

Swiss-Sys versus WinTD

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2019-08-14: Revisited with input from Ken Ballou

The original text has been left in place and revisited items shown in red followed by an explanation that appears with a bullet point

Overall conclusions:

A - SwissSys is more powerful, robust and allows the most flexibility in making changes, especially to pairings.

B - If you run a multi section weekend event, SS is the program that will serve you better. You can more easily have things split between machines should you desire and it will go back together better.

C - For a while it looked like the world was heading towards WinTD. I think WinTD has stalled a bit and SS Windows version has caught up if not passed it due to the deeper level of functionality present.

I would purchase the product of choice directly from the maker and not from the USCF. No need to have someone in the middle.

Deeper discussion points leading to the overall conclusions:

SwissSys (which shall be referred to as SS from this point forward) initially came out as a DOS only program. A while back, perhaps 2 years ago, it came out as a Windows version. Initially it had some serious bugs which seemed to be scaring long time DOS SS users away from moving to it. WinTD came out in 1997 many years after the DOS SS and came out as a Windows only version written from scratch.

The MetroWest Chess Club (MCC) used WinTD when it first went to computer pairings back in 1977 and used it faithfully for 3 years. We started using it shortly after it became available.

We decided to try out the SS Windows version as we had three particular items we did not like about the way the WinTD creator chose to do things and to date we have not been able to convince him to change. In addition, we had recently run into a clear pairing bug regarding odd man pairings so it seemed a good time to give SS a good looking over.

Let me say that for the three years we dealt with WinTD, they made many, many improvements that we asked for. Also, except for the bug found at the end of the three years, each and every case that we questioned the pairings, it turned out to be either our having set an option incorrectly or not a bug. In many cases we didn't understand what was being done but upon close examination and much debate then finally actually re-reading the manual and discussions with WinTD, we concurred that the program did as it was told to do. **WinTD only does Look Ahead pairings which is the USCF recommendation.**

- This is no longer true

Few people are aware of the subtle differences of Look Ahead versus Top Down pairing and hence, many times the pairing would be questions but a look at the wall chart could dispel the doubts. Pairings will indeed often come out differently. SS lets you pick which type of pairing to use but, the MCC remains with Look-Ahead. A TD who has good experience doing manual pairing will, I believe end up doing Look-Ahead pairing as they know they need to manage future rounds. In my own case, I discovered that the refinements and judgment calls I was making when I was doing Top-Down pairings were in effect making me do Look-Ahead.

Both programs necessitate careful understanding and selection of the options. **Neither program would keep an experienced Windows user from complaining about the interface and how the authors decided to do things.**

- No longer true for SwissSys. Windows users should not be unhappy with SwissSys now.

Our decision to evaluate the Windows version of SS was based on two points we could not get WinTD to budge on:

1. If all other things are absolutely equal after going through all sorts of evaluations, it uses a randomization for the final selection criteria. This came to light when people in the 3 point group were paired differently because of a change in a much lower point group. To generate the random seed, it looked at the whole section. If you check variation 2914 on page 107 of the rules, the TD can let the players choose by lot in those situations. **We prefer to have the option to not have it be random or at least not use the method it is using for generating the random seed.**

- We are considering a change. If all else is equal in the last round it may be more fair to have it coin tossed

2. Printing of pre and post ratings quickly and easily on standing reports went from being just a check box option to a many step, not simple process and hence, to us constituted a loss of much desired functionality.

Another shortcoming that does not affect the MCC as we are a weeknight club only, is the ability to run several sections at the same time that are on different rounds. Some actions, most notably undo pairings, apply to more than one section. This is not good. **Also, I can not speak to how well it does team events. I do know that SS DOS has been doing it for years and hence the experience should be part of SS.**

- WinTD is excellent at team events e.g. USTATE event
- Swiss continues to be very poor.

We started our modern experience with SS at version 3.2 Within a few uses of the program, I had accumulated a list of 20 or more usability issues and submitted them to SS. After three months of struggling with the usability issues, we were resolved that if the (at the time) just announced new release 4.0 did not solve many of the issues, we would switch back to WinTD. Version 4.0 addressed almost all of the issues we had raised and we have since decided to stick with it instead of going back. Version 4 was much, much better than 3.2. After going through the learning curve of SS, we find it to be much more powerful, robust and flexible.

WinTD is, in my opinion, easier to get going with.

- We strongly disagree. This is no longer true. At the time of the original article SS had only been on Windows for two years while TD made it debut as a Windows application several years later.

If you need to make manual adjustments to pairings, the user needs more than basic experience with the program. **Also, it is easier to make irreversible mistakes with WinTD than SS.**

- This is still true

The reason for this is that each round, both pre and post paired is kept in a separate file for SS. This means that old info is still around and you can go back as far as you need. On the other hand, this creates a lot of files along the way that at the end you will want to "clean up" and in fact, there is such a function built in to the program. WinTD on the other hand is one file for all your sections.

With SS, you truly need to do the built in tutorial to understand what's going on and how to effectively use it. If you don't, you will struggle a lot longer and harder.

One area of difficulty which may or may not apply is that, if you plan on doing clean up work on the event by moving the files from one computer to another, you will have little difficulty with WinTD but with SS,

you will have many files to move and all the paths and most of the remembered settings will be invalid. SS uses mostly absolute file paths instead of relative ones and hence the source of the problems. I've discussed this with SS. They were surprised at our use and our difficulties. **I don't think that SS has been used much if at all in a Weeknight type of scenario.**

- This is no longer true. SS has been used in many Weeknight scenarios in our region

There are different considerations for weeknight versus a weekend. In a weekend, one round usually happens right after another. Files aren't being moved around, lots of late round byes being taken on the fly, late round entries, etc.

SS has been, so far, pretty responsive to our complaints and as mentioned above, address many of them in going to version 4. **WinTD has been extremely responsive to all of my concerns and questions.**

- This has not been our experience in the last few years

They've also incorporated a good share of my suggestions. We've had maybe a dozen serious go rounds in the last year among the Club's TDs on whether a pairing was in error or not. In each case we discovered that we had set an option incorrectly (it wasn't incorrect until we didn't like what it produced) or that it did the pairings correctly. Most of our doubts we realized later was because we didn't realize that it was doing Look Ahead pairing and not Top Down. The two methods produce subtly different pairings. There is no option to select this but the USCF recommends Look Ahead.

Another important factor is that SS seems to be more actively worked on for improvements though at perhaps a slower pace than WinTD. The makers of WinTD have gone a long stretch now since their last release and no date for a new release is scheduled, I asked. This concerns me as I'm not sure how much drive they have do continuing improvement.

The program is very easy to use but some of the steps are not always obvious. If you go through the tutorial and the examples, you will probably have no trouble at all.

One very nice feature of WinTD that makes it flexible for doing many things with the information that can be generated is that you can enable it to print to a special text window that opens up within the program. If you enable printing to the text window, every time you print something, and there is a print button usually associated with each window, it opens a window within WinTD and outputs to it as plain, formatted text. You can output other things to the same window if you choose thereby appending to it. You can edit anything in the window. When you have what you want in the window the way you want it you can hit either the save to file button or the printer button.

This is how I generate the cross table, wall chart, pairings, pairing log file (that explains how pairings were done!!) and upset lists for the web site.

- NOTE: Three paragraphs about HTML output have been removed as they were so out of date as to be misleading. SwissSys does a pretty good job and has bulk exporting.

You should be aware that WinTD has been used for some National Level events with very good results. SS has been used for years.

- Some out of date information was removed from the above.