

RANKING VERSUS RATING: THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

There has been a significant amount of discussion about the ranking system for the past 11 years. This has led the PTT Division to investigate a rating system as a viable replacement for the ranking system.

The past: the current ranking system has been in place for about 15 years. There were discussions in 2000 at the Paralympic Games about ways to improve it as various problems had been identified:

Proposals

1. *The ranking system can be reviewed every 2 years (approved).*
2. *All points of a player are lost and the player is removed from the ranking list after 30 months of inactivity (approved).*
The motivation was “to encourage players to participate in tournaments and to prevent highly ranked players living on their past glory”.
3. *The number of tournaments that are counted into ranking list is limited to 6, 7 or 8 (6 was approved).*
The motivation was 1999 had the most tournaments, linked to selections for the Paralympic Games. While a large number of events is good to develop our sport, the ability to participate in tournaments could become a selection criterion. We do not want players who have time and money to be selected instead of better players with fewer resources. The current system is not balanced between Europe (most tournaments) and other regions. If the number of tournaments counted is reduced, players can go to other events where they get better results and it gives players a chance to compensate a bad result due to injury or illness.
4. *Include doubles matches into ranking points (withdrawn when a similar motion was rejected).*
Part of the motivation was that “lots of good teams in the team event lose the doubles intentionally when one team is much stronger” and one option was that the doubles match should be played 5th as the doubles has little impact on the ranking but a large impact on the sporting value of the match.
5. *Reduce bonus points for open medalists (withdrawn when a similar motion was approved).*
6. *Change definition of W/O matches (approved).*
7. *Base ranking points on opponent's value (withdrawn to be considered in 2002).*
The motivation was that the current ranking system is based on players' classes rather than players' levels i.e. a player would get the same number of points if he or she beat the world champion or a beginner. In tournaments, the value to the player is linked to the quantity of players met rather than the quality of the player. Thus the value of match should be indexed against the value of the opponent.

Thus the problems that were identified in 2000 are very similar to the problems being experienced now. With the 2000 proposal, there is already an inclination towards a rating system.

In 2002, the Sports Assembly established a working group to work on a new ranking/rating system which finally presented proposals at the Sports Assembly in 2006. At that time, there were some additional concerns:

1. The ranking was not consistent as during the same tournament, 2 players could meet 3 times: in open, team and singles events but they got different ranking points for each match
2. There was slow progress for new good players
3. The system rewarded participation more than performance
4. The system reinforced the European dominance due to relatively close proximity of tournaments so that playing in 6 tournaments is easier and cheaper for European based players than those from other continents

5. With the system of reducing points earned at Fa100 (Paralympic Games), Fa80 (world championships) and Fa50 events (regional championships) progressively over a number of years, the system additionally supported those players who had done well in previous years rather than done well in the current year for selection purposes i.e. players were “basking in their former glory”
6. This also served to put a barrier in the way of new players trying to break into the ranking
7. The ranking system is skewed on the basis of players making a good selection of tournaments to play in rather than beating good competitors

Example: currently, if a player attends a tournament where the level of the players is really high, even if he/she performs well, he/she may win a maximum of 2 to 4 matches in his/her event. It may also happen also that he/she will beat one of the top 10 players in the World Ranking, and if (for example) this tournament is a Fa30, supposing he/she is a class 3, he/she will earn 6 to 12 points that, multiplied by the factor (30), will result in 180 to 360 points maximum. Let’s call this player “A”.

In another tournament that, does not attract a lot of top players but does attract many new players enter from the Organising Association and a few foreign players, one of them with some “strength” but not as “good” a player if we compare him/her with our player “A”. This new player is “B” and the tournament is Fa20.

If this player B beats 3 new players in the group, and he/she advances to the main draw winning 4 matches and with this, the gold medal. This will result in him/her earning 410 points from the matches won and in addition 180 points for the gold medal and a total of 590 points.

The system proposed in 2006, and it remains the same now, is fairer than the ranking system because it:

- a) allows new players to be accurately rated after 2 tournaments;
- b) does not discriminate against players who do not have the financial resources to participate in a lot of tournaments as is implicitly required for a good ranking in our current system and which favours those able to attend a number of tournaments in close proximity to their homes;
- c) will promote better quality tournaments because players will enter the tournaments where they can play against the best players rather than the ones where they can easily get points by beating lower level players;
- d) will ensure that the standard of play will naturally improve;
- e) should promote more interest and possibly sponsorship in due course;
- f) will ensure a clear separation between rating and selection for World Championships and Paralympic Games as currently the system of ranking and selection are mixed.

