

January 31, 2007, SFL Tournament Review Committee
Report With the February 9, 2007, SFL
Commissioner Comments and Recommendations

BACKGROUND

In a meeting of the SFL Commissioners on December 2, 2006, a review of complaints received concerning the Fall tournament process was made. Complaints arose from the process used to award trophies due to the weather-related cancellation of most Sunday tournament games. Based on a review of these comments and the rationale used in the developing the Fall 2006 rules relating to the tournament scheduling and ranking process, the SFL Commissioners reached the following conclusions.

- Section VIII. of the Fall 2006 rules is complex and difficult to understand. Although the trophy awards for the Fall 2006 tournament divisions that could not play their games as scheduled were awarded in accordance with the current rules, several teams and clubs voiced concerns and were confused on which rules applied to their situation.
- The Fall 2006 rules are extremely burdensome when Saturday tournament games are cancelled and Sunday games are expected to be played. Using the Fall and Spring 2005 and 2006 seasons as an example, almost 100 tournament divisions would need to be rescheduled in one day if the Saturday games are cancelled. The process used for deciding the teams that would play Sunday games is very similar to the process that was used to determine the trophies this season and this process was not considered fair in several cases – a complaint that was also received in prior seasons when Saturday games were cancelled and the tournament divisions rescheduled for on Sunday games.

The Commissioners developed several proposed changes to the Rules. In order to provide an opportunity to review the proposed changes, establishment of a review group was approved. Several documents were prepared and made available to the SFL Club Representatives and the review group by letter dated December 8, 2006. The documents included 1) the Fall 2006 Tournament Methodology, 2) the structure and responsibilities of the tournament review group, 3) proposed tournament rules for the Spring 2007 season (Section VIII of the current rules) and 4) a document comparing the Fall 2006 tournament rules and the proposed Spring 2007 tournament rules.

To summarize the proposed Tournament rules – in the event that when weather or other events prevent the tournament from being played as scheduled for a given division, the remaining games for that division will be cancelled and no trophies will be awarded.

In response to the SFL's letter requesting volunteers for membership in the Tournament Review Group (Group) the following individuals offered to serve:

Jane Scott-Jones – McLean
Steve Bender – Independent
Dave Little – Herndon
Paul Frascione – VSA
Stuart Pregnall – Braddock Road

The Braddock Road representative was elected to chair the Group.

DISCUSSION

The Group reviewed the materials prepared by the SFL Commissioners. Group members offered their feedback on the proposals, and provided their own ideas on how to improve the tournament process. The Group communicated via e-mail to generate debate and discussion. The Recommendations below summarize the results of the Group's efforts.

Options and Recommendations

The Group agrees that when Tournament Division games for both Saturday and Sunday cannot be played, the SFL has little choice other than cancelling that Division's participation in the Tournament. However, the Group is not in favor of Tournament cancellation if games can be played on either Saturday or Sunday. Discussion below provides some options in these cases.

Saturday games are played as scheduled, but Sunday games cannot be played: There are several possible scenarios as follows.

- 1) Use the current process – with one change – to resolve the tournament division standings. Forfeits would not be used to calculate standings. The calculations would be based solely on regular season and tournament games actually played on the field.

Comment: It is unclear why forfeits should be removed since this may unfairly penalize a team. Furthermore, the tournament structure itself for the 5, 6, and 7 team single elimination divisions can result in an unequal number of games played and, depending on when games are cancelled, even round robin divisions may be adversely affected. The following are examples of problems that may occur using this approach.

- Team A and Team B play 8 regular season and 2 tournament games. During one of the games, Team A beats Team B. Team A also receives a forfeit win for some reason such as the other team (not Team B) not showing up for a game, using a red carded player, using an illegal player, etc. Team A wins all its games and Team B wins its games except for the loss to Team A. Accordingly, Team A will have 40 game points while Team B will have 37 game points. Eliminating the forfeit win for Team A will

reduce Team A's game points to 36. Accordingly, Team B would be ranked higher since it had 37 game points even though (1) a different number of games were used to determine the game points used to rank teams and (2) Team A beat Team B. Furthermore, if the tournament had proceeded as scheduled, Team A may have been ranked higher than Team B since if these two teams were tied after the third game based on bonus points, Team A would have been placed above Team B based on head to head results. Team A may also question why it should be penalized especially if the team that was assessed the forfeit had a much poorer record than Team A and would have probably lost the game anyway.

