

Observations and Analysis of an over-capacity event at the BCF

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I. Definitions

- Youth player – A player apparently in grade school
- Adult player – Any non-Youth player
- BCF – Boylston Chess Foundation
- MCC – MetroWest Chess Club

II. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide insight about what steps can be taken when attendance at a chess club event is greater than the optimal capacity afforded by the facility.

The model for this particular report is based on my personal observations from attending the BCF on Saturday June 17th, 2017.

My intention is to relate my experiences at the event with the mitigation ideas that have been discussed at the MCC through the years. From time to time the MCC has had to move and the capacity for normal and overflow attendance changed with every move. During these moves the MCC's average attendance and peaks continued to rise and have only dropped once along the way due to the change in time control to G/60 during the past two years. The average has continued to recover and it appears we are on track to return to our event average of 84 players which we saw for 13 consecutive years.

My hope is to make this report useful for both the MCC in consideration of its current search and specification for a new facility and to the BCF who might find my observations and the MCC ideas useful at this time.

I would like to state that the BCC did an exceptional job at managing the situation under very difficult circumstances. The event went on relatively smoothly and even though the playing circumstances were not great, the ability to play well was not, in my opinion, seriously impacted.

III. Event Scenario

- 66 players Total: 44 players in the Open, 22 in the U1800
- 15 of the 66 in the Open played up, approximately 25%
 - Only one of the playing up players had 2.5 or more points and he went from 1731 to 1782
- Tables
 - All but I believe 3 tables between the two rooms were called into service.
 - Three tables were left in the skittles room
 - Several were placed in the hallway outside the playing room
 - Isle breaks in the main room were eliminated except for one row which was needed to allow reaching the first row
 - 3 rows had 5 or more tables without isle breaks
 - This was done to accommodate more tables in the room
 - Several tables had three boards place on them
 - There was just barely enough room to have the three clocks for the three boards in-between the boards.
 - Scorebooks hung over the edge of the table in front of you as there was no room to the side for a scorebook
 - If you used a single sheet of paper you could slide it under the corner of your board in between the boards when not in use
 - Subjective observation: I could think of about 10 Adults who I consider regular and occasional players who were not present this day
- Chairs:
 - It seemed as though there were not going to be enough chairs and a scramble occurred for some time but apparently there were enough chairs for the playing room. Not clear if chairs were brought in or if indeed there were enough on site.
 - Chairs were jammed up side by side to each other
- Pairings:
 - The only place to traverse between rows of tables was directly in front of where pairings were posted.
 - Once you had seen your pairing it was difficult to move away from there and enter the correct row
 - If you had any possessions you left at a table and had to retrieve it then you had to travers this traffic jam twice
 - Accelerated pairings were used for the first two rounds
 - This was done to make the pairings more equitable in the Open section.
 - With 44 players you would need 6 rounds to ensure only one perfect score in a Swiss event. Accelerated pairings help to work against perfect scores by matching the higher players sooner
- Temperature
 - The temperature in my opinion was reasonably good the entire day with just one brief period that I think was during the 2nd round where it got a bit warm.
 - It was warm and somewhat humid outside but not hot

IV. Crunching some numbers for the Open section

A. Player Ratings

- 7 Masters (2200 or higher)
- 11 2000 – 2199 players
- 11 1800 – 1999 players
- 15 1600 – 1799 players who played up. 34%
- 0 players below 1600 entered the Open section

B. Players who crossed a rating floor as a result of this event

- Only 7 players crossed a rating floor
 - 2 Adults went from just below the floor to slightly above it
 - 3 Youth dropped to a lower floor
 - 2 Youth went up

V. Mood and atmosphere observations:

A. Adult players

- Positive
 - Temperature was reasonably well maintained in the room though it tended to the warmer end of the range. It was warm and humid outside but not hot
- Negative
 - A number of people articulated that if they had known attendance was going to be very high they would have not played.
 - These people mentioned that when they had last checked online it did not appear that a lot of people had signed up yet for the Open section
 - How difficult it was to get to your board at pairing time
 - Very unhappy at having to play at a table with three boards
 - That at some events they attended here the prize fund was reduced and here with so many it would not (likely) to be increased
 - Too many kids (Expressed by Adults)
 - “How ridiculous this all was”. This was usually heard when waiting for things to settle down and start the round

B. Youth players

- Very disappointed that after three rounds they were not getting a chance to play a master
- Disappointed that they ended up playing each other rather than masters

VI. Club Perspectives

A. About the MCC

In the modern era of the MCC the club has had three locations. Each of these locations had different nominal and overflow capacities. During these relocations the club attendance average always increased placing a greater strain on each locations capacity. During this time the MCC contemplated policies which they might need to put into place to try and mitigate excess capacity. To date none of those have been put into practice as the MCC did not run into the scenarios that required them. Many of these policies were considered for being put into place on a full or part time basis but all were dismissed as undesirable for the health of the club and would be put in place only if absolutely necessary. Some of the ideas include various flavors of the following:

- Playing up restrictions – A popular idea often proposed by 1900 and 2000 players who are playing in the Open section
- Playing up restrictions for the purpose of keeping sections more balanced and competitive
- Limiting entries – Has never been needed to date
- Splitting events by sections to occur on different nights – No real need identified and increases organizational burden in the form of TDs and expense

One theory and concern that we have kept in mind for the MCC is that if playing conditions should ever become “uncomfortable” that we would see a self-selection by players of choosing not to play. This would drive down our attendance back to a more comfortable level and we would likely see a repeating cycle over time of too many players, then players lost. The rise in players would likely be “new to the club” players as opposed to former players returning to the club. Thus over time we would not be establishing a loyal and dedicated collection of club players

B. About the BCF

The BCF has a mixed blessing scenario. Their attendance has been trending up for some time based on casual observations, (haven’t crunched their numbers for some time now). My casual observation is that there is a large pool of scholastic players that is currently very active and attending regularly.

