

How to Plan a PDGA Tour Event



Running a tournament can be challenging but enjoyable. All it takes is planning, advance preparation, and a dose of common sense during the actual event. Most PDGA members know how to play. Show them a good time at your well run event.

Here's an outline of the items you'll need to consider:

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|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Type of Event | 6. Staffing | 11. Food & Amenities |
| 2. Divisions | 7. Lodging | 12. Promotion & PR |
| 3. When | 8. Schedule & Capacity | 13. Registration |
| 4. Courses & Prep | 9. Sponsorship | 14. Equipment |
| 5. Finances & Fees | 10. Player Packs & Trophies | |

1. Type of Event

PDGA sanctioned events can have a variety of competition formats ranging from singles to match play to team play and doubles. In addition, a variety of experimental formats can be sanctioned. The tier level is your choice of how big of an event you plan to host. The level for pros typically depends on the amount of cash to be added to the purse. Usually higher tier events are upgrades from successful lower tier events hosted the previous year.

2. Divisions

Decide which divisions you will host. The first choice is whether to limit the event to just Ams or Pros. You are not required to host all divisions if you wish to specifically exclude some divisions. Be sure to advertise this in advance on your flyer. If you do not restrict the divisions offered, then your basic rule of thumb should be to host any division for which there are at least three competitors, and, where possible, to allow for smaller divisions if possible. For example, allow Advanced Women and Advanced Grandmaster divisions where there are limited entries but strong desire by the players to compete in those divisions.

3. When - Select a Date

The tier level determines the minimum amount of time in advance an event has to be scheduled. However, to get the best date for your event, the earlier you plan your dates the better. The PDGA schedules Major events and NTs by October of the previous year, soon followed by A-tiers. These events have priority, and all other events get scheduled sometime later. Refer to the previous year and current year-to-date schedules available either in the PDGA magazine or the pdga.com website to see if there are potential conflicts nearby. Many regional clubs have schedule planning sessions late in the year. One should also check with knowledgeable players in the area if there are any other events already planned for a nearby course. Your PDGA State Coordinator is a key resource to help coordinate and resolve date conflicts. The farther south, the earlier the season planning will start now that several events are scheduled in January.

Be sure to clear your date with the entity that governs your course (Parks & Recreation). The early establishment of good relations with Parks & Rec can be very important to your tournament's success. Find out if you'll need insurance, or if Parks & Rec already has insurance in place, and find out if you need to reserve the park. Reserve applicable shelters/fields. Will the bathrooms be open/available? (If not, consider a Port-o-let.) See if Park & Rec will co-sponsor. Use the tournament as a "motivating factor" to get needed course maintenance performed. Keep constant contact with Parks & Rec between the time you schedule your event and the actual tournament weekend.

4. Courses

Though you may have several good courses in your area it is probably best to pick your top course and simply play that one. It's easier to run a successful event if you only have one course to worry about. That means less OB (out of bounds) to string off and less staff required. It also encourages new local players to enter your event because it's one they play all the time.

If you plan to use a temporary course, add temporary holes to an existing course or use temporary tee or pin positions, please read Appendix A in the companion document "How to Run a PDGA event" for assistance with these issues. Generally speaking, it's not a good practice to create temporary holes at the last minute to accommodate more late registering players. This can result in poor hole designs and reduce the quality of the experience for those who registered to play the course they expected. It's OK to plan for adding extra well designed holes if needed and let players know this may happen, just avoid making last minute additions.

If you have multiple tees and pin placements, pick the best combinations on each hole and use them. The tourney will be much easier to run if you don't have to worry about moving baskets between rounds. It is also better to pick one set of tees for a specific group of divisions to play for the whole event. If the same division will play different sets of tees in different rounds, it increases the chances that someone will tee from the wrong pads. Then we have a sticky rules situation and potentially angry competitors.

If the course has multiple sets of tees, decide which divisions should play from each set. The PDGA has suggested guidelines to help with this decision as long as you know what skill level each set of tees was designed for. Since earning player ratings is important to players at all levels, make sure there will likely be enough players with established ratings (at least 5) playing from each set of tees being used so ratings can be calculated. All tees should be well marked and labeled so all divisions know which tees to play.

If you decide to move tees and/or basket placements make the decision well in advance. Have this information clearly marked on your tourney flyers and at the course. Strive to have the tees to be used in place and the baskets in the positions to be used as early as possible before the tournament. At minimum, the positions should be marked with paint on the ground so players can walk the layout in advance. There is nothing worse than traveling to someone's course, practicing all day Friday, only to find out the baskets/tees were not in their tourney positions. It is also a nightmare to arrive for practice and discover that the TD has not even decided which layout to play yet! This is particularly unfair to the visiting players.

