

Physically preparing for a Weekend Chess tournament

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I.	Introduction.....	2
II.	Things to consider.....	3
	A. Equipment.....	3
	B. You won't be at home so ...	3
	C. Inside weather: Hot and Cold	3
	D. Space and no Space.....	4
	E. Sleep and no sleep: Know your own sleep requirements	4
	F. Early and Late	4
	G. Food: Before, during and after: Then Repeat	5
	H. Your feet: Shoes or Sneakers.....	5
	I. Be prepared for personal stuff.....	5
	J. Hotel.....	6
	K. Travel considerations	7
	L. Rules, Rounds and time	7
	M. Game time:.....	8
	N. You are done but not done.....	8
	O. All this preparation	9
	P. Parting thoughts:	9

End of Table of Contents

I. Introduction

While you may be accustomed to playing a single game on a regular basis, say a weeknight chess club where you play one round/game a week, playing in a weekend tournament is a “different beast”. You’ve probably worked out how to play as optimally as you can in your one game a week situation. Things like leaving work early, eating a lite dinner or no dinner at all, arriving early to settle in, etc. These are all preparation factors. This document discusses things that may not have occurred to you yet if you have never played in a weekend tournament.

Please remember that as chess player participating in a tournament, you are competing. Just like any other sport you need to be prepared to play and you likely desire to play your best every time you compete. Even if you are not all that interested in the competition aspect of playing, the chances are your opponent will be and will do their best to win.

Some key differences between playing once a week and playing in a weekend event that this document will try to address are:

- Weeknights you likely play between 2 and 4 hours
 - Weekends:
 - You will be playing for up to 8 hours in a day
 - Are often two or three days long so repeat the experience of playing for 8 hours a day
- Weeknights you have a week to “get over” any disappointments you have in your play.
 - Weekends:
 - You will generally have 15 minutes to “get over” your previous game; the importance of mentally resetting before you start the next game cannot be overstated.
- Weeknights you only need to make it through one game food wise and comfort wise.
 - Weekends:
 - You have to plan your food for the day then repeat for additional days of the event. Typically the schedule for each day is a different and often starts earlier each successive day.
 - Being cold or too hot for two hours is a lot different than being too cold or too hot for 8 hours. Large function rooms can take hours to cycle between too warm and too cold and may do so multiple times during the day. Wearing layers is recommended.
- Weeknights you might be tired after work but you can make it through a game
 - Weekends:
 - Are you morning person or a night person? You are going to have to play in the morning, mid-day and possibly late into the night.
- Weeknights you might be used to going over your game with your opponent
 - Weekends:
 - You may need to politely decline going over you game. You need to be focused on preparing for the next round, e.g. Bathroom, Lunch or dinner, getting enough sleep for the next day.
- Weeknights you have all the things that support you playing chess
 - Weekends:
 - If you don’t bring it with you then you won’t have it. Things such as:
 - Key repertoire books
 - Warm up tactics books
 - Laptop that you use to prepare for the next time you play
 - Passwords you don’t have memorized for Online resources

II. Things to consider

A. Equipment

Let's get serious. Would you show up to play tennis without your own racket? Would you be hoping to borrow somebody else's sneakers? What, nobody brought a can a tennis balls?

You're going to play a chess game, bring the basics

- Board and pieces
- Chess Clock
 - Spare batteries
 - Tools to replace the batteries
 - Are your LCD digits fading? If so, replace the batteries before the event.

True story: I was at the Foxwoods open, which was located inside a casino and my LCD display was fading fast on my chromos clock. It took me most of my between round time to track down where to buy batteries but then I couldn't locate a screwdriver so that I could open the clock up to replace the batteries. I was not calm or well prepared to play the next round.

- Pens and score sheets, spare score book.

Be prepared, you might lose your pen or even your score book. Your pen may stop working or your opponent delays the start of the game because they desperately needs to go get something.

