

# COMPETITION FORMATS

A guide to support club and local event organisers



# Competition Formats for Clubs

A guide for organising club sessions and events

We hope that this guide will provide club and event organisers with advice, ideas and resources for planning club sessions and events that are safe, inclusive and fun, whilst maintaining a competitive spirit!

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## Your club's purpose and vision

As you organise your club sessions, it is good to consider the club's purpose and vision, to find out if this matches the perspectives of your club members. The club will be more enjoyable and successful if everyone has a shared understanding of its purpose and vision.

Clubs can be entirely competitive, completely social, or can offer a blend of social and competitive play. The keys to creating and maintaining harmony and positivity in your club is to have a shared understanding of the type of play the club provides, and effective communication with, and between, club members.

## Types of play – can a club be competitive *and* inclusive?

There are many reasons for people wishing to play pickleball. Some people are highly competitive, having played other sports competitively in their youth, whereas others simply want to enjoy socialising and staying active. The more competitive players likely want to play games that challenge their physical and mental skills, whereas social players perhaps want to have fun with old and new friends. Add to the mix the fact that everyone comes with differing abilities and personalities, and the role of club organiser can quickly become a poisoned chalice!

The challenge for any club organiser is to find ways to provide games that everyone can enjoy. This resource will share ideas about how this could be achieved and provides templates for competition formats that can be used for club sessions and small-scale events.

## Mixed ability club sessions

There are many variables to consider when organising club sessions, e.g., number of players, number of courts, length of time available, players' abilities (and the numbers of players in relation to their abilities). Organisers should also consider the wishes and expectations of the players, which relates to our previous comment about the importance of developing a shared understanding of the purpose and vision of the club. For example, some players may wish to spend the whole session playing games; some may wish to play only with others of the same ability; some

players might want to spend time practising; and others might want to mix play with socialising and chat! Below are some brief ideas to consider.

## Time management

Consider how the session is organised in relation to the time available. If you have two hours or more, then you might want to allocate time for mixed ability play, similar ability play (graded play), and practise time. It is suggested that the first 30 minutes of a session could be spent on mixed ability play because players will likely arrive at different times, so perhaps organise the games as players arrive, filling up the courts one at a time, with players self-organising within their own court. So, for example, as players arrive, they put up a court and play on it; once that court is full, the next players to arrive do the same on the next court, and so on until all the courts are up and full. While this is ongoing, players stay on 'their' court and play short doubles games with each of the other players.

Once you have either filled all your courts, or everyone who is expected to arrive has done so, you might then decide to organise games on a timed basis or a points basis.

Timed games is the easiest format to ensure that players get equitable time on court. However, this is not always popular with players who like to feel that they have played a 'proper' game, i.e., first team to reach 11/15/21 points. Depending on the players' abilities and length of rallies, in a typical 10-minute timed game, some courts might reach a very high and uneven score, e.g., 18-3, whilst other courts that are more closely contested might only reach a score of, e.g., 4-6.

As club organiser, you might decide to spend some of the club session doing timed games, and some of the session playing 'proper' games, i.e., games to 11/15/21 points.

One suggestion for a typical club session is as follows:

- 7pm-7.30pm Self-organising games within own court
- 7.30pm-8pm Timed games (3 sets of games, each game of 9-minutes' duration)
- 8pm-8.45pm 'Proper' games

- 8.45pm-9pm Finishing up and clearing courts away

## Player management

Once you have determined how you will split your club session, in terms of time management, you now need to consider how best to keep all players happy! We know that generally, to become more proficient at playing the game, we need to play others who are a *little* better than us – if we play someone who is far too good, e.g., a 2.5 player versus a 4.0 player, then this can adversely affect the self-confidence of the 2.5 player, and at the same time adversely affect the motivation of the 4.0 player. For both players, their levels of competence could be affected too, because the 2.5 player is not being given the opportunity to be successful, and the 4.0 player is not being challenged and stretched to play to their best ability.

However, there are times where it is advantageous to organise mixed play like this. Lower-graded players generally love to have a game with more experienced players - it inspires them, and they can become more proficient because the rallies are more consistent than they might be with a court full of beginners. Higher-graded players can ultimately benefit from taking time to help newer players because these players can soon develop their skills, and this will benefit the whole club.

