Managing the League

Recruiting League Players

A successful league program depends on getting enough players to make the league worthwhile for the players, the operators and the location owner(s). The number of ways to entice new players to the league is limited only by the imagination of the promoter and his/her resources. However, operating a fair league that fosters happy, contented players who share their enthusiasm with league play to others is the most effective recruiting tool available.

Recruiting players for your leagues may range from simple to difficult. It all depends on what you do with the opportunity you have and the tools you are willing to apply. For example, in an area where leagues have been a long-standing tradition in certain establishments, it may be difficult to find enough new players for an entire league. You may want to start small, and you may want to differentiate your league in such a way that you will have players that prefer playing on the league you are starting.

On the other hand, you may be an operator in an area where the sport is just becoming popular. In this case, it may be very easy to find a core of people to try out a league because they have never done it. They may have thrown darts in local establishments, but they have never been given the opportunity to play in an organized league. These players may be easy recruits if the league is portrayed as a new, inexpensive, appealing experience.

Recruiting means communication. Since the location owner and the staff know the bar patrons best, be sure to "talk leagues up" among these people. Give them as much information as you can about the league and the kind of fun it will offer players. If they are excited about the leagues, their enthusiasm will spread to the bar patrons. When the bar is full, the staff earns more money and has more fun too! The bar owner and staff should know where league sign-up sheets are kept and how to fill them out. Share responsibility for recruiting players.

The first prospects should be those people who already use the machine(s) in the establishment. Location staff people should point out the promotions – posters, table tent cards, etc., that announce the formation of leagues.

Regardless of the situation you are facing, you will only be successful if your communications are clear and comprehensive. There are posters, sign up sheets, tent cards, etc. that you can use. But you should not limit yourself to these tools; use your local media, too. Advertise the starting dates of leagues, and make sure that your leagues get published in the "Things to Do" sections of the local newspaper or listed on community calendars on radio and television. (See Section III – C for additional league marketing ideas and tools.)

Why Dart Players Join Dart Leagues

- It is fun to play darts. Competition increases the fun dart players will have, and enjoyable competition does not require heavy practice.
- Awards. Players can win from the prize fund and get other recognition in the form of pins, plaques, trophies, sportswear and other prizes.
- A friendly, social environment. Dart leagues are a relaxed way to meet and enjoy the company of other people and an easy way to schedule social nights out each week.
- An inexpensive, fun night out. In most leagues, fees and play are less than $8 per night. The National Dart Association sanctioning fees are only $8 per year and provide many additional player benefits.
- It is an easy game to learn. Weekly variety–there's a chance to meet new people and visit new establishments.
- Steady, organized competition. The league manager handles the scheduling details.

Keeping Track of Interested Players

Sign-up sheets should be kept with the location owner. For confidentiality reasons, sign up sheets should not be posted. Make sure that location owners use safeguards regarding the security of the sign up sheets. For instance, these sheets should not be left on the bar where they could be accidentally damaged or thrown away.

Make contact with interested players as soon as possible. Give them information about the league as soon as it is available. Communication with the players will keep enthusiasm high.

Tournaments as a Recruiting Tool

Some operators start a league by hosting a dart tournament. The tournament, if promoted properly, will attract a wide assortment of dart players and spectators who can form the basis of your recruiting pool. While they participate in the tournament, you can give them information about the leagues that are being formed, the establishments where leagues games will be played and other details concerning the league you are planning. Be sure to have league sign-up sheets on hand at the tournament.

Tournaments usually bring in the serious dart players, so take advantage of their opinions in charting out your league plans. These players may be able to suggest different types of leagues, games or schedules that will give the operator a competitive edge.

League Meetings

Some leagues have captains' meetings, players' meetings and joint meetings. It's up to the operator and the players in your league to determine what kind and how many meetings your league requires. Regardless of the structure you set up, a players meeting is important to make sure that everyone understands how the league will operate during the season. As stated earlier, some leagues have special team captains' meetings in addition to the players' meeting.

