

HOW TO RUN A SPORTS TOURNAMENT

INSTRUCTIONS

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INTRODUCTION TO SPORTS TOURNAMENTS

Christians in Sport exists to reach the world of sport for Christ. We have found over a number of years that running sports tournaments in your school, university or sports club can be really effective ways to give sportspeople an opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus proclaimed, while enjoying some competitive sporting action.

This manual aims to provide you with an outline of how you could run a sports tournament and resources to help you do so. Most of the advice can be applied to many different sports and we have included some tips for dodgeball, football and volleyball tournaments in particular. Therefore in order for it to work well in your context you may have to adapt the suggestions that follow.

For any type of tournament, players coming as a team can often help foster a competitive atmosphere but there is no problem if teams are formed on arrival. For dodgeball, in particular, inviting teams to come in fancy dress can increase a sense of team identity and playing music during the tournament can help create a buzz! A good length for a tournament is 1.5 to 2 hours including a gospel message at half time. It is important to make sure that those invited are aware that there will be a talk on the Christian faith, and it is advisable to remind players of this when explaining how the tournament will work.

We really hope that you will find this resource useful in providing an opportunity to introduce sportspeople to the Lord Jesus.

PREPARING FOR YOUR SPORTS TOURNAMENT

Preparation before the actual event is crucial in order that your sports tournament fulfils its aim and runs according to plan on the day.

There are a few key areas which need to be considered in preparation:

1. Venue

A good venue is crucial for an effective tournament so consider all the needs of your tournament. For example:

- Dodgeball tournaments are best held in sports halls but can also work well outdoors on a tennis court or even grass or astro turf pitches. It is very helpful if the area is enclosed with the boundaries not far from the ends of the dodgeball pitch. This is in order to stop the balls being thrown or rebounding far away.
- For football, ensure the pitches are of appropriate quality and size (e.g. smaller for 5-aside and bigger for 11-aside).
- For volleyball the venue depends on whether your volleyball nets require hammering into the ground as to whether an indoor or outdoor tournament is best. If so then best to use an area of flat grass, or even a beach if you live near one and the sand is of good quality. Bear in mind the likely weather at that time of year too!

When deciding on a venue it's key to take into consideration the expected size of your event and ensure the venue will be large enough. It is advisable to be able to set-up more than one pitch if you expect five or more teams. It is also recommended to book some extra time both before and after for setting up and clearing away.

2. Advertising

It is suggested that you begin to advertise your sports tournament at least three or four weeks prior to the actual event, and let people know the date as soon as possible. There are many ways to advertise, including flyers and posters, emails or through social media. However, often sports players come to sports tournaments because of a personal invite from a friend. Therefore it is worth making sure that 'key inviters' are on board with the chosen date and are inviting sports friends.

3. Running Order

Below is a possible running order for your sports tournament, however this can be adapted depending on your specific needs. Your running order should include sufficient time to explain the format of the evening and the rules of the sport and the tournament.

6.30: Set up and pray together

7.00: Arrival and team registration (teams may warm-up during this time)

7.15: Welcome and explanation of the format and rules

7.20: Group stages

8.05: Half time drinks and talk

8.20: Knock-out stages

8.45: Presentation and departure

4. Roles

It is useful to have at least one referee per pitch (having two on a pitch can help with dodgeball, in particular, if you have lots of available help) as well as one person running the tournament and controlling the music. You could use your half-time speaker in this role so that they are familiar to players when they speak.

5. Tournament Structure

It is helpful to have a rough idea of how many people you are expecting but the schedules in this manual should help you to be flexible. 4 to 8 teams is probably the ideal size for a group, dependent on the length of games. A good principle is to try to ensure good playing time for as many teams as possible. Here are some suggestions for different sports:

- Dodgeball: Be aware that dodgeball games are often quite short (under 3 minutes) especially if playing on a small pitch. Therefore it can work well to have large numbers of teams in each group if you are playing dodgeball and often for each team to play each other twice.
- Football: it may work better to have smaller groups and longer matches to give good continuous playing time. Set the length of the games by time according to how long you have available.
- Volleyball is generally played up to 25 points, where a point is awarded following every rally. It may be better to consider playing first to 11 or 15 points to keep games a bit shorter and avoid teams having long waits between matches.

Have more rather than less teams going through into the knockout stages as it keeps more teams involved for longer – you could even have a ‘cup’ and a ‘plate’ tournament following the group stages.

6. Equipment

Here is a suggested kit list to run your tournament:

General:

- Ball pump
- iPod and speaker for music during play, plus relevant cables/extension cables
- Risk assessment
- Clipboard
- Whistles
- Stopwatch
- Prize for the winning team
- Playing schedules

Dodgeball:

- Cones (3 colours)
- Dodgeballs (6 per pitch plus spares)

Football:

- Footballs at least one per pitch plus spares (if playing football outdoors in an open field it is best to have two or three balls per pitch so a match is not delayed by a ball kicked out of play).
- 2 football goals per pitch. Ideally each pitch having the same size goals helps prevent an advantage on different pitches
- Cones (2 colours per pitch to mark out a goalkeeper's area in a different colour)

Volleyball:

- Volleyball nets
- Volleyballs (one per court plus spares)
- Cones (one colour per court)

RUNNING YOUR SPORTS TOURNAMENT

Here are a few practical pointers that may be useful for running the tournament:

- If you don't know how many teams to expect, work out possible scenarios of how many groups you will use across which pitches if different numbers of teams arrive to save time on the day.
- Work out how long the matches will be given the time available and matches to get through.
- As teams register, decide according to your planning how many groups there will be and how long the matches will be. Then announce the groups to the participants before explaining the format of the tournament and the rules of the sport.
- After this announce the first round of matches and begin!
- Be firm and authoritative as referees, and announce the next round of fixtures at the end of each round of games.
- After the group games the speaker takes control and asks players to gather and take a seat.
- During the talk another member of the team works out knock-out ties
- After the talk that team member stands up and gives the fixtures for the knock-out stages (don't give these out before the talk).
- After the knock-out stages give out the prizes, sum up the theme of the talk and give a reminder about ways to follow-up.
- At the end of the tournament keep the music playing and tell the players that they can stay around for however long you have left in the venue to keep a relaxed feel.
- Once everyone has left why not get together and pray?

GOSPEL TALK OR TESTIMONY

If you are planning to take the opportunity to deliver a short talk about the good news of Jesus here are a few pointers:

- Bible based – use a verse/verses to bring the truth of the gospel.
- Short and Simple – 10 mins maximum is a good time to aim for. If the tournament is outdoors the talk may have to be shorter.
- Relevant – Can the talk have a sporty theme? Make sure you apply the truth to the sports world of the attendees.

Check out the Christians in Sport website for examples of evangelistic talks to sportspeople.

If you intend on sharing your testimony here are a few top tips:

- Be Christ centred – there is no story without Jesus, it is not a story about you but about what God has done in your life.
- Be simple – avoid Christian jargon.
- Be honest – don't be tempted to exaggerate (especially if you come from a Christian family) – your story is powerful because it is true.
- Be flexible – you don't need to tell your entire story each time. It may help to think about before, around and after your conversion.
- Be ready – leave them with a question.