One way to enable mixed-ability play is to *condition the games*, and this will enable a fairer, more inclusive experience for all. By conditioning the games, you can create adapted rules to support the lower-graded players and to challenge the higher-graded players. But it is suggested that you consider doing this for only short periods of time, and infrequently. Games can be conditioned by amending the rules; the court size; the movement of players; the scoring system; and the types of shots the players can use.

Below are some ideas for conditioned **doubles**-games:

- 🎾 The higher-graded players cannot smash, lob, or play hard drives. This will enable the less experienced players to reach the ball and continue the rally without fear of being 'hammered'.
- 🎾 The lower-graded players earn a bonus point if they play an outright winning shot, e.g., a shot that is not immediately returned over the net.

- 🎾 If you play on a badminton court, use the inside side-lines and inside back-line to make the court smaller, and therefore easier to cover.
- 🎾 Play a dinking game. So, the 'back-line' is the kitchen line. This encourages all players to practise dinking close to the net.
- 🎾 Consider putting the two strongest players together. Then, you can amend the lines to support the less experienced team. For example, the less experienced team's lines are the inside lines, while the stronger team must cover their full court. Or you could adapt this further to really challenge the more experienced team, by putting the less experienced team onto a half-court, while keeping the opposition on a full court!
- 🎾 With the stronger players still on the same team, you could also amend the rules. For example, the stronger team's third shot **must** be a drop that lands in the kitchen!
- 🎾 One last example for a game where the strongest players are in the same team. The more experienced team must play **alternate** shots (like doubles table tennis) - this will really challenge them and, be warned, there may be tears!

## Games formats

In this section we will look at some ways that you can organise games. These suggestions each come with benefits and limitations that we will discuss.

### Round robin

A 'round robin' format is where players are put into groups and they must play everyone else in their group. Round robins are often used for the early stages of competitions (also called the group stage). This ensures greater value for money for players entering tournaments because they are guaranteed a minimum number of matches. In a club setting, a round robin has several advantages and purposes:

- It ensures that players have a variety of games with other players.
- Once set up, the order of play is immediately ready, meaning that there is more efficient use of club time.

- Depending on the numbers of players and courts, you can organise each group to play on a single court, again thus reducing the amount of 'down-time' during the club session because players know that they are playing all their matches on a particular court.
- Again, depending on the numbers of players and courts, you can organise the groups according to ability, e.g., one group with 3.5+ players, and another group with 2.0 players.

When organising a round robin format, the first thing you need to work out is how many games need to be played to complete a round robin group. Here is the formula:

**Multiply the number of players/pairs by the number of games each player/pair must play in their group. Then, half that number to give you the total number of games required.**

E.g.:

7 players/pairs in a group. This means that each player/pair must play 6 other players/pairs, so  $7 \times 6 = 42$ . Half of  $42 = 21$ . So that group requires 21 games to complete their round robin group.

You can also organise groups of differing sizes, e.g., one group might have 7 players/pairs, while another might only have 5 players/pairs. You would generally only do this either because you have an uneven number of players/pairs, or because you have decided to organise the groups by ability, and this results in uneven numbers in each group. If this is the case, then there are two ways to ensure that all the matches in all the groups finish at approximately the same time - either adapt the scoring to suit the size of the group, e.g., the group with 7 players/pairs play each game to 11 points, whilst the group with 5 players/pairs play each game to 15 points; or play timed games, e.g., the group with 7 players/pairs play each game for 7 minutes (21 games of 5 minutes, plus 1 minute changeover time = 111 minutes), whilst the group with 5 players/pairs will play each game for 10 minutes (10 games of 10 minutes, plus 1 minute changeover time = 106 minutes).

Overleaf is a quick table to calculate the number of games required for different group sizes:

<b>Number of players/pairs in a group</b>	<b>Number of games required to complete the group</b>
3 players/pairs	3 games
4 players/pairs	6 games
5 players/pairs	10 games
6 players/pairs	15 games
7 players/pairs	21 games
8 players/pairs	28 games
9 players/pairs	36 games
10 players/pairs	45 games

You can see from the table, and from the timed games examples that large groups will take a very long time to complete, especially if all the games are on one court. You might consider creating smaller groups, or where possible, allocating more than one court for games (although this requires you to consider more carefully the order of play, to avoid having down-time due to players/pairs waiting to play others who are already on-court).