In determining the site for your players' meeting, you'll want to consider the following very important factors:
1. The league meetings are important and a meeting room is the best place to conduct one. Consider hotels, motels or convention facilities for your meeting. Or you might approach the league establishments themselves if they have meeting facilities or a private room. If you hold the initial meeting at one of your league establishments you will want to avoid showing favoritism. Give all your establishments who could handle the meeting a fair shot at hosting the meeting. Put their names in a hat and draw one. This is the fairest way to go, and chance will determine the location, not you.
2. Make sure the environment is free from other distractions. Having the meeting right in the lounge or bar area will not lead to an effective meeting. Players will not pay attention to the business at hand and will be more interested in drinking and socializing than in getting the league organized.
3. Schedule meetings at times when the greatest number of players will be able to attend. Many league managers will conduct league meetings on the same nights that leagues will be operating, assuming that that night will be relatively free for those who have already signed up for league play.

Getting Players to Attend the Meeting

Many operators have found it difficult to get players to attend the organizational meeting just because it doesn't seem all that important to them. To encourage widespread attendance, some operators have been quite successful by having a prize drawing. These prizes (which often cost less than they appear to be worth) will encourage people to attend the organizational meeting because the chances of winning are high.

Having as many people as possible attend the meeting is important so that the league schedule, procedures, rules and policies are clear from the beginning. This builds a clear understanding of how the league is established and governed, and how prizes will be awarded. It is also advised that there be a quorum present so the format and budget can be approved by way of a vote. Location owners should also be encouraged to attend or consider holding a separate meeting for location owners.

Distribute packets of information to the team captains and plan to go through all of your information with them one item at a time. Be sure to explain the score sheets (if the games are not set to score automatically), league rules, schedule and procedures. The more questions you can answer here, the fewer you will be faced with when league play begins. If this is

the first league of its type for you and/or the players, you should also play a few games using the league rules (and score sheets if applicable) or the league card system if the games automatically track the scores. This will give you and your players an opportunity to become familiar with the program prior to the first night of league play.

Preparing the Meeting Agenda:

The meeting should cover the following topics:
1. Review the league format.
2. Review the schedule: when and where teams will play.
3. Elect the officers you need to run your leagues.
4. Describe how players' fees are used: administration, prizes, cash awards.
5. Discuss all relevant rules and agree on penalty for forfeit or late start.
6. Distribute all league game rules and league agreements.
7. Review procedures for score sheets, league envelopes, etc.
8. Review weekly league fees and overall league budget.

Don't forget to keep in touch with the players after the meeting – through formal, mailed surveys and by way of informal conversations during league games and tournaments. Ask for their help in making format changes. Ask for reactions to changes you are considering, such as a raise in weekly league fees. If there is strong interest in changing formats, introduce a new league format -- but only if the majority of players are willing to change. Otherwise, you may have satisfied the few and alienated the majority of your players.

Season Kick-Off
Once the locations and players have been recruited and team captains identified, you are ready to start playing league darts. The more fanfare you create at the opening of the season, the more enthusiasm you'll have on your side. Do what you can to create excitement in the establishments where dart leagues will be held. Here are some ideas you can take to generate interest in the leagues as the season begins.
1. Prepare a news release for local media. Include background information about the establishments where the leagues will play and the history of darts in your area.
2. Check with your local radio station to create a radio announcement to be included in the calendar of events.
3. TV may be a long shot for publicity, but a story on darts or dart leagues could be a very interesting one to tell as part of the sports broadcast. Don't give up after the first time you have attempted to get coverage from a TV station. Pursue the sports or entertainment news director, or program director, from time to time via mail to suggest a dart story idea.
4. Advertise in the local media, naming the establishments where your league will be playing.
5. Provide banners and encourage bar owners to put them up.
6. Supply table tent cards and posters to announce the beginning of the season in the bars.

After the first week of play, keep the momentum going. Create a continued sense of urgency by compiling the game statistics quickly and posting them at the location and on your Web site as quickly as possible. If a league plays on Tuesday night, for example, be sure that the results are posted by Thursday evening. This gives dart players a reason to stop by the league locations, check the scores, practice and socialize.

