How I run a Rubber Bridge “Tournament”
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February 5, 2019

About 4 years ago I received a phone call at the club from the Senior Outreach organization of one of our local hospital groups. They asked if anyone at the club could direct a “Rubber Bridge Tournament” for them. I said I would do it.

I had absolutely no idea how a rubber bridge tournament should be run. There are several each year in the area, some at senior centers, some at the State Parks, and I know there must be others. I asked around about how they are run and got lots of answers. Many of the players really didn’t like the way they were organized, so I decided to make it up myself and see what happened. Turns out what I describe below has worked well and the players seem to like it.

Here’s how it works:

Each round is 4 hands, shuffle and deal at each table. This is what most at-home players are used to. Standard rubber bridge scoring. You could complete 2 rubbers, you could complete 3 sets at a part score. You turn in your score minus your opponents.

ACBLScore has a game type called “home style pairs.” In some places this is used for “Swiss Pairs.” There is a Victory Point scale already built in for home-style. (click “other” on the first VP selection screen.) The score-entry screen looks just like a Swiss Team. (you enter the result without the final zero just like we used to with pick-ups.) After entering the scores you have ACBLScore do assignments. I do assignments a round early. I assign round 2 spots while people are playing round 1, etc. Originally I waited for the round-1 scores, but then players were waiting on me. Doing it a round early means they are waiting for their table to be ready and not standing around my desk. They really don’t care that the assignments aren’t quite as good as they might be. They do like that in the later rounds the better players are playing against the better players and the final match frequently determines the winner. I have assignment/reporting slips that have a rubber bridge score diagram on them (a copy is included later).

Victory Points: I do a quick explanation at the beginning. My handout has the conversion table. I explain that this keeps a couple of slams in the first round from determining the outcome of the entire tournament. At first some people didn’t like that, but the second time they came they told me what a good idea it was.

Sitouts: ACBLScore will mess up if you have an odd number of pairs. It WILL assign a 3-way / round robin match, which is totally wrong for a pairs game. Set up with an extra pair so you have an even number. I call the extra pair “Sit” and “Out” and start them with an adjusted score of minus 200. They will always loose their matches by 200 giving the pair sitting out 12 VPs. This gives the sit-out pair a bit better than an average score to make up for not playing. Since the sit-out pair is at or near the bottom in the later rounds this doesn’t affect the results much anyway.

Stationary pairs: I use the “stationary” feature in ACBLScore when people request it. It surprises me that people who come in with walkers park them in the corner and say, “no, I don’t need a stationary.” Sometimes when I see them move I give them one anyway.

“Chicago Bridge”: Tried Chicago style scoring – vulnerability assigned based on hand number. Some players had done that before, but most hadn’t and didn’t like (or perhaps understand) it. Went to straight 4-deal rubber scoring the next time.

I post the results of each round on the wall once I enter the scores.

We run 8 rounds of 4 hands, 4 before lunch and 4 after.

The hospital group takes reservations online or by phone. They know how many tables are available at each location. When people arrive they check them in and assign a pair number/table and give them their first score slip and a brief description of how the tournament works. The hospital group has a number of rehab/assisted living centers that rotate as sponsors. The sponsors provide a light breakfast (Danish / muffins / mixed fruit, etc.) as well as a lunch. The sponsor also provides prizes, lately mostly gift cards. Prizes for 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and last – rubber bridge players like to have the “booby prize.” Lately we have also had prizes for 1st at the half-way point. The sponsors get to set up an information table and talk for about 5 minutes at the beginning and after lunch.

The crowd: Most of the players have been playing for quite a while. Rarely are there really new players. A few people have played duplicate at the club, but don’t anymore. They do well. Occasionally There will be a current pair from the club, but they don’t do very well – I suspect they don’t understand the strategy of rubber bridge. If they were dominating the game I would suggest that this game really wasn’t for them, but that hasn’t been necessary.

They play a range of conventions. Some of them only know Blackwood (what bridge player doesn’t). Some play Stayman, some transfers. They are split about half and half strong vs. weak twos. I point out that they should let opponents know what they play. I don’t know how much this happens.

I tell them that if anything goes wrong at their table they can call me to help. The most common director call is “Do we get to count our Honors?” I usually go the entire day without any director calls. The game is very casual and friendly. I know there are leads out of turn, etc., but they prefer to take care of them themselves. Fine with me. There are no masterpoints at stake. I could sanction the game and award masterpoints, but if these players cared about that they would be playing duplicate at the club.

In addition to the hospital group I have run this a couple of times for a Senior Living Facility and once for a financial advisory company. Each time they market their product for five or ten minutes.

There are a couple of additional files you will find useful
RubberBridgeScoreSlip.docx & RubberBridgeHandout.docx

Any Questions? Email me at
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Have fun!