- By their structure, the 5, 6, and 7 team single elimination tournament division have some teams playing more games on Saturday than other teams, e.g., 1 team in a 5 team division plays 2 games on Saturday while 2 teams in a 6 team tournament division play 2 games. The remaining teams in those tournament divisions only play one game. If all the teams in a tournament division played the same number of regular season games, then the team(s) that played the two games on Saturday would automatically be guaranteed one of the top two rankings. For example, assume the following using a 6 team single elimination tournament division:
 - ▶ All teams in the tournament division end the regular season with 30 game points earned in 8 games.
 - ▶ Team E and Team F win their first game and then lose to Team A and Team B respectively in their second game. Therefore, Team E and Team F earn 5 additional game points while Team A and Team B earn 4 additional game points. Accordingly, Team E and Team F would have 35 total game points while Team A and Team B would have 34 total game points.

Team E and Team F would be ranked as the first two teams since they had the most game points even though (1) a different number of games were used to determine the game points used in ranking teams and (2) Team A beat Team E while Team B beat Team F. Furthermore, if the tournament had proceeded as planned, neither Team E or Team F would have been eligible for first or second place trophies.

Since the fundamental problem that causes the distortion in the above examples is the number of games played, this proposal would appear

to need some method of mathematical adjustment would still be needed to adjust the game results to ensure that an equal number of games were used in the ranking process.

Recommendation: The SFL Commissioners recommend that this option not be adopted since it does not address the fundamental concern of using a mathematical process to determine the ranking of teams. However, if the option is selected, then (1) forfeits should be used in determining a team's standings and (2) a process needs to be defined that adjusts the results to ensure that an equal number of games are used to determine rankings.

2) Award trophies solely on Tournament seedings irrespective of Saturday game results.

Comment: It is unclear what is meant by tournament seedings. When the tournament schedule is developed, normally with about 2 games remaining in the regular season, teams are "seeded" for scheduling purposes. However, the results of the last two games of the season can significantly change these standings. For example, Tournament Division 6 of the Under 14 Girls had four teams with each team having 14 game points when the tournament schedules were prepared. Similarly, Division 17 of the Under 14 Boys had 6 teams with each team having 12 game points. By the end of the regular season the team rankings had changed in both of these divisions. Accordingly, using those results, the seeding of the teams within a tournament division would in most cases change.

Regardless of whether the initial seeding or seeding based on the regular season results are used to determine seedings, problems can arise by not considering any tournament games played. The following examples illustrate these concerns.

- ▶ Assume that, (1) using either the results for all regular season games or games used to determine the tournament divisions, Team A and Team B are considered the top seeds, (2) Team A and Team B are scheduled to play Team C and Team D respectively in the tournament, and (3) Team A and Team B lose their tournament games to Team C and D. It would seem unfair to Teams C and D to award trophies to Teams A and B since (1) Team A and Team B would receive a trophy even though Teams C and D respectively won their games against these teams, and (3) if the tournament had been played as scheduled, neither Team A or Team B would have received a trophy since they were eliminated from Sunday's game.

- ▶ The Under 19 Boys had 7 single elimination tournament divisions. Using these divisions as an example, 5 tournament divisions had teams ranked either first or second (using the process in place for the Fall 2006 season) that were not ranked first or second when the tournament was scheduled. Furthermore, even considering the entire regular season results, 5 of the 7 tournament divisions still had differences. More importantly, although the same number of divisions had differences, the differences were in were in different divisions. For example, using the tournament seeding for division 7, the top two teams were the same as the top two seeds when the tournament was scheduled. However, using all of the regular season results, at least one of the top two teams in the tournament was different than the tournament results. This means that at least one team in each division beat a higher ranked team in tournament play.

Recommendation: The SFL Commissioners recommend that this option not be adopted since eliminating tournament results may raise more questions than it answers especially when Team A beats Team B in the tournament, yet Team B receives the trophy.

- 3) Develop a revised process to calculate standings. The revised process could take into account such factors as goals scored, goal differentials, average points per game, the relative standings of the scheduled opponents. The Group was concerned that adopting a new mathematical model without a concrete basis would invite future criticism.