Also, find out how long it will take to play a complete round in tournament conditions on the layouts that you select for competition. Sometimes this can be tested in advance at an informal event or league night. Long, grueling rounds can make it tough for the event to run smoothly and even cause problems completing rounds before dark with weather delays.

Spruce up the course in the weeks before your event. See if Parks & Rec can have the grass mowed the week of the show. If tee signs are damaged or missing be sure to make a temporary replacement or replace them. Can new players find their way from hole to hole? Remove limbs and trash. Shore up dangerous areas around tee pads. Make sure all bridges and walkways are sturdy and safe.

5. Finances & Fees

Plan to keep expenses to a minimum. Pros are expecting to win money, so the goal should be to pay out as much as possible without sinking you and your club into debt. Hopefully, many of the expenses can be covered through disc sales by the club. Also, sponsorship money should go directly into the tournament purse. Some events put all of the added sponsorship money into the men and women Open division purses to try and get all of the top players to play in the same division.

Download the current version of the PDGA TD Excel report from the PDGA website in the Tour Information section even if it's for the year before your event. The Finance page gives you an idea of the various income and expense items that may occur with your event. Feel free to use this page for planning and tracking your sponsorships and expenses.

Set your entry fees. A set of guidelines is provided in the PDGA Tour Standards. Selecting a lower entry fee for the Masters division may guide higher rated Masters into the Open division. Be sure to add the appropriate PDGA fee to the entry fees plus decide whether to include a buck or two for the ace fund. Build in any other fees – i.e. greens fees or regional series fees at this point as well.

Read and complete a PDGA Tournament Sanctioning Agreement once it's available for your event year and send the applicable fees far enough in advance.

6. Staffing

Plan your tournament staffing needs in advance. Identify responsibilities early on. All PDGA TDs must be certified officials and current PDGA members. Contact the PDGA office to get the test for you and any members of your team to become certified officials if needed. Find someone to sell discs and merchandise during the event. Consider getting a local disc retailer to handle your sales at the event unless you plan to buy and resell merchandise yourself. Start with a few key individuals whom you can trust and depend on. Be certain to include your local club members. Solicit the help of your area golfers who do not play events. Maybe they'd like to help staff. Build a large volunteer force. Assign specific tasks to people who have the appropriate skills. One person can't do it all. Follow up with staff members all the way up to the event. If you plan to play, it would be better to find another individual who is a certified official to serve as TD during the event. You can remain as Co-TD.

7. Lodging

Try to work out a discount with a local hotel. Ask them to be a sponsor. Steer disc golfers to the hotel. Tell them to mention that they're with the tournament. If there are camping facilities in the area, make this information available. Some of your local players will also be happy to host long range travelers. Determine all of the options so you can help attendees.

8. Schedule & Capacity

If your tournament is a big draw, consider splitting pro and amateur players into two different events on two different days or different weekends. If this is not an option, consider only allowing the Professional and the Advanced Amateur divisions. Decide on how many golfers you can handle. You cannot have more than 5 players per hole which is 90 on an 18-hole course. Rounds in fivesomes also take longer to play and wear players down. Foursomes, or even threesomes on courses longer than 18 holes are much more player friendly.

Determine the number of rounds based on the minimums required for your tier level. Most weekend events do not include more than 72 holes. A 9-hole final is less desirable when more than 24 holes will be played on Sunday because it will be that much longer before golfers can get on the road out of town. Finals are meant as showcases and should be used primarily at premier events. If the course isn't suitable for a gallery and you're unlikely to have one, then a final might not be a good idea.

Determine all of the event details well in advance. Select a tee time for the first round for each day of competition. It is generally better not to select the starting times for the second round of each day of play. This will give you some flexibility in case you get thrown off schedule by weather conditions or unforeseen complications.

On the first day of the tourney you may be able to select a first round tee time that is late enough in the day (10:30 or 11:00 am) so that it enables golfers from nearby to drive in the morning of the show, thereby saving them one night of hotel expenses. A late start will also allow out-of-towners, who have never played your course, to learn it the morning before the first round. This can allow them to come in the night before, possibly avoiding having to take time off from work to come and learn the course. This will encourage newcomers. All days after the first day of the tournament should have a start time set as early as possible since no registration or player meetings will be needed. Your goal should be to get players on the road home as soon as possible. Remember our golfers will be tired. The quicker we can get them on the road, the safer their trip home will be.

