

Elementary School Chess Tournament Advice

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So you think you want to put on an Elementary School tournament? This is great!!! Elementary School Chess needs people and clubs like you to continue to grow this wonderful sport for our children. However, though putting on a tournament is fairly easy to do, it does take an enormous amount of planning and coordination. There are pitfalls to be avoided. However, with proper planning, you can make your event an immediate classic.

Before we go on, consider this. Every year, we lose 70-90% of all sixth graders from the chess community. Although there are some tournaments for Middle and High school, there could certainly be more. If you have room at your tournament site for 10 – 40 additional players, it would be easy and great to have one additional 7-12, or 7-8 section. Keep in mind to check the schedule so that you do not conflict with the tournaments sponsored by WHSCA. These tournaments are well attended and you will find it difficult to compete with the state level tournaments.

The information listed below comes from eight years and 32 tournaments of experience.

Site and Date Selection

This should occur 6-12 months prior to the tournament

- The scholastic chess season in Washington, generally runs from mid-October through the end of March, culminating in the State Championships. The latest you can schedule a tournament and still have it be a qualifier for that year's State Tournament is two weeks prior to State Tournament
- Tournaments on holiday weekends tend to not do well.
- Check the existing calendar to make sure you are not competing with another tournament within a five mile radius. (www.whsca.org and www.nwchess.com)
- Once you determine the date that you want to have the tournament, start calling the governing bodies of the site you prefer.
- In general, school districts start determining their facilities schedule between May and August. Preference will be given to school sports teams and clubs.
- If you are dealing with a public facility, you will most likely have to pay either a site fee or custodial fees (or both).
- If at all possible, try to get full use of the kitchen. (We will get into concessions later.)
- Remember, you will need to obtain the facility for Friday night also for setup.
- Are tables and chairs part of the deal? Who will be responsible for set-up and tear down?
- Measure the facility to figure out the number of players you will be able to accommodate. You will need a slightly larger area than the game area to accommodate players and parents between games.
- Arrange to have a microphone system available.

- Advertise! Advertise! Advertise! Get the word out to other chess coaches and to the major chess calendars to let people know about your tournament.

Tournament Format

- Determine which sections you will have in the tournament. There are many possibilities here. The standard format is K-3, 4-6, 7-8 and 9-12. Another option would be K-1, 2-3, 4-6, etc. Or if you have enough players, you can hold a grade level tournament. In this case, if you don't have enough players for a separate playing section, you can combine sections, but still present the grade level awards.
- Another option is to group the sections by rating. An over 900 section and under 1000 section tournament has been used successfully. In this case you could have one over 900 section (with all grades) and a K-3 U1000 and a 4-6 U1000 section.
- Quads are another popular format and provide very competitive games in a short amount of time. Players are divided into groups of 4 based on rating and separating teammates and siblings as much as possible. Then they play a round robin. Each quad runs at its own pace.
- Another factor in tournaments is the time control. Especially for better players (and some older players,) the longer time controls are appreciated. G/45 or G/60 with fewer rounds works well.
- Just as a note, to be a Washington State Elementary Chess Championship qualifier, there are rules about section size and number of rounds. Please see these rules for more details.

Tournament Committee

- As the tournament coordinator, unless you have a lot of experience, the ability to be in multiple locations at once, or a death wish, you will need to form a committee of dedicated people that will be totally in charge of their selected duties. Do not try to do everything yourself or micro-manage the various activities. Instead, consider yourself as the President with a cabinet. Each cabinet chief has the actual duties. Your job is to be there to advise and coordinate to achieve the central goal. However, the final strategy must be up to you.
- Once you determine your committee chairs, task them with filling their own personnel needs.
- Listed are the various committees you may want to create: Facilities, Awards, Concessions, Entertainment, Security, Floor Director, and Tournament Statistician. We will examine their responsibilities as we discuss each function.

Facilities

- Works with the site staff to assure that the facility will be opened and closed on schedule.
- Should monitor trash cans, bathrooms, etc. during setup and the day of the tournament.

- If you are in a carpeted facility, it might be wise to have a carpet shampooer and cleaner to immediately attack potential stains.
- Should have a direct line to the site facilities manager for emergencies.
- Setup/teardown, boards/pieces/clocks, tables/chairs etc.)

Awards

- You should begin shopping awards companies as soon as you decide to put on a tournament. You should place your order
- Awards should be ordered based on a 30-40% ratio to the number of entries.
- You have the option of giving awards for overall, grade, team, and sportsmanship. Most tournaments will give them all.
- If you put a trophy out on display, you should give it out.

