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Addressing Tournament Format Challenges and Introducing the WFT Flight Format

Introduction

The World Foosball Tour (WFT) is committed to delivering the best possible tournament experience for players, fans, and the future of the sport. After completing two major events with outstanding turnout and participation, we continue to listen to player feedback and recognize the most common complaint: inefficiencies in tournament formats.

As part of our promise to constantly improve, we have analyzed current tournament structures and their limitations. This white paper explains the trade-offs of traditional formats, outlines the challenges they create, and introduces a potential solution: the WFT Flight Format, which will be tested at Nationals 2025.

Why Change May Be Needed

While WFT events have been successful, several ongoing issues have been highlighted:

- Long wait times between matches
- Unpredictable match scheduling
- Frequent scheduling conflicts
- Late nights extending to 2 AM or later
- Difficulty for non-players and spectators to follow the structure
- Growing attendance only intensifies these problems

No format is perfect. Every system has advantages and disadvantages, especially as participation grows. However, ignoring these problems would be a disservice to the players and the sport.

Analysis of Existing Tournament Formats

Double Elimination (Current Standard) Pros:

- Two chances to advance
- Familiar structure

Cons:

- Excessive downtime between matches
- Constant uncertainty regarding match times
- Increased conflicts for players entered in multiple events
- Finals format is confusing to non-players
- Late nights becoming routine
- Problems worsen with higher turnout

Single Elimination (for Main Events) Pros:

- Fast, straightforward bracket
- Easier scheduling

Cons:

- One loss eliminates a player — no margin for early mistakes
- Players may feel entry isn't worth the risk, reducing participation and prize pools

Swiss Format Pros:

- Everyone plays multiple matches
- Strong value for entry fee

Cons:

- Initial seeding carries minimal weight
- Requires full-day commitment for one event
- Limit's ability to enter multiple events
- Revenue impact: one entry fee vs. several per player
- Difficult to scale across divisions without cutting events

- Risk of sandbagging in hybrid Swiss models

Round Robin Pros:

- Full intra-group play
- Clear method of winner determination

Cons:

- Impractical for large brackets
- Slows overall tournament progression
- Single entry fee undermines financial sustainability

Financial Implications of Fewer Ranks and Events

Some players have suggested reducing the number of skill divisions ("ranks") to simplify tournaments. However, fewer ranks directly translate into:

- Fewer events
- Fewer entry fees collected
- Lower prize pools

To maintain prize pools after cutting divisions, entry fees would need to be increased by approximately 20% per rank eliminated. Cutting two ranks would mean a 40% increase, potentially pricing out beginners and rookies — undermining long-term player development.

While sponsorship has been proposed as a solution, WFT welcomes but cannot rely on external funding to sustain prize pools. Fluctuating sponsorships create instability for player expectations and tournament planning.

Introducing the WFT Flight Format

The WFT Flight Format is a new tournament structure designed to address common player concerns while preserving event sustainability.

Important: This format will be tested at Nationals only. All other 2025 tournaments — including the World Championships — will continue using the traditional format.

