

MR TOURNAMENT ORGANISER

By Stephen Babbage

A 'Tournament Organiser' is a big, important title to have. There is real money involved, lots of organisation and time required to do a good job. The payoff however, is happy gamers, an event people will travel long distances to get to and the satisfaction of running an event people will remember fondly for the rest of their lives, or until dementia sets in! This article is intended to be the sequel to the article found in Blood Bowl Magazine 11, 'Mister Commissioner'. The advice and recommendations in this article are intended for those people who want to move one step beyond being a commissioner of a league, and run a tournament. I highly recommend running a weekly gaming session at your local gaming club (being in charge) for a while or being the commissioner of a Blood Bowl league before running a tournament.

What is a tournament?

A tournament is an event, normally held annually, where players come and play several games over at least one day.

A winner of the tournament is declared. This is different to a league, where players will come once a week or once a fortnight to play one or two games in a game club. Tournaments can be as small as a one day event held in your spare garage on trestle tables with your friends. They

can be as big as an event held as part of a gaming convention (such as GenCon) that players travel from different countries to attend, where the tournament has over 50 players and runs over a long weekend (3 days).

Before you start a Tournament...

Tournament Organiser checklist (this should be done several months in advance):

- Advertise the event. On websites such as the NAF website (www.bloodbowl.net), in hobby stores and at other nearby gaming conventions.
- Find out the costs for each player to attend. There are lots of factors in this including:
 - Covering the cost of prizes not donated to the tournament.
 - The cost of hiring the venue or being a part of the convention (more later).
 - A joining fee to something like the NAF which ranks coaches/players around the world.
 - Finding reasonable accommodation if your tournament runs for more than one day.



- Make sure you have a method for player entries/registrations to be taken, recorded and money to be collected before the event (and maybe on the first day). Think about issuing a confirmation of entry or a receipt of payment.
- Make sure that your rules are clearly spelt out so that there will be no confusion about the rules used.
- Make sure that you have clearly worked out how people are going to be ranked and how people progress through the tournament. (Do winners play other winners? Is it a round robin tournament? How is painting/sportsmanship judged?)
- Read other articles and get advice. Two suggestions are 'Mr. Commissioner' in Blood Bowl Magazine 11 and 'Tournaments – a Practical Guide' in Blood Bowl Magazine 2.

When you are running a tournament...

- Make sure you check people's teams/gangs/armies before they begin.
- Show or make available a ranking table so people can see how they are going.
- Collect and update people's results, including sportsmanship.
- Wander around the tables and make sure that people are having a good time, answer rules questions and generally oversee the event.
- Make sure that there is a method to give a winner for the best painted team/miniature and other prizes being given not tied to the rankings.

Some of the points in more detail:

1. NAF

Does the game you are running a tournament for have an international body that ranks coaches/players? Blood Bowl does, and it's called the NAF. (Other bodies such as Rogue Trader may be worth looking into.) Membership to the NAF costs US\$10 per player. Coaches (as players are called in Blood Bowl) are ranked according to how well they do in tournaments. The Tournament Organiser needs to record information on how NAF coaches perform, and give this information to the National Tournament Organiser (who happens to be me in Australia/New Zealand/the Asia Pacific) who then uploads the results to the NAF website. The end result? NAF coaches will come

to NAF approved tournaments to get better rankings on the website and to play other NAF coaches.

If you are interested in your tournament being NAF approved, then several months in advance you need to register your tournament on the NAF website (www.BloodBowl.net), and talk to your National Tournament Organiser. They will approve your tournament if you meet the requirements. This will mean that very good coaches from all over the world may come to your event. The same would apply to other organisations such as Rogue Trader events.

2. Organisation and prizes

You need to be organised to run a tournament, hence the name Tournament Organiser. If you can't keep your bedroom tidy, then running a tournament may not be for you. Make sure that you have plenty of running time to get organised before the tournament. I would recommend that you start advertising 6 months ahead, particularly if you have players coming from some distance to play. Some advertising takes that long (or longer!) to get printed and distributed, such as a convention booklet. Before the event actually takes place you need to make sure that you have the right number of tables/chairs and other things you need for your game such as scenery. These days it makes things a lot easier if you can bring a laptop to record results (but keep a close eye on it as you don't want it to go missing!). Making sure that you have all the official rulebooks you need (that are up to date) on hand will help for any obscure rulings you may need to make. Ensuring that you have photocopied spare team sheets (as are needed in Blood Bowl), results sheets (and other sheets players need to give you information) a week in advance makes sure they all reach the tournament with you (pack them early and double check).