One example of creating smaller groups is this: imagine you have a group of 8 players/pairs that you want to compete against each other. You can see from the table that if they stayed as one group you require 28 games to complete the round robin. However, if you split the group into 2 groups of 4 players/pairs, you now only require a total of 12 games - granted, the players/pairs will have only played 3 other players/pairs; however, you could finish the competition with **head-to-heads** to give each player/pair 1 more game. E.g., the winners from each of the 2 groups play each other, the second-placed players/pairs play each other, and so on. This requires 4 extra games and gives everyone 4 matches.

**There is a round robin template at the end of this booklet for you to print and use.**



## Ladders

There are many variations on ladder leagues, and we will explore some of these.

**Snakes & ladders.** If you have lots of players/pairs in relation to the number of courts, e.g., 10 players/pairs with 3 courts, then a traditional ladder works well because this requires a surplus of players/pairs to ensure a variety of games. Look at the example ladder:

1. *Jane/Sheila*
2. *John/Babs*
3. *Eilidh/Sam*
4. *Dave/Mo*
5. *Hannah/Bobby*
6. *Stuart/Sean*
7. *Elizabeth/Andy*
8. *Sheena/Scott*
9. *Molly/Martha*
10. *Anne/Chris*

The aim is to get to the top of the ladder (currently *Jane/Sheila*) by challenging pairs above them. E.g., *Sheena/Scott* could challenge *Hannah/Bobby*. Whichever pair wins the challenge takes the higher place on the ladder, e.g., if *Sheena/Scott* beat *Hannah/Bobby*, they swap places on the ladder (but if they lose, they stay where they are).

The advantage of this type of ladder is that it can be carried over into the next club session (you could even have it as a weekly feature, for example, 30 minutes of ladders each session, with the league running for the whole season).

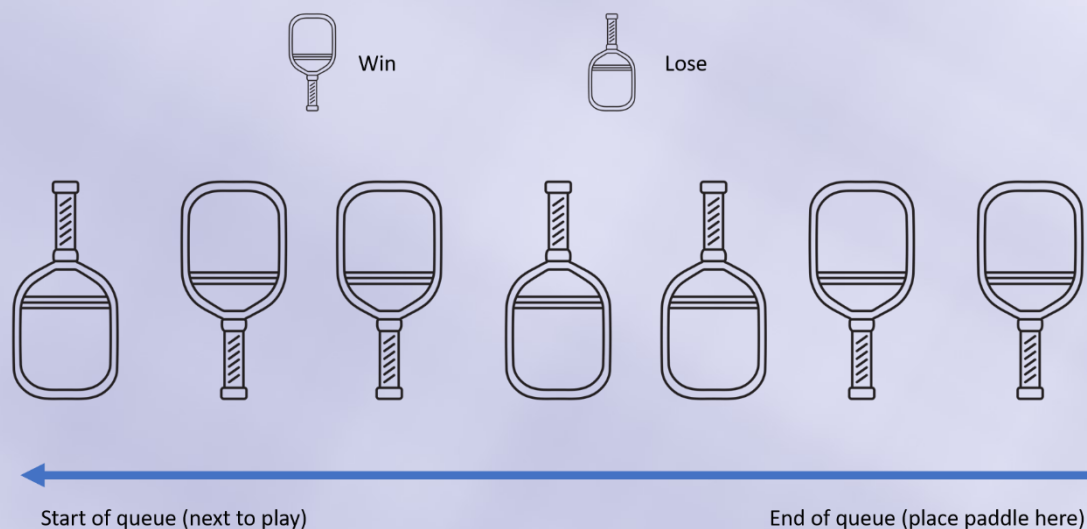
Another advantage of this type of ladder is that you can adapt its organisation to suit the players. For example, you could pair players according to ability (perhaps to split the strongest players up); and you can amend some rules to make games more inclusive or even just more fun. For example, pairs in the top 3 spots must reach 11 points to win, but players elsewhere must only reach 6 points to win the

game! Or for added pressure, use a deck of cards to decide how many points to reach - in secret, each pair randomly selects a card from the deck and that is the score they must reach to win, but ssshh, don't tell the opponents what your target score is! E.g., one pair pulls a '7' from the deck, whilst another pair pulls a 'king' (10 points). You could even include the joker (1) and the ace (11).

