

**FORENSIC TOURNAMENT MANAGEMENT
VIA COMPUTER PROGRAM**

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With the increased emphasis on individual events at college forensic tournaments, both high school and college tournaments have become extremely difficult to manage manually. The shift has been to computer managed tournaments, and the reasons for this are as varied as they are valid.

There are two major areas in tournament management that the computer program shines in. They are time saving and minimal error possibility. The

number of staff required to run a computer oriented tournament is minimal. Fewer people required for fewer hours is a money saver as well as a time saver. The Northwest Community College program allows for time saving the minute the entries start coming in to the host school. With that program, the events can be entered immediately as each school entry is entered whole, and the computer does the sorting for event entries on a separate event menu.

The computer memory does the panning for each round, so the number of people and hours required to do this manually are saved. When results come in, the computer tallies results, saving uncountable time and also minimizing errors. Students take small comfort in the knowledge that they "should have been" in finals except for a Tab room error.

Computers minimize errors in all aspects of tournament management. Leaving a student out of a round, transposing numbers in results, misadding figures, these can all be avoided or easily corrected by fewer staff using the computer.

There are various programs on the market. Northwest Community College has developed and plans to market a program that has been tested extensively and used successfully at the largest invitational college tournament in the country, The Great Salt Lake, at the University of Utah. Individual events for seventy six schools were handled by five people over a three day tournament.

Computer generated postings, ballots, checklists, rank order listings, and school code listings, all add to the ease of tournament management and create an enjoyable experience for all concerned: students, judges, staff, coaches, and the tournament administrator. When it becomes a question of hosting or not hosting a tournament because of the work involved, those who can only be brought into the computer age kicking and screaming must ultimately consider the main benefactor of tournaments: the student. Tournaments must be held, and computers must be given serious consideration in their management.

There are a myriad of computer programs beginning to be used throughout the country. Just as the word processing explosion has begun to re-shape English classes across the nation, computer use in tournament management has begun to re-shape tournament administration.

Only a few years ago, the number and types of computers and programs available for tournament administration were limited. Today that is no longer the case. A wide variety of programs suitable for various computers are readily available on the market. This puts consumers in the enviable position of being able to pick and choose the computer program that best suits their needs.

Since all computerized tournament management programs have as their goal increased efficiency and accuracy, the wise consumer should be asking themselves several key questions related to these two issues.

In order to improve on tournament management efficiency, several aspects

need to be examined. Is this program compatible with computers available at our campus? Is this program comprehensive in terms of handling a wide variety of tasks associated with running tournaments? Is this program flexible to handle a wide variety of tournaments? Is this program easily learned and/or understood, so that valuable tournament time is not spent simply learning the system? When these questions have been explored a final determination can be made on increased efficiency.

All computer salespeople will tell you that a computer is 100% accurate. They will qualify this however, with the statement that of course, the computer is only as accurate as the humans who enter the information. Therefore the key issues in determining a program's accuracy will be what program features are designed to minimize errors and provide for error correction. This usually encompasses clear instructions for use, ease of use and ease of editing.

The NWCC computer program is not yet perfect, but there are several aspects of this program that make it highly efficient and accurate for a variety of reasons. A close examination of the features of this program will demonstrate what it can do to improve both the efficiency and the accuracy of tournament management.

The NWCC computer program is the result of 6 years of development and refinement. The current edition is compatible with all IBM and IBM compatible machines with either a 2 floppy disk system, a hard drive or a 3 1/2 inch system. The IBM and compatible system represents an improvement in speed of use and expanded capabilities through the expanded memory of most compatibles. The IBM system is more than twice as fast as the older version programs that operate off of Radio Shack TRS

Moving to IBM compatibility alone is not necessarily an advantage however. If any of you have tried to change from an Apple or a Radio Shack TRS computer to an IBM you will have realized that the words "user friendly" do not apply to this family of computers. The best program in the world is no good if it takes years to learn to operate it effectively. So let's examine two issues. One, what benefits are there to computer operation and two, what features of the NWCC program make it worthy of consideration.

It is probable that many forensic coaches or forensic tournament administrators are "computer shy" and think that because they are not computer literate that this concept of computer tournament administration is too difficult for them. While this thought has validity, be assured that the authors of this paper are not computer "whizzes" with years of computer experience and do not possess infinite knowledge about the functions of a computer. We are forensic coaches who are interested in providing the best possible tournament experience for our students and for other forensic competitors. Although we entered the computer world kicking and screaming, we have become solid advocates of its use.