The other think you can do is approach businesses for sponsorship of prizes. These don't need to be gaming and miniature stores, although that's the logical place to start. Maybe try approaching hardware stores (they have useful tools for miniature conversion and flocking and their toolboxes make nice miniature cases), art stores (paintbrushes, paints, glues and other hobby tools such as knives) or music stores (DVD's or CD's are always popular prizes).

These are just some possibilities. I was at a recent tournament where one of the prizes was a climb up the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and it was a hotly contested prize! If a business sponsors you, make sure that you note that on your advertising, and then thank them afterwards (with an appreciation certificate) and at the end of the

tournament to the players (so they know where the prizes came from and can support those businesses with more purchases!).

3. Location

Most tournaments are a part of a gaming convention. A gaming convention is in one sense just a whole pile of tournaments for different games all happening at the one venue at the same time. But it's a lot more than that. It also often has gaming vendors with stalls at the convention, a much larger number of players in the one location and trophies and prizes available through the entry price and sponsorship of the convention of a whole. Other advantages exist too, such as food being available near the tournament, players being able to transport share with players of another game to get to the convention, having an admiring crowd always passing by, and raising the profile of the game you are running to other gamers.

(I guess this is called economy of scale!) Advertising for a convention often happens by a booklet being produced for the convention with a list of the games available at the convention, containing brief explanations of rules and advertising blurbs for each game on offer. This booklet is then left at hobby stores, gaming clubs and other conventions. Often a website is also made which has the same information as the booklet. If you're planning to run a tournament as part of a convention, you must get in contact with the organiser(s) of the convention and make sure that this is ok. There can be many things you need to discuss, such as whether you can organise your own prizes, what the entry price will be, when you need to submit your blurb and rules spiel for their booklet and so on. I find that conventions generally cost a little more per



player, but I believe the extra costs are justified and the benefits outweigh them. One of the big advantages of being a Tournament Organiser as a part of a convention is they will handle registrations (entries) to your event and will tell you who is playing and who has paid. You will have to handle this yourself if you are running a tournament which is not part of a convention. If you're planning to run a tournament separately, a venue will need to be found. Some tournaments are run in a remote boutique hotel (eg, the Halfling Dinner Mug), where a room is booked for the gaming, and accommodation is provided at the hotel at a reduced rate (the hotel sponsors the tournament). Others are held at the same place as where a gaming club meets, such as a Scout hall. If the tournament runs over several days, then accommodation needs to be advised or players will need to fend for themselves. Make sure that you recoup costs for hiring the venue through the player entry fees. Remember that if you don't have enough guaranteed players for your tournament you could be left out of pocket quite substantially!

4. Advertising

In addition to advertising as part of a convention (in the convention booklet and on their website), lots of advertising can be done for just your game. Make sure that you let the players of your gaming system know about it! I find the humble A3 poster (preferably in colour), left on a noticeboard of your local gaming stores, hobby shops and gaming clubs generates a lot of interest.

There are a lot of websites around where people talk about your game. Make sure that these online communities know about your tournament. For Blood Bowl there are lots of forums where a tournament can be advertised to let fellow Blood Bowl coaches know about the tournament, including:

- The forum on www.bloodbowl.com
- The NAF website Forum (and tournament sections) (www.bloodbowl.net)
- The TalkBloodBowl Forum (www.talkbloodbowl.com)
- BloodBowlCentral (www.bloodbowlcentral.com)
- The online Blood Bowl leagues (<http://fumbbl.com> and www.olbbl.com). I often also e-mail everyone I know living in my country who I know plays Blood Bowl, let them know about the tournament and ask them to tell all their gaming communities.