Here is a sample breakdown for a 200 person tournament with a K-3 and 4-6 division:

Overall trophies	Total
K/3 First through Fifth Place	(5)
4/6 First through Fifth Place	(5)
Grades K-6 Grade Trophies - First through Fifth Place	(35)
K/3 First through Fifth Place Team	(5)
4/6 First through Fifth Place Team	(5)
K/3 Sportsmanship Award	(2)
4/6 Sportsmanship Award	(2)

Medals are awarded to players that did not receive a trophy but qualified for state with a plus score (3.0 points out of 5.0 points). In addition, I would have 20 additional trophies in the back room available with “Outstanding Performance” instead of a place, grade, or division on the plate. These are trophies that you can award to players to avoid tiebreakers from determining trophy distribution.

- Do you want to give out participation awards? These could be medals, certificates, or small trophies.
- Most tournaments want to give trophies away to all Kindergarten players. This is a great way to motivate them to continue on to a life of chess.
- Before trophy presentation begins, make sure that all trophies are physically in the exact order in which they are given out

Concessions

If done properly, concessions will be a positive memory from your tournaments and your largest profit center. If your tournament is large enough, there may be chess vendors that will want to rent space from you. You can either charge them a percent of sales, a flat fee, or negotiate for equipment for your club. The most important concession you will do is your food service to the tournament players and families.

If at all possible, when you negotiate for the site, try to get full use of the kitchen so that you can cook simple things. If at all possible, someone on your kitchen staff should have a food handler’s card. Although cooking requires a little more work, you will produce higher quality food and a higher profit margin.

Choosing food to sell

- Most Important – Stick to basics and keep the selection down
- For the morning serve coffee, milk, and juice to drink. Also keep a stock of soft drinks. Have a limited supply of doughnuts, muffins, and/or bagels and cream cheese.
- For the balance of the day, stick to pizza and hot dogs. You may also want a limited number of salads (Caesar, Chinese Chicken, Antipasto, etc)
- You will also want to have snacks. You can have bananas, pears, and apples for fruit. Although we can argue the merits of selling candy, face it, it is what sells. Keep the selection small and stick to the major brands. I would suggest Milky Way, Skittles, Red Vines, Gummies, and Hershey Bars. You may want to have chips also but again, keep it simple.
- Watch your inventory through the day. If you are over inventoried on an item, discount it immediately so you do not take a loss on it.
- If you have control of the kitchen, purchase pizzas from “take and bake” vendors such as Papa Murphy’s. Check with the school and see if they already have an account with them that you can use to get a discount. In this way, you will increase your margins.
- Check with local wholesalers, and stores for your food and soft drinks. You might be surprised at what they might donate if you hang one of their banners in the tournament area.
- These are foods and drinks you might think are good choices but you may regret:
 - Any drinks that have a bright color base such as red, purple and orange sodas. Remember, things get spilled. These colors stain carpets, even if you clean them quickly. Your contract with the site may include money for damages after the event.

Popcorn – if spilled, this is a royal pain to clean up.

Product with nuts such as candy bars, granola, peanut butter, etc. Nut allergies are a major concern nowadays. Nuts don’t have to be eaten by the person with the allergy. If someone eats a product with nuts and touches chess pieces that someone who is allergic to then touches, the child can still get a very serious reaction.

Entertainment

If you have the room, you may want to have organized activities for players and siblings. You will want to have dedicated people monitoring these areas. Listed below are suggestions:

- A video room where you can play movies for the kids
- Monitored and organized outside activities and games for the kids to play (weather permitting)
- A craft area. You can set up a table or two using scraps of cloth, construction paper, glue, glitter, and tape. If a volunteer is gifted and wants to help kids that would be an additional bonus. If you do this, try to have it

on a non-carpeted floor. You may also want to lay disposable tarps or plastic under the table. At the end of the day, you can just roll up the tarp and throw away the mess.

- A face painter
- A Story Teller/Reader
- An area where kids can be noisy and listen to music without bugging adults.
- If you have a high caliber player associated with your club, you may want to do “simuls”.

Security

Keep in mind that you are ultimately responsible for the health and safety of the children at your event. When you negotiate the site, you need to be aware of any insurance needs that you need from the site coordinator. There is normally coverage already in place, but you must make sure.

It is wise to have parents/staff either posted outside or at least occasionally making the rounds of your area, especially if the general public has access to your site. You will need to focus on strangers that may be coming close to or are making contact with the children. You also want to make sure that the children are not doing anything that is potentially dangerous or destructive. You cannot rely on parents to monitor their own children.

