

PARENTS'/COACHES' GUIDE TO SCHOLASTIC CHESS (Updated 2/9/2023)

Welcome to the world of Scholastic Chess! To add to your understanding of how tournaments work, and to answer some of the many questions you undoubtedly are waiting to ask, we ask that you read this Chess Tournament Introduction.

How do you pair players together? We follow the pairing rules developed by the U.S. Chess Federation (USCF) on Swiss-System tournaments. The "Swiss" was designed to accommodate many players competing in the same tournament, while still producing a winner, even though the winner cannot play against everyone else in the tournament. This is done by matching together players who keep winning, thus reducing the number of players who continue to win. After each round, if all the players with "perfect" scores (those who have won all the games) play each other, and if half the players win their games, while the other half loses, then the number of "perfect" scores at the end of the round will be half as much as it was when the round started. Players who continue to win, therefore, will probably face harder opponents. Players who lose their games will probably face others who are doing the same, and their opponents should get easier.

This is not an elimination tournament-- even players who lose their first five games will probably face someone in the last round who is in a similar situation. Players do not face the same player more than once (except possibly in a very small section). The halving process continues until the last round, when, in theory, one or a small number of players has won more games than anyone else in that section.

A player's score in the tournament shows how he/she is doing. Each time a player wins, he/she gets 1 point for that round, while a draw is worth ½-point and a loss is 0 points. A player's score is the total number of points he/she has at any point in the tournament. Players with the same score face each other as much as possible, beginning with the top scores down to the 0's.

In the first round, all the players are ranked in rating order. Unrated players are usually placed right after the lowest rated player, unless the Director assigns an estimated rating to an unrated player. The top half of the tournament, by rating, is then paired against the bottom half, in rating order. The same method follows for the rest of the rounds. Players with the same score are grouped together and paired with each other, top half vs. bottom half, in rating order. Adjustments for color assignments or to avoid same-school pairings are often made to the rating orders. If there is an odd number of players with the same score, the lowest ranked player will usually drop to the next lowest score group of players and play the highest rated player in that group instead. If there is an odd number of players in the entire tournament, then one player, usually the lowest rated player with the lowest score (a different player each round) will receive a 1-point bye that round. The halving process continues with this higher half vs. lower half method, and ***it is not uncommon for players to face opponents with ratings much higher or lower than their own-- remember, pairings are made by score first, and then by rating.***

Occasionally there are so many players that it becomes likely that more than one player will win all the games. In this case, we may "accelerate" pairings, dividing the tournaments into four quarters, instead of halves, in the first round. In Round 2, higher-rated players who won may play stronger opponents than usual, while the lower rated players who won may play higher-rated players who did not win. This is all to try and reduce the number of players who start round 3 with two points, reducing the possible number of perfect scores at the end. Adjustments are made in this basic method, so that players avoid playing opponents from the same school. In small score groups near the bottom of the tournament, it may sometimes be necessary to pair players together with different scores, to prevent players from the same school from playing each other.

We also try to make adjustments so that players alternate colors, or at least so that they will have played three Whites and three Blacks by the end of the tournament. We also try to avoid assigning the same color three times in a row to the same player. However, we avoid making any switches in pairings if there is a large difference in the ratings of the players being switched (except to avoid giving 3-in-a-row or to avoid same-school pairings). In theory, the top-scoring players will face each other at the end to determine the winner of the tournament.

What if the opponent is not there? At the beginning of the first round, some players, even though they have already entered the tournament, are not going to show up without giving advance notice— often a very inconsiderate thing to do, and for which they can be penalized. The Tournament Director will decide if and when to make re-pairings among players without opponents.

How are scores shown on the wallchart? The wallchart shows a player's cumulative score (how many total points he/she has) after that round. This is a 6-round tournament, so the highest possible (perfect) score is 6 points. The tiny numbers above a player's score each round indicate the Player Number on the wallchart of the player's opponent for that round, and the "W" or "B" shows if he had Black or White. The team wallcharts show the scores of the school's four highest-scoring players. Any number of players may compete for a school, but the total of the school's four highest scoring players produce the school's team score (at least two players from the same school are needed to make a team). It doesn't necessarily matter which players on the team won or lost that round, or how many players won their games. **Only** the scores of the **four highest-scoring players** are counted for the team.

