

The Wisconsin Chess Rating

Students and adults playing in WSCF tournaments receive a Wisconsin rating. WSCF has been calculating this rating since its inception in 2004. Since then over 4500 players have participated in WSCF events. In the 2010 – 2011 season alone, 1400 players played in WSCF tournaments. From this pool of players WSCF calculates the Wisconsin rating using the WinTD chess tournament management software.

To put these numbers in perspective we can look at the number of memberships at the world, national, state and local levels and their perspective rating systems. The World Federation of Chess commonly referred to as FIDE (**Fédération Internationale des Échecs**) currently has 158 membership entities with membership numbers from 77 in Kuwait, 3300 in the English Chess Federation to 74,198¹ in the United States Chess Federation. Local state ratings systems include the Kansas Scholastic Rating System with nearly 600 annual memberships and the Northwest Scholastic Rating System with over 14,000 players in the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Locally some clubs have their own chess ladders and some leagues have their own rating systems.

People often ask the difference between the rating systems at the national, state and local levels and which is more valid. A chess rating is calculated using a variation of the Arpad Elo rating system². Some local clubs use the Harkness rating system to calculate their chess ladders. WSCF uses the formulas available in the WinTD program which was developed by Tom Doan of Estima Software. Tom has also been a programmer for the rating system used by USCF and is on the USCF ratings committee. WinTD gives you a choice of which rating system to use.³ We choose to use the USCF formula. The rating in each system reflects a player's relative strength to other players in that system. Hence that rating has validity in that system but not in another. In some cases these numbers are similar but this is by coincidence. The WSCF ratings and USCF rating are very close to each other if players play an equal number of games in each system. An example might be where a player plays 25 games in each system and has a WSCF rating of 725 and a USCF rating of 780. One pattern that is recognized is that if the players have equal number of games then their rating will be within 100 points of each other. Again each number is not a measure of ability per se but is a measure of strength compared to other players within the respective systems. If a player plays more WSCF games than USCF then their WSCF rating will be higher than their USCF rating and vice versa. This holds true for rating up to 1200 after which the number of WSCF players is very small. However the median WSCF ratings increase each year. The average scholastic player nationally with USCF ratings is about 700. The range in the USCF system is 100 to 2800 and in WSCF 100 to 1700.

Players use their rating to gauge their ability and WSCF uses their ratings to pair tournaments. When the TD starts a tournament he/she uses the WinTD software to assign each player a pairing number. If there are ten players in a division, the software sorts the players by their rating and assigns each a number of 1 to 10. Then according to chess protocol player # 1 is paired with player # 6, # 2 is paired with # 7, # 3 with # 8 and so on. This system

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prevents the best two players in the division from being paired in the first round. If there is no system used⁴ the players are then paired randomly and it is possible for the two best players to be paired in the 1st round, something everyone would prefer not to happen.

Some players are concerned when their USCF rating is higher than their WSCF rating and conclude that the WSCF rating doesn't reflect their ability. However, what the numbers really mean is not "absolute ability" but only playing strength in that system for the games played in that system against players in that system. WSCF TD's assign pairing numbers by using a function in WinTD where the program selects the higher of the two chess ratings. USCF ratings are downloaded monthly from the USCF Golden Data base. If a student's USCF rating is 1100 and their WSCF rating is 900, the program will use the 1100 USCF number for pairing purposes. For players to have their USCF rating used to pair them at tournaments it is helpful to include their USCF ID number on the registration page.

A successful local rating system has been shown to increase USCF membership. Kirk Winges of Washington state is the developer and administrator of the NWSRS. There are 14,000 scholastic participants from Washington, Oregon and Idaho who participate in this rating system. Kirk states that these three states have the highest number of scholastic USCF members per capita than anywhere in the US. He attributes this fact to the local rating system. "High tide raises all boats" is a quote often used to describe this effect. Perhaps this is and will continue to happen in Wisconsin Scholastic Chess.

To date WSCF players could find their Wisconsin rating on the tournament results pages after their latest tournament. Now WSCF players will have the ability to go to the front page of the WSCF website and click on Player-Rating Look Up. They then can scroll down the list alphabetically by last name till they find their name and rating. They can also look at the WSCF top 100 and the Wisconsin rating sorted and ranked by grade level.

¹As of August 2009, <http://detroitchess.com/USCFmem2.htm>

² Arpad Emrick Elo, 1903 – 1992, University of Marquette Physic Professor, Developer of the ELO chess player rating system.

³ FIDE, USCF or 2P

⁴ Commonly called "unrated"