



Why is my child paired against an opponent with a higher (or lower) score?  
What factors are used for pairing? Is this pairing correct?

We get lots of questions about the pairings at our tournaments.  
Pairings are the single most complex part of tournament operation.

The WSCF follows the USCF "Swiss System" rules for pairing players. Most of our tournaments are "Combined, Individual/ Team" tournaments. This means that players compete for individual prizes and for team prizes. This "Combined" tournament style increases the complexity of the pairing calculations because of the need to avoid pairing teammates with each other whenever possible.

There are several pairing rules or "criteria" that need to be considered.

**The USCF Pairing Criteria are:**

- Avoid players meeting twice.
- Players with Equal Scores are paired whenever possible.
- Within a score group, the upper half is paired against the lower half (with exceptions).
- Players receive each color the same number of times, whenever practical.
- Players receive alternating colors whenever practical.

Additionally, in Combined Individual/Team style tournaments:

- Teammates should not meet whenever possible.

Much of the confusion and questions about pairings are because the USCF rules use words like "Avoid", "whenever possible", "whenever practical", etc. The USCF system recognizes that sometimes all the rules cannot be met.

Another source of confusion stems from the fact that the [USCF rules](#), which we follow, differ slightly from the [FIDE laws](#). (FIDE is the international governing body for chess) In general, the USCF rules allow for wider latitude.

For example FIDE law 04.1.B1 "*Two players shall not meet more than once.*" is an "Absolute" rule in the FIDE system and cannot be violated.

The similar USCF rule 27A1 "*Avoid players meeting twice*". States that "*If it is necessary for players to play each other twice, then top priority should be given to having them face each other no more than twice.*"

In other words, FIDE Law strictly forbids two players meeting twice. The USCF rule says that this is to be "avoided", and "top priority" should be given to ensure the same two players don't meet a third time.

**Avoid Players meeting twice.**

This is the highest priority criteria. It is possible that the same 2 players will be paired twice at a tournament. It may be unavoidable due to the number of players in a section or the number of players on a team.



**Players with Equal Scores are paired whenever possible.**

This means that a player with 4 wins “should” be paired with an opponent who also has 4 wins. This may not be possible for several reasons.

- If the players have already met, they would not be paired again.
- Forcing the pairing results in other players in the section meeting twice.
- Forcing the pairing results in teammates meeting.
- Forcing the pairing results in unequal colors.

It looks like the pairings are wrong in the example below.

Wouldn't it be better if Player A was paired against Player C, and Player D against Player F?

2009-10-10 CUMBERLAND ELEMENTARY WISCF K-3 - Round 5		Pairing Sheet, Page 1	
Board	White	Black	
35.	___ PLAYER, A (3.5)	___	PLAYER, B (2.0)
36.	___ PLAYER, C (3.5)	___	PLAYER, D (3.0)
37.	___ PLAYER, E (2.0)	___	PLAYER, F (3.0)
38.	___ PLAYER, G (1.5)	___	PLAYER, H (0.5)
39.	___ PLAYER, I (1.0)	___	PLAYER, J (0.5)

What you can't tell from looking at the pairing sheet is that in round 2, player A and C already met. Player D and F are on the same team. Maybe we could just switch Player B with Player F. That would work except that E has already played against B in round 1.

The “published” pairings determined by the WinTD software are usually the best possible solution for the current circumstances. That is not to say that the computer generated pairings are “perfect”, but manually switching players around may result in other pairing criteria being violated.

**Teammates should not meet whenever possible.**

WinTD will drop a player out of a score group to avoid pairing teammates. If one team makes up a large portion of the players in a section, teammates may have to be paired. One way to avoid this is to spread your players across multiple sections. Not only can this reduce the chance of pairing teammates, it may increase the chance your school has to win a team trophy in one or more sections.

Due to the complex nature of the pairing calculations, we use a software program, [Windows TD version 4](#) to calculate the pairings for our tournaments. This program is written by Tom Doan and Tom Maycock of Estima software. This is the same software used by the USCF at National tournaments attended by thousands of players.

Additional information about the pairing rules can be found in “The USCF's Official Rules of Chess, 5th edition” available for purchase online at the [USCF Bookstore](#), and other booksellers such as [Amazon.com](#). You can special order a copy from [Barnes and Noble](#), and the [Milwaukee Public Library system](#) has several copies available.