

Southern Statement on Year End Rating Concerns

When the year end ratings were published in November this year, 85,470 league players received a 2007 rating. The data used to calculate the ratings was Adult/Senior, Super Senior, Mixed Doubles (if you only played mixed doubles) and Category I and II age division tournaments. Starting with the 2007 league year the Southern Section no longer used data from NTRP tournaments.

While the great majority of players agree with their rating and many are "thrilled" because their rating went up, there are about 10,000 who appeal down. Of those, approximately 3,000 appeals will be granted according to the current national criteria and 7,000 appeals will be denied.

In trying to compare why individual players move up, down or stay in level, it often becomes a difficult comparison. The computer uses the actual ratings of players at the time of the match and the match scores to calculate new ratings for the end of the match. Even two players who play as partners exclusively for the entire season may receive different ratings because they started the year with a different rating. The system does not use win/loss records or position played. Another factor is that we use very tiny measurements to determine who is in the appeal range or not. For instance, in the 3.0 level, a 3.05 is granted an appeal while a 3.06 is denied unless age 60 or over. In that age group, a 3.10 is granted but a 3.11 is denied.

USTA has a group of experts, pros, volunteers and staff who examine numerous choices in the way we administer and regulate league tennis. Gaining majority opinion on NTRP issues is a daunting task as most topics have a wide range of opinion on what is best.

For instance, some believe we should share full detail of ratings in hundredths of a point (3.22 vs 3.5) and others believe that this would be a negative and a drastic change in policy.

Many factors of play can not be reflected in NTRP calculations, such as:

- Physical condition of players at time of match
- Court conditions: sun, wind, temperature
- Styles of play
- Preferences of surface
- Strengths of players: physical, mental, strategy
- Players playing the "match of their life"
- Players playing far below current skill level
- A doubles player that is playing in a singles match or a singles player that is playing doubles

This emphasizes the necessity to address ratings in ranges, not as an absolute number that specifically identifies a level at a particular time.

The system using NTRP levels as a range to manage play has been extremely successful in the last 27 years. We believe that providing ratings in tenths or hundredths can be misleading and can also lead to manipulation of match results. For these reasons we do not provide NTRP information more detailed than that now available.

A new rule coming into play at the end of 2008 will address many concerns expressed in the last several years that the same team wins the local league and competes at state, sectional and/or national championships. Those players will not be able to appeal down for a year. There are concerns that this rule change may be too harsh for those teams/players that compete in large draws up to 48 teams at the state championships and do not win or get to semis/finals. USTA will monitor this rule change closely in 2009 to evaluate the impact.

We receive many good suggestions for discussion each year from players and captains. A few recent ones include to give more appeal range to players in their 70s and 80s, to prevent senior players from being moved up beyond 4.5, to add appeal criteria that utilizes the number of matches that created the rating, to use win/loss record (at least in some situations), to allow seniors to play down in adults, and to consider additional appeal if the level is not offered locally.

Of course we do not want to lose any league players, but due to a number of factors including injury/illness, relocation, team politics, ratings issues, and other personal issues, we lose approximately 25% of our players each year. Some come back the following year and we bring in a lot of new players (20,000 self rated in 2007).

Our complaints often come on both sides of an argument. Too many moved up, not enough moved up. Self rate guidelines are too harsh, not harsh enough. Too many DQs, not enough DQs. Too hard to move down, too easy to stay at same level. Finding what the majority thinks is the right balance is an ongoing exercise that will never end. Perfection is not attainable, but improvement is always the goal. Treating players consistently and fairly is a major concern which becomes more difficult when adding subjective procedures. We can assure all players nationwide that the rating they received was generated in a single computer located in New York and that no one receives special treatment or is singled out by this process by any other means than math.

Out of 85,470 players who received ratings this year: 19,639 were moved up (23%), 2,297 were moved down (3%) and 63,535 (74%) stayed in level. Some would argue that in an aging population, these ratios of up/down movement are too high. One argument back is that we also have the most players in the lower levels where more improvement will occur.

The decision makers at all levels appreciate feedback as they weigh the choices each year. Forward your thoughts through your local and/or state league coordinator (this helps us determine if the idea is supported by the state as we try to determine which ideas are supported by the majority of states in section). The Southern Section then makes recommendations each year to USTA.

You may also contact Marilyn Sherman, Director of Adult Tennis, USTA Southern Section, 770-368-8200, Sherman@sta.usta.com
The USTA Southern Section goal is **"To promote and develop the growth of tennis by offering the best adult league programs in the United States to members of the USTA Southern Section."**