B. You won't be at home so ...

Plan on what study materials for the road you will want to have with you but be realistic

- Books, chess, non-chess
- Your games or game databases
- Laptop or tablet and things that go with them, e.g. power, mouse, stylus, etc
- **Passwords** for cloud services, e.g. chess.com, ChessBase in the cloud, that you wouldn't normally remember if you were not at home to look them up
- Don't overdo it, do you really need to haul this stuff with you, you probably won't have time to use much or any of it, certainly not between rounds and at night, you probably would be better off using the time for sleep for the next day.

C. Inside weather: Hot and Cold

There is "weather" inside as well as outside. The playing room may be a huge room or a tiny space. In either case the temperature might change multiple times the course of the day. In the morning it might be freezing, later it might be sweltering. This is especially true during the summer as the facilities climate control adjusts, or perhaps doesn't adjust to the temperature outside as it changes through the course of the day.

Recommendations:

- Always have a very lite easily removable jacket or sweater. You may feel the need to take it off or put it on several times during your game. Make sure it is "**quiet**". You don't want to annoy yourself or others by having every movement you make be audible.
- Dress as if it will be warm and use layered clothing such as a light jacket or sweater to deal with being too warm or cold
- Dedicate a lite jacket to live in your chess bag

D. **Space and no Space**

Many playing venues, especially rented spaces, do not usually provide someplace for you to “put your stuff”. Stuff here refers to you wonderfully warm winter coat, lunch box, bags, chess bag, back pack. Using a sufficiently large but not huge chess bag which can accommodate enough food and water for each game helps to consolidate your tournament “stuff”

Recommendations:

- Leave what you can in your car, or your room if you have a hotel room
 - Leave your winter jacket in the car. Wear your “warm gear” from the car into the facility.
- Consolidate your chess board, pieces, clock with all your other stuff into one carrying case. Your case should be large enough to accommodate everything that you need to have with you. This includes your light jacket, lunch, cough drops, water bottle or coffee mug ... everything. If you have a car or a room you can consider leaving restocking goods there to save space in your bag but consider if you will have time to restock between rounds.
- Ideally, your stuff should be able to stand up and not have to lie down. I recommend a standing computer case or a bag that you can gain access to the contents to from the top easily and will remain standing as you reach into it.
- Your case will likely need to be placed between your chair and your neighbors. Assume it will be kicked a number of times by your or your neighbors during the day.

E. **Sleep and no sleep: Know your own sleep requirements**

Unfortunately you may not yet have figured out your true chess related requirements for sleep. A great night’s sleep the night before the first round might not benefit your play as much as you might hope.

For myself, I tend to not get a lot of good sleep regularly. I’ve learned that I need to have at least three nights of attempted “good sleep” leading up to the first round of the event and that if I take naps on those days as well it will help.

From my own self-observations I have found that three days of good sleep will improve my play better than anything else I can do to prepare for a tournament including taking vacation days to study chess just prior to the event.

F. **Early and Late**

Some days some rounds start “early” and some days some rounds may end “late”. What’s early or late is different for all of us.

- Look at the start time of the rounds and figure out the possible end times should both players use all the time on their clocks.
- Be alert to your own biorhythms during the day and if you have measures to help you, e.g. coffee, brisk walk, etc, employ them if you can.

For myself, being a “night owl” has made me tired and slow to start in the early morning rounds but at about 10:00 pm my brain is at its peak of alertness for the day. For some people, 10 pm may be the time when they normally go to sleep or preparing to. When the projected end of the round is 11:30 pm or later and we’ve both been playing all day long, there may be a performance difference between us.

G. Food: Before, during and after: Then Repeat

USCF rules state that you are entitled to fifteen minutes between rounds. This is not a lot of time to try to get a lunch out of the facilities restaurant if they have one or jump in your car to go a half mile to a fast food place and back.

- Know your food needs and ensure that you can provide for yourself over the course of the first day
- Plan for additional days. Take into account different round times on different days
- Know what the surrounding food offerings are in the area in the event you try to leave the site for food.
- Many players bring their own lunch. Don't forget plates, napkins and utensils.

H. Your feet: Shoes or Sneakers

It may not otherwise occur to you to think about your footwear in terms of playing chess.

