

Suburban Friendship League
Tournament Alternatives
(December 30, 2007)

BACKGROUND

The SFL Commissioners realize that one of the great benefits of the SFL is the tournament. It gives an opportunity for teams with comparable abilities to play games against each other. While some may view the top divisions as the ones that really benefit from the tournament, we also get a number of compliments from the divisions composed of teams that have less than a stellar season.

As the SFL has grown larger, the logistics associated with the tournament have become much greater and more taxing on everyone involved. Each season the tournament becomes more and more difficult to schedule. In the Fall 2007 tournament, all of the field slots available and then some were used to schedule the tournament. A couple of clubs provided more fields that required to support their teams. If this had not happened, then we would have dropped teams. Even with these additional fields and officials, several clubs were threatened with that penalty prior to providing fields and officials. The club names do not matter since this is a constant problem, i.e., the problem remains the same, only the names change. At least 3 issues cause the problems we have with the initial tournament scheduling efforts – field availability, referee availability, and competing club demands. The following is a brief overview of each problem area.

- **Field Availability** – A club initially commits a field for the tournament. Some event happens outside of their control and another program claims priority for the field and refuses to (1) move the game to another field and/or (2) move the time of the game to support a dual use. Accordingly, the field is not available or the club is only willing to commit to Saturday games since they cannot provide assurance that Sunday slots will be available. One example of this problem includes regular season cancellations in other programs, such as travel or other sports, that have access to the field.
- **Referee availability** – It is no great surprise that many of the referees for the younger age groups come from the players in the older age groups. This works well during the regular season, however, the tournament makes some of these resources unavailable since they are not playing even close to their home field and their game schedules are not known until the last minute since the SFL does not release the tournament schedules until about a week before the tournament starts.
- **Competing club demands** – Many of the clubs have internal tournaments for their house teams that are not part of the SFL. Accordingly, while these may not affect the fields we need, they do place increased demands for referees.

The fall seasons are especially challenging. Because of daylight concerns, a field can realistically only support 5 Saturday game slots rather than the 6 slots used in the spring. This translates into a significant loss of fields. For example, assume that we use 50 fields to support the tournament in the spring. This translates into about 450 useable game slots. Supporting the same number of slots in the fall requires about 60 fields – a 20 percent increase.

Because of the inability to assure field availability we also experience changes to the tournament schedule after it is developed. The tournament scheduling process takes a great deal of time and the time frames are tight – the initial draft field schedules are done about 1 week after the games used to determine the tournament divisions are completed with the schedules posted to the web site about 3 to 5 days later. This does not allow for much manual rework. However, we almost always have numerous changes caused by several reasons – teams dropping out after the schedule has been developed or clubs wanting to change fields. The manual rework is error prone and time consuming. When this happens before the schedules are posted, the effort is less, however, we always have several cases where this happens after the schedules were posted.

The SFL Commissioners met in early December 2007 to discuss alternatives for addressing the problems and it was agreed that the SFL would develop a document that outlines (1) two basic options to address these issues, (2) advantages and disadvantages of each option, and (3) any other items that may apply to a given option. The clubs would then be allowed to decide (1) whether additional options should be considered and (2) which option should be selected and the features of that option that should be adopted. A third option – reducing the time for each tournament game so that more slots become available for a given field – was considered but rejected as an option that should be presented for consideration. In the past, when the SFL was much smaller, the SFL used this approach to maintain the round robin tournament format. Specifically, we used 1 hour game slots (20 minute halves) to generate 8 Saturday game slots in the spring and 7 slots in the fall. However, we received a number of complaints on this format from the teams and clubs and it was abandoned.

OPTION 1 – ELIMINATE THE TOURNAMENT

Overview: This option would eliminate the tournament and use the last weekend of the season to schedule an additional week of regular season games so that 8 weeks of games can be scheduled. In the cases where the season allows a nine weeks, the last weekend would be used to handle major game cancellations during the other game weeks.

How it would work: The following are examples of how this option would be implemented.

Example 1 – Season Consists of 8 Weekends

- Each team is scheduled for 8 games.

- If games are cancelled during the season, then an attempt will be made to automatically reschedule these games on Sundays using the current process contained in the rules.
- No attempt would be made to automatically reschedule games after week 6.

