



Foundations for Structuring a Successful League Program

Electronic dart leagues are an important and growing worldwide trend with special benefits for dart players and dart-machine manufacturers and operators, as well as tavern and bar owners. Leagues offer dart players an organized way to enjoy the sport in a friendly and enjoyable manner. Operators and manufacturers of dart machines should see increased business as a result of this trend. Bar and tavern owners will realize extra business as well, if they are willing to support a league program in their establishments.

Dart leagues are not the same as dart tournaments. Leagues are a weekly event of dart competition in seasons that last from a few weeks to a full year. Tournaments, by contrast, last only an evening, full day or weekend. Tournaments are held to select winners, whether they be teams or individuals. Prizes and/or cash are awarded to these winners. Often, following a season of league play, there is a special league tournament to determine the league's season champions.

Become Familiar with Leagues

The first step in becoming a successful league-program operator/coordinator is to know as much as possible about leagues of all types: darts, pool, foosball and bowling. Many of the characteristics you'll find in one league carry over into leagues in other sports. Familiarity with any type of league helps you become familiar with dart leagues. Read as much as you can on leagues, and find out what is happening in your area. Find out if there are other leagues in your area. Who else is currently operating leagues? Which ones are succeeding? Are there leagues that have failed? Uncovering the answers to these questions will help you develop your plans for a successful league program.

Attend League SMART for the educational sessions on leagues and most importantly to meet with other coin operators and league coordinators from around the world to share ideas and learn what has worked well for them. Visit as many league establishments as you can during league play to see how leagues are organized and managed. Look for promotional materials in the bars and in the local media.

Most importantly, talk to the dart players to find out what motivates them to play in their specific dart leagues and how much they spend a league night to play darts. Be sure to have them separate the league/dart-play costs from extra money they spend on food and drink. (Use the information on additional monies spent to help solicit league play in new locations). Uncovering the answers to these questions will help you develop your unique plans for a successful league program.

The reason for checking out the league situation in your area is that every league seems to differ in varying degrees from other leagues. It all depends on what the players and the operator decide to make it. It can be a most enjoyable and most profitable experience.

This research will prevent you from starting a league that is unattractive to players. And if you must compete with other leagues in your area, you will have to offer something that is more attractive than what your competitor offers. Since you will have talked to players, you will know what they prefer, and you'll know how to communicate this to potential dart players for your leagues.

Homework never ends. Always watch what is happening with your leagues and competitors' leagues. Continue to ask questions, and continue taking notes. There are many variations to the concept of leagues, and you will continue to see different ways that operators form and manage leagues. That's why we've prepared this binder, so you can keep adding to it as your research continues.

Knowing the Different Types of Leagues & Deciding What Type of League to Run

There are as many types of league systems as there are operators and locations. The league system must be tailored to meet each operator's needs and wants. The "want" is to make as much money as possible; the "need" is to generate enough cash to pay the bills and make a living. The secret to both is to entice as many players as can be accommodated on the equipment available and to play on a regular weekly basis to accomplish your goals.

The type of operation involved will dictate league configuration and size. If, the entire operation is in an urban area, then there is much more flexibility in the league type. If on the other hand, the operation is mostly rural, then the league type will be dictated by distance and the players' willingness to travel. There is some trial and error involved in finding the right combination to make the league work for you.

In-House Leagues

An in-house league is confined to one establishment with all participants playing in only one location. If you have never run a dart league, an in-house league may be the ideal way to start. It will promote play in that location, and you can easily control the situation while you are able to learn as you go. In addition, since all play is confined to one location, the location owner will see this type of league as an easy way to promote loyalty to that establishment. Leagues are usually held on slow nights, so location owners will see customers and sales they normally wouldn't see on slow nights.

