

An Officials View

By Dr. Azmy Ibrahim

Many umpires find themselves directly or indirectly acting as referees at local and regional tournaments. For this reason a seminar was conducted at the U.S. Nationals about referee's duties and responsibilities. This article is a summary of the seminar.

The seminar was led by Wendell Dillon, Chairman of the Education Committee; Azmy Ibrahim, who covered interpretations of laws and regulations and the eligibility requirements; and Aly Salam, who explained how to design a tournament and prepare a time schedule for maximum efficiency. Attending were 11 umpires: Irina Borisova, Terry Canup, Dick Evans, Joe Helfand, Olga Kahn, Stan Kahan, Cindy Marcum, Roman Tinyszyn, Chris Williams, Zhao-Ming Yang, and Joseph Yick.

The goals of the seminar were: 1) to improve the quality and consistency of refereeing at USATT tournaments; 2) to prepare some national umpires for the IU exam; and 3) to prepare IU participants for the national referee exam to be administered before and during the 2000 U.S. Open. Several topics were discussed.

Designing a Tournament With Less Conflict

Schedule Men's and Women's events at the same time, Senior and Junior events at the same time, higher and lower rating events at the same time, higher rating events before lower ones, restrict the number of entries in each event, etc.

Designing a Time Schedule

Calculations are needed to find out the number of entries, matches, hours, days, and tables that are needed. Little tips are always helpful, i.e. start the largest events, doubles events, RR events, and higher rating events first. Leave intervals several times during the day to catch up with delayed matches. To avoid the unexpected, limit the number of entries, give discounts to early entries, and penalties to late and phone entries.

Conducting the Draws

Only #1 and #2 seeds are placed in upper and lower places in the draw. The rest are placed at random in their assigned places on the draw with some concerns to geographical separation. RR events can follow snake formats; regular, reversed or variations. Ranking of players will follow an order starting with World ranking, followed by Continental ranking and Association ranking. In doubles, the higher rated player of the pair will constitute the power of the pair. In mixed doubles the male player ranking takes precedence. Alteration of the draw is always discouraged. It may be conducted when there is a drastic imbalance between the two halves of the draw. It is not acceptable once an event has started.

Forms of Competition

Different forms were presented: Double Elimination, Round Robin (RR) and Knock Out (KO). It is advisable to avoid repeating matches between the same players in Double Elimination or follow-ups of RR winners. One way is to announce in advance a certain policy that whenever two players will meet again, i.e. in the finals, the final match will decide the winner.

Tie Breaker

This is one of the hardest processes to deal with. The referee should ask the players to let him do it in private. As complicated as it may look, in actuality it follows simple rules, i.e. match points, then match ratio of win to loss, then game ratio of win to loss, then point ratio of win to loss. At any time there is a two-player tie, the head-to-head rule applies.

Eligibility Requirements

A special session was allocated to discuss eligibility requirements. Information was solicited from the International Olympic Committee, ITTF, NOC and U.S. Olympic Committee.

Generally the new rule requires a player to be a citizen of the association he/she is representing. More on eligibility will be covered later.

Other Topics

Throughout the workshop, Wendell emphasized how to make decisions and how to apply the rules with minimum disruption of matches. Other subjects included responsibilities of the referee before, during and after the tournament, possible conflicts between the referee and the tournament director, and ways and means to avoid them.

As you can see the summary of these topics does not give them adequate coverage. I would like to invite all umpires, directors, coaches and players to attend the open seminars, which are offered at the U.S. Nationals and U.S. Open each year.

Another decision which the Officials Committee has taken is to invite any umpire, club or regional level, etc., who is attending the U.S. Nationals or the U.S. Open to bring his umpiring card and volunteer to umpire some matches during the tournament. That way we can cover as many matches as possible.

Another issue discussed at the umpires' seminar was the application of the new expedite rule.

Expedite Rule

At any game if the score is 19-all or later, whenever the time reaches 15 minutes, although the expedite rule will not be enforced in that game, all other remaining games begin in expedite for the remainder of the match.

I hope this information will encourage all umpires (or potential umpires or interested players!) to participate in future seminars, and also volunteer to help in future tournaments.