First let's look at computerized tournament management. Although many high school programs have always emphasized individual events, at the college level it has only been in the last 10 years that they began to receive equal importance with debate events. In fact, in recent history individual events have recently surpassed debate events at tournaments. Today a typical high school tournament will feature from 5 to 10 individual events, while a typical college tournament will feature 8 to 12 individual events.

Whether pairing individual events by hand or computer, certain steps must be done. These include compilation of master entry lists, pairing rounds in panels, assigning rooms and judges, tabulation of results, determination of rankings and out-round contestants and finally tabulation of final rounds and determining winners. In order to make a reasonable comparison, take a hypothetical tournament at Anywhere University. This tournament has 11 individual events with an average of 60 contestants per event. Now look at each of the steps to see where a computer can be useful.

Step one is compiling master entry lists. This is necessary to get an accurate listing of who is entered in the tournament and from what school. At this step there is very little difference between manual operation and a computer program. Each name of each contestant must be typed, accurately of course, and double checked against master entry sheets.

Step two, the actual pairing begins. Manual tournament operation requires individual cards be made for each contestant in each event. Since this requires a second copying of the master lists, these must also be checked for error, increasing the work time. The second copying of data also increases the risk for errors. After the cards are completed, the paneling process begins. Each card is laid out in panels for each round. Afterwards, a master list of the panels is written (usually by hand first and then typed). This process is then repeated for each event for each round. Typically this process done by hand requires two people for each two events and approximately 40 staff hours of work. There is increased risk of error as the data is re-copied and re-typed each round.

In comparison, this process is where the computer shines. The original entry list remains in the computer memory. No re-copy is necessary. Nor is it necessary to develop a card system. Pairing time for a round is approximately 1 minute for a computer. Adding printing time to the process, our hypothetical tournament could be paired and posting copies ready for all eleven events in 1 staff hour.

Step 3, assigning rooms and judges. This step is also very similar for both manually run tournaments and computerized tournaments. The only difference is that if the same rooms are available for all three rounds for the same event, then rooms can be entered only once, and the computer will automatically assign them to panels for all rounds.

Step 4, tabulation of results. In a manual tournament this requires record-

ing results on a card system or a master sheet system. For tournaments that give out master cumulative sheets after the tournament, it sometimes means recording on both. With a card system, it is necessary each round to re-arrange the cards in the original panels. Working with 60 cards increases the risk of error and reduces checking procedure accuracy. Transposing the information to master sheets from cards again increases the risk of error. And with any manual system using handwritten results, there is the possibility of misreading a number.

Advantages to a computer system are many. Panels are readily available for each round. Results can be entered and checked by panel. It is relatively easy to move from event to event as the ballots come in. And best of all, the information is stored both for a final tabulation to determine finalists, but also to print a master copy for cumulative sheets.

Step 5, determination of rankings and out-rounds. Here again manual operation needs to be slow and precise. Each contestant's rankings and ratings must be added and double-checked. Then comparisons are made to determine finalists. This is also where many human errors are made and where the errors are most difficult for the students. Typically, the process takes an hour per event. Then the results are re-written on master sheets. With the computerized system, the computer does all addition and ranking. Tab sheets are printed for master results as well as a complete ranking for each contestant. Typically this process including printing time takes one hour for all eleven events. In addition, the chance of error is vastly reduced.

Step 6, tabulation of final rounds and determination of winners. At this step the differences between manual operation and computer operation is blurred by the wide variety of individual event computer programs available. Some programs do virtually nothing with out-rounds, while others have complete programs. Computers can be used to print accurate posting copies, print ballots, pair panels, tabulate results and determine final rankings. The essential advantage to computer use here is some additional time savings and increased accuracy. Again, since the information is already entered into the computer, and the computer can do all the compilation, there is less chance of error.

But, whether or not a computer program is right for your school, what does the NWCC program provide?

Starting from the beginning, our program is menu driven. For those who do not use computers extensively, this means that all the operations of the computer are laid out in the beginning, and operators need only select a number from the menu to get into the operation required. (see figure one)

But let's look specifically at the 6 steps to tournament operation and see what this program can do.

Step 1, compiling master entry lists. One of the drawbacks of many computer programs is found in this step. Many computer programs require

each event to be entered separately. Since tournament invitations include an entry form for each school with each event, this step requires thumbing through each entry form, getting separate lists of contestants for each event. One of the advantages of the NWCC program is that contestants are entered according to each school.

The advantage to this system includes the following: First, each tournament devises its own entry form, thus the information entered is tailored to the flexibility of each tournament host. Second, this reduces the possibility of inadvertently leaving a contestant off the master list. Typing in each school requires less shuffling of papers and makes the process more efficient. Third, this also allows you to begin entering information days in advance of the tournament when the entry forms first start arriving.

