

The Logic of Tie Breakers

Ask three different engineers their opinion on the best way to design something, and you'll get five different answers!

The same appears to be true if you ask three different tournament schedulers how to resolve ties between teams when seeding the elimination phase of the tournament from pool play.

The following is a list of terms that we use to define different ways of resolving tie breakers:

Normalized Rankings

This is the primary determinant in establishing the rankings of teams or players in a pool. Normalized Rankings are computed as the Total Points Accumulated divided by the Number of Games Played. The reason for using this rather than total points is to recognize that not all flights in a pool will always play the same number of games.

In the EZ Sport Scheduling system, you have a lot of flexibility in tailoring the way Total Points are calculated. You control the formula by specifying points awarded for:

- a) Wins
- b) Ties
- c) Shut Outs
- d) Run / Point / Goal Differential

These are specified on the Schedule page.

Beyond that, you have:

1. Head-to-head

The fundamental logic here is that if two teams play each other in pool play and end up with the same number of normalized ranking points or percentages, then the team that won their original match must be the stronger team and should advance with preferred seeding out of the pool into elimination play.

2. Shut Outs

The logic here is that the team with the most shut outs must have the strongest defense, and should therefore advance over other competitors if all preceding tie breakers are even.

3. Point Differential With Cap

The logic here is that a measure of combined offensive and defensive prowess is indicated by the difference in runs, goals or points Taken from the opponent, and those Given up to the opponent. In order to prevent a blow out from an exceptionally strong team against an exceptionally weak team from overly biasing the results, a Cap on the difference is often established. Caps are evaluated on a game by game basis, so the maximum number of points for this category can not exceed the Cap multiplied by the Number of Games played.

4. Fewest Gives

Similar to Shut Outs, the stronger team is concluded to be the one with the fewest runs, goals, or points given up to the opponent.

5. Point Differential (Raw)

Same as Point Differential With Cap except that the cap is ignored and total Takes less total Gives for all games is used.

6. Electronic Coin Toss

When all else fails, flip a coin. In this case, a random number is generated for both tied teams, and the one with the highest value wins. If you're finishing tournament has fewer slots than the number of teams in the pool, you may want to use this only as a last resort. If you're tournament has enough slots for all teams to participate, and all you need to do is a fair way to assign a seed to the tied teams, this is a good mechanism. Due to the nature of the bubble sort algorithm in use, you may notice that the teams go through multiple iterations of the coin toss. In this case, the last one counts (it is just as random and fair as the others).

These last 6 tie breaking rules may be applied in any order, or not at all. These are defined at the Division level to allow greater flexibility to the League or Tournament director.

If you leave the Tie Breaker Rule Set field empty, only the Normalized Rankings will be used. If you enter "1,5" then rule 1 will be applied, and if they are still tied after that, then rule 5 will be applied. If you enter "5,1", then rule 5 will be applied followed by rule 1 if needed.

Technically, this provides 5,040 different ways of resolving tie-breakers with automated calculations doing the work for you.

If you see "M:?" in the tournament bracket seeding section of the Plan Schedules dashboard, you may need to resort to manual tie-breaking procedures. To minimize your effort, you will want to think about tie breakers carefully to try and eliminate as many manual tie-breakers as possible. Manual tie-breakers will require a manual adjustment to the schedule 50% of the time. Many tournaments will use discipline reinforcement as a mechanism (e.g. fewest penalties wins) or other objective measures (e.g. most first downs, penalty kick-off). Occasionally, you can record this tie-breaker by adding a game to the schedule and entering a score to reward the winner. Sometimes, you can add a point to a score to record the tie-breaker. Otherwise, be prepared to make a manual adjustment.