You could also amend the rules, e.g., the top three pairs are not allowed to smash!

There are limitations to snakes & ladders. The main limitation is that if your club plays doubles, then you really need to remain with the same partner for the duration of the league. Another problem with this format is that there can be issues with players waiting to challenge others who are already on-court, whilst other pairs are waiting around for a game. And, unless you have many pairs, there is less variety of opponents.

**Paddles up/down.** This format works well for timed games and for 'proper' games. The way it work is this: after you play a game you place your paddle in the queue, but...if you have won your game, place your paddle with the head facing up, and if you lost your game place the paddle with the head facing down.



When the next court becomes available, the four paddles that **face the same way** will go onto court to play. Look at the example picture, the first four paddles that face the same way are paddles from players that won their previous game (you can see there are currently only 3 paddles from players who lost their previous game, even although one of them is at the start of the queue. Once the next game is on-

court, the other paddles move up the queue – this means that when the next game comes off-court, there will be 2 more ‘losing’ paddles and 2 ‘winning’ paddles to join the queue. So, the next game on will be 4 of the 5 ‘losing paddles’. Players are required to select their partners for each game.

The advantage of this type of ladder is that players can opt in and out of games. This is helpful if players wish to take some time out to socialise! Or if players need to leave the session early or arrive late. Players also swap partners frequently (and this can be played as singles too) and because of the nature of paddles up/down, it is rare for any player to win all their games!

Like all formats, it has limitations. The main one is that, unless the club organiser can periodically ‘mix up’ the paddles, or unless there are lots and lots of players, there can be a tendency to play with the same small group of players. This format works best when there are large numbers of players at the session.

**Bingo, move & split.** This is a popular format if you have the exact number of players for the number of available courts, e.g., 3 courts and 12 players (doubles). It can still work if you have an uneven number, but this requires a little more thought. For this format to work, everyone must start and finish their games at the same time. Decide whether the games will be timed, e.g., 10 minutes; or whether everyone plays until one pair reaches a set score, e.g., 15 points, at which time they shout ‘bingo!’ and everyone stops. When ‘bingo!’ is called, whichever team is winning on each court are declared the winners (if it is a draw, whichever team reached the draw score first are the winners – there are other ways to decide who wins in the event of a draw, it doesn’t really matter which way you choose, so long as everyone knows beforehand).

Before the first game you will have decided which is the ‘top’ of the hall and which court is at the ‘bottom’ of the hall. So, after the first game, the winners move 1 court up the hall (winners on the top court stay on that court), whilst the non-winners move 1 court down the hall (non-winners on the bottom court stay on that court). As pairs move courts they must also split and partner a new player for the next game.

This is also a great format for playing singles (half court or full court). If you have too many players, e.g., 3 courts and 14 players, then the easiest and fairest way is to ask

each player to take a turn off - when they go back onto court, they will take the place of the next player who is coming off. You could do this in alphabetical order to keep things simple.

## Numbers format

We will now look at a system for generating mixed games.

**Numbers.** Allocate everyone a number, e.g., Sheena (1), Anne (2), Bob (3) etc. Create the order of play by grouping the numbers into 4s (for doubles).

If you have an even number of players, then you can use this system (below) to create your order of play. Look at the column 'Game 1' to see that each number has been paired in order, giving 6 pairs (1 & 2, 3 & 4, etc.). The colour coding represents the games on each court (**court 1**, **court 2**, court 3). E.g., game 1, court 1 is 1 & 2 versus 3 & 4.

