

Setting Tournament Deadlines

Part 1 — Registration opens

There are a handful of meaningful dates for tournaments, aside from the date of the tournament itself. Which means there are a handful of questions tournament directors have to ask themselves to define that meaningfulness.

The key dates are (according to tabroom.com):

- Registration opens
- New Entries due
- Fees & Obligations freeze
- Judge entries due
- Online drops and name changes
- Nuisance fines apply

Opening registration seems as if it ought to be easy, but there is an art to it. And it's different for a tournament requiring people to make elaborate traveling plans than it is for an easily accessible local event. If a tournament has more prospective entrants than slots, that's also an issue. Let's try to break it down.

If space is an issue, you need to waitlist all entries. Over time we've settled on a process that says dealing with the waitlist should begin two weeks to a month after registration opens. The process, which we'll talk about separately, aims at giving everyone a reasonable amount of time to get signed up and to be treated equally, as compared to a first-come, first-served approach, which rewards the unimportant characteristic of signing up the minute registration opens. Promptness is not a particularly meaningful virtue; it usually means that some eager varsity student who is masquerading as the coach was poised to sign up the team at the starting gun, grabbing an endless number of TBA slots. The point here is, registration-opens-date minus a few weeks is when people are admitted.

You probably want two months between admission and the tournament for people to make their travel plans if they're flying in or need lots of hotel rooms. This is not because it takes two months to make these arrangements, but room and flight availability is better earlier on. By the way, the process of teams organizing transportation and lodging works in your favor in getting TBAs turned into real names.

So, that's two and a half months from registration opens to tournament begins: two weeks to a month to allow everyone to register, and two months for them to get their arrangements sorted out. Keeping in mind that the majority of teams attending any tournament are from the same schools as last year, meaning that most people attending already have your tournament on their schedule, this makes pretty decent sense.

I'm more wary of opening too early than too late. One year Penn opened three and a half months before the tournament. There were a lot of entrants, way more than could be

accommodated, meaning that clearing the waitlist after a few weeks was totally a business of playing with too many meaningless TBAs. Because, realistically, only a few schools needed to make serious arrangements that early, about a full month of this three and a half was filled with smoke and mirrors, which would be no big deal if a decent number of teams didn't have serious flight and lodging arrangements to make. If you get 6 teams in right away, but a month later get another 6 teams in, it's not a big deal if you live down the street, but if you're flying in from Timbuktu, the problems are obvious.

With a tournament where everyone is probably coming from nearby, I would say two months lead time is quite enough. If you need to do a waitlist, so be it (I recommend waitlists for any invitational, if only to filter out any questionable entries, e.g., unchaperoned children), and take it out of that two months. Your guests will not be needing to jump through quite that many hoops, and a month and a half of time from waitlist clearing to tournament is plenty.

For a local free-for-all type event, where you've got plenty of space and your guests are going to be a lot of novices whose faces their coaches barely recognize, about a month is time enough.

Needless to say, there may be specific reasons for doing things differently, but this makes general sense overall. It's roughly the way most tournaments are handled in the northeast, including the colleges.