However, the rating system was not accepted as it was too complicated to follow and so the ranking system continued to be amended over the years to try and introduce an increased element of fairness by:

- awarding points for the doubles (although this had been rejected in 2000 in order to encourage the doubles)
- removing bonus points from the open event
- adjusting points for team events
- removing the open event (has an impact on ranking)
- introducing the tournament credit

The present: the rating system has been running in parallel to the ranking system for a number of years but this was the one proposed in 2006. In 2010, PTT approached an expert in ratings and rankings to develop a new system for PTT based on the following principles:

- reward performance/quality not quantity/activity (the higher rated the player you beat, the more points you earn)
- no bonus points
- some reduction in points for a period of inactivity

The system was developed and presented at the informal meeting of nations during the 2010 PTT World Championships. At its meeting in Gwangju in November 2010, the PTT Division decided to introduce the system with effect from 1 January 2012; to use the current ranking system for selections for the 2012 Paralympic Games; to use the rating system for seedings at the Paralympic Games.

At its meeting in Rotterdam in May 2011, Gaël was asked to work with David and the Players' Committee to identify parameters which could be adapted to ensure the system met all needs. As a result of this, the following is pertinent:

	Actions	Objectives
1	Decrease time to get removed from rating lists from 30 to 12 months 12 months was confirmed.	Give more visibility to active players (done on the ratings 1 October 2011). This can be changed easily. The players "removed" are in fact not shown on the rating list
2	Increase depreciation factor for inactivity from 2% to 10% 5% was agreed.	Increase participation but is not recommended (see note 1 below)
3	Compress by 20% the players' ratings on January 2012, players will keep their relative rankings but the difference between them will be narrowed This would be assessed annually and was agreed.	Good players will get more points by winning matches against lower ranked players and will lose fewer points when losing against lower rated players. Not recommended
4	Count only factor 20 and 40 tournaments for ratings This was agreed.	Give more importance to these tournaments and increase participation. Not recommended as the tournament credit should cover participation and the top tournaments should be counted

Note 1: imagine a player with rating of 1500 points who does not play for 2 years and is re-rated downward to 1215 points. They return to competition, practice hard as they want to play internationally at the same level they did previously. At the first tournament they come up against a player of similar ability and rated with 1505 points. These two players meet each other 3 times, in the team event, group and singles final. Each time the returning player wins and gains a total of 78 points, so they are well on the way to recovering the points lost by not playing for 2 years. However the opponent has become a victim of an unlucky draw etc. losing these same 78 points. That is quite significant and in reality the two players are of almost similar ability, and the points interchanged would have been only 23 points had they started off on the same or near rating. So when determining the value of this parameter, one has to take into consideration not only the effect on the player who is not active, but also what effect the player will have when they return.

Players' Committee proposal: essentially to maintain the current ranking system for selection purposes with the following adaptations

PC recommendation	Impact
i) Reduce the number of tournaments in which players compete from 6 to 5 on which the ranking is based. Not considered as rating system to be introduced.	Still favours Europe
ii) Introduce the obligation to compete in a tournament outside the home continent Referred to the Selection Officer.	Possible to implement and will encourage participation (<i>selection issue</i>)
iii) Exclude Paralympic Games, world championships and regional championships	Will encourage participation

from the tournament credit Referred to the Selection Officer but also excluded from the rating system.	
iv) Increase 2% loss of points for non-participation per year Agreed to 5%.	See 2 in the table above and note 1
v) Establish a penalty for late withdrawals unless for a medical reason Included in the withdrawal penalty policy.	Already in process but is not something for which points should be deducted as the ranking or rating system relate to play (and organisers will be out of pocket) so fines are better (<i>operational issue</i>)

The PC itself has said: “**The Rating System will clearly show the level of the players’ play in relation to another player;**” but argues that it should only be used for seedings.

The Future: is up to the PTT Division to decide at its meeting in Split.

Remember:

- A. a rating system produces rankings
- B. selections are quite different from rankings/ratings and need to be considered separately

Issues for selection:

- Increase the tournament credit period from 18 to 24 months and increase the value of the minimum credit to be eligible for selection to increase participation and respect the 2 year cycle of the Paralympic Games and World Championships selections
- Remove the European Championships from the tournament credit to equalise opportunity for those players not based in Europe
- Add the requirement that a player must participate in a tournament outside his/her home continent to ensure participation of top players outside their continent with a possible impact that it would negatively affect wheelchair players (airlines restrict the number allowed on a plane at a time)
- Have specific qualification event/s, in addition to the regional championships, for selection purposes to reduce the number of players selected from the rating (tournament structure).

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