

Establishing a Justifiable Line-up

The Michigan High School Athletic Association Tennis Rules and Policies require:

“The best player shall play No. 1 Singles.”

“All team members are to be ranked in position according to their ability (Singles-flight one through four OR doubles flights one through four). Doubles teams shall be ranked according to the ability of the two players as a team and not as individuals.”

The dilemma of many coaches is developing a system or process to determine the ranked order of the players and thus **establish a justifiable line-up**.

The following (with contributions from Joe Gentle of North Muskegon and Karen Page of West Ottawa) is such a system or process. It is not intended to be all inclusive and any modifications or special provisions are encouraged by the MHSAA Staff. It is recommended that the **Singles'** ranking be established first so those singles' candidates not making singles', can be included in the **Doubles'** ranking process. Coaches will need to make some initial judgement as to skill level placement.

A. Singles

Have the top eight (or less) players play a round-robin challenge using a six game format (tie-break at 6-6).

Phase I---Divide the eight players into two groups (A & B). If less than eight, do only one grouping. Since these preliminary matches are only one set, have the players play more than one match per practice. It is best to always schedule and tell the players, in advance, exactly when the challenge matches will be played.

<u>Match #</u>	<u>Group A</u>	<u>Group B</u>
1	1 vs 2	5 vs 6
	3 vs 4	7 vs 8
2	1 vs 4	5 vs 8
	2 vs 3	6 vs 7
3	1 vs 3	5 vs 7
	4 vs 2	8 vs 6

Create a ranked order using the results of **Phase I**. If there is a tie (identical records), use fewest games lost to determine the position.

Then, move the bottom player (for ex.-#3) from Group A to Group B and the top player (for ex.-#6) from Group B to Group A.

<u>Phase II</u> ---	<u>Group A</u>	<u>Group B</u>
4	1 vs 2	5 vs 3
	6 vs 4	7 vs 8
5	1 vs 4	5 vs 8
	2 vs 6	3 vs 7
6	1 vs 6	5 vs 7
	4 vs 2	8 vs 3

Again, create a ranked order using the guidelines described in **Phase I**. If necessary, do another **Phase**.

Phase III---With four players now established as the Singles' players and in a preliminary ranked order, play **two-out-of-three set** challenge matches. Format: #1 vs #2 and #3 vs #4. Then a second match-Loser of #1, #2 vs winner of #3, #4. This should establish a justifiable ranking order of #1, #2, #3, & #4 Singles.

Note: Phase III is a two-out-of-three set match format.

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B. Doubles

If two players are compatible and want to play together as a team, allow them that privilege. Sometimes a subjective pairing based on personalities and the coach's sound judgement is best in the long-run.

Phase I---If a clear objective solution to Doubles' pairings is desired, then, arrange the players in groups of four. Attempt to have similar skill level players together. **Play a set of 5, 7, or 9 total games.** Having an uneven number rather than 6, 8, or 10 total games helps to deter ties.

Match

A	Player #1 & Player #2	vs	Player #3 & Player #4	Games Won-_____	Games Won-_____
B	Player #1 & Player #3	vs	Player #2 & Player #4	Games Won-_____	Games Won-_____
C	Player #1 & Player #4	vs	Player #2 & Player #3	Games Won-_____	Games Won-_____

Results-----Total Games Won

Player #1-----	_____
Player #2-----	_____
Player #3-----	_____
Player #4-----	_____

Place the two players with the most games won as a team and place the other two as a team. If ties occur, play a tie-break game.

The above example involves four players. Use this format involving all the remaining players having them in groups of four. If a greater comparison of eight players is desired, place the top player from the lower group and exchange with the bottom player of the top group. Repeat matches as described above.

Phase II---Using the preliminary round-robins to establish pairings and creating an initial challenge ladder of Doubles' teams, **play a two-out-of-three set challenge match** for position. As the challenge ladder changes, continue the challenges until a sound, justifiable ranking order is determined. Scheduling in advance and informing players of challenge matches is very important for the integrity of the results and for the players' to not have excuses as to their performances. The coach should decide when "enough is enough" so that the proper focus on drilling, playing as partners, and preparing for competition with opposing schools can be developed.

Note: Determining the line-up early in the season is very important. Keep in mind the MHSAA Policy---"A player must have played a majority of all matches played at that position or flight in which he/she is entered for Regional play." Organizing the challenge matches will give the coach credibility and have the players feel that a "fair" opportunity to perform was given. It also creates a positive opinion of other coaches that the line-up is justified and players are in ranked order.