

Creating a Wellness Tournament

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It's no secret that the rigors of forensic tournaments compromise wellness. However, there are many practical steps which tournament directors can take which incorporate wellness opportunities into their tournaments to help create a healthy atmosphere for all participants. This essay will focus on the tournament schedule, tournament activities and practices, and tournament food and beverages.

Tournament Schedule

Too often, tournaments have tried to cram into a two or three day schedule all forensic activities known to humankind. Initially, directors should focus on offering only the events at their tournament they can reasonably schedule in their allotted time schedule, perhaps not including four styles of debate and all the "traditional" individual events, plus experimental events. For those few tournaments that do still offer both debate and individual events, creating a split schedule, so participants can focus on one activity or the other for a significant block of time while having a break during the corresponding events can make for a manageable day (e.g. debate from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and all individual events from 2:00-6:30 p.m.). Most students today have chosen to focus their participation on a single facet of the activity, so while as forensic educators we may be philosophically committed to both, creating a tournament that includes both can be a unique, though not impossible challenge. Consciously choosing which events to offer will make creating a healthy schedule easier.

Perhaps the biggest consideration when crafting a healthy tournament schedule is the wise use of time. Too often tournaments have been scheduled solely around classroom availability instead of considering the health of the respective participants. Initially, when deciding on the beginning time of a tournament, directors should be cognizant of the distance and mode of transportation that tournament participants have covered or used. If the majority of tournament participants are driving to the tournament the morning competition begins, perhaps a later start time and earlier ending time would make that day healthier. However, if most participants have arrived the afternoon before and have had the opportunity for a restful night's sleep, tournament events can begin earlier in the day.

Allowing for adequate sleep should be foremost in the minds of tournament directors when they create their tournament schedule. Twelve-hour days may be occasionally necessary, but the repeated twelve-hour day becomes a grind. Clearly, no tournament events should begin before 8:00 a.m. and a 9:00 a.m. start would be reasonable and appreciated by most tournament participants, knowing that it takes some participants several hours to get ready for competition in the morning. Ending each day at a reasonable hour, no later than 8:00 p.m., allows

for participants to have a reasonable evening meal, mostly likely not having to resort to a fast food alternative, and still have ample time for eight or more hours of sleep. Most forensic educators themselves work full days during the week with teaching, research, and administrative duties; there should be no reason to lengthen that schedule during a tournament. Mid-day breaks are also useful for encouraging wellness. Lunch breaks should approach 90 minutes. A typical 45 minutes to an hour break doesn't really let all team members congregate from late rounds, travel to a healthy meal and return to the tournament so as not to feel rushed for continued competition. Mid-day breaks can also allow time for a brief nap for those participants who find that habit to be healthy.

Keeping a tournament on time is essential for wellness. Reasonably allowing adequate time for travel to and from rounds is essential and given today's practices with double entrants, case disclosure and judge debate critiques, it's not reasonable to schedule an individual events round for less than 90 minutes and a debate round for less than 2½ hours. Dates for tournaments also need to be flexible. Not every tournament needs to occur on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday schedule. For forensic educators who work all week, there should be a conscious attempt to allow at least a single day off each week, even during a tournament. That may mean that a "day off" includes some tournament or travel, but accommodations should be made to consider this need. Some tournaments may occasionally begin on Thursday to end by Sunday. While some degree of regularity is appreciated, some tournaments may want to alter their days in certain years. Likewise, tournament directors should be conscious that many religious observances occur on Sundays. Tournament directors should consider scheduling accommodations for those who wish to participate in these observances since research has clearly shown significant benefits to a healthy spiritual life. Putting some creative thought into crafting a tournament schedule can truly make a tournament a pleasant and healthy experience for both participants and host.

Tournament Activities and Practices

Both tournament related and non-tournament related events can help to create a tournament that embodies wellness. For the tournament, insuring that there are adequate hired judges so that each full time judge has at least one round off per day helps to alleviate feelings of being overwhelmed. If judges know they'll have at least some time to collect their thoughts, visit with their team, relax with some food, they will be better able to effectively adjudicate during the remainder of the tournament.

