

# **A Tournament Director's Manual**

## **By Rich Edwards**

### **Tournament Advance Planning**

As the debate coach, you are key to planning a successful tournament. Ultimately, you will be responsible for everything that happens at the tournament. You will, however, need lots of help. Once the tournament itself rolls around, you want to be free to serve in a public relations role and as an ombudsman. You need to have the freedom from menial tasks that will allow you to serve as a congenial host for your guests. In the year before the tournament, however, there are three key responsibilities that you need to do:

**First, claim the weekend on your state tournament calendar.** Some state organizations have quite a formal process for establishing a tournament calendar. If you are not familiar with this process, ask an experienced tournament director in your area how it works. In some states, it amounts to nothing more than finding a likely weekend and sending out your tournament invitations. Make sure, however, that you are fully informed about the process for claiming a tournament weekend in your state. There is no point in planning to have a tournament if others won't come.

**Second, reserve motel blocks.** Do this immediately after you have secured a date on the tournament calendar. Actually, you should check with the motels in your area before even requesting a calendar weekend; if you cannot schedule the motel space, you can't have a tournament. In some areas it is necessary to block motel rooms almost a year in advance. If you are in a college town and your tournament falls on a football home game weekend, you could be out of luck unless you plan very early.

**Third, send out your invitations on time.** There is no general rule for how early these should be sent out; check with other tournament directors in your area to find out what is customary and then send yours out just a little earlier than that. Teachers pay little attention to mail received over the summer, but your invitation should generally be on their desk early in the season so that they can plan their budgets accordingly. Your tournament invitation requires advance planning of its own because it typically includes such things as (1) a time schedule, (2) an indication of how ties will be broken for clearing teams or for speaker awards, (3) an indication of how rounds will be paired, (4) notice about whether elimination round brackets will or will not be broken, and (5) rules summaries for individual events. Make a collection of tournament invitations for other tournaments in your area to get ideas about the issues normally addressed in the invitation.

**Fourth, reserve your rooms.** You must know how large a tournament you can accommodate in your available space. You may have to reserve the right to close tournament entries if your tournament grows too large.

Effective tournament operation requires the involvement of your key students and parents. I suggest that you consider appointing the following individuals for your tournament:

**Tournament Director:** Many high school coaches appoint one of their most experienced and dependable debaters to this position. It certainly provides outstanding experience for the student, and can provide important freedom for you during the tournament. The tournament director would be in charge of meeting with all the other directors, coordinating their activities. If you do not have a student that you fully trust, then you should assume this position.

**Tournament Amenities Director:** Responsible for providing food during the tournament for coaches, judges, and contestants. The amenities director would typically be a parent or a home economics teacher. This can be a money-making operation if it is efficiently managed.

What most high schools do is to sell pizza, pre-packaged items, and drinks to tournament contestants. This not only makes money for your tournament, but it also helps keep contestants close to the tournament during meal times so that they are not late for subsequent rounds. In most areas, high school coaches and judges expect that a tournament will maintain a judges' lounge with free food and soft drinks. Often the judges' lounge is located in the home economics room, so begin early in establishing a good working relationship with your colleagues in the home economics department. Usually the food-selling operation can more than pay for the free food functions at a tournament. Some tournaments also sell T-shirts or other promotional items to tournament participants; the amenities director would typically oversee any such operations.

**Tournament Registration Director:** Responsible for conducting registration on the day of the tournament and collecting fees from participants. This person should oversee the preparation of packets to give to each registering school (maps, restaurant list, time schedule, etc.). Most importantly, the registration director needs a printout from the computer showing the computer entries for each school. TRM/PC can print out such a registration sheet showing all entries and judges from each school. The registering coach should carefully double check each sheet, marking spelling problems, noting drops, etc. The registration director should establish a system for notifying the tab room immediately of any significant changes at registration. The registration director should also have pre-prepared receipts to give to each registering coach. Think carefully about how to establish a financial accounting system so that you can be fully responsible for the funds received. In some cases, the registration director can also serve as the tournament treasurer, tracking tournament disbursements on through to the end of the tournament. Size of staff: The director plus two or three other persons at the main registration table.