How the WFT Flight Format Works

- All Players Pay one entry fee for the entire event regardless of which flight(s) are played. Win 3 consecutive matches in Flight A (including any byes) → Qualify for the elimination bracket.
 - Lose once in Flight A, and you're out of Flight A and don't play any more matches in that Flight. You will be automatically entered into Flight B if you lost in Flight A.
2. **Flight B Entry (Second Chance):** Players who lose in Flight A will be automatically entered into Flight B. You may also enter Flight B if you didn't enter Flight A, and it still cost the same entry.
- Win 3 consecutive matches in Flight B → Qualify for the elimination bracket. Shall you lose in Flight B, you don't play any more matches in Flight B and you are out of the event.
3. **Seeding:** All Flights and the final Elimination Bracket are seeded.
- Matches are best 2/3 for Rookie through Pro ranks, and 3/5 for Open and Women's. All matches are win-by-2 with no cap, meaning matches continue until a player/team wins by 2 points.
4. **Elimination Bracket:**
- Single elimination to a champion.
 - 3rd and 4th place teams play a tiebreaker for award placement and prize difference.
5. **Other Important Details:**
- If you lose in Flight A before winning 3 matches in a row (including a bye), and you also lose in Flight B before winning 3 matches in a row (including a bye), you are out of the event and cannot register for eliminations, hence you lost 2 matches.
 - Flight A and B are separate brackets. Wins from one Flight do not carry to the other. Each Flight is a brand-new challenge to win 3 consecutive matches.
 - Losing once in a Flight eliminates you from that Flight. Flights are not "3 matches guaranteed" — a first-match loss means you are out of that Flight.
 - Flights only determine who qualifies for the final elimination bracket. They do not award trophies or medals.
 - When a Flight is called, all available matches are launched at once, including bye matches where opponents are ready.

- If both players receive byes, they still begin play at the official start time, and proceed match-by-match without delay.
- WFT staff will aim to pre-call matches 10 minutes before Flight start times. Matches start on the scheduled time, any absences at the starting time will immediately trigger the recall process.
- Text alerts are not guaranteed — check your brackets directly for updates. Use the bathroom, grab drinks, and return before match start.
- When you qualify for the Elimination bracket, your seat in that bracket is non-transferable.
- Flight entry fee = entire event fee. No separate fee needed for the Elimination round.
- ~~If you lose in Flight A and haven't pre-entered in Flight B, you must rebuy to enter Flight B.~~
- Flight A will fully conclude before B starts with ample time in between.
- Any Flight with 16 or fewer teams will still qualify at least 4 teams. This means you may need to only win 2 matches to Qualify.
- ~~You may play with a different partner in Flight B — if both of you are not qualified in Flight A.~~
- If two events have restricted Flights, you must choose **one event only**. Once you choose that event, you must stay in the **same event for all Flights and all elimination rounds**. You cannot play Flight A in one event and Flight B in the other.
- Any player ranked Expert or below who successfully qualifies in Flight A of any event, will win a prize equal to 50% of their entry fee, which will be credited back to their account.
- You may enter only Flight B if you prefer — but you'll have to pay the same entry fee cost. ~~WFT staff will call all Flight B only entrants to the stage to pay additional Entry before Flight starts.~~
- ~~Players ranked Pro and Master in the WFT ranking system will pay a higher flat rate Entry once, simulating dual entry. (This balances expected qualification with revenue fairness.) They are also not required to pay double entry in Flight B due to elevated entry fee.~~
- Divisions using the Flight Format: Singles and Doubles across Rookie, Amateur, Expert, Pro, Open, and Women's Open.

The WFT Recall Process

- 6 minutes after a match is called: First recall (loses choice of side).
- 3 minutes later: Second recall (loses serve).
- 3 minutes after second recall: Match may be forfeited.
- Staff will act on recalls once they become aware — timing starts upon staff recognition.
- Post-Match Recall: If no match result is entered, both teams will go on their first recall. If no update within 3 minutes, Players will go on their second recall, if no update within 3 minutes, a coin flip determines the winner.
- Repeat offenders may be placed on a 1-recall-only policy by staff, meaning they will not be allowed a second recall before forfeiture.

Examples and Data

- Each Flight will qualify approximately 12.5% to 24.8% of the total teams entered in that Flight. Here's how the math works:
 - In a 128-team bracket, winning 3 matches reduces the field to 16 teams — 12.5% of the original bracket.
 - With 129 teams, the bracket expands to 256 with many byes. Winning 3 matches reduces to 32 teams — 24.8% of the field.
 - With two Flights feeding into one elimination bracket, 25% to 49.6% of total players may qualify. The average is approximately 37.3% of the field.
- We chose the "win 3 matches in a row" rule instead of setting a fixed number of qualifiers (like top 16 or 32) to maintain flexibility. A fixed 16-team cutoff in a 256-player bracket would only allow 6.25% to qualify — too low. Conversely, in a 16-team bracket, 100% would qualify, which also isn't ideal.