As noted in a previous section some subset of the Youth players appear to specifically desire an opportunity to play Masters. From this then:

- These Youth players will attempt to play up no matter what sections are offered, in particular up into the Open section

This is supported by the observation that Thursday night the Open section had much fewer players than the U1800 yet by Saturday that Open section mushroomed to 44 players

As a side note, and very subjective on my part is: I suspect that there is a general opinion out there among the Youth and possibly their parents that they way to get their ratings up faster is to play up. I have the sense that they are looking for the big upsets. I find it hard to believe that 1600 players or their parents are thinking that they need the greater learning experience by playing the masters.

VII. Possible remedies the BCC could apply

Given the past discussions held at the MCC about policies that can be put in place related to sections and capacity issues the following ideas have been suggested. Some as will be shown we have thought to NOT be effective.

A. Projecting an overall increase in attendance in excess of the current facilities capacity

If the BCF believe that chess in their region will continue to grow and want to be able to accommodate the occasional spike in attendance, they will need to seek out a larger facility sooner rather than later. This will need to be taken into consideration with their current lease renewal. This is an extremely non-trivial consideration but key to the future of the BCF or any chess club.

The MCC in its search for a new location is setting the bar at 120 players. It has had stretches of over 90 players so to accommodate a modest growth in the attendance we are planning for the greater capacity.

B. Optimizing the space you have

- Replace all chairs to make them all uniform in size (not wide) and comfortable. This will increase the feeling of space and greatly ease traversing down the aisles
 - The MCC has tested and plans on purchasing chairs when we move into a new facility:
 - [Link to Chair Example](#). Better prices have been found on similar chairs

C. Split event by sections to be on different days

- Requires more TD volunteers
- May interfere with scheduling of other events on same weekend. It might turn out that if attendance remains high that you will have to plan on most of your events being split into two days.
- May have almost no effect on having too many people as people could enter more than one section because they are on different dates. To have a chance of working you would have to limit people to playing in only one section/Day.
 - Theoretically you would have had the 44 players of the open section still coming to play. This is at the edge but if it ever increases then you are back to where you started with only some relief due to not having everyone there on the same day

This idea is generally considered impractical and not likely to work in the long run

D. Limit the ability to play up.

- By restricting the ability to play up you may get a better balance across sections but you may not have any impact at all on the overall attendance and thus you have not addressed the overcapacity issue.
- On the other hand you may drive attendance down because some players and parents might opt for some other activity instead of playing in a more ratings appropriate section on a weekend.

For deeper consideration of the impact and ramifications of instituting a playing-up restriction policy there is a collection of Topic papers in the club archives. While not the most current analysis the 2012-06 document has probably the most thorough discussion of pro-s and con's.

- [2012-06 discussion](#): Early chapters is analysis, Chapter 7 is the start of discussion
- [Topic Archive page](#)

E. Rapid Churn games in case of over-capacity emergency

- Announce in the event advertising that you reserve the right to have the players play Game 30 in place of Game 60 so that you can “reuse” the capacity to accommodate the large

number of players. You would reserve the right to do this on entire or partial sections at the TDs discretion.

F. **Limit Entry by capacity**

Our discussions at the MCC have classified this as a very tricky and potentially club damaging approach to keeping attendance within capacity limits. Our outlook is that we never want to be put in the position of telling people they can't play when they want to play. Some of the philosophical issues you will need to consider are listed below. Each of these has side effects that they may produce which could very seriously negatively impact your overall attendance and the perception of your club.

- Gaming the system prevention methods need to be put place
 - You would most likely want to insist on Online entry so that you have a financial commitment. If not then people will simply register to ensure they have a reserved spot and then cancel at will. You would likely want a policy about how many times they can have an all of a sudden cancellation before you disallow them or somehow put them at the bottom of a list as the first to be bumped. This now involves more entry management and possible disputes and complaints.
 - You need some provisions for those who claim a hardship of doing online entry, e.g. They don't use a computer or pay anything online, etc.
- Is entry preference or priority given
 - by first come first serve
 - You might get very section skewed sections resulting in canceling a section
 - It becomes a race to enter as soon as one can and those who cannot commit soon enough never get to play. E.g. Someone can only know on Wednesday if they can commit to Saturday but over time the events always fill up by Tuesday.
 - by rating
 - Do you let the club become "elitist" by only taking the highest ratings for a section
 - Do you allocate seats by section first then somehow manage to allow more in if it looks like there's space? (more manual work and disputable work)
 - by past attendance
 - How do you become a faithful member if you can't get enough playing time.
 - What constitutes no longer being active enough to get a seat based on past attendance
 - by membership class (pay more to get a seat to play)?
 - Those who can buy their way in get first seating?
 - Do you allocate seats by limits in each payment class?
 - Again management and perception problems