Example 2 – Season Consists of 9 Weekends

- Each team is scheduled for 8 games.
- If a significant number of games for a weekend (including week 8) are cancelled, then those games are automatically scheduled for the ninth weekend using the existing game fields and times were possible. Clubs would be allowed to make changes based on field availability. However, the clubs would be required to notify the SFL by 6:00 PM on the Sunday of the game weekend being cancelled of any changes. For example, if the games on week 8 are cancelled, then the club would have until 6:00 PM on the Sunday of week 8 to notify the SFL of any changes to the games that were being moved to week 9.
- The ninth weekend would be reserved for major game cancellations and not available for minor cancellations such as a small number of clubs having to cancel games because of the weather. These games would be automatically rescheduled on Sundays using the current process contained in the rules.
- Should more than one week have significant cancellations, then the current process contained in the rules would be used to attempt to schedule those games. For example, if all the games on week 2 and week 4 were cancelled due to weather, then the games for week 2 would be moved to week 9 and the games for week 4 would be automatically rescheduled on Sundays using the current process contained in the rules.
- No attempt would be made to automatically reschedule games after week 6 if the reserved weekend had already been used.

Other items: The following are some other items that can implemented with this alternative.

- Regular season trophies can be given to the top teams based game points earned. At least 2 teams in each age group and division would receive regular season trophies. If teams are tied, then the only tie breaker used would be head to head competition when 2 teams are tied. If head to head competition cannot be used to break a tie (e.g., 3 or more teams are tied or the 2 teams did not play each other, etc.) then all the tied teams will receive the same trophy. The cost to implement this proposal is minimal – probably less than \$20 per registered team.

Advantages: The following are advantages to the adopting this alternative.

- Field and referee availability should not be a major problem since a normal load of games would be scheduled on the last weekend of the season. In other words, if a club supports 2 fields and 8 games on Saturday during the first 7 weeks, they can be expected to support 2 fields and 8 games on Saturday during the last weekend of the season.
- For most seasons, this approach would ensure that at least 7 and in most cases 8 games will be played by most teams.
- The team registration cost would drop to about \$50 per team since no funds would be needed for trophies or tournament referees.

Disadvantages: The following are disadvantages to the adopting this alternative.

- The current benefits associated with the tournament would be eliminated, e.g., teams playing teams of comparable abilities would not be guaranteed and the SFL would not provide trophies to about 50 percent of the teams.
- No method would be available to determine the best team in a given age group. The current process normally has several teams with undefeated regular seasons in the younger age groups since these teams are not scheduled against each other.

OPTION 2 – REQUIRE CLUBS TO COMMIT TOURNAMENT FIELDS AND REFEREES AT THE START OF THE SEASON

Overview: This option would maintain the current approach using the last weekend of the season to schedule a tournament and schedule the maximum number of regular season games possible during the remaining weeks of a season. At the start of each season, each club would provide the field names and slots that could be used and supported with referees for the tournament. The SFL would then determine the maximum number of teams that these fields could support. Around week 4 or 5, the clubs would certify that the fields and referee availability had not changed or would provide the actual number of fields and referees that would be available. If fields were lost during the process, then the maximum number of teams established at the beginning of the season would be reduced. On the other hand, if fields were added, then they would only be used to the extent that fields were lost, i.e., no more teams would be added to the tournament than the number originally established at the beginning of the season. For example, if the fields provided at the start of the season would support 60 percent of the teams, then no more than 60 percent of the teams would be scheduled for the tournament regardless of the number of fields that were made available during week 4 or 5.

Significant financial and team penalties would be assessed to clubs who did not support their field and referee commitments.

How it would work: The following is how this option would be implemented.

- On April 1 for the spring season and September 1 for the fall season, each club would be required to provide the field names and slots on those fields that had been reserved for the SFL tournament. Clubs would not be allowed to provide unnamed fields, i.e., a club will not be allowed to provide something like “2 fields to be determined later”. The SFL will provide the number of fields needed to support the registered teams as guidance to each club. For purpose of this discussion, the rule of thumb is that a club needs to provide 1 field for every 8 to 9 registered teams if all registered teams are expected to play in the tournament.
- The SFL will calculate the number of teams that can be supported on the fields provided. This becomes the maximum number of teams that will be scheduled. For example, if the field slots provided support 60 percent of the teams, then only 60 percent of the teams will be scheduled for the tournament. The top eligible teams would then be scheduled for the tournament. (See discussion below on how to determine eligible teams.)
- At the end of week 4 or 5, the SFL will ask the clubs that are providing fields to confirm (1) that the fields provided at the beginning of the season are still available and (2) referees are available to support those fields. If a club cannot provide the fields promised, then the number of teams that will be scheduled for the tournament will be reduced unless other fields with referees are provided by other clubs. Even if additional fields are identified, the maximum number of teams scheduled for the tournament will not significantly change from the initial season estimate since the trophy order will be based on the initial number of teams. At this time, clubs would be allowed to substitute fields at this time without penalty. For example, Club A may have provided Field 1 and 2 and the beginning of the season. However, because of field closures, they are now providing Field 3 and 4. If a club does not provide a timely response to the commitment request, then the SFL will consider that the fields originally promised are no longer available.
- After the week 4 or 5 commitment, the fields are considered “locked” and a club will be assessed a penalty if a promised field or its time slots need to be changed. The penalty will be \$20 per game slot changed if that change is made before the schedule is developed, \$30 per game slot if the change is made after the schedules are developed but not posted, and \$40 per slot if the change is made after the schedules are posted. For example, Club A commits to Field 3 and 4 and then decides to change the games to Field 1 and 5. Assuming 14 games were expected to be scheduled on these fields, the club would be assessed a (1) \$280 penalty if this change was requested before the actual schedules have been developed, (2) \$420

penalty if the schedules have been developed but not posted, and (3) \$560 penalty if the schedules have been posted. As noted above, if the field change is made during the commitment process, then the club is not assessed a fee.

