

## **An Officials View**

### ***Recommendations for Future USA Team Trials***

**By Dr. Azmy**

I hope this article will in no way be considered a criticism of the team trials tournament. In fact, it was a successful and pleasant tournament. Let me start by congratulating all those who attended it, especially the players. All players who attended should consider themselves great champions. Those who made the team deserve our thanks for a great effort and best wishes for a greater performance at the World Championships.

Thanks also to those who contributed to the success of the tournament. Clark Mitchell and Pam Ramsey succeeded in hosting the coaches, staff, umpires and Board members at the Olympic Training Center. It is a serene place on rolling hills facing a calm lake. The morning breeze added more charm to the place. The venue where the tournament took place was somewhat farther away from that beautiful setting, in Balboa Park, San Diego, California. A well-organized, hospitable and efficient staff in both places went out of their way to make us comfortable and secure. Wayne Johnson, the tournament director, developed a smooth-running schedule which helped the tournament to run efficiently and successfully.

However, we always learn a little bit from every tournament. It seemed like there were a lot of matches for each player, especially those who advanced out of their qualifying round and joined the final round robin stage. Some players became tired. Physical fatigue, such as shoulder and muscle strain, was apparent. Richard McAfee, a pillar in the sport, looked at it this way. He said that Team Trial tournaments are not a place for practice, or for playing the most matches. It is a tournament for the highest level of play in our country. Many players will reach that level maybe once in their lives. Therefore, it should be treated as such. We should accommodate those who come to compete by giving them an opportunity to perform to the best of their abilities. He recommended that we start with mini round robins, in which all players compete. Then eliminate two or three players from the bottom of each round robin to reach a reasonable number for the final round robin. Those who advance into the final round robin will carry over their matches with others who advanced.

For example, suppose we have 14 players. We can start with two round robins of seven players each. At the end of this stage the bottom two players in each round robin are dropped. That leaves us with five players from each of the round robins to form a final round robin of 10 players. The advantages of such a system are as follows:

1. All players are playing from the first round.
2. Each player will play all his or her matches seriously, as they are carry-over matches.
3. Each player will play less and have an equal number of matches.

A problem occurred during the tournament that caused much debate. Two players – one man and one woman – were injured after playing matches, and were forced to withdraw. It became a critical issue for those who lost to them before they withdrew from the tournament. Should these matches count? An appeal was made, and the Athletic Committee called for a meeting under the direction of Dennis Taylor, the National Team Committee Chair, to deal with the matter. The Referee (myself) attended, as a non-voting member, and explained the rules and regulations. All other members were given a chance to state their opinions and suggestions. The meeting ended with a unanimous vote, that all matches played by those who withdrew due to injury would be considered defaults. The meeting was conducted by Dennis Taylor in a very professional matter, and the vote taken indicated a reasonable comprehension of the spirit of the sport. There is

always a fear that players may try to default to each other at the end of a round robin, rightly or wrongly, to help others become members of the team. While driving back and forth with Wayne Johnson we discussed the situation and he suggested the following remedy: a system where all points gained and lost in every game in the tournament, with the standings decided by the ratio of points gained to points lost, may eliminate the possibility of players trying to give games or points to each other. It will also make players take every point seriously.

In conclusion, two main suggestions were proposed after the tournament which could help improve our future Team Trials.

First, all players start in a few small round robin events, ending with a final round robin with carry-over matches.

Second, the ratio of points won to points lost in all matches played would be used to determine the ranking of players on the team.

I hope that the Board will consider these suggestions in upcoming Team Trials.