Do whatever it takes to get the league started with fanfare and enthusiasm.

Handicapping Information
Point Per Dart or PPD
Players can be rated using any open in/out '01 (301, 501, 701, etc.) game so long as there is only one (1) player on each scoring position. '01 games where two (2) or more players share the same scoring position cannot be used in the National Dart Association PPD rating system as presented here. Special instructions and additional tracking are necessary during league play to meet association tournament requirements. PPD will show gradual increases or decreases each week based upon the players' actual performance. Current match totals will be added to the previous totals and recalculated for each player in your league. This will result in the correct, or real average.

Referring to the score sheet example below the scorekeeper has recorded the points remaining and actual darts thrown directly from the machine at the end of the game, in the appropriate box for each player. This is the only information required in the PPD player rating calculation. Feats, accomplishments, wins, losses and games played no longer have a value when determining player skill. Recording feats will be optional and used only when awarding feat pins, patches or other recognition awards.

Again referring to the score sheet example below look at Ken who is player one (1) on the home team to demonstrate the formula for the PPD rating system. In the six (6) 301 games he plays he has 51, 115, 0, 193, 5, and 159 points remaining for a total of 523 points remaining. Since he has played six (6) games of 301 he had a possible 1806 total points. In these games he threw 12, 6, 13, 6, 9, and 9 actual darts for a total of 55 actual darts thrown. Using this information you subtract 523 from 1806 to determine the total points scored, which is 1283. Now you divide 1283 (total points scored) by 55 (actual darts thrown) for a PPD of 23.32. The player with 0 points remaining is the game winner except when a foul has been committed. Additional markings to indicate this will be needed, such as an "F" in the fouling players box.

Mark Per Round or MPR
Players will be rated using standard scoring Cricket only. Any game of Cricket that restricts the player's ability to score marks in the form of points cannot be used in the National Dart Association MPR rating system. In games where two (2) players share the same scoring position the total marks scored and actual darts thrown must be recorded individually. New and upgradeable machines, as mentioned earlier in the opening paragraphs will provide this information correctly only if the necessary upgrades are installed. Generally MPR will show gradual increases or decreases each week based upon the player's actual performance. Current match totals will be added to the previous totals and recalculated for each player in your league. This will result in the correct, or real average.

Referring to the score sheet example below the scorekeeper has recorded the total marks scored and actual darts thrown directly from the machine at the end of the game, in the appropriate box for each player. This is the only information required in the MPR player rating calculation. The round information displayed by the machine is not used to calculate player's MPR. Feats, accomplishments, wins, losses and games played no longer have a value when determining player skill. Recording feats will be optional and used only when awarding the feat pins or other recognition awards.

Again referring to the score sheet example below use Ken who is player one (1) on the home team to demonstrate the formula for the MPR rating system. In the six (6) scoring Cricket games he players he has 10, 7, 10, 12, 7 and 8 total marks scored for a total of 54 total marks scored. In these games he threw 12, 15, 12, 15, 9, and 7 actual darts for a total of 70 actual darts thrown. Using this information you divide 54 by 70, which is .77. Now, multiply .77 (marks per dart) by 3 (to convert to rounds) for a MPR of 2.31. Notice the circles around one player in each game that indicate the winner.

Handicapping
In order to keep interest in your dart program, adequate competition must be provided for all your players. A league system that continually has predictable champions goes stale easily. Players who consistently fall outside the norms of a league (whether at the top or at the bottom) must be brought back into the middle of the pack, or at least moved in toward the middle. When league outcomes are assured before the season half, players in the bottom half tend to drop out. Likewise the 10% at the top grow complacent, and only stay in additional leagues when the money tempts them. The solution to keeping interest in your league system is to handicap using one or more of the following methods.

