

Running a DDR Tournament - Keys to success

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The first thing to do when you're thinking about running a tournament is to get a very general idea of what the tournament is going to be like. These first brainstorms will lay the foundation for a successfully planned and executed tournament.

- When will the tournament be? If you're interested in running a more competitive tournament or a tournament with a large cash prize, you'll need to plan farther in advance. Generally, national tournaments are announced at least six months in advance of the tournament, which usually means that the tournament director should be planning it at least a month or two before that. Casual tournaments for your friends, on the other hand, can be thrown together the week or even the night before.

- What will the scale of the tournament be? Is this a tournament for bragging rights among you and your friends, are you running a tournament which will attract most of the good players who play at your arcade, or are you running a semi-national or national tournament with thousands of dollars in prize money?

- Where would you like to host the tournament? Are you going to use your Cobalt Fluxes and your PS2 in your apartment, are you using your local arcade's machine for a few hours, or are you renting out three machines and a banquet hall for a weekend?

- What level of competition do you want to encourage? In a similar vein, how thorough do you want your tournament format to be in terms of how you go about finding a winner?

- Where are the prizes and expenses coming from? Is everything coming from entry fees, with cash prizes going to the winners? Are there other sources for prize money? How much will the machine and facility cost to use? Are you going to obtain sponsors or have any prizes donated?

- Will you be running a technical tournament, a freestyle tournament, any other formats, or any combination of the above?

Once you have thought these things out, it's time to plan your tournament.

- Write your ideas out in a lucid fashion. You'll be consulting them a lot.

- Contact the proprietor of the facility you wish to use for the tournament. Express your interest in renting out the DDR machine. Remember to keep an open mind! the manager of the facility likely has regulations for this kind of thing and it would be unwise to upset negotiations at this point. The manager will likely want a fee up front or immediately after the tournament. Often you'll pay by the hour to use the machine on "free play", but sometimes they will agree on a flat fee for a general amount of time (example: \$50 for a Saturday afternoon before 1pm). Rarely, but often enough that it warrants mention here, the manager won't allow you to use the machine in "free play" mode, so you'll have to use tokens or quarters for tournament play. Make sure you know what setting the machine will be on before you leave this meeting.

- Once you've established a date, time and general price for use of the DDR machine, it's time to contact any potential sponsors. Here you can be a little more aggressive in pitching your tournament, as many businesses are very open to using promotions as advertisement (and sometimes they can write off their donations!). Some examples of sponsors to think about:

- Redoctane.com – a good bet for some extra prizes
- Cobaltflux.com (if you are running a large tournament)
- Sports drinks such as Gatorade or Powerade
- Local independently owned/operated restaurants
- The arcade itself (redemption prizes? Free game coupons?)

- Determine the entry fee for the tournament. Casual tournaments can be anything you want, and more competitive tournaments usually cost around \$10 to enter. National or very competitive tournaments can even be as high as \$20, but you'd better be offering some awesome perks and prizes if you're charging \$20 for entry. Also, determine if you will accept entry fees in advance and if you'll offer a discount to early registrants as incentive to register early.

- Speaking of perks, think about these. Something as simple as "free play before the tournament" can draw extra people to your tournament. Other possibilities for perks:

- Coupons from sponsors
- T-shirts (always a hit)
- Discounted play on other arcade machines during the tournament
- Food discounts during the tournament

- Determine the rules for your tournament. This is what gives the tournament "personality;" feel free to be as creative or as straight and narrow as you like. Whatever you decide, think your rules through THOROUGHLY and be VERY SPECIFIC. You may assume something in your rules is obvious, but it's really only obvious to you. Some basic things to think about:

Machine courtesy
Ground rules (e.g. no Matrix walking)
Qualifier?
Song selection?
Mod selection?
Bracket style (single, double elimination? Round Robin? something else?)
Prize distribution?