If you are using a facility that has a skittles area that is in a different building from the chess playing area, you might also want to post a volunteer in the walkway to make sure children get to where they are supposed to go.

Floor Director

The Floor Director takes the responsibility of all tournament play. This person needs to know the rules of chess as he/she will be the final arbiter for any decisions regarding tournament play. The Director, along with the judges, must also be able to handle the emotional meltdowns that occur along the way. Finally, you will need to handle parents ranging from confused to irate in an understanding and diplomatic fashion.

If no one at your club has these skills, there are directors available for hire.

Check-In

It is highly recommended that you do not pre-pair the tournament. You should allow for one hour of check-in and end check-in ½ hour prior to the beginning of the tournament. All players not checked in should receive either a zero or ½ point bye at the discretion of the Floor Director. If they do not arrive by the end of round one, they should be withdrawn from the tournament. There is also the option of hand pairing them prior to the beginning of round one if another player is available due to a bye or late arrival.

Coaches Meeting

Approximately, 30 minutes prior to the start of the tournament, Floor Director will hold a meeting for all coaches and concerned parents. The purpose of the meeting is to go

over the rules and ask for volunteers for judges. Many smart Tournament Coordinators will have made enough phone calls prior to the tournament to get volunteer judges.

Basic Tournament Rules

Listed below is a sample of rules and Judges Instructions used in most Elementary School events

- The tournament will be 5 games, G30 on an analog clock or G25 with a five second delay on a digital clock
- Touch Move, Touch Take will be in effect. If a player touches a piece with their fingers, they must move that piece unless it results in an illegal move. If they touch an opponent's piece with their own piece, they must take that piece unless it results in an illegal move. If you move a piece and you release that piece on a legal square, the move is final.
- Clock usage – If a K-3 player brings a clock to a table, both players must agree to use it or it may not be used. If a 4-6 player brings a clock to the table, the clock will be used. If both players bring a clock, the player on black chooses which clock will be used. In all cases of clock usage, the player playing black will choose the side of the board to place the clock on.
- We want the players to make all of their own decisions. Therefore, Judges may not interfere in any game without the children raising their hand to request the judge come to the game. The only exception to this is if there is obvious cheating, if the players begin arguing out loud, or if a physical or emotional situation occurs.
- If a Judge is called for a ruling, clocks should be stopped. The Judge may only advise on what the rules are. Again, we want the children to make their own decisions based on the rules. For instance, if a Judge is asked, "Is this a stalemate?" the judge should not say yes or no, but instead, explain the stalemate rule to the children.
- At the end of the game, the children raise their hand for the Judge to come over to record the game. Both players must agree on the outcome of the game. The Judge may not correct the children if their agreement is incorrect. At this point, the Judge writes down the result on the Judges sheet. The Judge should show the written result to the players and have them verify that the results are correct.

Tournament Statistician

In order to get the tournament rated and to accurately do pairings and standings, it is suggested that you use the Swiss-Sys computer program. It is recommended that a club purchase the program and train people to use it. However, you have the option to hire a qualified computer operator to do the tournament.

The commonly used tie-breaks to be used are Solkoff, Cumulative, and Opposition Cumulative and should be entered in that order (SCO). It will save you a lot of grief and questions if you do not enter these until after you post the fourth round standings.

The statistician will also be responsible for submitting the final results to the appropriate rating service. A nominal fee is charged by WHSCA to cover the rating expenses.

Trophy Presentation

After the last game of the last round finishes, recruit people to help do the bulk of the clean up. Sometimes the tables in the playing area need to be put away before the awards ceremony. Announcing that the quicker this happens, the faster we will finish is a good motivator.

The person who will do the trophy presentation should be comfortable public speaker with the ability to quickly read a name and phonetically say it. Before you proceed with the trophies, honor your committee chairs and the Judges. This event would not have happened without them. Finally, ask the children to thank their parents for bringing them to the tournament.

Now, on to the trophies. Start with the sportsmanship awards. Then, proceed with the Grade awards for one of the sections. Next come the Overall awards for the same section and then finish with the Team awards for that section. Then proceed to duplicate this system for the other section(s)

Once trophy presentation is over, nicely encourage people to leave and finish the clean-up task. Once you are done go out or home and relax, you have earned it!!!

I am sure that everyone who reads this might think that they have a better way. If you do, share it with everyone, especially new clubs that are looking to put tournaments on in the future. If we all help each other, chess will continue to grow.