Comment: The approach used for the Fall 2006 season already took into account, goals scored and average points per game. Goal differential was not used since this encourages a team to run up the score on a weaker team. However, the approach did account for bonus points which accomplishes the same objective while not encouraging the running up of scores. It is not clear how to determine the relative strength of the scheduled opponents since in many cases the teams in a tournament division may not play the same opponents. The concern that adopting a new mathematical model without a concrete basis is well founded.

Recommendation: The SFL Commissioners recommend that this option not be adopted since it does not address the fundamental concern of using a mathematical process to determine the ranking of teams.

Saturday games are rained out, but Sunday games can be played: Several suggestions were offered to include use of indoor or all-weather venues to conclude all scheduled Tournament play. Field Permit schedules are the major factors that preclude these suggestions as being viable alternatives. The limited amount of time available to most Clubs for field permits on Sundays allows for only three or four games to be played. This is simply not enough time to recoup rained out games from the previous day.

The following is the most plausible scenario recommended by the Group.

- 1) Use the existing Tournament seeding rules, and schedule the top two seeds to play on Sunday. The final season standings would not be added into the calculations.

Comment: This is identical to the approach in the Fall 2006 rules. However, this approach uses a mathematical process to determine the top two teams which has raised concerns in the past that are consistent with the concerns raised during the Fall 2006 season. Furthermore, the difficulties associated with scheduling about 100 tournament divisions and notifying the affected teams in time for those teams to notify their parents and players in one day are significant since even under the best of conditions, this process is not completed until very late on Saturday or early Sunday morning.

Recommendation: The SFL Commissioner continue to believe that no attempt to schedule Sunday games should be made if any Saturday games are cancelled because (1) a mathematical process (which has been the source of complaints and concerns) is required to determine the top teams and (2) the difficulties in attempting to reschedule 100 tournament divisions in one day and notifying the affected teams in time for those teams to notify their parents and players the day of the game are very significant.

The Group generally agreed that whatever rules the SFL adopts should strive for consistency throughout. For example, when the SFL normalizes game points giving average points of games played instead of full points for regular season games only (if one team is missing 2 games and one team is missing 1, the first team adds one game only). The issue here is why the SFL normalizes regular season game differences and tournament differences independently of each other or as a composite. If Team A has 7 of 8 regular season games and 2 tournament games for nine total, and Team B has played all 8 but only 1 tournament game, they both have 9 games, but the result of normalizing the games separately may produce a different result. The Group believes consistency would avoid additional criticism.

Comment: The SFL did maintain consistency when it implemented the Fall 2006 rules. Basically, a mathematical adjustment was only performed if the same number of games actually played were different. It did not matter whether the total number

games was the same because (1) the number of regular season and tournament games were the same or (2) one team played 2 tournament games and 6 regular season games while the other team played 1 tournament game and 7 regular season games. The key was that both teams had played a total of 8 games. Therefore, no mathematical adjustments were required. For example, in tournament Division 4 of the Under 16 Boys, the first place team played two tournament games and 7 regular season games while the second place team played 8 regular season games and 1 tournament game. A review of the Fall 2006 tournament ranking worksheet (available on the web site under SFL Documents) for this division shows that no adjustments were made since both teams had played 9 games even though one team was scheduled for 11 games while the other team was scheduled for 10 games.

Observations on Round Robin Games in Tournaments: Although not specifically tasked with this issue, the Group did receive suggestions on this matter and the information is submitted to the SFL for its consideration.

The rankings of round robin teams when all tournament games have been played as expected can also be improved. One of the tie breakers used to achieve final rankings is “least goals allowed during the regular season.” The rules do not require any adjustments or averages to be made for the number of games played during the regular season. This can be unfair. An example would be two teams tied in round robin tournament play and team “A” played eight regular season games giving up 8 goals for an average of 1 goal/game. Team “B” only played six regular season games and yielded 7 goals for an average of 1.16 goals/game. The way the rules are currently written, team “B” would win the first place trophy using this tie breaker even though their average goals yielded per game is higher than team “A”. The rules could be modified to use the “least average goals per game allowed during the regular season.”

