



Memo

To: USATT Board of Directors
From: Gary Schlager
Date: December 10, 2018
Re: USATT Sanctioned Tournaments

DOES THE CURRENT TOURNAMENT RATING FORMAT NEED AN UPDATE?

Issue

The following is a common example/occurrence in tournament play at most rated levels including the “Open” events in regional tournaments:

1. 1550 rated players do not enter the 1600 or 1800 levels at tourneys (or whatever the break point). They enter the 2000 and 2200 and 2400 (or maybe even the Open). They do this to whale hunt for “ratings”.
2. Because #1 run is so common the <2000 event is more like an <1700 event with just a few players >1900 (typically). Everyone plays “up” 2-3 divisions. So what is the point of these brackets? There are no rules on who can play what. There are no guardrails. The 1600 level player that “plays-up” rarely get out of the brackets and the true 1950 player has nothing to gain and everything to lose (in the above example) unless their desire for say \$40 in prize money exceeds their fear of losing 100+ rating points. Most players fear the point loss much more than the possible monetary gain and, because of this fact, many sit out.
3. Due to #2 above this reduces the number of players competing and waters down all brackets. Plus the wide range of playing levels/skills leads to poor matches with wide dispersion. This is the whole issue that the US Open format (this year) is trying to fix (with the brackets and round robin format).
4. The higher level and elite players do not enjoy this level of play (nor does the 1800 player enjoy playing against the 1350 level either)...waste of time and a little disrespectful. In other sports (or countries with TT) are the elite and professionals forced to play with the recreational players?

Possible New Rules To Consider

The tournament committee should evaluate possible rule/format changes such as the following:

1. For all sanctioned tourneys every player must first play in their rated event (i.e. the event which is closest to their actual rating). So a 1550 player must play in the 1600 event in order to qualify to play in any other events
2. If a 1550 player defaults in the 1600 event (for example) then all other events are also defaulted (important for enforcement) or a points penalty applied (such as 100 rating points). Or you could just let players default and take the points penalty and still let them play up – maybe leave this for committee review and discussion.

3. Cap on “playing up”: The player may then play the next 2-3 consecutive brackets “up” – so the 1800, 2000 and possibly 2200 (in this example).
4. The player can also play age and double events obviously.

We need the right software that enforces this at sign-up, which should all be electronic in the future (versus paper) – get into the 1990s at least!

Benefits

1. Does away with much of the disparity and crappy brackets and matches – there will still be some but not 75% which is common.
2. Does away with the better/elite players dreading the round robin matches where there could be 400-700 point (or more) rating variances and lots of wasted time. If players want an “in-game” lesson from an elite or advanced player they should pay \$60 for an actual lesson.
3. Gets people off the sidelines and playing in their event where they know they will meet players at a similar level. Minimizes the rating points impact of a loss. Every ratings bracket will be competitive and chock full of similar level players (i.e. what the US Open is trying to achieve)
3. Encourages players to play more tourneys in order to get their rating up if they want to play in the higher brackets (and say whale hunt for ratings...they need to get there first).
4. Better matches = more fun
5. Due to #3 above the organizers/local clubs and USATT make more \$\$

Other

1. The current rating system leaves lots of stale ratings in the system. There are many examples where players haven't played a sanctioned tourney in many years and still carry an “active” rating. This is strange b/c who knows what level they are actually playing at. For example, a player may get to say a “2000 level” and then drop-out of the tourney circuit forever just so they can say they are “2000 level”. Plus after 5 years or more it's very unlikely that these layers are at that “2000 level” anymore (who knows). Ratings should be not be used as permanent status symbols or collectables – they are living, breathing and change. In the end, ratings are regarded more highly than actually “winning” an event. This is backwards and does not encourage more participation. In fact, it fosters just the opposite.
2. Should we tweak our system to encourage more competitive sanctioned play, not less.
3. Another bolt-on idea is to require that players enter at least one sanctioned tourney per calendar year in order to maintain their rating (would also drive \$\$ due to the ratings cravers). If not, a points penalty deduct could be assessed (for “inactivity”) or maybe the reverse, where active players are granted points for entering tourneys no matter who wins or loses (positive reinforcement “bonus” method).
4. Another partial fix could be that if you fail to play at least one tourney per year then you are ineligible to win prize \$ in the next tourney. Again, this is to encourage players to play within the system versus sitting on the sidelines. This is a tougher problem to fix.

Goals

1. Get more players playing on a regular basis
2. Take away the ratings “stress and paranoia”
3. More competitive matches inside the prelim. brackets
4. Respect the sport and respect the elite players (they have earned it)
 - Example: In tennis does the 4.5 player play the 3.0 player in a tournament?
 - Example: In the martial arts, are the red belts fighting the black belts?

- Question: What other sport puts beginners versus advanced players in sanctioned tournaments?
- 5. Focus on winning tournaments versus ratings hunting
- 6. More players playing grows the sport and grows revenue for everyone

Stakeholder Considerations

1. Revenue for the tournament directors and clubs (and funding prize money)
2. Revenue for USATT HQ from match play
3. Encourage more players to actually play in tournaments
4. Discourage sitting on the sidelines to “protect” ratings
5. Encourage and foster competitive matches for both recreational and elite level players
6. “Relevance” in match play and “respecting” the elites and players with higher level ratings

Scratch Your Head Considerations

How do we study this problem?

1. Is this a math/money problem for the clubs and organizers?
2. Is this a math problem to determine if more players would compete under an amended tourney structure?
3. Is this a human behavior/psychological problem to study?
4. Should all of the above be studied, possibly more? If so how do we study this to determine the most likely outcomes?
5. There is no problem at all...everything is good?

Recommendation

Submit the matter to the Tournament Committee for further evaluation and comment. Then discuss at the next Board call to determine next steps, if any.