Example One:

- 129 players enter Rookie Singles Flight A. This requires a 256-player bracket due to exceeding 128 entries.
- 127 players receive a bye (counts as first win). 2 players play a match for their first win.
- 128 players begin round 2. 64 win — cutting field to 64.
- 64 players begin round 3. 32 win their third match and qualify for the final elimination bracket.
- The other 97 players (those who lost rounds 1, 2, or 3) are eliminated from Flight A and may enter Flight B.
- All 97 players enter Flight B. This creates a 128-player bracket with 31 byes.
- 66 players play first-round matches with others getting a bye. 64 proceed to round 2, 32 to round 3, and finally 16 players win all 3 to qualify.
- Now 32 from A and 16 from B enter the final elimination bracket (48 players total).
- 48 players form a 64-player bracket with 16 byes. Bracket is fully seeded. Top players from both Flights receive byes.
- Final bracket is single elimination. 6 rounds are needed to determine a champion.
- In this example:
 - 48/129 players qualify = 37.2% of field.
 - Remaining 62.8% are eliminated with 2 losses.
 - Up to 24.8% of players (those qualifying in A) could lose in final elimination bracket with only 1 loss total.

Example Two:

- Same setup, but 128 players enter Flight A instead of 129.
- Flight A runs a clean 128-player bracket: 128 → 64 → 32 → 16 winners qualify.
- Remaining 112 players enter Flight B. Again, 16 qualify.
- Final bracket has 32 players, no byes.
- 5 rounds of single elimination determine the winner.
- In this format:

- A maximum of 16 players (12.5%) could lose in eliminations with just 1 loss.
- The other 87.5% of players would have 2 losses.
- If a player from Flight A wins the event, only 11.7% of players ended with just one loss.
- These 1-loss players were also awarded 50% of their entry fee back as a prize to create more fairness for the loss difference.

Key Features and Benefits

- Two chances to qualify instead of being eliminated after one loss.
- Predictable match start times: plan your food, rest, entertainment, or other events.
- Fewer event conflicts and reduced downtime.
- Eliminates late-night chaos: WFT will do everything possible to end main matches before midnight, but it's not guaranteed. Flights and Eliminations play until they finish that day.
- All skill levels play on prime days (Friday–Sunday).
- Scalable format that handles high turnout efficiently.
- Stable prize pools without drastic fee increases or dependence on sponsorship.
- Improved spectator experience: friends, families, and new fans can understand and follow easily, and know when you're playing.

Trade-Offs

- Change is hard: adapting to new structures takes time.
- Staggered qualification: some players will qualify on a different day than eliminations.
- ~~Entry fee flexibility:~~
 - ~~Players entering both Flights may pay more (~\$40 vs. previous ~\$30).~~
 - ~~Players entering just one Flight may pay less.~~
- Not everyone gets 2 losses: 11.7% to 24.8% of players could be eliminated after just 1 loss.

These changes aim to balance player experience, event efficiency, and financial sustainability — all without compromising payouts.

Summary

The WFT Flight Format represents a strategic modernization of tournament structure — built on player feedback, logistical experience, and financial modeling.

This hybrid format delivers faster pacing, predictable schedules, second chances, and financial sustainability — while preserving the competitive integrity of major tournaments.

The Flight Format was first tested at Nationals 2025 and proved to be highly successful. Despite our tournament software not yet being designed for the system—requiring several processes to be handled manually—the format still ran nearly exactly as planned, with only delays on the final day due to scheduling. After the event, we sent a vote to the players, and the response was overwhelmingly positive: **85% in favor, 15% against**. With such strong player support and proven real-world performance, the Flight Format is now being officially adopted moving forward for WFT Majors.

Thank you for being part of the WFT community, and for helping shape the future of competitive foosball!