

# Judge Obligations

There are two ways of handling judge obligations, by the round, or by the tournament. There are reasons for preferring one over the other, but in general, bigger events with MJP and, perhaps, TOC bids, are better served by partial obligations, i.e., judging by the round, while smaller tournaments are better served by full tournament obligations. Don't be blinded by the idea that the cool kids do by-the-rounds if it doesn't make sense for your tournament. Your job as tournament director is to give your customers the best tournament possible, not to slavishly imitate some other tournament.

## Judging by the round

Judging by the round is relatively new in high school tournaments. As stated above, most high school tournaments are better off with tournament-based obligations. However, tournaments with very large fields, and also MJP and/or strikes, are probably better off with round-based obligations.

The usual by-the-round setup in LD is that there are six rounds, and one judge is obligated for two rounds for each debater. So if you have 4 debaters, your school is obligated for 8 rounds of judging. This could be split between as many judges as you want. 8 judges could judge 1 round, or 2 judges could judge 4 rounds. (In Policy, it would be 1 team incurs an obligation of 3 rounds, and the math proceeds accordingly.)

Examples: In a team with 3 LDers, this would mean that their coach judges 6 rounds. Normal, and just what it would be if the obligation were by-the-tournament. But if a school sends 2 LDers and 1 judge, that judge is only obligated for 4 rounds. If a school sends only 1 LDer and 1 judge, that judge is only obligated for 2 rounds.

Special adjustments can be made in tabroom for 7-round tournaments, say 2-2-3 or 2-3-2 or whatever.

What is the benefit of by-the-round obligations? First of all, at a serious bid tournament, a lot of your attendees are in the hunt, with multiple coach/ judges, an eye on scouting rounds, and everything else that goes with the circuit mentality. This frees them up to do what they want to do. Secondly, prefs are proportional in by-the-round situations. That is, tabroom.com adjusts accordingly. If you had a tournament with 600 rounds of obligation, that would mean that your Ones would be 18% of 600 (108 rounds), regardless of the number of judges in the pool. When you pref, you can see who is in for how many rounds, and fill up your Ones (and other numbers) until the number reaches 18% (108 in our example). In MJP with full-tournament obligations, it's 18% of the number of judges, not the number of rounds. You give a whole judge a One (or whatever) for the tournament. So with by-the-rounds, if one debater brings two judges, each judge obligated for one round, that's more choice for everyone on the prefing side. Secondly, there are those schools at a tournament with a whole bunch of parent judges that you may want to strike or pref at the bottom, and each of those judges is only in for one day. In tournament-obs, this one school of parent judges might soak up the entire bottom of your prefs, but with by-the-round obs,

they are sliced and diced proportionately, so your prefing becomes that much more accurate.

The problem with judging by the round is a simple one. If my math is correct, at best there's no difference from full-tournament obs, but as you approach worst-case scenarios with judge numbers, everyone at a tournament gets slightly less desirable prefs than with full-tournament obligations. Also, you may need more judges at the edges of the math with by-the-round-obs vs tournament obs. Previously I felt that these were a strong enough indictment against round-obs to make them categorically undesirable. But here's the thing: most people don't do this math. Most people don't see round-obs as problematic at all. In fact, they see them as desirable, for the reasons above: you get more freedom for your judges, and you get proportional prefing. My recommendation: give your customers what they want (if it makes sense).

## Judging by the tournament

With full-tournament obligations, every judge is on call for every round through a specified elim +1. This is the time-honored (or, alternately, the old-fashioned) way of handling it. The fact that it is the way it's been done for years does not necessarily mean there's something wrong with it.

Full obligations remains the default because it makes the most sense. At tournament where your pool is, say, 30 judges, meaningful prefing is already a nightmare, if not an impossibility. Adding partial obligations only magnifies the problem, unless your tab staff is very experienced and very mathematically adept. Also, at smaller tournaments, people sort of expect full obligations. They're probably already maxed out in the number of teams they're bringing, and they're not hiring lots of judges on their end in aid of a hunt. And, on a purely practical level, for smaller tournaments running on a tight budget, it's fewer mouths to feed in the judges' lunge and bodies to keep track of. There is something to be said for that.

## Handling full obligations responsibly

Having maximum use of your judge pool does not mean that you have free rein to abuse your judges. Your tab room needs to give everyone in the pool at least one prelim round off. Even your hired judges, who tend to be the first up for abuse, need a round off.

By the same token, nobody needs 2 or 3 rounds off, but 1 round off does clear the head, and also makes the judges feel as if they're being treated humanely. Of course, this obligates you, as the tournament director, to have enough judges in the pool so that rounds off are indeed possible. Here's where that recommended overage comes in, not just to protect you and get better prefs, but to have the human resources available to give everyone a break. By the way, in MJP situations, a lot of judges only end up judging one of the two flights, in later rounds especially. This is identical to a round off, so have your tab staff keep an eye on who's judging lots of doubles and who's judging lots of singles.

It's important to realize that, despite rumors to the contrary, judges are human beings. If you work them to death, they will zone out because, simply put, endless back-to-back rounds can be exhausting. It's not so bad in single-flighted elims with decent prep breaks in between, but it's murder in a series of endless double flights. Plus judges tend to get resentful if you abuse them. If you're counting on hiring a fair number of judges year after year, you want to treat them well. If they resent coming to your tournament because you work them to death, the word will get out and your tournament will suffer in the long run.

In Public Forum, where the tendency is to treat the judges like cattle, you might have a different situation. The bigger the tournament, the more parents and whatnot in the pool. Overages in PF are not unusual. Your obligation here is to make sure that the rounds are evenly distributed among the judges. You don't want some poor parent thinking "the computer has forgotten" them, or wishing "the computer" would do so. Lately tabroom has been good at this (it wasn't always). But keep an eye on it. In PF, everybody should have had at least one round by round 3. If not, something's wrong, and you need to fix it.

## By-the-Round in PF?

My original thought on this was why not? The underlying reason was to provide information to the teams on who was in for how many rounds, an important consideration when there are a lot of parent judges, as in the usual PF pool. My experience with it, however, has not played out well. We're doing it to account for parent judges, but parent judges, virtually by definition, don't understand it, especially when it comes to break rounds. You're welcome to try it, but as of this writing, 2020, it's not recommended.

## Elimination Rounds

Whichever you do for prelims, by-the-round or by-the tournament, announce your elim policy clearly in your invitation before the tournament starts; it's the same for both approaches.

- State a specific round through which all judges are obligated (rather than "first elim" which could be a runoff; it's never a good idea to end obligations at the runoff stage). As a general rule, the hardest round to pair is octos, following a double where, at this point, a lot of judges are no longer obligated. Therefore, keep judges obligated through octos, if you can. It will greatly benefit the tournament, especially in divisions with MJP. Granted, you may not be able to do this, but it's worth a try.
- Then add a +1 for one's own team's participation. A sample phrasing of this in an invitation is: *All judges are obligated through the Octos [or whatever] round, and then one round after their own team's participation.*