**Debate Tab Room Director:** Responsible for overseeing the operation of the tab room during the tournament. No position is more important to the continuity of your tournament. Many a tournament has been destroyed by getting a reputation for sloppy tabulation or long waiting periods between rounds. The tab room director needs to be a person who is meticulous; one who will stay with the job until it is done. Size of staff needed: two persons for each debate division. The tab room director should establish familiarity with the computer software well before the tournament, running simulations with all of the staff.

**Individual Event Tab Room Director:** Responsible for overseeing the IE tab room staff. Size of staff needed: One person per event plus two persons for computer entry. The tab room director should establish familiarity with the computer software well before the tournament, running simulations with all of the staff.

**Ballot Director:** Responsible for distributing ballots to judges and for running ballots between the competition rooms and the tab room. The tab room directors must have the ballots in a timely fashion and in a steady stream (rather than getting them all at the end in one lump). The ballot director needs to have a process for tracking which ballots have been received and which have not; by the time only three or four ballots are left outstanding, the ballot runners should be waiting outside of those rooms, ready to rush the late ballots to the tab room. Size of staff: Two ballot runners for each building in use, but not less than two ballot runners for each division. Ballot runners should also be in charge, before the tournament, of placing appropriate signs in hallways and on doors identifying locations and marking each debate room.

**Room Director:** It is essential that you establish a relationship of trust with your principal and with other teachers concerning the use of rooms. If materials are stolen or equipment is damaged, you will have trouble securing rooms for subsequent tournaments. The preservation of trust is so important that you should take whatever extraordinary steps are necessary to maintain it. You should assign your room director the task of looking at every room, keeping a notebook indicating how each room was arranged. Make sure that the room

is put back the same way. If your school has folding tables available, see if you can have tables set up in each of the rooms where policy debates will happen. This will usually keep debaters from using the teachers' desk. Some tournaments take the extraordinary step of taping off the corner of the room containing the teacher desk with plastic police-scene tape. Avoid using computer rooms or other rooms with very expensive equipment. Even if you can get permission to use such rooms, you are just asking for trouble. Make sure that you know what your school's custodial staff will and will not do for you. You may be expected to pay them something extra to clean rooms on Saturday evening. If you do not have regular custodial staff available, your room director should see that each room is cleaned and returned to its original condition and furniture arrangement. You would do well to use garbage bags to completely empty the trash cans in each room; I have personally known of situations where the rooms were spotlessly clean but a teacher freaked out because of soda cans or pizza boxes in the trash (prima facie evidence of a violation of their class room rule of no eating or drinking).

## **The Week of the Tournament**

Establish a tournament master notebook to store the original entries and changes as you receive them. Store in this notebook a paper record of every telephone conversation, email, and fax, along with the tournament entry blanks themselves. Arrange this notebook in alphabetical order by school name. This notebook will be your ultimate reference for questions about entries or changes.

Early in the week of the tournament, have the tab room directors enter all of contestants in each event into the computer program. Have the tab room people print out registration sheets. These sheets put together on one page all of the entries and judges from each school. You should personally find the time to compare your master tournament notebook entries with the registration sheet printouts. Finding errors early will lessen the trauma of having schedules prepared with contestants left off.

The night before the tournament begins, have your tab room staff complete their tournament entries, double-checking everything against the main tournament notebook. Instruct them to print round schedules for each of your preset rounds and sectioning for all prelim rounds of individual events. It is highly unlikely that you will end up using these early schedules, but preparing them is an essential step. It provides a fall-back schedule in case you were to run into computer trouble on the day of the tournament. It also insures that your tab room staff is familiar with the steps necessary in pairing the preset rounds.