If you have contacts like that, you are crazy not to advertise through them, even if it's just ringing the people who you normally game with and getting them to come!



Make sure that in your advertising you have a contact phone or e-mail so that interested people can ask questions. Email is a good way for this, but if you put your phone number make sure that you specify the times that are good to call you, as some gamers keep to strange hours of the day and night!

5. Rules

Make sure that you use the current rules for tournaments where possible, unless you very clearly state that you are doing something unusual and it would be worth repeating often if you are doing something very different (like using an old rule set). See if you can find how other tournaments are run for your gaming system, like getting your hands on the Rogue Trader tournament rules, or asking around on forums on the Internet that discuss your game. If you are changing rules to be different in some way, this should be very clearly spelt out in your advertising. If there are many changes, it may be worthwhile producing a 'house rules' document listing them all very clearly, and make this available to players before the event (e-mail is wonderful). It is very worthwhile finding some other veterans of the game and discussing changes to the rules you are planning. They may find an effect that you hadn't anticipated that they may be able to show you. Another way to go is to actually test the rules you are proposing with your local gaming group or club to see how they work. By doing this you should avoid having someone win the tournament who did so by exploiting the rules rather than by superior strategy/luck. If someone does breach the rules, make sure that you are firm but fair. Occasionally you will have to deal with someone who is acting in an unsportsmanlike manner. This can be the most stressful part of being a Tournament Organiser. It is important to realise when dealing with this sort of person

that the main reason of participating in a tournament is to have fun. If someone is jeopardising that fun, it may be necessary to do something. It might be as simple as quietly discussing it with them away from the rest of the players, or in extreme cases expelling them from the tournament with or without a refund. By having clear rules and expectations, such as making sure that rolls take place in a public place with an accountable witness, you should minimise this difficulty.

6. Points and rankings

Make sure that you have decided well in advance what method you are going to use to work out who will be the winner of your tournament. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel here, many tournaments use the same methods (such as Rogue Trader tournaments) and it is worth exploring what is done elsewhere. Whatever you decide, make sure it is clearly spelt out well before the tournament starts, and consider putting it into your advertising. Be aware that the way you calculate the points will change the emphasis of your tournament. If you place a large number of points per round on decimating your opponent, then players will arrive with that objective in mind, and play that way. (I would recommend against that.)

I'd also think about how things such as sportsmanship and painting of the models used affect the rankings. I tend to give separate prizes for these things, but some tournaments include these factors in the ranking of players. How many points can a player earn per round/game? The more points that separate a totally one sided game from a closely fought game, the more spread out your rankings will be and it will be harder for players to get back into the running to be the tournament winner



later on. In Blood Bowl tournaments, I normally run with 7 points handed out each round, distributed between the two coaches playing each other. A total decimation means 6 for the winner and 1 for the loser, while a very close result would mean 3 1/2 points for each coach.

This enables a coach who has had a couple of bad losses to still be able to come back and win a tournament with some good coaching and luck. It also means that a coach not doing so well at the bottom of the table doesn't feel so bad with people not miles above them in the points count.

Think carefully about your points in relation to how long your tournament goes on for. If players will only play four games across the tournament, every game will be critical. If, however, there are seven games across three days then losing one game is acceptable to still be able to win the tournament. Also think about how you will work out who plays who in each round. Using a Swiss style system where winners will play winners and losers will play other losers is good for keeping games close in each round, and makes it hard for coaches to keep winning (as they are playing the other 'better' coaches who have also won). The disadvantage of this method is that opponents need to be calculated at the end of each round and this means that every player needs to have finished before the next round can be worked out and then begun. This can be quite a complicated method to calculate. Brian Horton is working on a computer program to help Tournament Organisers of Blood Bowl calculate each round quickly using the Swiss system. This program takes into consideration factors such as making sure players don't play the same type of team twice in a tournament or the same style of team (bash, agile, running) twice in a row, and allows people to choose one other coach to not play (because they may be their brother and play them all the time, or always play

them in a local league). This program worked well at CanCon '04, and will actually be used at MOAB 2004. Another method that works well with a smaller number of players is a round robin method where each player plays each other player once, or several other players based upon some preset criteria. This enables the rounds to be developed in a way so that they can all be organised early and no calculation for the next round needs to happen while all the players are waiting.