Comment: This is a valid concern and reflects how the SFL intended the rule to be implemented. To the SFL’s knowledge, this tie breaker has not been used very often and when it has been used the teams had played the same number of games so it was not an issue. The SFL has implemented this change in its proposed rules for the Spring 2007 season.

Processes Used to Determine Seedings

Since the process used to determine Tournament seedings has potential impact on Tournament trophy awards under certain scenarios, the Group examined this process to see if refinements could be made to improve it. The Group generally found that the process was challenging for several reasons.

One complicating factor was the time when Tournament seedings are developed. The seedings are developed before the regular season has concluded. There is potential for teams to get inflated seedings if they play weaker opponents early in a season. Also, when scheduled games

are missed early in a season, the process now considers the points for a Forfeit as a of the calculation. The Group has recommended discontinuing Forfeit points in when calculating tournament standings when Saturday games are played but Sunday games are cancelled. The Group generally agreed that consistency in the application of Forfeits needed to be addressed. It is being recommended that Forfeits points not be used to calculate seedings or Tournament standings.

As an example, suppose a very good team who on average earns 3 bonus points per game played yet receives a forfeit during the season and only receives 1 bonus point for that game (1-0 score). This team has now won all their games but their bonus points are not what they could have been on average if they had the opportunity to play the forfeited game. At the top of some divisions there are often a few good teams that also win all their games and earn all their bonus points. If part of the tournament is cancelled, the SFL ranking of teams for continued play or trophies includes the use of bonus points which may adversely affect the team who was forced to take a forfeit for a reason not of their own fault.

As an alternative to eliminating the use of Forfeit points, the rule also could be improved by modifying a team's bonus points for a forfeit to the average number (minimum of 1) that they earned in the games actually played during the entire season. This would only be applicable to tournament ranking efforts in the event of partial cancellation. Issues of rounding and what makes sense in that regard is also a topic for discussion when considering averages. Goals allowed is also used in the partial cancellation ranking process but this category would not have an adverse effect on a team receiving a forfeit and therefore would not require any modification. This may affect the rankings of any team in any division.

Comment: It appears that this recommendation is to eliminate forfeits when determining tournament divisions. As noted in Section VIII.D. of the rules, games where forfeits are awarded are not considered when determining the tournament divisions. Furthermore, any penalties associated with reporting scores late are also eliminated. The process described in the rules already ensures that only actual game results are used in developing the initial tournament divisions and has been used since the SFL was established.

The process used to assign teams to tournament divisions recognizes that the teams will have played a different number of game when the tournament is scheduled for a number of reasons. Rather than use a mathematical process to make adjustments so that each team's results is based on the same number of games, a different approach is used. Specifically, as noted in Section VIII.D. of the rules, each team's game point percentage is calculated and the teams are then ranked using this process. The game point percentage is calculated as followed:

$$\text{(Game Points Earned for Games Actually Played)} / \text{(Total Games Played X Maximum Game Points Possible Per Game (4))}$$

Since the game point percentage is how teams are assigned to tournament divisions, only actual game results are used to determine the tournament division for a given team. In other words, other factors, such as bonus points and goals allowed, are not normally used to determine the teams place in a given tournament division. This is one reason why some tournament divisions have 3, 5, 6, or even 7 teams since the SFL strives to develop tournament divisions where the teams have comparable abilities. The following are examples of tournament divisions that were created during the Fall 2006 season.

- ▶ Division 5 of the Under 14 Girls and Division 7 of the Under 12 Girls had 6 teams. The game point percentage for each team in these division was 50 percent and 66.7 percent respectively. Other tournament divisions also had teams with identical game point percentages at the time the schedules were developed.
- ▶ Division 2 of the Under 12 Boys had 6 teams with game point percentages ranging from 85percent to 75 percent. The teams with 85 percent had played 5 games (4 games were won and 1 game was lost) while the other 4 teams had played 6 games. One of those 4 teams won 4 games, tied 1 game, and lost 1 game while the other teams had won 4 games and lost 2 games. Since the game point percentage was used to rank the teams, all 6 teams were considered comparable since the game point percentage made the adjustment necessary for the different number of games actually played. As it turned out, one of the teams that had only played 5 games was one of the top teams while the other top ranked team had played 6 games.

