



## How to Run a Successful Tournament

### Why run a tournament?

Why run a tournament? The answer is two-fold: 1) operators and location owners host tournaments in order to bring more players to their machines and into their establishments; 2) for players, tournaments offer an opportunity to win money or prizes and have fun.

Tournaments can range from one-day events held in local bars or clubs, to two or three-day events held in larger venues such as hotels and convention centers. Tournaments can be geared toward novice players and master players alike. Regardless of the size or type of tournament, there is one important point to remember: it is always a special event.

### Types of local tournaments

There are three primary types of local tournaments one can host: operator tournaments, league tournaments and location tournaments.

#### Operator Tournaments

For operators, tournaments can improve their bottom line while providing an effective mechanism for building a stronger player base. Tournaments intended for novice players will identify players who can become league players. These players have the potential to become regular customers for an operator's machine locations. Operators may choose to rent a large space at a hotel or convention center that can accommodate a large number of players and spectators. These tournaments can attract a hundred or more players.

#### League Tournaments

League tournaments are very similar to operator tournaments and are normally held at the end of the league season. The only difference between an operator tournament and a league tournament is that the participants in the league tournament must be players in a specific league.

#### Location Tournaments

For the location owner, tournaments are usually not as large as the operator-sponsored tournaments, but they are still big special events for the establishment. A location tournament draws people into the establishment for fun and as a result, increases business for the owner. Both the operator and the location owner realize higher revenues from tournaments sponsored by location owners.

#### Round Robin Tournaments

"Round Robin" tournaments are ones where every team gets to play every other team. The team with the most wins is the championship team. This type of tournament can be run as an operator, league or location tournament.

### Tournament Coordination and Pre-Planning

Tournaments are indeed, special events, and special events require special planning early and extensively organized. There are nine important steps in the planning process for a successful tournament: 1) advertise; 2) determine location; 3) select a date; 4) scheduling and timing; 5) secure referees and officials; 6) rules of play; 7) organize registration system; 8) use correct bracket sheets; 9) awards and prizes; 10) secure vendors.

#### Advertise

The key to a successful tournament is extensive promotion. While promoting the tournament to attract players, also attempt to encourage spectators to the event. Most players like competing before a crowd, and the spectators represent a ripe group for recruiting league and tournament players.

Where you advertise will be determined by what area you want to draw from whether it be local, regional or state. Posters and flyers are very effective means of promotion (see enclosed samples). When designing your promotional materials

remember to include all key information such as the day(s) and time(s) you are planning to hold the tournament, the tournament location, a contact name and phone number for entry information and added details, and the awards and prizes including any added money. Three inexpensive and readily available means of promotion are to include your tournament information on your weekly standing or stat sheets, in your league newsletter if applicable and on your Web site as well as the NDA's Web site.

Your promotional materials should be placed in highly visible areas of your location. It is also beneficial to send promotional materials to the sponsoring operator, other operator members in your area, invited guests (i.e. beer distributor and other possible sponsors), your player mailing list, local newsletters and newspapers, and local radio stations.

During the tournament you will want to advertise any special events you may have scheduled (e.g. minis, 50/50 drawings, blind draws, etc.).

Prior to and following the event you will want to send out press releases to local media (see enclosed samples). Players enjoy seeing their name, or even their picture, in print and will walk away from your tournament with a positive experience. By establishing a news release template of your own, you will simply need to add the names of the winners to the release and send them to the media.

Advertising and promotion of your tournament are essential to determining its success. Advertise early and advertise often.

### **Determine Location**

Again, the location of your tournament depends on the type of tournament you will run. Location tournaments, by definition are held in one bar or club and the location owner usually takes a primary role in the promotion and management of the tournament. Operators, however, could also take on these roles for the location owner. Operator tournaments may require a hotel or convention center and league tournaments usually take place in a location within the league system. Once you have chosen your location, encourage the location to do specials on drinks, food, etc.

Your equipment needs will vary depending on the type and size of the tournament. It is important to determine the number of machines you will need and where you might get any extra machines you may need. The tournament must run smoothly and in a timely fashion, and this will directly affect the number of machines you have available for competition. If you are adding equipment, it is advised that you draw up a floor plan to ensure you have adequate space for the added machines. Some possible avenues for obtaining more equipment would be taking equipment off existing routes, from distributors or manufacturers and rentals.

Once you have determined the number of machines you will have, the floor plan is set and your schedule and entries are finalized, you must insure that you have enough quarters readily available as well as changers. Changers should be placed on the tournament floor in areas that are very visible to the players and areas that provide enough space for the lines that may form in front of them.

Space requirements are important when selecting a location and must be considered very carefully. There must always be ample space for the equipment, players and spectators as well as for registration and guest activities. If you have sponsors donating prizes or other items, they may request space to promote their company or product.

