



# Double-Elimination Formats

Another loss isn't necessarily the player's gain.

In the past two months I've tried to convince you that round-robin or single-elimination formats are the best. This month, we'll go over what has become the standard for large tournaments in the US, the double-elimination format. I don't like the DE format myself, but it's useful to understand it if you're going to be a tournament director or even a player in one.

The basic goal behind DE is to allow every player to have more than one match; the main complaint about single-elimination is that everyone who loses in the first round only gets one match. You stay in the DE tournament until you have two losses. (Interestingly, you don't hear about tennis players clamoring for DE in tennis tournaments.) The problem is how to arrange the matches fairly, and for a reasonably speedy conclusion.

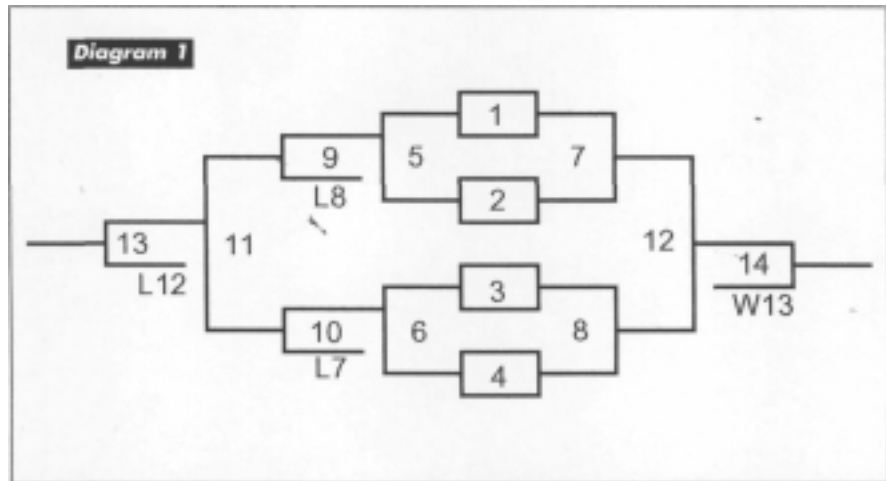
**Diagram 1** shows a standard DE chart for eight players. The first matches are down the middle. Seeding and byes for the first round are done the same as for single-elimination, which was covered last month. The matches are numbered for reference.

The winners of the first round advance towards the right, while the losers move to the left. The winners' side remains simple. The losers' side is complicated by the need to make room for the later losers on the winners' side. This is shown by the appearance of L7 and L8 in matches 10 and 9, who are the losers of matches 7 and 8.

An important thing to note is that when L7 and L8 move over to the losers' side, they swap top and bottom. This is to avoid repeated matches. For example, if L7 were not swapped to the bottom, he might have to play the same person he played in match 1 or 2. While there is no way to avoid repeated matches at some point in the tournament, they should be delayed as long as possible, so that they can only occur between players who are already in the money. With eight players, you can't do better than this one swap, but with 64 or 128, things get more complicated. A good large DE chart will do at least two levels of mixing/shuffling to delay repeats.

I shudder to think of all the DE events I've played in that didn't do this shuffling, and I ended up losing twice to one player. I would have much preferred to play someone else for my second loss.

When a winner on the losers' side is final-



ly determined, she or he comes over to play the winner of the winners' side in match 14. There are two basic ways to do this final match. In the old days, if the winners' finalist lost, then each player would have only one loss, and in keeping with the concept of DE, there would have to be another match. The potential of needing a whole extra match at the end of the tournament can really mess up scheduling, especially if it is being taped for TV. The solution that is used nearly always today is to have a single final match. Sometimes this single match is made longer to make it a better decider of who's the best.

One problem while scheduling the rounds for DE is that there are twice as many rounds on the losers' side. This means that if you play the winners through as quickly as possible, the winner of match 11 will be waiting for several rounds, getting rusty and fretting. If matches are played in the order numbered on Diagram 1, there will be fewer long waits.

If you lose in the first round, winning the tournament will be a real challenge, since you have to win twice as many matches to get to the finals as the person who just beat you. The best example of someone who met this challenge was Jimmy Caras in the 1967 U.S. Open 14.1 tournament, who lost in the first round and came back to beat Luther Lassiter twice in the finals to win the tournament.