- After double checking that you've got the Who, What, When, Where and How figured out, you're ready to make your tournament advertisements. I've been fortunate in my tournament running experience--the arcade from which I rent the facility has taken care of my advertising needs as part of the cost of using the machine. You may not be so lucky. Be SURE that your advertisement includes the following:

Tournament Name
Date
Complete location
Time
Contests (e.g. "PA and Freestyle")
Entry Fee
Tournament format (brief)

A few options for your advertising include:

Making your own advertisement with Photoshop or MSWord, printing it and distributing it yourself (easy, simple, cheap)

Outsourcing your distributional needs to a place like Kinko's (easier, convenient, much more expensive)

Advertising through the Internet (making your own tournament website, posting in the Tournament section of DDRfreak.com)

Whatever you decide to do for advertisement, be sure that your words are BRIEF, LUCID and EFFICIENT. No one likes to try and decipher an ill-conceived and poorly written tournament format, and no one will read 200 words on a letter-size flyer either.

- Once the advertisements are out, don't try and change too much. DON'T CHANGE THE DATE, TIME or LOCATION unless it's ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. You can tweak the rules if people don't think they are fair, but if you're confident in your rules selection then simply thank them for their suggestions and go about your business. DO NOT ENGAGE IN ANY FLAMING, whether they flamed your tournament rules or you think their suggestions are stupid. You are the Tournament Director, with a capital T and D. Your word is final, and you are smarter than them. No need to lower yourself to their level if they think "OMG YOUR MOD SELECTION IS TEH LAMEZOR!!"

- Secure any items or assistance you may need during the actual tournament. Some items and assistance I've used during tournaments I've run in the past include:

Sound System for Public Address related functions

Barriers to separate the competitors from the spectators

Extra lighting

Extra seating (if necessary)

A laptop, for keeping track of the brackets, competitors and money

Overhead projector, so competitors will have a general idea of what's going on in your brackets

Fans

Food/drink

People with cameras to take pictures/videos of the tournament

Other fun DDR-related activities such as Stepmania with home pads

- If you're collecting money in advance for early entries, be sure that you keep track of everything. This sounds like a no-brainer, but you don't want to lose or spend \$50 worth of prize money, and then have "some 'splainin to do" on the day of the tournament.

- Make sure your machine is in tournament condition. Talk with the manager of the facility about having the mechanic perform maintenance on the machine the week before the tournament. If you know how to perform maintenance on a machine, and the manager will allow it, that's the ideal route to take but ONLY if you're extremely confident and knowledgeable in the repair and maintenance of the machine.

As the tournament approaches, it's time to put your extensive planning and preparation to work. It's time for the fun part!

- On the day of the tournament, be sure to arrive VERY early. If your tournament starts at noon, you may want to arrive as early as 9am to set up the machine, seating, food, your computer, etc.

- Give yourself plenty of time to relax and not stress out. Remember, the way you conduct yourself during the tournament very much parallels how relaxed the competitors are, and how much fun everyone has.

- As players start to arrive, your role in effect changes from Producer to Actor. You've planned everything out thoroughly, and hopefully your tournament will basically run itself. Be outgoing with the tournament entrants, and thank them personally for coming to your tournament. Make sure any warm-up goes smoothly, make sure everyone is comfortable and

relaxed, and make sure that the machine is ready for competition.

- As the tournament starts, make sure that the machine is working correctly. Make sure players know the rules by explaining them to everyone before the tournament starts (also, have copies of the rules available for the players to consult). Keep the pace of play up, especially if you're paying by the hour. Resolve disputes to the best of your ability. Be confident and correct in your decision making. Minimize downtime between rounds and/or players.

- Don't be afraid to have fun! That's the reason you are running a tournament in the first place.

- As the tournament winds down, be sure the prizes are ready to be distributed. Congratulate the winners, as well as everyone else who came to the tournament. Thank everyone for coming! They voluntarily donated their time and money so you could run a successful tournament, and you owe that to them. Thank the manager of the facility, as well as your sponsors. Keep in mind that they most likely took a financial hit to accommodate your tournament.

- Be sure that before you leave the tournament facility, you have returned the machine and any seating to its original positions. Pack up any items you used and throw away any garbage. Leave the facility nicer than you found it.

- If you've been maintaining a tournament website, post the results along with any pictures or videos that were taken during the tournament ASAP after the tournament.

- Create a log of what went well and what didn't, so you can learn from your mistakes when you plan your next tournament!

I hope this guide helps you run your next tournament. Good luck, and have fun!