## **The Day of the Tournament**

In the typical high school tournament, you are beginning your tournament at the end of the normal class day on a Friday. That means that the day Friday will be filled with calls letting you know of last minute drops. Even those tournaments that establish a hefty "drop fee" still have numerous drops on the day of the tournament. This is why you would like to wait as long as possible to produce your final first round schedule in the computer; you would like to record just as many drops and changes as possible before taking this step.

When the round one schedule is ready in the computer, print out ballot labels. These can either be printed directly onto label sheets or printed on regular paper, then copied (with a copier) onto label sheets (30 labels per sheet). Have the tab room staff place these labels on the back of the ballots (up at the top of the ballot). Why the back? If you put the label on the front of the ballot some of the judges will think that they don't need to fill in the names of the contestants on the ballot (since it is already there on the ballot label). This is a very bad thing; it is a vital double check to have the judge fill in the team names and the debater names on the ballot. Putting the ballot label on the back of the ballot seems to remove this temptation to leave the team names off of the ballot.

Never distribute more than your round one schedules, even if you think you have other preset round schedules ready to go. Often you don't know of problems until you begin to get reports of judges who didn't show up or teams that are having to forfeit. Wait until round one is underway to produce your final round two schedule; put the schedule under doors and in hallways so that contestants can go immediately to their next round when round one is finished.

## **Tab Room Operation During the Tournament**

The ballot director will be responsible for laying out ballots on the ballot table and seeing that judges get their ballots. Inevitably, however, some judges will not pick up their ballots on time. This problem can be solved only through proper collaboration between the tab room and the ballot director. A key tab room staff member should be present at the ballot table shortly before round start time to make decisions about judge switches. No matter how carefully the judges are assigned in the computer, there will need to be some changes made at the ballot table. Judges don't show up, judges say they have heard one of the teams before, etc. A tab room staff member needs to make the decisions about how to make judge switches in order to get ballots out on time. Generally, the switching process shouldn't begin until just a minute or two before the scheduled round time. Some judges will plan to pick up their ballots just a few minutes before the round is scheduled to start. Once the round start time has passed, however, aggressive action must be taken to get all of the ballots distributed to some acceptable judge. If one round is half an hour late going out, then the whole tournament will be half an hour behind schedule. If your time schedule involves interspersing IE and debate rounds, then it is especially important to keep everything on time. When one event gets behind, there is a cascading effect.

Once all ballots for round one are out the tab room staff should turn its full attention to recording any changes into the computer. Judge changes should be entered into the computer using the display round function. If any teams have dropped or added, a new preset round two should be prepared. The tab room staff should be sure to have the schedule for the next preset round posted before the first round is over. Ballots should be ready at the ballot pickup table so judges returning their round one ballot can pick up their ballot for the next round.

Entry of the round one ballots should wait until all of the round two ballots have been picked up from the ballot table. Only then should the tab room staff return to the tab room to record in the judge changes in round two; then the entry of round one ballots should begin. The tab room staff should be divided into recording teams with two persons responsible for recording ballots into each computer (a reader and a computer operator). The person reading the ballots should announce the judge name (use the ballot label on the back if the signature is unreadable). The computer operator should then call up the ballot and call out the name of the first student on the computer screen; the ballot reader should announce points and ranks for that contestant. The computer operator should then call the name of the second student on the screen, and so on. It is never safe to assume that the first name appearing on the computer screen is the first speaker (often teams will have one person be first affirmative, but second negative). If spelling problems are noted, the computer operator can make that correction right from the ballot entry screen; simply click over on the debater name and make the change.

Special planning should go into the preparation of the first power-matched round schedule. Such a round is problematic for the tab room because all ballots from previous rounds must be recorded before the scheduling process can begin. Knowing that this is necessary, the tab room staff should be sure to record ballots in a steady stream from the time the first ballot is delivered to the tab room. Be sure to inform the ballot runners that ballots are needed in a steady stream; they should never wait to deliver ballots until they have a stack of them. In the most efficient tab rooms, the recording staff is ready and waiting for the last ballot so that scheduling can begin almost immediately after the last ballot is received.