### **Select Date**

Keeping in mind the goal of bringing in new as well as existing customers and increasing your bottom line in the meantime, selecting the right date is important. First on your list of criteria should be selecting a date that will not interfere with any other event in the area. Competition is not what you are looking for in this instance. Secondly, consider your slow traffic nights even though Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights would be initially successful. These nights are already busy and holding a special tournament will not increase your profits substantially. Choosing a slower night will draw new and regular customers and also peak the interest of passersby who notice a larger number of cars in the lot and are drawn out of curiosity even though they may not participate.

Once you have selected a date, be sure to let other area locations know the date in an attempt to avoid them scheduling other events at that time. A good idea for league operators is to set up a seasonal calendar and have locations commit to

dates in advance. After your first successful tournament, it is also helpful to establish a standard yearly date for the tournament.

### **Schedule and Timing**

Larger tournaments have more than one event, so it's best to schedule all events for specific times and then publish the schedule with entry information. This prevents players from entering events with overlapping time slots. Laying out your format is also crucial at the earliest stage and once determined, the format should be announced on all of your fliers as far ahead as possible. Try to organize the schedule with as few conflicts as possible.

Always start your event on time and keep it running smoothly. If you have established your event time schedule and you have planned the playing time adequately, you are headed in the right direction. Consider the general ability level of the players and the amount of time will be required for moving individuals and teams from one machine to another. The other important factor in keeping to your schedule is the number of dart machines you plan to use in the tournament. This number will decide how many matches can be played in an hour. If you keep your event moving the players will more likely leave with a positive flavor for your next event.

### **Secure Referees and Officials**

Referees should be secured early in the planning process and should be appointed for each match. Many NDA players have become NDA certified referees and these tournaments provide a great opportunity for them to acquire the necessary tournament hours they may need to advance to the next level of certification. Experienced International referees teach these players, which makes them valuable assets to any league system or tournament situation.

It does not require many officials to run a tournament. A tournament director is a must and will direct and coordinate actual play. This person needs the support of a good public address system and an assistant who can leave the podium to handle details. Another person should be available to assist the director with problems, general supervision, and behind-the-scenes event troubleshooting.

Having a technician available for machine repairs is a must at all times during tournament play. At no time should play be delayed for long periods of time because there is no one available to fix a problem with a machine.

### **Rules of Play**

Refer to the NDA Official Player's Guidebook for the official rules of play for your tournament. Make sure all players understand and agree on the rules before tournament play begins.

### **Organize Registration System**

Regardless of the size of the tournament, an efficient system of registering players must be established. When you do have a large tournament, you will want to consider pre-registration by mail so that much of the registration detail is taken care of in advance.

Organize a system that will work best for you and for your players (see enclosed samples). Do not make players wait in separate lines to register for each event. Register once, and issue each player a control number. Then, issue as many tickets with that control number to the player to correspond to the number of events for which that player has registered and paid. Those tickets can then serve as a basis for position and team drawings.

Office supplies should always be on hand for an organized registration system and should include such items as pens, pencils, labels, tape, white out, staplers, paper, etc. Having all of these items available at all times will help insure a successful registration.

### **Tournament Bracket Sheets**

In single or double elimination events you should use a 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256 or 512 team bracket so that all necessary "byes" are awarded only in the early rounds of your event (see 8, 16 and 32 team sample brackets enclosed). Names are drawn randomly and placed in the first round of competition. When there are fewer teams than the number on the bracket sheet, you must add "byes". You cannot have two "byes" as competitors (see distribution of byes sample enclosed).

### **Awards and Prizes**

Tournaments vary in how they award winners. Some give trophies and medals only. Others solicit prizes from local merchants and give them away to the winners, while still others offer cash prizes.

Tournaments awarding cash prizes get the money from two sources: money from the entry fees and sponsor funds from private businesses. Most tournament organizers combine these two sources for the purse, but it is entirely possible to run a successful tournament when you use only one source of revenue.

When setting the prize payout structure, it is important to divide the money equitably among the winners and the various events. Try not to pay 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> places too heavily. It is usually best to spread the prize money to as many places as possible (25-30% of the field). When a player of lesser skill gets "in the money" it does wonders for their attitude toward the sport and your tournament. The more winners you can reward, the better.

Keeping in mind that the tournament is a special event, it is a nice touch to have an awards ceremony at the conclusion of the competition. This is the right time to present trophies and cash prizes and to take photos to accompany your press releases.

### **Secure Vendors**

Vendors that supply equipment to players should be contacted to attend the tournament and sell their products. Players lose or damage their equipment and will need a place to purchase new items. If a vendor cannot be secured to attend, try to work it out that they will send supplies that can be sold by your tournament staff. This is a convenience for the players and will keep them happier in the long run.

the team payout.