- If you cross your feet out of habit or hook them on the legs of the chair while you play you may find that the top of your feet may get sore and possibly feel bruised over time during the event. Your sneakers may provide helpful cushioning, maybe not. Your shoes being stiffer may provide better protection, maybe not.
 - After you play in a weekend event, make a point of noticing if your feet or legs feel bruised or ache from having played over the weekend and consider a remedy for next time.
- While your upper torso may think the room temperature is fine, your feet might be a lot colder. I have played in events where there was clearly a colder stream of air at foot level under the tables. This is especially true if your game is located near an emergency exit. Personally I have found my shoes to be warmer than my sneakers so I always wear my shoes for chess.

I. Be prepared for personal stuff

- Spare Contact lenses
- Spare Glasses
- Contact "juice"
- Tissues
- Cough drops
- Aspirin / Advil
- Earplugs (for example Mack's or CVS ultra-soft silicone ear plugs - 22 dB)
- A cap to keep your head warm or to visually block vision when your head is down

J. Hotel

- Consider staying at the hotel to avoid all of the above even if you are relatively “local”
 - Staying overnight to be able to get to be early to rest for the next day and avoid travel time back home and to the site each day may well be worth it to you.
 - Arrive and stay over the night before the first round to settle in, be on site and perhaps study or just decompress.
- Event Hotel rates
 - When events are held at a hotel almost every organizer will have arranged for a special rate for the event. Even if you don't see it advertised on the particular flyer or web page for the event you are looking at, ask for the chess event rate.
- Roommate or no Roommate
 - You may want to see if you can find someone you know to share the room with you when you are first planning to attend the event.
 - You may want to have a room to yourself
- Check-in logistics
 - If the first round is in the morning you usually won't be able to check into the hotel that early
 - If you will have only a short break between your morning round and the next round you might want to use time off your clock to go and check-in during your game so that you will be able to go to your room during the break between the rounds
 - If you will be rooming with someone you may want to leave their key at the desk for them to check in without them needing to find you. Be sure to let your roommate know you plan to do this to save them time.
 - Try to avoid checking-in at a time when many other chess players may also be trying to check in.
- Check-out logistics
 - Usually the check-out time will occur after that day's round has begun so you will need to check out before your round begins. This usually means you will need extra time that morning to move your things out of the room, have time for breakfast, check out then get to your game on time. If they have self-checkout then you will save time.
 - Remember, all the other chess players need to check out before the round begins too. You do not want to get stuck in a line before the round starts.
- Breakfast
 - Breakfast may be free but may not be timely. The window of opportunity for you and all the other chess players at the hotel to have breakfast is approximately the same unless you plan to rise very early relative to the start of that day's round. Even buffet breakfasts can have a huge backup of traffic for seating and for paying the bill. Allocate a lot of time or rise early if you plan on going to breakfast at the hotel.
 - More timely is to order room service for breakfast. Be sure to check the what the promise of delivery is, e.g. Delivered within X minutes of your requested time.
- Validate your parking
 - Be sure to bring your parking ticket in and get it validated to save you time and or money
- Parking
 - Whether you are staying at the hotel or travelling to it, be sure to leave enough time upon arrival to find parking as some facilities may fill up due to the fact that a chess tournament is being held at the location so an unusually high number of people will need to park.

K. Travel considerations

- Fill your gas tank before the day you will travel, don't wait till you are on the way.
- Traffic:
 - Traffic is usually greater on weekends on major high-ways
 - Traffic is greater on Holiday weekends when many multi-day events are held
 - Greater on Friday nights
- Allocate travel time to:
 - Account for the above plus unexpected delays
 - Account for the delays due to weather events
 - Check the forecast the night before
 - How much time you need to be early to settle in and be ready to play
 - Get parking before it fills up.
 - Some sites have limited parking. Don't spend the first fifteen minutes of your game looking for parking

