

# A Look at the Grading Review Process

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As a solo piper, I have always held a curious eye toward the EUSPBA's annual grading process. I previously have had second- and third-hand reports of the process over the years, but never witnessed the process myself. This year, I attended the Musical Committee's review of grading changes and season standings for the 2000 season. I received an increased awareness and respect for the integrity of the process and the individuals on this committee. I can say with confidence that the review of individual grading issues was handled with proper deliberation and consideration—with a clear focus on musical issues. The grading review process is certainly one of the strengths of the EUSPBA.

The committee pored over 100 separate requests for grading changes, in addition to reviewing the performance records of those individuals who finished at the top of each grade. A grueling task. If you are looking for an easy answer to the question, "How do competitors get an upgrade?" you will not find one. Each upgrade request and resulting decision is reviewed on an individual basis, weighing many different factors. I was impressed by the fact that, in addition to the deference paid to the proper playing standard within each grade, the committee reviewed each decision based on what was best for the individual competitor. The committee is made up of active judges, judges who do remember competitors' strengths and weaknesses. This positive, "personal" approach to each decision is a quality of the process that goes unnoticed by the general membership.

In one respect, however, there is a definite answer to the question, "How do competitors get an upgrade?" They ask. Some competitors will always be more active than others within the same grade. This aspect is also considered. Active competitors who finish at the top of their grade in cumulative points get noticed, obviously. However, there are certain competitors who show clear progress, yet do not travel to as many games. There is no doubt that a formal letter of request from an individual player helps draw attention to these folks and gives the committee an indication of the commitment and mindset of the individual. A competitor who asks to be upgraded and supplies a letter of request, letter(s) from instructors, a detail of competitive activity with results, and/or copies of scoresheets, shows a high level of dedication to their own progress and receives a good chance of benefiting from the committee's full consideration. Certainly, making an appropriate case for yourself allows the committee to become more familiar with you and your particular circumstances.

It was clear to me by listening to the judges on the committee that, for the most part, you are not just a face in the crowd to be forgotten by those who evaluate you. Those on the committee are mindful of competitors who might benefit by another year in their grade. Some requests are inevitably denied, but what was interesting to see was the true desire of the committee to honor all requests. When there was doubt of a competitor's ability to flourish in a higher grade, the denial was not outright. The request was placed at the base of the stack to be reviewed again with more deliberation. There was a real reluctance to deny anyone's request and a truly positive outlook on the abilities of all players. Frank and honest discussion was focused squarely on musical issues. In all instances where an upgrade was denied, it was believed that the competitor would benefit by remaining in their grade for another year.

No one should think that the annual re-grading of individuals is arbitrary. The image of an elite body sitting in a piping and drumming "Star Chamber" should not be entertained by any of the membership. While maintaining an appropriate standard of play in all solo grades would seem to be the Musical Committee's underlying goal in its review, the overriding concern is most definitely quality music and the continued progress of individual pipers and drummers.