Regarding awarding 1 bonus point for a forfeit, the SFL at one time did calculate tournament bonus points for a forfeit using the average bonus points earned during the tournament. However, this approach was abandoned since (1) the process was very complex and (2) history has shown that about one half of the tournament games were either tied, decided by penalty kicks, or settled by one goal (see below). Moreover, the team receiving the forfeit was guaranteed 4 game points or advanced to the next game automatically. Accordingly, the clubs decided to only allow 1 point.

A review was also conducted on whether awarding more than one bonus point for a forfeit would significantly affect the average bonus point calculations using the Fall 2006 tournament division where average bonus points were calculated (407 teams). This analysis showed that changing the bonus points award for forfeits from 1 to 2 would have changed the average bonus points for about 45 teams (about 11 percent). However, changing the bonus points awarded for forfeits from 1 to 3 would not have changed the average bonus points for any of the teams after considering the 1bonus point adjustment. This calculation is somewhat imprecise since it did not eliminate the effects of any forfeits that may have been

assessed or received. However, the calculation where 2 bonus points are added used in the average bonus calculation shows that the addition of 1 additional bonus point does not make an impact since none of the teams' average bonus points changed.

Recommendation: The SFL Commissioners recommend maintaining the current policy of awarding 1 bonus point for a forfeit assessed during the tournament for the reasons stated above. Adopting a more complicated process for determining average regular season bonus points does not seem warranted at this point since (1) using the recommended calculation is very complex and an analysis of the Fall 2006 season show that such a calculation would not impact very many teams (about 11 percent) and (2) the results would only be useful when a mathematical process is used to rank teams for tournament purposes and the primary reason for revising the tournament ranking process is to eliminate the problems caused by using mathematical processes to rank teams rather than actual game results.

Another Group recommendation related to Tournament seeding is to collect team data on all leagues each week. If the SFL builds up the potential Tournament seeding tables for each team over the course of the season, the monumental task to collect it all for Tournament seedings diminishes. Additionally, the data can be evaluated season to season to see how the results would change based on each potential scenario.

Comment: The SFL updates the web site almost daily (an normally several times during the day on weekends) during the regular season and the team standings pages are based on game point percentage. Although the team standings do not make the adjustments discussed above for forfeits and late call penalties, it is unclear why this needs to be done weekly since a prior week's tournament seeding results are useless once additional games are played. In other words, the calculation of tournament seedings must be "started from scratch" when they are performed.

It is also unclear what scenarios need to be evaluated. As discussed in the Fall 2006 tournament methodology, the SFL waits until the "last practicable moment" to develop the tournament divisions. In order to help evaluate the process used to develop the tournament, the SFL has maintained statistics on the competitiveness the tournament groupings using the existing process. At the end of each season, this information is provided to the SFL Club Representatives. The following are the statistics for the last 4 seasons.

Actual Goal Differential for the 2005 and 2006 Tournaments

	Fall 2006	Spring 2006	Fall 2005	Spring 2005
Games Tied (Round Robin Divisions Only)	13 (5 percent)	35 (9 percent)	30 (8 percent)	31 (8 percent)
Games Decided By One Goal/ Penalty Kicks*	135/40 (48 percent)	176/25 (44 percent)	170/37 (44 percent)	153/25 (40 percent)
Games Decided By Two Goals	68 (24 percent)	70 (18 percent)	92 (24 percent)	79 (21 percent)
Games Decided By Three or More Goals	65 (23 percent)	115 (29 percent)	93 (24 percent)	117 (31 percent)

* The games settled by penalty kicks are included in the games settled by one goal.

As can be seen in the above table, in about 70 percent of the tournament games have been decided by 2 goals or less over the last 4 seasons. During the Fall 2006 regular season 1,626 games were actually played. The following are the goal differentials for these games after eliminating forfeits and late score reporting penalties.

- ▶ About 13 percent (210 games) were ties.
- ▶ About 26 percent (421 games) had a one goal differential.
- ▶ About 18 percent (296 games) had a two goal differential.

These statistics show that during the regular season had about 57 percent of the games settled by 2 goals or less while the tournament generally results in over 70 percent of the games being settled by 2 goals or less. Accordingly, the SFL Commissioners believe that the existing process produces competitive tournament divisions.

Recommendation: The SFL Commissioners do not recommend any changes to the current tournament division scheduling process.