Be sure that the computer setup screen has been appropriately marked with the type of power-match desired. There are two types of power-matching in use: high-high and high-low. In both cases, teams with similar records meet one another. In the high-high match, the top team meets the second team, the third

team meets the fourth team, and so on. In the high-low match, the top 2-0 team meets the bottom 2-0 team and so on in toward the middle of the bracket; the top 1-1 team meets the bottom 1-1 team, and so on in toward the middle of the bracket. Some inexperienced tab room people believe that a high-low match is “power-protect,” meaning that the top team in the tournament meets the bottom team in the tournament; no major debate tournament, either at the college or high school level uses such a “power-protect” scheme and this is not what is meant by “high-low.” Even the “high-low” match pairs teams with similar records together.

How does one decide whether the pairing should be done high-high or high-low? A five or six round tournament should never have more than one high-high round and many tournaments have now moved to all “high-low” power-matching. The problem with high-high power matching is that it unduly punishes teams for doing well. There is, however, no rule for how many rounds should be power-matched or whether they should be high-high or high-low; that is the choice of the tournament director. It is customary, however, to announce (often in the tournament invitation) which type of scheduling will be in use.

The TRM/PC program has a setup option for how to even brackets for power-matching. One option is to “pull the leftovers down” and the other option is to “pull weakest opposition record teams up.” What is meant by these options? These are both standard ways of evening brackets for power-matching and either choice is reasonable. Suppose, for example that you are scheduling a high-low power match in round four. The top bracket (2-0) has twelve teams that must be affirmative and ten teams that must be negative. In order to pair this bracket, the computer must first make it even. This can be done in one of two ways. The “pull the leftovers down” method will take the bottom two affirmative teams and place them at the top of the 1-1 bracket, so that there are now ten affirmative teams and ten negative teams in the top bracket; the computer will then proceed by pairing the top of one bracket against the bottom of the other. The “pull weakest opposition strength up” method would even the bracket by pulling two negative teams from the 1-1 bracket up into the 2-0 bracket; the two selected for pullup would be those that had the weakest opposition record (as measured by the number of wins accumulated by their opponents). After this pullup, the top bracket will have twelve affirmative teams and twelve negative teams; TRM/PC will then begin the process of pairing the top against the bottom of the bracket.

It is a settled matter of tournament operation that teams must always be even on sides in even numbered rounds and TRM/PC is programmed to insure this happens. The only exception is in the scheduling of a very small division (fewer than 16 teams) where all rounds are preset. In such a situation TRM/PC utilizes a random number preset system that insures sides are even after all prelims are over, but teams might start out with two negative rounds in a row. In a large tournament, however, it should always be true that all teams are even on sides in even numbered rounds. There is no side constraint in odd numbered rounds, however, so teams may well be negative in round two, then negative again in round three.

**What about breaking ties?** TRM/PC makes available to you thirteen different types of tie-breakers; how should you decide which of them to use? The first consideration is whether there are applicable rules in your state or league which you are expected to follow. If you are in Texas, for example, and you wish for your tournament to be a TFA (Texas Forensic Association) qualifier, you must follow the TFA rules for breaking ties. If there are no applicable rules that you MUST follow, here are some suggestions: (1) Always select wins as your first team tie-breaker; there is no other responsible choice; (2) your second tie-breaker would either be total points or high-low points. I prefer high-low points. (3) your third tie-breaker would be either total points or high-low points (whichever one was not selected as your second tie-breaker). (4) your next tie-breaker would normally be ranks unless it is a Lincoln-Douglas division. (5) I recommend opposition wins and opposition points as the next tie-breakers. (6) Judge variance controls for high or low points judges and would be a good choice after opposition strength. If your tournament invitation says how you will break ties, be sure that the computer is set to match what the invitation says.

Speaker award ties should be broken in much the same ways as team EXCEPT that wins is normally not used as a tie-breaker of any sort, and it certainly would not be the first tie-breaker.

