

Empower the Player

The success of a large league shows that the smallest details can make a big difference.

By Ed McGrogan

The most intimate league I've ever been a part of is also the biggest league I've ever been a part of. Those two qualities would seem to be mutually exclusive, but not at the Four Seasons Racquet Club in Wilton, Conn., where a 15-year-old, 50-player league proves that organization and consideration lead to widespread appreciation.

"It was totally designed from a players' perspective," says commissioner Arnie Hoegler, who had experienced the common pitfalls of tennis leagues first hand: lopsided matches, inflexible scheduling and general confusion.

Hoegler wanted players to look forward to each week as an ever-changing challenge, so he ditched the traditional ladder system—which often leads to repeat matches—in favor of his quality-points system. Each player is assigned a point value based on their position in the standings; if that player loses, their opponent earns that amount of points.

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But losers of the league's best-of-three-set matches can also earn points—half of the total for winning at least seven games, and three-quarters of the total for winning a set.

"The ranking system ensures that I'll get to play a large number of people with a variety of styles," says Zach Horne, a league member for five years. "The league provides a great opportunity to grow all sides of my game."

According to Hoegler, 80 to 85 percent of players will have at least a .500 record. It's a competitive balance that the NFL and NHL would be proud of.



Another key to a great league is its flexibility. This is a Tuesday-night league, but courts are set aside for make-up matches on Wednesdays.

"We realized that players were going to miss matches," says Hoegler. "It meant that more players could commit, because they know they'd get them in."

Hoegler is extremely hands-on, accommodating schedule requests down to the morning of the match. Revisions are frequent, but players are altered to them instantly over email. Players also go online to enter their scores and connect with each other. It's a system that all league members appreciate, no matter their skill level.

"Not to mention a great post-match atmosphere with cold beer available," adds player Jeremy Rabinowitz.

The good vibes can help the club in other ways, including generating new memberships. Unlock the potential of your league by putting the players first.

"Above all, Arnie's active management of the league makes everything work," says league member Marin Strmecki. "It is the key." ■



Ed McGrogan is a senior editor for *TENNIS* magazine, *TENNIS.com* and *Tennis Industry*, and has been earning quality points in Hoegler's Tuesday-night league since 2012.

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