Traveling Leagues

Traveling leagues include several locations. Players go from location to location during the season to compete against a wide variety of players in several settings. The operator benefits more from this type of league as they are much larger than single-location, in-house leagues. There are more players in several settings. There are more players; therefore, more machines are needed and played. Since traveling leagues require players to move from location to location during the season, location owners get the chance to introduce their establishments to a steady stream of prospective customers each week. Every week there will be people in the bar buying food and drinks as the players compete in league play. Depending on your area, you might even be able to create a day/weekend league, especially if there are a lot of players in your area who work the swing shift.

The operator has to decide the kind of dart league to organize and manage, and that decision is reached based on careful consideration of the dart dynamics in your specific area. As mentioned earlier, the first decision is to determine what type of league to organize: an in-house or traveling league. If you have started with an in-house league, as your expertise grows, there is no reason to remain exclusively with in-house leagues. By expanding to traveling leagues, the base is broader so more revenue can be made from cash boxes and through league administration. In the long term, it's preferable to have traveling leagues, as the total number of players is larger and more attractive to location owners as it brings in new clientele.

Sponsor Fees

Each location should pay a sponsor fee of about \$30.00 per team sponsored. This money is used for league administrative fees and/or trophies and a league-ending banquet. Once you know who your teams are and where they will play, invoice your sponsors for their sponsor fees. Do this early and follow up until all fees have been paid. It is very difficult to collect these fees after the league is over.

Locations who resist this sponsorship fee should consider the economic advantages of sponsoring a dart league team. For example:

An 8-team league, round robin format will play 14 weeks
30¢ cost .25 cents per player.
4 players play each game, which equals \$1.00.
12 games each match, which equals \$12.00.
12 games x 14 weeks = \$168.00 (location's half is \$84.00)
Location's quarter drop = \$84.00
Sponsorship fee = \$60.00
\$24.00 from League Player only

This amount does not include food, drinks, practice or money spent on other games in the location.

Scheduling

Some establishments have dart leagues or other dart events most nights of the week. Others have one night a week for dart leagues. Be sure that when you make scheduling decisions, you base these decisions on input from the establishments and from the players. "Off nights" are the best time to schedule leagues in most cases.

Take in to consideration other leagues that are running in the location that might interfere with the new league you are starting, due to room size making it too crowded, or having people who want to play two leagues (e.g. pool and darts). Remember, the more nights of play the better, even if the location is running its own tournament, it means money in your pocket.

Team and Scheduling Options

Once you have decided whether your league will be an in-house league or a traveling league, your next decision will concern team and schedule structures. Leagues are made up of teams, not individuals. Teams can range in number from as few as two players for each side (doubles), three players per side (triples), four players per side (four-person team) or as many as eight. Doubles, triples and four-person teams are most popular in the United States.

Mixed Doubles consist of one man and one woman on each team. Mixed Triples must have at least one woman on the team, but many have two women. Four-person team events usually have any combination of men and women, unless the event is being played to certain local rules.

If your experience with leagues is limited, or if electronic darts is not a cultural part of your geographical area, it's best to start with a Mixed Doubles League with basic game features.

1. Mixed Doubles Leagues – having one woman and one man on each team – are more fun than they are competitive. And since you want your first-time players to enjoy themselves, this type of league offers the strongest potential for creating fun and enjoyment for new league players.
2. It is easier to recruit couples than it is to find individuals. The couple has a night together enjoying darts with friends. The league provides a routine excuse to go out and enjoy at least one evening a week together.
3. The demographics of dart players across the United States are half men and half women. By drawing from both sexes, it may be easier to form teams as you start your league.

More advanced players may prefer to specialize in men's and women's leagues where competition is often tougher and the play more challenging. These leagues are organized for experienced dart players who must demonstrate certain abilities and handicaps in accordance with the National Dart Association's system of player ranking. In other words, the leagues are organized by experience and skill from novice level to master's levels. Nevertheless, you'll find that friendly, fair competition and fun is important, regardless of the skill level of the dart league, these are the winning ingredients for a successful dart-league program.