When all the schools have been entered, the computer will then generate checklists for each of the events as well as a checklist for each school. It is, of course, possible to edit the school lists at any time. This makes it easier to record changes. (See figure two)

Step 2, Actual pairing. The pairing is randomly generated with two checks built into the system. The first computer check is designed to prevent contestants from the same school meeting each other whenever possible. A new feature of this program is a second check designed to prevent the same contestants from hearing each other whenever possible. Of course with very small tournaments and several contestants from the same school in one event, these checks are not effective. But with a large event both of these factors are considered. As with all programs, the pairing process takes only seconds per event for the computer. What is essential here is a usable change format. Despite the computer checks, there are intangible circumstances the computer can't control. Students who are double-entered, for example, may need to speak first or last in a panel. This program allows for convenient alteration of each of the panels.

Another added feature to this program is the option to do only one round of an event. This can be extremely useful if round one is to start minutes after registration. Sometimes drops require the re-pairing of an event, but with this program, round one is paired and additional rounds are paired after changes are recorded. This is also useful if there is a small tournament staff and little time to pair before the tournament begins. All of the round one events can be paired and the additional rounds saved for pairing when round one is underway. (See figure 3, 3.1, 3.2)

Step 3, assigning rooms and judges. As with most programs, rooms can be assigned once and then repeated for subsequent rounds without re-entering. Or it is possible if necessary to change rooms each round. Also the feature of being able to pair round by round if desired gives more flexibility to the staff assigning rooms and judges. The program will not assign judges at this point.

Tournament staff feel the flexibility required for judge assignment makes it better handled as a manual operation.

Step 4, entering results. It is not necessary with this program to have all the ballots from a particular event to begin entering results. All of this is handled easily from menu selections and allows you to avoid the last minute rush entering events. You can switch with ease from panel to panel or event to event. To avoid any confusion, the computer will keep track of which panels you have entered results for and tell which ones are missing. The screen will also flash while entering events if a place is missing. It alerts the operator to too many fourths and no thirds, for example. Once again, errors are easy to check and easy to correct. It is also possible to completely re-enter a panel if the need arises. (see figure four)

Step 5, determining rankings and out-rounds. After all results for an event have been entered, it is possible to get final rankings and tabulation cumulative sheets. As with other parts of the program, this option is always available when an event is finished. So even if some events are not completed while some are, it is possible to determine rankings for particular event.

This program will compile a complete rank order listing for each event. It will also print a complete tabulation sheet in school code order. This program also has the unique option of running a four round tournament. If this option is chosen, the computer will print all four scores on the tabulation sheet, but will drop the low score to determine rank order listing. (see figure five)

Step 6, tabulation of final rounds and determining winners. In the elimination round portion of this program, there are several additional new options. The manual changes are still available, however, the scramble panels function saves a lot of hand work. As in the preliminary rounds, the postings give you room options which saves writing time. You are also given ballots with this information and a manual tab sheet. (See Appendix 5.1) The ballots list each of the contestants in a given panel and avoid confusion later. This program includes options for finals, semi-finals and finals from semi-finals. The finals program will take the top rank order contestants at your command, as will the semi-final program. With semi-finals you have the option of running as many panels as you wish, which is helpful for tournaments that might have three panels or more in semi's. When going from finals after a semi-final, the computer remembers the semi-finalists and allows you to select them after the results are in. (see figure 6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4)

We are currently working on a sweepstakes program. This will be invaluable in time saving at the end of the tournament when you are involved in the last minute crunch of trying to get things ready for an awards assembly.

In summary, the catch words for our program are easy and flexible. We were determined to provide a program that was easy to use and flexible enough to be used at a variety of tournaments, by a variety of people.

A few final comments are necessary to compare manual tournament administration with computerized programs. Using manual operation requires a knowledgeable staff. The fewer people who are capable of pairing and tabulating results, the more time it will take. Since most tournaments are not blessed with a half-dozen or more trained individuals, there is increased time load training staff members. Increased staff often increases costs as well. Computerized tournaments require in general 2 staff members who are knowledgeable about running tournaments and who become familiar with the computer program. It should also be noted that increasing the speed and accuracy of tournament administration has numerous side benefits for coaches and contestants. More accuracy, of course helps contestants, who are often at the mercy of tab room error. It also contributes to tournaments running on time. This is enormously important for consideration of students and judges who have other needs and commitments. Finally for coaches, well run tournament improve their credibility. All coaches lose credibility when students who should have been in the finals, don't get there. It also gives even the tournament administrator time to work with students.