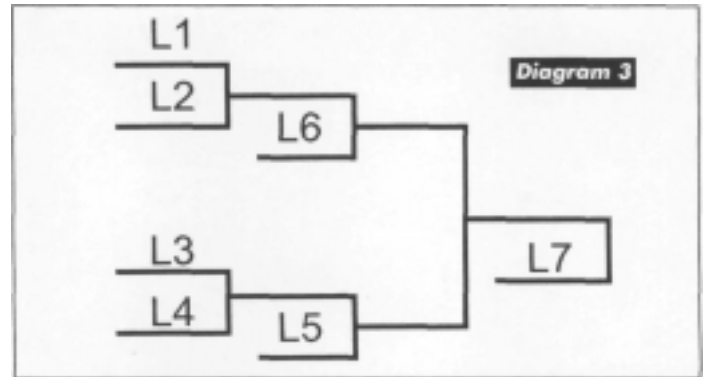
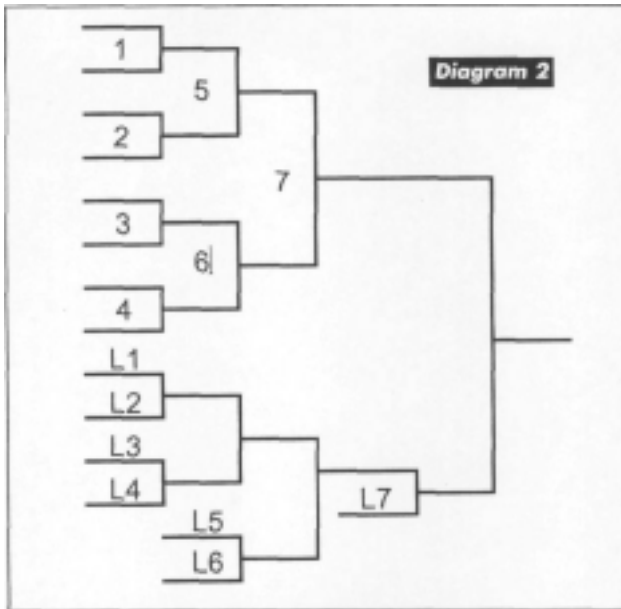
For scheduling, it's important to note that there will be nearly two matches for each player entered, and there will be about

twice as many rounds as for single-elimination. Tournament spreadsheets on the Web sites mentioned before will keep track of these details for you.

An alternative DE chart is shown in **Diagram 2**. The idea here is that the losers from each round on the winners' side form their own single-elimination tournament. The winners of each mini-tournament come back together to find the overall winner of the losers' side. This chart is easier to follow and plan the schedule for than the normal DE chart.

The main problem with this system is that if the original chart has nearly 50% byes, the bracket for the losers in the first round will be very sparsely populated, and the players will have an easy ride into the money. This can be corrected by combining the first- and second-round losers into a single bracket, as shown in **Diagram 3**. It is like part of the DE chart folded over.

A final system that lets players have a second chance is the "buy-back" format. For this, you have a bunch of preliminary, small single-elimination groups. Eight players is usually a good number. The winner of each flight goes on to the main competition. The seven players who lost can re-enter the tournament. Usually they will pay another entry fee, but you could also include one re-entry in the original fee. It is possible for a player to get back in the tournament several times, depending on how much time is available and how quickly the maximum number of entries (and re-entries) is reached. I've seen one player



start five times and eventually end up with third place in the main event.

One advantage of this format is that you can start play when only some of the players are present. For example, as soon as 16 were at the site, you could draw into two groups of eight. As more players arrive,

sign up.

Once all the preliminary groups of eight are played out, the main event begins as a single elimination. You can use seeding so that any byes go to those players who qualified first. This encourages players to arrive early. The winners of the initial groups do

they sign up and you have flights with a mixture of new and re-entered players. It is best to form two groups at a time, so that no one knows exactly who will be in their flight when they

have to wait before the "main" event, but they can know when that will start and schedule their time accordingly.

This "buy-back" format offers the best of double-elimination — players get as many chances as they want — and single-elimination — with the straight-forward chart and schedule. It works best in an handicapped event, since the players don't care so much whether Efen is going to be in their flight, but with the second and third chance, an initial bad draw can be overcome.

If you have a competition format you enjoy, please send it in and I'll discuss the most interesting in a future column.