First Some Warnings
1. Like all changes in program, handicapping must be thoroughly explained and sold! The top of your league players won't readily embrace a system designed to let other players win. They currently hold that top position, a handicap will force them to work harder to keep what they feel is their rightful place.
2. Experience has found most handicapping systems do not keep the best players from winning! Those players work harder, become better, and still win because they are driven by competition. Handicapping systems help equalize the league, runaways and landslides will be a rare occasion with a good system.
3. Some handicap methods work better than others, some won't fit a geographic locale, to skill level differences. You may want to try multiple methods, as some methods are complimentary.

Having a handicap to complain about allows your better players to brag about their prowess. Use this strategy to help sell the handicap methods.

Classification
The players do not generally regard classification as a handicapping method, but in fact it accomplishes the handicap function. When the size of your player base allows, the strongest teams are grouped in a separate league from the weakest teams. Determination of team strength is the key to successful classifying. Last seasons final team standings, team tons, or total team PPD or MPR Skill Rating can give you increasingly accurate abilities. Pre-posted league levels can push the better teams to higher skilled leagues, positioning the "c" league as a 4 player limit of 70 PPD, the "b" league team limit of 85 PPD, "a" limit of 100 PPD, and masters unlimited is a good place to start. Other subtler classifying can be done when assigning the league sign ups or the scheduling. Obviously, classification requires a system with multiple leagues, and requires the largest player base of all handicapping methods. If player base numbers are not a concern, all league systems should do some classification.

Team Skill Rating Limits
While similar to classification, team skill rating limits are not hampered by league size; the 4 player's individual classifications from a previous season are added to form a total team skill rating. The league administrator arbitrarily designates a team skill rating limit and all new players skill ratings. NO total team skill rating may go over that limit; they must find 4 players whose total stays below the limit. This forces the best players to recruit or dropout. The shortcoming of this method is that established teams are continually being broken up. This method should be used in a single league system where one team continually dominates.

Spot Darts
Although the players tend to think spot darts are additional darts for the weaker players, this method simply restricts darts from the better players. At the beginning of every game in a night's series, the first round is called the spot round. The weakest players throw their normal 3 darts; the stronger players possibly may throw none, simply passing their turn. The better a player is the more this passing (not throwing) successive darts effects him. Any size league can be "Spot Darted" as long as a rating system is available, preferably using the PPD and MPR skill rating formulas. Because this is a perpetual handicap system, "Spot Dart" must be sold to the player base and players educated before instigating the method.

Spot Darts 25% Method
Give the top 25% 0 spot darts; 2nd 25% gets 1 spot dart in round 1; 3rd 25% gets 2 spot darts each game; and the bottom 25% gets to throw all 3 spot darts in the first round of each game. This method is relatively easy to mange and is supported by most league management software. (See chart on following pages.)

Spot Darts Based on Player Skill Rating
Using Player Skill Ratings, spot darts are assigned according to the inverse of the Player Skill Rating. Every 3 PPD costs the player one spot dart: 0-14 6 spots; 14.01-17 5 spots; 17.01-20 4 spots, etc. and 29.01 and above have no spot darts. A 0 spot darter would pass the first 2 rounds and begin his game in the 3rd round, effectively a 6-dart handicap. The method self-adjusts. As the players get better, they are increasingly handicapped. (See chart on following pages.)

PLEASE NOTE: Players must closely observe how many darts they have actually thrown, when using the spot dart method for their Player Skill Rating feats.

Hand Scoring Points
The AMOA-NDA is not an advocate of hand scoring, but this method is self-explanatory.

Conclusion
- Handicapping keeps interest in your league.
- Most handicapping methods will need to be explained and your player base convinced of their merit.
- Classification is the best method of handicapping if size or locale is not a restraint. Classifying is not exclusive. Other methods of handicapping can be used with it.
- Limits on total team Player Skill Rating are classification at its most extreme. It forces the best players to drop out or recruit.
- Spot darts can be tied to a percentage of your Player Skill Rating ranking or on a point per dart method. The percentage method uses 3 to 0 spot darts. The point/dart method has no limit on its spot darts.

- All these methods increase the level of competition and excitement in your program.