

Stewarding

by Arthur McAra

Everyone knows that Games committees employ stewards to make sure that competitions finish on time, that competitors are kept in line, and that judges are fed and watered! Well, no, that's not quite the desired attitude, but some stewards are instructed this way and succeed in making life miserable for everyone, including themselves. Keeping to the games schedule is important, but this is only one of many objectives that the steward has to keep in balance. This article will take a look at how stewards can make a competition fulfilling for everyone.

The steward's job is to ensure that competitions run smoothly for competitors, judges and organizers. Most stewards are unpaid volunteers, but they hold essential positions in which they exert a large influence over the competitors' enjoyment, the judges' satisfaction, the spectators' delight, and the organizers' relief.

HAVING A SYSTEM

Games organizers are advised to have two stewards for each event. It really does help things run smoothly and is well worth the extra recruiting effort. In addition, the Piping and Drumming Director, or his/her deputy, should be constantly patrolling the competition areas to see that events are running on schedule and to help with particular problem situations that stewards may encounter.

THE BEGINNING

The day starts at registration when the competitor checks in, finds out where the competition area is and goes to let the steward of each event know that (s)he has arrived. At this time, you should give a rough idea as to what time the participant might expect to play, and should ask where the competitor will be tuning. Always remind the player that it is their responsibility to be ready to play when their turn comes; it is not your job to hunt under every tree and behind every building to find them when it is their turn.

Don't sit at the table with the judge, looking as if you are assisting in the determination of the outcome. To do your job, you need to stand at a distance that allows you to speak to inquiring competitors without disturbing the ongoing competition, yet near enough to allow the judge to get your attention.

NOW WHAT?

Ah, yes, we did mention problems. "What do you mean I have been scratched? When I last checked in here, there was a half hour wait for this event, and the judge for my other event was ready for me to play. How was I to know that five people in front of me would not show?" With the best organization in the world this can happen, so what to do? First thing is to check the facts. Strange as it may seem, pipers and drummers have been known to exaggerate. Was the competitor really next up in the other event? Did (s)he play in that one? Is there time to let this person play out of order? What does the judge think? (Remember that if you ask a judge, it is only for advice, not a ruling, on matters concerning schedule).

A decision has to be made and you must make it. Be sensitive to the fact that competitors have practiced long and hard for this opportunity and are under a lot of stress (regardless of grade or experience). While making allowances, look out for the occasional competitor who is an experienced "manipulator." And under no circumstances should you tolerate abuse.

Other problems may include someone practicing so close to a competition that it is interfering with the competitor and judge. Your job is to relocate the offender. If a loudspeaker blaring out information on the sheepdog events is located within three feet of your judges' good ear, get the Piping and Drumming Director to rectify the situation. A quality that games organizers find useful in stewards is common sense.

BANDS

Band contests are a little different in that there is a specified time to be on the field, and sometimes even an "on deck" time and place. Keeping to these arrangements should be no problem to the band that is serious about competing; they will probably have a runner checking with you regularly for updates on the schedule. Again, you have to be aware of the occasional P/M trying to take advantage of your good nature and, in the process, upsetting the timing for all the bands following. Gently (?) remind him that we would like to have the awards ceremony in daylight!

THE MAJORS

Strangely enough, running a major open or invitational solo competition can be the easiest of all. The competitors are experienced, ready to play and you are probably indoors (i.e., you've got the competitors confined!). Your main job is to keep track of who is in which tuning room and to ensure that everyone knows you are doing all you can to give him or her chance to perform at their best. Indeed, this is what a steward should be doing in all contests; thinking of all the contestants, the next up and those to follow.

PLANNING AHEAD

When competitors realize that you are working for their benefit, they cooperate, and we all have a great day. While they don't say it often enough, most competitors genuinely appreciate the efforts of a good steward.

Stewarding can be a great experience for competitors, new and old, to better understand what's involved in running a contest. It's also a great way for family and friends who are non-musicians to get involved in the games. If you're interested, take a look at the EUSPBA calendar (in the VOICE or on the website www.euspba.org) and contact one of the games listed there. Thanks for volunteering to steward!

Arthur McAra is the former Treasurer of the EUSPBA and has served as Chief Steward of many games for many years (this article was originally published in the VOICE Spring 1999 issue)