Game 1	Game 2	Game 3	Game 4	Game 5	Game 6	Game 7	Game 8
<b>1 &amp; 2</b>	1 & 3	<b>1 &amp; 5</b>	<b>1 &amp; 7</b>	1 & 9	<b>1 &amp; 11</b>	<b>1 &amp; 12</b>	1 & 10
3 & 4	5 & 2	7 & 3	9 & 5	11 & 7	12 & 9	10 & 11	8 & 12
5 & 6	7 & 4	9 & 2	11 & 3	12 & 5	10 & 7	8 & 9	6 & 11
7 & 8	9 & 6	11 & 4	12 & 2	10 & 3	8 & 5	6 & 7	4 & 9
9 & 10	11 & 8	12 & 6	10 & 4	8 & 2	6 & 3	4 & 5	2 & 7
11 & 12	12 & 10	10 & 8	8 & 6	6 & 4	4 & 2	2 & 3	3 & 5

You will see that **player number 1 is emboldened**. This is to help you organise the rotations. Look again at Game 1's list. Now visualise each number rotating 1 place clockwise, **except player 1** - what you visualise should be what you now see in the column for Game 2. You can see that this process is repeated for each subsequent game. Whilst we have created the order of play for 8 sets of games with 12 players, it would take 2 more sets of rotations for all 12 players to get back to where they started (10 sets of games).

This is a fantastic format if you have an **even number** of players - it also works if you have too many players for the number of courts, e.g., 14 players on 3 courts (2 extra

players), because you simply have the pair at the bottom of each rotation taking a turn off (however, this does mean that one player will always be off for 2 games in a row).

If you have an **odd number** of players, e.g., 13, you can still use the rotation system, but you would **not** keep player number 1 in the fixed position. Instead, **all** your numbers will rotate 1 place clockwise. Below is an example of how this might look with 9 players using 2 courts (**court 1**, **court 2**, off).

Game 1	Game 2	Game 3	Game 4	Game 5
1 & 2	3 & 1	5 & 3	7 & 5	9 & 7
3 & 4	5 & 2	7 & 1	9 & 3	8 & 5
5 & 6	7 & 4	9 & 2	8 & 1	6 & 3
7 & 8	9 & 6	8 & 4	6 & 2	4 & 1
9	8	6	4	2

The major limitation of this format is that if you have players arriving late or leaving early, it completely scuppers the entire competition.