9. Sponsorship

Try to solicit sponsorship for your event. Here are a few "sponsor hunt" tips:

- a) Create a standardized letter explaining who you are (club, businessman, disc golf patron, etc.), your organization, and who to expect at the tournaments (i.e. 75 men and 10 women from 13 states, ages from 21 to 45. Of these, 25 will be from Your Town.)
- b) On another sheet, briefly explain the game of disc golf and the PDGA Tour. Distribute the PDGAs "What is Disc Golf" brochure. You may even want to develop a brochure for your club! Be sure to mention the difference between a Frisbee® and the modern golf disc. If possible, include a picture, drawing, and a good description of a pole hole. A short, well-made video might also be utilized here.
- c) If you have a local company or companies in mind as a major sponsor (the exact amount depends on what you perceive as major for your situation), find out who is in charge and write a personalized cover letter containing much of the same material that a general letter contains. (Note: as a rule, personalizing requests, regardless of the amount sought, can only help). Make sure you mention why you are asking them for sponsorship. Then, specify what level of sponsorship you are seeking. Above all it is important to outline what the potential benefits are to the sponsor. Including a copy of Disc Golf World or the PDGA Brochure "What is Disc Golf" will show a potential sponsor that disc golf is an exciting sport that is growing fast across North America and around the world.
- d) Plan what types of sponsorship options you will have available for "selling" to your various sponsors. Basic options are: title sponsor, tournament program sponsor (IF you have a tournament program, you sell ads to local businesses!), leaderboard sponsor (with this one the sponsor gets their name at the top of the leaderboard), scorecard sponsor (normally "sold" on an annual basis), and the easiest of all....hole sponsorships.

e) If you do not succeed in your sponsorship quest, do not despair. Most businesses you go to will not sponsor you. Always remain polite and upbeat. Tell them that you will be back next year. Also, always go back from year to year to the major sponsors (beer and soda, etc), changes in ownership and operation of these distributors are always going on as are changes in their marketing strategies. By coming back each year, they will be more aware of your event and the chances of securing a sponsorship will increase.

Contact local merchants and businesses to see if you can get a title sponsor (someone who will donate several thousand dollars). Consider linking your tourney with a local charity. This may make sponsorship funds easier to acquire. Many times it can be difficult to obtain a large cash sponsor. If this is the case, concentrate on obtaining as many smaller sponsors as possible. If you can not get a title sponsor see if you can sell individual hole sponsorships. Most area businesses won't balk at donating \$25 (or \$50 or?). Eighteen holes times \$25 yields \$450...which can go a long way towards making your payout respectable and your event shine. It is easier than you think! Approach friends and fellow players for sponsorship. Twenty-five (\$25) per hole is easy to sell!

Some sponsors will donate merchandise which might work well for players packages. Mail "Thank you" letters to sponsors after the event. Tell them how many people attended and where they were from. Mention that it was a PDGA event. If you have "cool things" made with a sponsor's name on it (like banners or posters) be prepared for some attending the event to think that they would make a cool souvenir also (these items might "walk away"). Secure them well if you need to give them back to the sponsor after the event. Keep a list of the names and addresses of your sponsors so that you can contact them next year (and mail those "Thank you" notes).

10. Players Packages & Trophies

Treat these differently for pros and amateurs. If you have items for pro player packages, they should mostly be donated, not purchased. Any dollars spent on pro player packs reduces their purse and must be made up from other funds. Not so with our amateur golfers. The PDGA requires player packs be provided to amateur divisions in A & B tier events (see Tour Standards) so that every am receives something for attending. In addition, consider awarding at least three trophies or plaques in each of the larger divisions and one trophy for each of the smaller divisions. The remainder of your funds collected for each division, after deducting expenses, goes toward prizes based on finish position and CTP prizes.

11. Food & Amenities

Do you know of a sandwich shop that would like to provide sandwiches during the break? This could be easy money for a local merchant and a great tie-in to a new sponsor. Call up any sandwich shop and propose a deal. Have them arrive early in the mornings (before the first round) to take sandwich orders and money. Have them return with the food during the lunch break.

Do you know of a local bar or restaurant that might like to host a get-together during the event? Would they like to sponsor? Steering players to various local restaurants is a great way to promote camaraderie and spend money with (or recruit new) sponsors.