One other consideration is how you show ranks to players. Some unsportsmanlike players can even leave and not return if they find out they are ranked poorly. One way to help minimise this is not to release rankings to players until they are into the next round. This is particularly worth considering between rounds/games from one day of the tournament to the next. Many Tournament Organisers including myself have been left in a pickle after players have not turned up for a second or third day of play in a tournament after competing in the first day. It is worth considering points for a player who has to sit out a round (a bye) because there is an odd number of players in the event. I would tend to be generous as they don't get to play in as many games as the others – and that's what they paid for!

7. Things to do during the tournament

The most important jobs for a Tournament Organiser to be there for during a tournament are:

- To calculate the rankings and other statistics that are necessary for prizes and things like the NAF.
- To be available for rules queries and to check that people are playing by the rules.

One thing that's nice is to take photos of your winners and the tournament for memories for years to come and to help in advertising for future years. It may also come in handy for other uses, such as newsletters or articles. :-)

As Tournament Organiser, I always ask for a copy of their team sheet (gang list/army list) before the games commence, to make sure that they haven't made any 'mistakes' which would be contrary to the rules of the tournament. Some people are unscrupulous and will win at any cost so it is well worth setting up an atmosphere where cheating is not tolerated but yet not having to act like a brute squad or overbearing rules lawyer. People are at tournaments for fun and most players will gladly change their teams/armies/gangs if a 'mistake' is found.

Sometimes it is a genuine miss by the player, sometimes they have not understood the rules, and sometimes it is an attempt to undermine the tournament rules. Always assume that it isn't the latter reason.

8. Should you play in your own tournament?

Short answer: No

Slightly longer answer: Preferably not, although it can be more fun if you do. The only time I would consider playing in a tournament I was running would be if:

- Other people were playing who could make independent rules decisions.
- There were only a small number of players (12 or less) and you could still do all your rankings and calculations without holding up other players because you yourself were playing.
- Playing in the tournament meant that no one had a bye round.
- It wasn't your first tournament as Tournament Organiser

Because people pay money for a tournament, and the competition can be serious, playing in your own

tournament (particularly where there are a lot of house rules) can cast aspersions on your own integrity as a Tournament Organiser. If everyone competing are friends then it's normally not an issue and you should go ahead and have fun!

9. Fancy Schmancy

Little details to be considered:

- Table Layout – should it be in a grid format, or one long line of tables. Think about what's easiest to observe, what looks best for players and passers by and what fits in your venue.
- 'Top Table' – do players move around according to how well they are going? If so, having a fancy table at the top of the ranked players with a custom board or special scenery to reward those who are doing well might be a nice way to clearly emphasise winning.
- Mini Tournaments included as a part of your tournament for players to compete in for fun or prizes if they finish their games early – like Blood Bowl Sevens, Squig Races or Chariot Races.
- Sportsmanship – some people can feel pressured to give good sportsmanship results because their opponent can see what they gave them. Think about clearly distinguishing what a top score means, what a low score means and if players can record sportsmanship without their opponent seeing.
- Have an assistant to step in, in case of you being sick during the event or a family emergency. I've missed parts of tournaments I've been running because of funerals and weddings. The assistant can also just help out with rules queries, results calculations and so on to make your work easier. This is particularly important if you have more than 40 players in your tournament.

This article discusses many different aspects of running tournaments. Tournaments can be big or small, and hopefully this article can help you to think through the issues involved. At the end of reading this article I hope that you've now got a better understanding of what's involved. It may inspire you to run your own tournament, it may turn you off ever thinking of running one. If all this article does is give you more respect to the organisers of the tournaments you're a part of and makes you be nicer to them, then this article has been worth it!

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| Author | Stephen Babbage is a member of the BBRC and tournament organiser for Australia's biggest Tourney. Yes, he knows what he's writing about! |
| Further Information | The Blood Bowl box set is available from all good GW stockists. |
| More BB | Turn to page 38 for part 2 of the Elf Playbook. |
| Website | www.BloodBowl.com |