

Item 20S-02: District or Unit Run Online Regionals and Sectionals Management Perspectives

With the recent success of Support Your Club games, Virtual Club games and the Online Regional; at a glance it may seem that moving towards allowing Districts and Units to run Regionals and Sectionals would be the logical next step. Management believes there may be a future where units and districts can run online tournaments but there needs to be a broader strategic conversation around tournaments, both in-person and online. However, if we do decide to go forward without a broader strategy, there are many negative factors that need to be explored to fully understand what the true impact of this would be to the current online play “ecosystem”.

Financial Impact to Clubs – With the first 4-day venture into running a Regional event online, while difficult to specifically quantify, the attendance in club games suffered somewhere around 25% over that timeframe. The main reason that it's difficult to quantify is that the clubs were still going through a period of rapid growth at that time so it's not as simple as comparing attendance during those four days to the same period for the prior week. The actual attendance over the four days was down 9.8% over those four days while we had been experiencing approximately 15% growth for the days immediately before the tournament, hence the estimate of a 25% decrease. Most all our clubs have some sort of overhead even while they are shut down, with some having significant ongoing expenses. Most of the clubs that fall into that second category are our largest clubs and the clubs that do a major portion of our new player recruitment. These clubs are all “on the brink” of financial losses that will lead to them never reopening their brick and mortar clubs. Even if this financial impact is more imagined than real, the psychological impact on these club owners and managers that have worked so hard to keep their club alive, would be devastating.

Player Impact – Creating lists of players in neighboring Districts/Units along with historical data may all seem well and good but, learning from the club experience, we will be inundated with special requests from players with all sorts of reasons why they should be allowed to play with the partner of their choosing. Having the ability to make exceptions would be mandatory but, at the same time, would also be almost impossible to manage—at least in the near-term.

Technological Issues – While we've made huge strides in development, we are still faced with many limitations within BBO's system. The size of these “lists” of a host District/Unit coupled with neighboring Districts/Units and the historical data would be far too large for BBO to handle. We already have clubs that are pushing the limitations. Another key issue is that the extra processes that need to happen in the background from both BBO's side and the ACBL's are not a linear relationship to table count. In other words, the things that need to happen to run a 400-table event are only a slightly larger effort than for a 100 table event. This means that doing more events that are smaller would lead to inefficiencies as compared to running less, but larger, events.