The special character of an event comes from the additional non-disc golf activities for the players. Are there recreational activities nearby that might interest them? Get brochures or arrange discounts for attendees. Plan a barbecue, Flymart or a party on the Saturday evening of a weekend event. Pulling this off successfully can be tricky because many times players prefer to find their own entertainment or do their own thing. Planned activities will likely be more successful the more isolated your event is located, where alternative options are limited.

12. Event Promotion & PR

Get flyers made. Mail flyers to all course pros in your area and surrounding states. Mail them to everyone you can afford to mail them to or use email. (If needed, you can purchase a mailing list of PDGA members in your area from the office.) Your event will be listed on the PDGA Tour schedule once your Sanctioning Agreement has been submitted. Make sure all of the major disc publications know your tourney dates and that they actually publish the correct dates. Consider placing an ad in these publications. Posting your event on the internet such as the PDGA Discussion Board is another smart idea. Give instructions on how to pre-register. When you hold the event, stick to what you said on the flyer! If you promise a minimum cash purse, then you need to deliver. Avoid promising money you haven't got in the bank.

Have a communications volunteer; someone who will stay in touch with the local media. Send out press releases two weeks ahead of your event. Contact the media with information Saturday night about the top competitors in each division. Follow up on Sunday night with the final results. Stress both the top local player and the top person from farthest away.

13. Pre-Registration

With more and more tournaments filling, pre-registration is now strongly recommended for all PDGA events. Above all, this reduces a TDs workload and stress on the morning of the event. Consider checking into some of the online services for handling your preregistration. There will likely be credit card fees involved. You'll have to decide whether to pass these on or cover them as an expense.

Continue posting your current registration list to the PDGA website for your event. You'll receive an event password that allows you to do this and to later report the scores for your event while it's happening (or shortly thereafter).

Generally it is not a good idea to "verbally" (includes email) hold a registration slot for a player. For example, it's Thursday night and you have 87 pre-registrants for Saturday's event. You get a phone call from a player who has waited until the last minute. He asks you to hold him a spot. (He's good for it, you know he'll pay you for it when he arrives.) You agree and the player starts his 12-hour drive to your event. The next day you receive 3 more checks in the mail for pre-registration. Now you are in a fix. You have four people vying for three spots and you guaranteed a spot to the one person of the four who did not think enough of you or your event to pre-register. Avoid controversy, count people as being registered after you have gotten their money.

What if someone who pre-registered doesn't play? Do they get a refund? Yes, if you are able to fill their spot with another golfer or they tell you they are withdrawing sufficiently in advance. No, if you held them a spot and you can't fill it with another golfer. And the answer is especially 'no' if the player doesn't even call to let you know they are not going to get there.

14. TD Equipment

You will need some items, a "tournament director kit," in order to run a smooth event. This kit will include: leaderboard (generally a large board with slots in it which will hold the cards that bear the competitors' names, scores and position in the tournament), as well as the leaderboard cards and scorecards. The leaderboard cards should serve as your player registration and waiver form and, contain boxes across the top for entering round by round and cumulative scores.

You can dress it up by getting them printed in different colors for the different divisions. But make sure you have more than enough blanks printed (to cover mistakes, getting wet, other damage), so your color coding system doesn't break down if you run out of a color you need. Decide whether to use one scorecard per player which will have all of their scores recorded on it for the whole event, or to do the more common approach of preparing one scorecard per group each round with all group members' names on them. There are tradeoffs with each approach. The downside of having all of a person's scores on one card is the risk of it getting lost or damaged from several rounds of use, especially when rain is involved.

To save work at player check-in, have as many of these cards prepared beforehand as possible, based on pre-registration entries. Quality scorecards list the hole lengths for each course layout to be played, have enough room for 5 players, feature tournament name, host club and sponsor logos across the top, course rules especially OB, and even have a course map on the back.

You should also have, pencils, loud noise maker (air horns work well) course reserved sign, small bills for change, discs, special prizes, ace pool sign up sheet if it's not included in the entry fee, closest to the hole markers (plastic sandwich bags, note cards and nails work great), water coolers, first aid kits, rule books, minis, official tourney clock, plastic bags for dry scorecards (in case of rain), and other assorted tourney fun things. You will also need the emailed list of current PDGA members with their player ratings to confirm qualifications for amateur divisions, and PDGA membership forms (all of which come with the event package sent to you in advance of the event by the PDGA).

Make sure to get any sponsors' advertisement sheets and banners. Determine where they will be located and how they will be mounted in the event you'll need to prepare for that.