**A table to show the rotations for 6-12 players is included at the end of this booklet.**

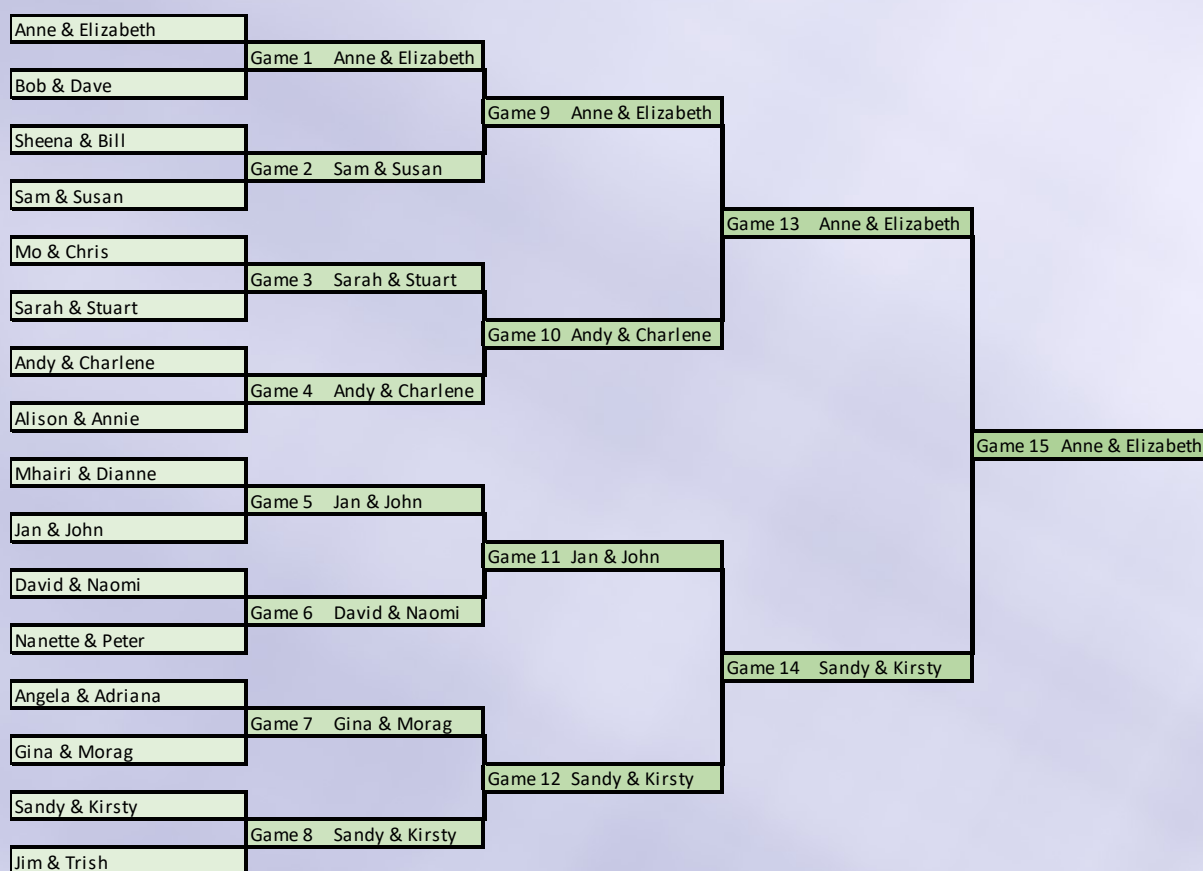
### Knock-out format

This is the final section, and to be honest, it only just made the cut! Knock-out tournaments are exclusive in nature – the best players stay in and get more games, and the rest get put out, which is not an ethos we advocate. However, knock-out formats are generally used for latter stages of competitions, so we will look at how these can be organised.

It is suggested that you start with round robin group matches and organise them so that the top player/pair or top 2 players/pairs from each group progress to a knock-out (and you could also run a type of ‘plate’ knock-out for the others who did not finish in the top 2 spots).

The **formula** for working out the **number of games required** to play the knock-out event is very simple - the number of games required is **1 less than the number of players/pairs** (unless you also want to run a 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> place play-off, in which case the number of games equals the number of players/pairs).

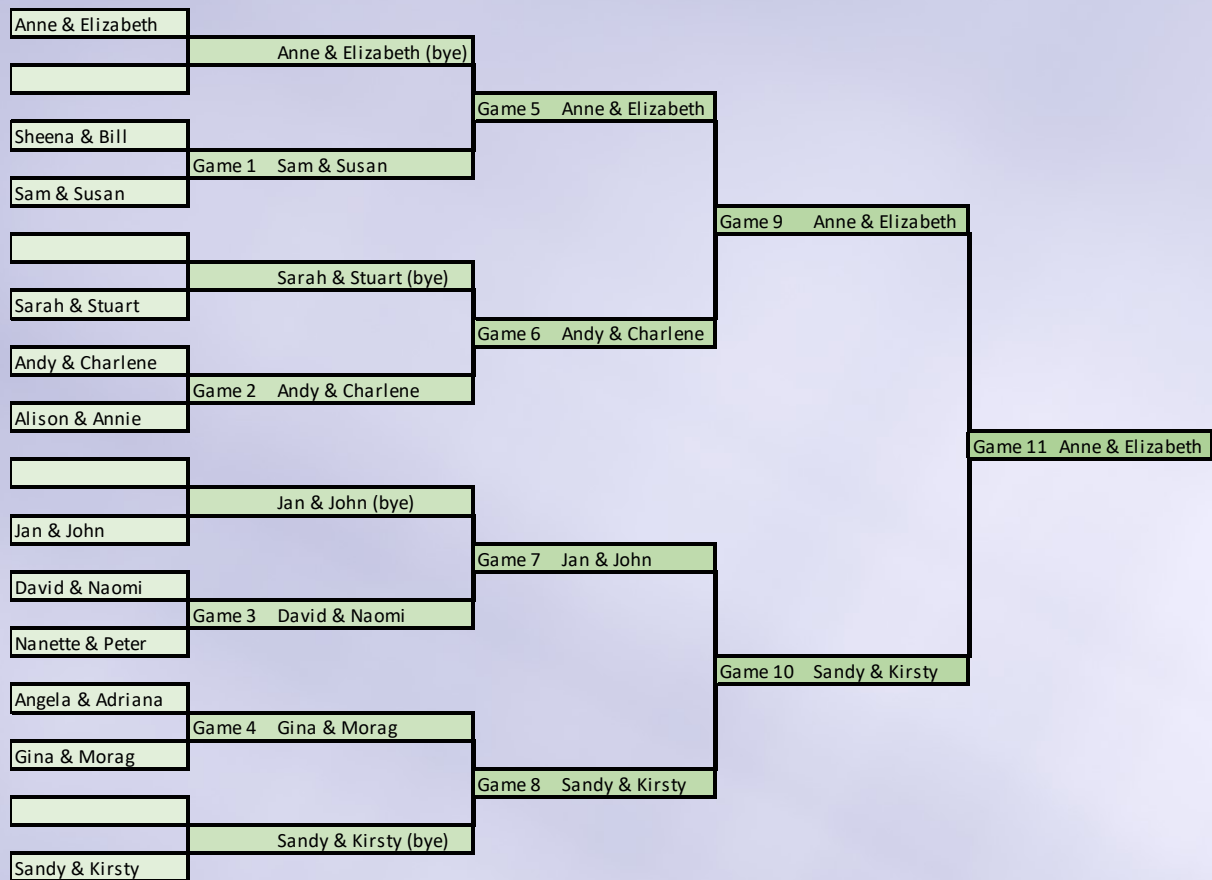
The actual organisation of the knock-out tournament is more complicated. The easiest format is when you have either 4, 8, 16, 32, or 64 players/pairs. This is easiest because all the 'slots' in the knock-out are filled, which means that you don't need to worry about giving players a 'bye' into the next round. The example below shows a typical format for 16 pairs.



