Tabbing Best Practices

These are our operating principles in offering debate competition:

Debate tournaments need to be scrupulously fair. They need to reward the competitors who do the best at that tournament. They need to run under rules that are clearly presented and fully understandable. They need to be inclusive. They need to be open and transparent. They need to address the needs and concerns of all who attend—contestants, judges and coaches.

1. Whatever system one chooses to use for pairing a tournament, it needs to be clear to the competitors. Publish an explanation of how you'll be tabbing on your invitation.

2. To insure neutrality, tab must include more than one person from more than one school.

3. Standard pairing procedure is 2 presets, followed by high-low based on points within brackets.

4. If judging assignments are random, they must be *entirely* random in every round for every pairing. Picking off the top, i.e., going with whatever the computer assigns, or taking off the top of a list if given alternatives, is the only acceptable system. PF rounds will, as a rule, be tabbed in this fashion. Some provision may be allowed to give judges rounds off to even out the burdens. And in random divisions, it is desirable to allow a handful of strikes, for teams to block judges they think may be biased against them.

5. If we do not prefer a random system, the perceived best judges should adjudicate the most important rounds; this is consistent with the principle of wanting the best debaters at the tournament to do the best at the tournament. Since any tab staff has its own biases about who are the "best" judges, the ones who are have the most at stake—the teams debating at the tournament—should decide who those best judges are for their most important rounds. Mutual Judge Preferences allow the teams to do this. MJP means that the two opponents agree on the desirability of the judge; during the tournament, tab will do its best to find the most highly preferred judge for the debaters congruent with the competitive necessities of the round at hand.

6. MJP works best when *all* teams pref. Distribution of this article (http://www.jimmenick.com/vault/ndca_mjp.pdf) or something similar is recommended for tournaments where preffing is not universally understood or accepted.

7. Tournaments should ask registrants to mark their own judges as Circuit, Traditional or New, as a general guide for other teams unfamiliar with the judge pool and/or new to preffing. Tournaments may or may not enforce the publication of paradigms.

8. MJP will offer meaningful tiers for organizing the judges. A suggested range is 8-10 judges per tier, in the number of tiers necessary to contain that number of judges across the pool, plus a small set of strikes (10%). Each tier, aside from strikes, will be of equal size. (E.g., with 40 judges, 4 strikes + 4 tiers of 9 judges each; 60 judges, 6 strikes + 6 tiers of 9 judges each.)

9. Mutual is mutual: The last possible placement of a judge in an MJP tournament, only after every mutual possibility is exhausted, would be a non-mutual assignment. Placements in order: 1-1, 2-2, 3-3, 4-4, etc., until all tiers are exhausted, then 1-2/2-1, 2-3/3-2, etc., then 1-3/3-1, 2-4/4-2 etc. If for some reason you decide that any unequal pref should be prioritized over an equal pref, you are *not* offering MJP at the tournament.

10. Assignments of the most preferred judges will be into the most important rounds, congruent with maintaining the competitive nature of the event. As a rule that means that first pref goes to Down 2, then Down 1, then Down 0, then Down 3, Down 4, etc.

11. A tournament can stop honoring prefs when teams are out of range of elims, if this will help prevent ghettoization of lower preffed judges. It is also recommended that, if a tournament can, it offers to place judges in advance of the tournament into other pools (PF or novice/JV divisions), where lower preffed judges are probably happier anyhow. Ghettoization of judges for any reason (and going off mutuality with 1-2s rather than 4-4s is a major way to increase underutilization of lower preffed judges) is to be avoided.

12) Care needs to be taken in break rounds for maintaining mutuality, as occasionally the numbers look better than they are. The problems arise when we run out of straight-out mutuality (all rankings equal) and go to arithmetic mutuality (all the rankings add up equally). A 1-1, 1-2, 2-1 is an example of the latter, where both sides add up to 5, i.e., it's a total 5-5 pairing. This happens fairly regularly, and is still mutual. So is 1-4, 3-3. 4-1. It's 8-8, and tab should try to improve, but in the end, it's one judge you like and one you don't like on both sides, plus one in the middle and it's a mutual situation for both sides, so it is acceptable. But here's one that is unacceptable: 3-1, 3-1, 1-5. It adds up 7-7, but it is totally weighted in one direction. In these situations, use the old-fashioned solution of assigning five judges and allowing each side to strike one of them. This usually only happens late in a tournament, when one is really up against the wall resource-wise, but it does happen.

13. At highly competitive circuit tournaments, tab may prefer an ordinal system of preferencing. This is a form of MJP that allows more mathematical flexibility, but is not advised for most events at this time due to its unfamiliarity to the community at large. (It may be the inevitable step after MJP is universal, but not yet.) Use of ordinals should roughly align with the tier system discussed above.

(Full documentation supporting these Best Practices is at http://www.jimmenick.com/vault/TJM_full.pdf.)