- Clubs will be assessed penalties if a field is withdrawn after it is committed. The penalty for withdrawing a field initially provided at the start of the season and not providing a suitable replacement during the week 4 or 5 commitment process will be \$20 per game slot lost. If the field is “lost” after the commitment process but before the schedules are developed, then the fee is \$30 per game slot lost. If the field is lost during the commitment phase after the games are schedules are developed but not posted, then the fee is \$40 per slot. If the schedules are posted and the field is lost, then the fee is \$50 per game slot. For example, Club A commits to Field 1 and 2 at the start of the season and decides that it cannot support any fields for the tournament. Assuming 14 games were expected to be scheduled on these fields, the club would be assessed a (1) \$280 penalty if this field loss occurred during the week 4 or 5 commitment phase, (2) \$420 penalty if the loss occurred after the week 4 or 5 commitment phase but before the schedules have been developed, (3) \$560 penalty if the schedules have been developed and not posted, and (4) \$700 penalty if the schedules have been developed and posted to the web site.
- Clubs may be assessed team penalties if a field is withdrawn after the initial commitment depending on the method used to select the teams eligible for tournament play. If a field is lost before games are scheduled, then the approach that is selected for determining the teams eligible to play in the tournament will be used to determine whether a club is penalized by having its teams removed from the tournament. For example, Club A has 8 teams and all 8 teams are ranked in the top 20 percent of their respective regular season age groups. Club A then withdraws the tournament field used to support these 8 teams. If the decision is made to schedule teams based on club support (Method 1 discussed below), then all 8 teams will probably be dropped from the tournament. On the other hand, if the decision is made to schedule teams based on team rank (Method 2 discussed below), then none of the teams would probably be eliminated.
- Clubs will be assessed team penalties if a field is withdrawn after the week 4 or 5 commitment. If a club decides to drop a field after the week 4 or 5 commitment, then at a minimum, the number of teams from that club playing on the field withdrawn will be dropped from the tournament regardless of the method used determine which teams should be scheduled for the tournament. Additional teams from that club playing on other fields may also be dropped to help recover the lost slots. For example, Club A has 8 teams and all 8 teams are ranked in the top 20 percent of their respective regular season age groups. Club A then withdraws the tournament field used to support these 8 teams. This field had (1) 1 team from Club A playing in the top tournament division which was expected to play in a 4-team round robin tournament division and (2) 1 team playing in a 4-team single elimination division.

The following actions would be taken. First, both of Club A's teams expected to play at home on the lost field would be dropped from the tournament. This would eliminate 3 games since (1) the round robin tournament division would be converted from a 6 game round robin format to a 3 game round robin format and (2) the 3 game single elimination division would probably be changed to a 3 game round robin format. Next, these two new round robin tournament divisions would be moved to fields where Club A had its other teams playing. Those Club A teams would be eliminated from the tournament to make room for these tournament divisions. This process may result in creating new tournament divisions or simply "fitting them into" a given field slot. The actual number of teams dropped from the tournament from Club A would be determined by what is needed to make up for the lost field.

- Registration fees would be based on assuming that all teams would be scheduled for the tournament. However, if it turned out that a significant number of teams could not be scheduled, then a rebate on the next season's fees would be made much like the current process which takes any excess revenue and rebates it back to the clubs the following season. The rebate would be a general rebate with all clubs sharing equally. For example, registration fees are developed that assume all 500 registered teams will play in the tournament. However, only 60 percent of the teams could be supported for tournament play and the SFL has \$30,000 of excess revenue primarily caused by the reduction in the tournament size. Each club would receive a \$60 per team reduction in its fees for the following season.¹ As more experience is gained, the initial registration fees may be adjusted to reflect a more realistic tournament scenario. For example, if after several seasons it is clear that only about 60 percent of the teams will be able to play in the tournament, then the registration fees will be based on assuming that only 60 percent of the teams will participate in the tournament.

Other items: The key issue that needs to be resolved for this alternative is how to select the teams eligible for the tournament when adequate fields are not provided to support all the registered teams. The following are two methods that can be used.