Using the example above, if you wished the players who were knocked out in the semi-finals (games 13 & 14), to play for 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> place, then you would add one more game (in this example, it would be Andy & Charlene versus Jan & John).

You can see from the example that when you have 4, 8, 16, 32 players/pairs the template works very well because all the slots are filled. But how do you deal with numbers that don't fit neatly into the template? You need to give some players a 'bye' into round 2. Usually, you will give the better players a bye. It is also important that you separate the players with a bye, so that the draw is evenly balanced. Look

at the same knock-out draw below, but this time we only have 12 pairs - the players who have been given a bye are deemed to be the strongest.









You can see that the number of games required to complete the draw is reduced, but the formula remains the same - the number of games required is 1 less than the number of players/pairs (in this case, 12 pairs = 11 games).

One last thing to consider. You should try to separate the strongest players in the draw so that they are more likely to meet in the semis or final.

**Two simple templates (8 players/pairs, and 16 players/pairs) are available at the end of this booklet.**

## Round robin template

	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5	Team 6	TOTAL
Team 1							
Team 2							
Team 3							
Team 4							
Team 5							
Team 6							

### Groups of 3

1v2  
2v3  
3v1

### Groups of 4

1v2  
3v4  
1v3  
2v4  
1v4  
2v3

### Groups of 5

1v2  
3v4  
5v1  
2v3  
4v5  
1v3  
2v4  
5v3  
1v4  
2v5

### Groups of 6

1v2  
3v4  
5v6  
1v3  
5v2  
6v4  
1v5  
6v3  
4v2  
1v6  
4v5  
2v3  
1v4  
2v6  
3v5

Formula for working out number of round robin

matches is: **Number of players/teams X number of matches each player/team must**