**Double Checks:** The well-run tab room provides a means of catching recording errors. The best method is to use the down-time during each round to have a full reading double check of the ballot recording from the previous round. The way to do this is to print out a copy of your “Results for Packets” from TRM/PC. This will look just like the results sheet that you will distribute to tournament participants at the end of the tournament. Find a large table where two tab room staff members can lay out the results sheets in alphabetical order on the table. One staff member will read from the official ballots to another staff member who will cross off each box of the results sheet after it has been double-checked. Emphasize the importance of staying alert so that every error, whether in record, points, or ranks, will be caught. There usually is not time for a full reading double check after the entry of the final prelim round (unless there is an overnight break), so for that round, the staff members entering at the computer should read the ballot back from the screen after each one is entered.

**Backing up:** Periodically make a backup copy to floppy disk of your tournament data. In the TRM97 program, all of your tournament data (both elim and prelim) is contained in a folder called “DATA.” In the TRPC program, all data is contained in a folder called TRPCData. In either case, the folder will fit on a single floppy disk (the folder should be about 1 megabyte in size). The backup of this folder should be done in the tab room down time while rounds are underway; make a backup copy during each round, marking the disk carefully to show the point at which the backup was made.

**What if TRM/PC will not pair the round properly?** How will I know if there is a problem? If the computer round check disclosed that you have unpaired teams or teams uneven on sides (in even numbered rounds), then you have a problem. I would try first to correct the problem by changing the option for evening brackets (if you selected pull the leftovers down, try selecting pull weakest opposition record up, or vice versa). Then re-pair the round and check it out again. If the problem is still not corrected, try pairing the round as high-high rather than high-low. If the problem is still not corrected, you can always print out the team cards and pair the round yourself, putting the round schedule back into the computer using the manual scheduling option. After you have entered the teams meeting into the computer, you can still use the computer to automatically assign your judges and rooms.

**Preparing for Elims:** During the final couple of prelim rounds, you should click through your room and judge entries to make sure that you have enabled the rooms and judges for elims that you want to have enabled.

**Procedure for going from prelims to elims:** (1) Record in all ballots from the last prelim round; (2) Print a list of teams in order, remembering to click the option to “set the elim bracket” (it is also required to type the word ‘proceed’ in the authorization box) – this process erases any pre-existing records in elims and sets your elim bracket; (3) Click the option to print the elim bracket so that you will have a visual chart showing how your elim bracket is constructed; (4) Click the option to print teams in alphabetical order – this gives you a printout for posting showing who will be competing in elim rounds, while not disclosing the seed order (you would not post the bracket printout because it would disclose the seeds); (5) Select the option from the elim menu to “Schedule Elim Round Judges.” This allows you to place judges in each elim debate. Click the option at the bottom of the “Schedule Elim Round Judges” screen to print the schedule and then to print ballot labels. You are now ready to begin your elim rounds.

## **Closing Down the Tab Room**

Once the first prelim round is underway, you should prepare your packet printouts from TRM/PC. Typically this would include the “Results for Packets” printout, a list of teams in order (usually just the clearing teams), and a list of the top ten or top twenty speakers.

Once the tournament is well into elims, most directors find it easier to proceed by hand rather than to continue operation from the computer. Keep in mind, though, that if you maintain your elim records in the computer, TRM/PC will print out an attractive result sheet from elims and a final bracket, showing the

winner. These paper records will be useful for you to maintain in your files as a permanent record of the tournament.

Make a backup to floppy disk of the "DATA" or "TRPCData" folders so that you will have the computer data to use for simulations when you are training your tournament staff for next year's tournament.

NOTE: The TRPC (debate) and TRIEPC (individual events) programs are available from my web site at Baylor:

[www.baylor.edu/Richard\\_Edwards](http://www.baylor.edu/Richard_Edwards)

If you have trouble finding my web page from that link, just use <http://www.baylor.edu/> and look for faculty and staff home pages. Find the program(s) you want and click on them to download to your computer.

If you need my assistance, I am available to you at [Richard\\_Edwards@baylor.edu](mailto:Richard_Edwards@baylor.edu) or (254) 744-2443.