Games

301, 501 and Cricket are the most common league games. Combination Leagues (combo leagues) combine '01 games and Cricket games. The most popular league for beginners is a 301 Open In-Open Out format. The reason for this is that beginners have a harder time controlling their darts. In 301, everything counts for a score and players have more fun.

Number of Games Played

Most leagues play 13 games of '01, 11 games of Cricket, or a combination of games. The main thing to keep in mind is play should last for a minimum of 2 1/2 hours. Your beginning players will play slower and may need to play fewer games per night than your advanced leagues.

Scoring & Statistics

If you have machines that use a card system for scoring, familiarize yourself and your staff with how it works so that you can demonstrate it at the players' meetings. If not, determine what method you are going to use.

Most operators are using the machine manufacturers' software to track and compute league statistics, create schedules and prepare reports. There are also some independent league software programs available, and some operators choose to set up their own software program.

Most machines have slots in them that allow players to place an envelope that contains the weekly league fees and score sheets (if you are not using a card system). A lot of leagues have the route collector pick up the envelopes and then mail out a copy of the standings, as well as post them at the establishment and/or their Web site.

Handicapping

Determine if your league(s) will use a handicap system and if it will be capped, classified or open-skill level. There are many handicapping systems to choose from and you will want to find the one that works best for your leagues and that will be accepted by the players. Several meetings and/or test tournaments will let players see how the different handicaps work. Most leagues are using the Spot points (0-3) method.

League Officers

Many leagues have a president and vice president, and there is a team captain for each team as well. There is, however, wide diversity in the number and type of officers individual leagues have. All the captains are called to a league meeting to settle league disputes or protests. By letting the team captains settle league disputes themselves, it keeps the operator/coordinator as a neutral party with all players and locations.

In many cases, the operator will handle all of the administrative tasks in conjunction with team captains and location owners.

Position	General Responsibilities
President	Calls meetings, organizes agenda, key communicator for league
Vice President	Serves in president's absence, assists president
Operator's Staff	Handles money and statistics

League Seasons

Most operators have two or three seasons per year, two (14-15 week or 21-22 week) leagues and a short summer (8 week) league. Giving each team a home and away game with the same team and all teams play each other. Most leagues start between 7 and 7:30 p.m. and play an average of 6-8 games per evening.

Fee Structure

Weekly fees vary from league to league. The low average is \$3 per player plus .25 –.50 cent administrative fees. The high average is \$6 with no administration fees. Determine the weekly fees with the input of the players, because you won't want to overprice the league and limit participation based on price.

Paying Wins and Losses

By paying wins and losses, even the lowest-skilled team in the league gets back money at the end of the season.

Example: \$3 per player + \$12 per team x 2 teams = \$24 per match
 12-game format means that each game is worth \$2
 win pays 75% = \$1.50
 loss pays 25% = .50

League Changes

If you are considering a change to your league structure, make sure that you ask the players and the establishment owners for their advice. Unless you have the support of the players and the location owner for the change, it probably will not succeed.

Record Keeping, Reports, Budgets

Accurate record keeping is vital to keeping a league running smoothly and successfully. Errors reflect badly on the operators and cause morale problems among the teams and players. Do whatever you can to simplify records so that records and reports can be generated in a timely and accurate fashion. Since most operators manage their leagues differently from other operators, it's difficult to provide guidelines that will apply to all, or even most, situations.

League Budgets

The budget should be an open plan so that players know the revenue sources as well as the complete expenses. If the operator plays a major role in collecting and tabulating scores, this is a legitimate expense for which compensation is expected. The budget should be reviewed during the players' meeting(s) so that they know how the prize money is distributed and how they can win it. Keep the budget simple to be understood by all league members.

League Income:

- Registration fee (paid for by the establishment)
- Nightly playing fees (not including the cost of machine play)

League Expenses:

- Team cash prizes
- Trophies
- Feat prizes
- Mailing/Administration
- Banquet
- Captains' gifts

End of Season Reporting

Prepare your league standings report and reconcile your ledger. Prepare the league payout report and deduct any delinquent fees from the team payout.