on opposite ends, and then manually override matches where necessary. Instantly create your initial draws and publish them online for all to see!

Publishing and Printing

With the STRONGVON system, you have a host of options for printing and publishing bracket sheets, registration lists, and results. With use of a single database, you can easily generate outputs of the most accurate data and then quickly convey them to competitors and coaches. Publish online your registration list at any time with your choice of registration details to share. Post your initial draws or complete bracket results online with just a few mouse clicks. STRONGVON makes it very easy to extract your data at anytime by multiple means, while maintaining the integrity and convenience of a single data source.

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Getting a Login Account is your first step to integrating much needed technology into your events. Your free account gives you loads of useful functionality immediately after validating your email address:

- Download and use of the full version of software without restrictions
- Publish a website for your event
- Collect pending online registrations for offline and PayPal payment methods
- Create, print, publish, and manage brackets

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