(More Tournament Rules Appear In The U.S.C.F. Rulebook)

What if several players are tied at the end with the same score? The tiebreak systems used are:

1. Players who have won all 6 games (only) will play a special speed playoff for First Place;
2. Otherwise, the computer adds up the scores of each tied player's opponents (a half-point is counted for any rounds that the opponent did not play), and disregards the least-significant (usually the lowest scoring) opponent (the Modified Median System). The player with the highest total has played opponents with the best scores in the tournament-- in theory, the hardest opponents. If the players are still tied, the low scoring opponents are counted also (Solkoff Tiebreaks). For players who are still tied,
3. The computer adds each player's score to his/her score from the previous round (the Cumulative System). Thus, if a player won his first two games, lost his third, won his fourth, lost his fifth game and drew his last game, his score in the tournament would be 1 point after round 1, 2 points after round 2, still 2 points after round 3 (he lost), 3 points after round 4, still 3 points after Round 5 and 3½ points after round 6. His Cumulative Tiebreaks would be $1 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 3 + 3\frac{1}{2} = 14\frac{1}{2}$. To break ties among players with the same Cumulative Tiebreaks, the computer repeats this process, but it adds all the Cumulative Tiebreaks of the opponents of each tied player (the Cumulative Tiebreakers of the Cumulative Tiebreakers, or CTBCTB system). This almost always breaks the tie. The Cumulative Tiebreak System rewards players who win earlier when the opponents are usually easier, then face tougher opponents.

NOTE: If computers are NOT available to calculate tiebreaks, then Modified Median and Solkoff Tiebreaks will be used first to break ties for players with 5½ points. If still tied, and for **all players with 5 points or less**, cumulative, then CTBCTB Tiebreaks, will be used.

What is the time limit on the game? Each player has 60 minutes for the game, **plus a 10-second delay per move**. Unless the game has already ended, the first player to use up all his time usually loses. A clock will be used for each game if either player supplies one. If neither player has a clock, **start without one**. The Tournament Director will assign a clock to a game, splitting the elapsed time, when necessary.

Is it necessary to write down the moves? All experienced tournament players are required to keep score of the game; inexperienced players are not, **but they should**, otherwise they won't be able to learn from their mistakes by going over their games. **If a player is keeping score and his/her opponent is not, the opponent will receive a ten (10) minute time deduction** (if the opponent has between 5 to 15 minutes left at that point, he/she will continue with only 5 minutes). This compensates players who are using the time during the game and making an effort to keep score, if their opponent is not doing so. **EXCEPTION: In games where either player is in 1st grade or below, scorekeeping is not required, with no penalty.** If either player has less than 5 minutes left for the game, neither player is required to keep score anymore. **All players lose chess games, but good players play over their games**, to find out where they might have improved, and learn how to do better next time. **Use of the electronic scorekeeping device ChessNoteR is prohibited** (requests for exceptions based on medical/accessibility issues must be submitted, with supporting documentation, at least three days in advance of the tournament).

What time is the next round? When is the lunch break? The schedule of rounds is posted outside and elsewhere. Here it is again: **11 am, 2 pm and 5 pm Saturday; and 9 am, 12 pm and 3 pm Eastern Daylight Time Sunday**. We will try to text and put the pairings up on the website (earlier if possible) and both players may agree to start early (only if both players are present can clocks be started early). The time between the rounds is for meals. The games should all be done in time for **the Awards Ceremony at about 5:30 pm Sunday!**

Spectators who are quiet and orderly may watch the High School sections (subject to TD permission), but NOT the other sections.

EVERYONE MUST RESPECT HOTEL AND CITY CENTER PROPERTY AND GUESTS AND MUST COMPLY WITH THE HOTEL'S AND/OR CITY CENTER'S RULES AND THE TOURNAMENT CODE OF CONDUCT.

How do I find out about other tournaments? Everyone in the tournament must be a member of the U.S. Chess Federation (USCF). Continental Chess offers a special reduced rate on USCF memberships **when purchased online along with an entry for a CCA tournament:** *Chess Life* magazine every month (\$25 Premium Young Adult membership), or *Chess Life For Kids* every other month (for younger players) for \$18 Premium Youth members. There you'll find answers to questions about ratings and other tournaments. **There are MANY DIFFERENT USCF-rated tournaments, both scholastic and Open tournaments, in which you can play!** Many are designed just for players with certain ratings (Under 1600, for example). You can see what your national chess rating is on the **U.S. Chess Federation website** at www.uschess.org. You can use your rating to play in rated chess tournaments throughout the U.S.! Need more information? Visit the USCF website at www.uschess.org.

REMEMBER: THE BEST WAY TO GET BETTER IS BY PLAYING BETTER PLAYERS!