**play, ÷ 2.** E.g. 6 players/teams x 5 matches = 30 matches ÷ 2 = 15 matches needed to complete the round robin.



## Numbers format tables of rotations

6 players /pairs	7 players /pairs	8 players /pairs	9 players /pairs	9 players /pairs cont...	10 players /pairs	10 players /pairs cont...	11 players /pairs	11 players /pairs cont...	12 players /pairs	12 players /pairs cont...
1 & 2	1 & 2	1 & 2	1 & 2	4 & 6	1 & 2	1 & 6	1 & 2	10 & 11	1 & 2	1 & 12
3 & 4	3 & 4	3 & 4	3 & 4	2 & 8	3 & 4	4 & 8	3 & 4	8 & 9	3 & 4	10 & 11
5 & 6	5 & 6	5 & 6	5 & 6	1 & 9	5 & 6	2 & 10	5 & 6	6 & 7	5 & 6	8 & 9
1 & 3	7 off	7 & 8	7 & 8	3 & 7	7 & 8	3 & 9	7 & 8	4 & 5	7 & 8	6 & 7
5 & 2	3 & 1	1 & 3	9 off	5 off	9 & 10	5 & 7	9 & 10	2 & 3	9 & 10	4 & 5
6 & 4	5 & 2	5 & 2	3 & 1	2 & 4	1 & 3	1 & 4	11 off	1 off	11 & 12	2 & 3
1 & 5	7 & 4	7 & 4	5 & 2	1 & 6	5 & 2	2 & 6	3 & 1	8 & 10	1 & 3	1 & 10
6 & 3	6 off	8 & 6	7 & 4	3 & 8	7 & 4	3 & 8	5 & 2	6 & 11	5 & 2	8 & 12
4 & 2	5 & 3	1 & 5	9 & 6	5 & 9	9 & 6	5 & 10	7 & 4	4 & 9	7 & 4	6 & 11
1 & 6	7 & 1	7 & 3	8 off	7 off	10 & 8	7 & 9	9 & 6	2 & 7	9 & 6	4 & 9
4 & 5	6 & 2	8 & 2	5 & 3		1 & 5		11 & 8	1 & 5	11 & 8	2 & 7
2 & 3	4 off	6 & 4	7 & 1		7 & 3		10 off	3 off	12 & 10	3 & 5
1 & 4	7 & 5	1 & 7	9 & 2		9 & 2		5 & 3	6 & 8	1 & 5	1 & 8
2 & 6	6 & 3	8 & 5	8 & 4		10 & 4		7 & 1	4 & 10	7 & 3	6 & 10
3 & 5	4 & 1	6 & 3	6 off		8 & 6		9 & 2	2 & 11	9 & 2	4 & 12
	2 off	4 & 2	7 & 5		1 & 7		11 & 4	1 & 9	11 & 4	2 & 11
	6 & 7	1 & 8	9 & 3		9 & 5		10 & 6	3 & 7	12 & 6	3 & 9
	4 & 5	6 & 7	8 & 1		10 & 3		8 off	5 off	10 & 8	5 & 7
	2 & 3	4 & 5	6 & 2		8 & 2		7 & 5	4 & 6	1 & 7	1 & 6
	1 off	2 & 3	4 off		6 & 4		9 & 3	2 & 8	9 & 5	4 & 8
	4 & 6	1 & 6	9 & 7		1 & 9		11 & 1	1 & 10	11 & 3	2 & 10
	2 & 7	4 & 8	8 & 5		10 & 7		10 & 2	3 & 11	12 & 2	3 & 12
	1 & 5	2 & 7	6 & 3		8 & 5		8 & 4	5 & 9	10 & 4	5 & 11
	3 off	3 & 5	4 & 1		6 & 3		6 off	7 off	8 & 6	7 & 9
	2 & 4	1 & 4	2 off		4 & 2		9 & 7	2 & 4	1 & 9	1 & 4
	1 & 6	2 & 6	8 & 9		1 & 10		11 & 5	1 & 6	11 & 7	2 & 6
	3 & 7	3 & 8	6 & 7		8 & 9		10 & 3	3 & 8	12 & 5	3 & 8
	5 off	5 & 7	4 & 5		6 & 7		8 & 1	5 & 10	10 & 3	5 & 10
			2 & 3		4 & 5		6 & 2	7 & 11	8 & 2	7 & 12
			1 off		2 & 3		4 off	9 off	6 & 4	9 & 11
			6 & 8		1 & 8		11 & 9		1 & 11	
			4 * 9		6 & 10		10 & 7		12 & 9	
			2 & 7		4 & 9		8 & 5		10 & 7	
			1 & 5		2 & 7		6 & 3		8 & 5	
			3 off		3 & 5		4 & 1		6 & 3	
			Cont...		Cont...		2 off		4 & 2	
							Cont...		Cont...	

Knock-out template for 8 players/pairs



Knock-out template for 16 players/pairs