Method 1 – Schedule Teams Based on Club Support

- This approach is based on the concept that a club providing adequate fields to support its teams should be allowed to have all its teams scheduled for the tournament. For example, if a club has 8 teams and provides 1 field, then all teams regardless of standing should be scheduled for the tournament.

¹ The actual rebate per team may vary based on age group. For example, it is more costly to support an Under 19 game than an Under 12 game. The SFL Commissioners will determine the approach that should be taken to award rebates.

Method 2 – Schedule Teams Based on Team Rank

- This approach is based on the concept that the highest ranked teams should be allowed to play in the tournament regardless of whether a given team's club has provided adequate fields to support the teams actually scheduled to play in the tournament. For example, a determination is made that 60 percent of the teams will be scheduled for the tournament. Club A has 16 teams ranked in the top 60 percent of teams but can only provide 1 field for the tournament. Accordingly some other club, in effect, will be providing 1 field to support Club A's teams.

Advantages: The following are advantages to the adopting this alternative.

- This approach provides several incentives for clubs to focus on their tournament support responsibilities early in the season and that fields with the necessary referee support are reserved for the tournament.
- Assuming that teams are scheduled for the tournament based on club support (Method 1 above), then the clubs are able to provide the fields and referees are not penalized when other clubs are unwilling or unable to provide the same level of support.
- Registration fees would be reduced if a full tournament cannot be held. The actual amount will vary depending on the number of tournament games actually held.

Disadvantages: The following are disadvantages to the adopting this alternative.

- Clubs that are unable or unwilling to commit fields and officials at the start of the season may cause a reduced tournament size even though fields may become available later in the season that could support a tournament with more teams.
- Assuming that teams are scheduled for the tournament based on team rank (Method 2 above), then clubs may be providing fields and officials that support clubs who are unable or unwilling to provide fields and officials. Accordingly, increased pressure may result from club management and the players to reduce that club's field commitment the following season.
- Assuming that teams are scheduled for the tournament based on club support (Method 1 above), then the tournament divisions may not pair teams with comparable abilities as well as the current practice. Table 1 shows an example of what would have happened in the Under 14 Boys tournament divisions for the teams playing in Division 1 during the regular season if only 60 percent of the 51 teams had been scheduled (assumes the teams dropped were equally distributed).

Table 1: Comparison of Tournament Pairings for Regular Season Under 14 Boys Division 1

Actual Fall 2007 Tournament		Estimated Tournament Based on 60 Percent	
Division (Teams)	Game Point % Range	Division (Teams)	Game Point % Range
1/2 (8)	100%	1 (6)	100%
3 (5)	91.7% – 87.5%	2 (6)	91.7% – 79.2%
4 (5)	79.2% – 75%	3 (5)	75% – 62.5%
5 (4)	66.7%	4 (4)	58.3% – 54.2%
6 (6)	62.5% – 58.3%	5 (5)	50% – 41.7%
7 (4)	54.2%	6 (5)	37.5% – 25%
8 (5)	50 %		
9 (4)	41.7%		
10 (6)	37.5% – 29.2%		
11 (4)	25%		

The Under 14 Boys represent the best case scenario since they have the most teams. Table 2 shows an example of what would have happened in the Under 16 Boys tournament divisions for the teams playing in Division 1 during the regular season if only 60 percent of the teams 28 teams had been scheduled (assumes the teams dropped were equally distributed).

Table 2: Comparison of Tournament Pairings for Regular Season Under 16 Boys Division 1

Actual Fall 2007 Tournament		Estimated Tournament Based on 60 Percent	
Division (Teams)	Game Point % Range	Division (Teams)	Game Point % Range
1 (4)	100% – 91.7%	1 (6)	100% – 75%
2 (5)	75%	2 (5)	70.8% – 60%
3 (4)	70.8% – 70%	3 (3)	50% – 40%
4 (4)	68.8% – 60%	4 (3)	37.5% – 25%
5 (6)	50% – 40%		
6 (5)	37.5% – 25%		

The actual distribution in these examples would depend greatly on which teams were dropped. For example, using the Under 16 Boys example above, if the clubs that dropped teams had been Burke Athletic (2 teams), Herndon (2 teams), Northern Virginia (3 teams), Prince William (2 teams), and Team America (2 teams), then the groups would have looked as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of Tournament Pairings for Regular Season Under 16 Boys Division 1 With Selected Clubs Dropping Teams

Actual Fall 2007 Tournament		Estimated Tournament Based on 60 Percent	
Division (Teams)	Game Point % Range	Division (Teams)	Game Point % Range
1 (4)	100% – 91.7%	1 (4)	100% – 70.8%
2 (5)	75%	2 (4)	68.8% – 60%
3 (4)	70.8% – 70%	3 (5)	50% – 40%
4 (4)	68.8% – 60%	4 (4)	37.5% – 25%
5 (6)	50% – 40%		
6 (5)	37.5% – 25%		