For contestants, limiting the number of events one can enter and/or crafting individual sweepstakes awards which do not require students to exhaust themselves by participating in 5 or 6 events, perhaps events they feel highly uncomfortable doing, can create a reasonable tournament experience.

Crafting a tournament that embodies wellness includes creating wellness opportunities as well as limiting opportunities that jeopardize wellness. For example, when selecting tournament hotels, directors should actively seek hotels

that have exercise facilities with extended hours so tournament participants can benefit. If that is not possible, most campuses have some recreation facilities that a simple phone call might enable all tournament participants to be able to use when guests of the host school. Planned activities can also include opportunities for exercise. Some tournaments have included a volleyball game the night before competition. Bowling is a near universal, inexpensive, and often humorous activity. Depending on the climate, various outdoor activities could be incorporated into the schedule to combine socializing with the tournament environment. These planned recreational activities are particularly important between halves of swing tournaments, to give some mental separation between the stress of a competitive environment. If specific athletic events are not possible, perhaps having a host student sponsor a walk around campus could be included into a tournament schedule. This outdoor walk could be a fine alternative to the "smoking breaks" as an opportunity for "fresh" air.

Socializing is a significant reason why many are attracted to and remain in the activity. Parties for students and coaches have become popular traditions at many tournaments. However, there should probably be opportunities for these two groups to socialize separately since students are always likely to feel "on stage" whenever in the presence of potential judges. Obviously these parties should serve healthy food, and while renown as opportunities for alcohol, non-alcoholic alternatives should be available, even encouraged for all participants. Socializing often compromises sleep as well, so parties should begin and end at times that allow all participants to have a full night's sleep.

Tournament Food and Beverage

This is perhaps the easiest area of a tournament to make significant contributions to wellness. At tournaments, a wellness lounge should be available for participants throughout competition. This lounge, ideally, should not just be another classroom with harsh lighting and desks. It should strive to be a comfortable environment in which to relax, perhaps visit with friends, and serve as a departure from the stress of the regular tournament. Healthy snacks (e.g. energy bars, power ades, etc.) should be readily available to provide extra energy between scheduled meals. Perhaps soft music and other strategies that encourage participants to relax can provide a much-needed respite from the rigors of competition.

Tournament directors should be cognizant of all meal opportunities during the tournament. Initially, catering a meal or two can encourage healthy eating habits and save time during a tournament. Breakfasts should include fruit, juice, bagels, even granola, milk and cereal as well as the traditional coffee and jelly donuts. Affordable lunches can also be furnished by having a sandwich buffet with fruit and vegetables, a variety of meats and cheeses and various breads and non-carbonated beverages. These can be healthy and cost effective alternatives to just conveniently ordering pizza. If contacted, many college food services can provide meals; even box lunches at reasonable prices that allow pre-selected

healthy food choices. For evening meals, fast food restaurants are always well advertised and easy to find. Directors should work to feature a variety of healthy sit down style restaurants that may be unique to the tournament locale. Many times such restaurants will make special offers or provide discount coupons for tournament participants. Keeping tournament participants away from establishments that rely on extensive frying of foods should help participants feel energized, not sluggish throughout the tournament.

Tournament hosts should also insure that there are adequate opportunities for water throughout the tournament, especially given certain climate changes participants may experience given different geographic locations. Making certain that drinking fountains are operable and even providing bottled water helps keep participants from becoming dehydrated during hikes across campus for rounds.

Conclusion

Nearly all of the ideas in this essay have been tried at some tournaments across the country, and some wellness practices have become integrated into various tournaments. Each idea can be taken to extremes, but overall, tournament directors should work to conceptualize their tournament from a wellness perspective, understanding the unique pressures their campus, schedule, and/or date may provide to participants and then take steps to integrate as many opportunities for healthy decisions as possible. Wellness cannot and should not be the sole focus of a competitive tournament. By its very nature, forensics is competitive. However, with an understanding of what elements typically jeopardize health during a tournament, hosts can work to provide a variety of experiences which contribute to a healthy lifestyle so participants don't leave each tournament feeling drained of energy and their own wellness routine compromised.