L. Rules, Rounds and time

- Know when the rounds are supposed to start before you arrive
Some options:
 - Keep the event flyer handy and have the round times circled
 - Write the start time for each round each day into your scorebook
 - Write the start time for each round on an index card or piece of paper and place it in your chess bag.
- Know what the time controls are
 - Some "schedules" use more than one time control, e.g. G/60 for rounds 1,2,& 3 then something else for the remainder of the event.
- Your Clock
 - Have your clock instructions with you if you need it's help to set your clock
 - Set your clock for the next round before that round begins
 - If you can, pre-program and save all the time controls you need for the event
 - Verify you batteries are good
 - Have spare batteries and any tools needed to replace them
- Special Rules: Find out what they are
 - Organizers are allowed to supplement the USCF rules for their event.
 - Find out what special rules they have
- Phones and devices: Almost every organizer will have very explicit rules about phones.
 - Be prepared to power off your phone and leave it in your bag
 - Often the phone is not allowed to be even visible if in your bag so put it away so it won't be visible
 - If you mess up a phone or device rule you will typically lose half your time or be forfeited. Don't mess up.
- Always, when in the tournament room, turn off your phone, keep it from accidental view. Perhaps leave it in your room or car. Think of the weekend as a no-phone weekend as much as possible.
- LISTEN to the announcements typically made at the start of each round for important reminders and rules.

M. Game time:

- Let the past go: Play the board in front of you now
 - If you think about your previous game, especially if you lost, even more so if you “made errors” or let it “slip away” then you are creating a self-distraction and not putting your all your focus on the current game
 - If you think about the previous game during your current game, mentally say to yourself something along the lines of: “Not allowed, play this game”
 - Every move you made prior to the move you are about to make does not matter. Forget about the previous game, forget about the previous move. Be in the moment and focus on playing the best move you can right now. Nothing prior to this move matters.
- Ear Plugs or Music
 - If you using either ear plugs or music:
 - You may miss draw or resignation offers by your opponent because they didn’t realize you did not hear them.
 - If your opponent is using either ear plugs or music
 - They may miss draw offers you make. Be sure to get them to notice you are trying to communicate.
 - Hopefully they will let you know they are using ear plugs for the benefit of both of you
 - If anyone players can hear the music they have a legitimate complaint that a TD will enforce. There is a rule that you are not allowed to distract your opponent or other players.
 - Don’t be offended if someone asks you to turn down the volume
 - Try not to get offended and thus distracted if when you ask someone to turn down the volume they seem offended. Who knows, maybe they are gaming you to be distracted since you called them on the volume.
- Play the board, not the person
 - Don’t let your opponent “game you” either intentionally or unintentionally
 - They may be “rude” or cop an attitude
 - They may look distracted or feeble

N. You are done but not done

Once your game is over:

- Record the result of your game in your score book or score device
- Personally verify that you or your opponent has correctly recorded the result immediately after the game. You are responsible for result being recorded. Do NOT depend on your opponent to record the result. Physically verify the result is recorded correctly.
- If you have time, verify your game score while it is fresh in your memory. You may try to ask your opponent to view their score sheet for this purpose before you go your separate ways, perhaps take a photo of it
- While your opponent may offer to go over or discuss the game you just finished and this makes your overall chess experience more fun, your priority must be to prepare yourself for your next game.
 - Most people will understand if you say: “I’d really like to but I really need to ... before the next round”
- Your attention should now be focused on playing the next game. Do whatever you need to do to be ready to sit down and play your next game well. If you feel the need to think about that previous game and be angry, sad, disgusted or whatever, set a limit for yourself to be done by the time you sit down to play the next game. For Next time

O. All this preparation

Having done all this preparation it won't be of much use to you if you forget to take it with you. Some ideas:

- Place your chess bag by the door
- Put your keys with your chess bag
- Have a large reminder card or piece of paper placed on your chess bag and have a checklist for all things that you need to make sure are with you before leave, e.g.
 - Your electronic or paper score book
 - Your Lunch
 - Your beverages
 - Your suitcase
 - Directions and address of the site.
 - Program in the directions to your navigation device the night before
- While at the event make a note of anything you want to remember to pack or do for the next event.

P. Parting thoughts:

- Learn from every event and prepare better for the next.