

NorthWest Pinball Championships

Player FAQ & First-Timer's Guide

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This FAQ is designed to walk you through everything you need to know as a new player. If you've never entered a pinball tournament before, don't worry — by the time you finish reading this guide, you'll feel confident and ready to jump in. Let's get started!

Getting Started

How do I register?

Registration requires a **\$50 registration fee**, which allows you to play in any division during the tournament. There is a player cap of **160 players**, so don't wait too long!

What divisions can I play in?

There are several divisions, each their own separated tournament, and you can play in **multiple divisions** during the event:

- **Open** — The main event. You'll play on a bank of 10+ modern pinball machines. This is the biggest and most competitive division.
- **Classics** — Play on a bank of 8 electromechanical and early solid-state machines (older, vintage games with a different feel and charm).
- **Women's** — A division featuring 6 machines. The Women's division shares its machine bank with the Charity division.
- **Charity** — Also features 6 machines (the same bank as Women's). Open to unlimited players for qualifying — a great way to get extra play time and support a good cause.

Do I need to be experienced to play?

Absolutely not! The NWPC welcomes players of **all skill levels**. Whether this is your first tournament or your fiftieth, the event is designed to be fun for everyone. You'll learn as you go, and the community is incredibly supportive of new players.

How Qualifying Works

What is a card?

A **card** is your entry to play a set of games during qualifying. You purchase a card (digital card tracked by our online system) for a specific tournament, then decide which machine in that division you want to play on that card, play them, and your scores are recorded. Think of it like a round of play — each card is one chance to put up your best scores on multiple games.

How many games are on a card?

- **Open:** 5 games (out of 10+ available machines)
- **Classics:** 4 games (out of 8 available machines)
- **Women's:** 4 games (out of 6 available machines)
- **Charity:** 5 games (out of 6 available machines)

How many cards can I play?

As many as you want! However, only your **best 2 cards** count toward your qualifying ranking in each division. Playing more cards gives you more chances to post great scores. Our online system automatically track your overall score and highlight which are your two best cards if you play more than two.

What is a scorekeeper?

A **scorekeeper** is a volunteer who watches your group play and records the scores into the scoring system. They ensure fair play and handle any issues that come up during your games, such as machine malfunctions. Be kind to them — they're giving their time as volunteers to make the tournament run smoothly!

How do queues work?

When you buy a card, you can decide which game you want to play and you can either self-queue from your phone on our online system for this machine or ask a scorekeeper to put you in that queue. It is all virtual and tracked online which monitors in the room to see your position in the queue. When it's your turn, your name will be called and you'll be assigned to a machine group. Pay close attention to queue announcements so you don't miss your turn. If you miss your call, you may need to wait for the next available slot, which can cost you valuable qualifying time.

How Scoring Works

How does the 300-point scoring scale work?

Each machine has a maximum of **300 points**. After any scores are submitted by the scorekeepers on a machine, they are all ranked in order. The #1 score on a machine earns 300 points, #2 earns slightly fewer, and so on down the rankings. Your overall qualifying position is determined by **adding up your best points across your best 2 cards**.

What are tiebreakers?

If two players have the same qualifying score, the tiebreaker is determined by comparing their **next-best individual machine scores**. The player with the higher score on their next-best machine wins the tiebreak. This means every game you play matters, even beyond your top scores.

How Finals Work

How do finals work?

Finals use a **group match play format**. Players are placed in groups of 4 and play 3 games per round. After each game, players are scored based on their finish position using the **4-2-1-0 scoring system** (explained below). Players are eliminated round by round until a champion is crowned.

What does 4-2-1-0 scoring mean?

In each game during finals, the player who scores highest gets **4 points**, second highest gets **2 points**, third gets **1 point**, and fourth gets **0 points**. After 3 games in a round, the 2 players with the most total points advance to the next round. This system rewards **consistency across all 3 games**, not just winning a single game.

How many players make finals in each division?

Division	Finals Qualifiers
Open	Top 40
Classics	Top 40
Women's	Top 8
Charity	Top 24
Open B Division	Top 8 (IFPA rank 1,500+ who didn't make Open Top 40)
Classics B Division	Top 8 (IFPA rank 1,500+ who didn't make Classics Top 40)

What is a bye?

A **bye** means you skip an early round of finals automatically — it's a reward for qualifying higher. In **Open and Classics**: qualifiers 1–4 receive a double bye (skip 2 rounds), and qualifiers 5–16 receive a single bye (skip 1 round). In **Charity**: qualifiers 1–8 receive a single bye. The higher you qualify, the bigger your advantage heading into finals.

What is B Division?

B Division is a special finals bracket for players with an IFPA world ranking of 1,500 or higher (meaning less experienced competitive players) who didn't qualify for the main finals. It's a fantastic way for

newer competitive players to experience the thrill of finals play! There is an Open B Division (Top 8) and a Classics B Division (Top 8).

 Tip

If you're new to competitive pinball, B Division is a wonderful goal to aim for. Even if you don't make the main Top 40, you might still earn a spot in B Division finals!

Common Questions

What happens if a machine breaks during my game?

Alert your **scorekeeper immediately**. The tournament director will assess the situation. Depending on what happened, you may receive a compensation ball, a replay, or be moved to a different machine. Don't panic — the staff handles these situations regularly and will make sure you're treated fairly.

What happens if I'm late to my finals round?

You will be **disqualified**. There is no check-in grace period and no alternates. Set alarms, stay nearby, and pay close attention to announcements. This rule is strictly enforced — no exceptions.

Is there streaming?

Yes! Finals on Saturday and Sunday are **streamed live**, and qualifying on Friday and Saturday may also be streamed, thanks to **GeekGamer.TV**. It's a great way for friends and family to follow along remotely.

Are there prizes?

Yes! Anyone making it to a finals round receives **cash prizes**. All Top 4 finalists in each division receive trophies or plaques. **100% of card/ticket money goes back to players as prizes**, supplemented by sponsor contributions. For reference, over **\$32,000** was paid out in 2025.

Tips for First-Time Competitors

- **Arrive early** on your first day to get oriented — find the registration desk, the machine banks, and the queue area.

- **Start with 1–2 cards** to get comfortable, then decide if you want to play more.
- **Don't worry about your ranking** — focus on having fun and learning the machines.
- **Talk to other players!** The pinball community is incredibly welcoming. Don't be shy.
- **Watch your queue position** — when your name is called, head to your assigned group promptly.
- **Be respectful** of scorekeepers and other players. Good sportsmanship matters.
- If something goes wrong on a machine (ball stuck, malfunction), **don't try to fix it yourself** — call over your scorekeeper.
- **Bring snacks and water** — it's a long day and you'll want to stay energized. Support our host by ordering drinks and meals from them directly.
- **Check the schedule carefully** if you're playing multiple divisions so you don't miss qualifying windows.
- **Consider volunteering as a scorekeeper** — you can earn free cards, and it's a wonderful way to meet people and learn how the tournament works from the inside.

Most Importantly

Have fun! The NWPC is one of the best pinball events in the world, and everyone there loves the game. Whether you finish first or last, you're part of an amazing community — and you'll walk away a better player than when you arrived. Welcome to the NWPC!

For full rules, updates, and registration links, visit **www.nwpinballchamps.com**