

February 9, 2009

From: United States Table Soccer Federation (USTSF)
To: USTSF Regional and State Directors

SUBJ: LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF USTSF

Greetings to all!! I'm putting out this very long (and very past-due) letter today for a number of reasons. Among the first is communication, between:

1. USTSF and its new Regional and State Directors,
2. Regional & State Directors and their player bases, and
3. Regional & State Directors and their local communities.

To begin, one of the most vital aspects of the USTSF Reg/St. Directors program is enabling the directors to in fact have direct access to USTSF staff, whether it's simply to clear up player misconceptions overheard or read on internet forums; whether it's to provide your ideas or player feedback to USTSF on any issues or concerns; whether you seek advice or assistance in building your player base via grass roots development or via running more successful promotions & tournaments; or whether you or someone you know wants to make a positive difference by volunteering to head up or participate in any USTSF action committees.

That's why we have a USTSF Board of Directors email group (ustsf@foosball.com), why we've established a Reg/St. Dirs email group (statedirectors@ustsf.foosball.com), and why we've established a special forum area for Reg/St Dirs to exchange information, ideas and success stories among themselves and/or USTSF staff. Create an account in the main section (www.forum.foosball.com) then email your account name to USTSF Board member Jim Waterman (jim@foosball.com) and request access to the USTSF section. (More on this later!)

The rest of the range of topics in this letter will be wide, but in addition to the recurring theme of communication, I do have one essential theme – one that I think most all of you will find both helpful and informational, if not highly useful. Basically, the main theme is that there are plenty of folks who are running (or can run) efficient and enjoyable tournaments within the confines of the tournament hall but unfortunately, much of what needs to happen outside the tournament hall is either neglected or a mystery to many tournament directors/promoters. For example, tournament directors struggle to find decent venues, to find event sponsors, to pay out their advertised prize funds, or to see their tournaments have any positive impact on the long term growth or development of their local player bases (and for those directors that are also route operators: to see improved revenues). Moreover, before the tournament begins, while it's going on and/or from the point it's over nobody other than the players themselves ever knows it happened – where's the media and community engagement?

My objective: Empower and enable USTSF Reg/St Dirs and other affiliated promoters to engage their community, local businesses and area charities as part of the process, resulting in more

diverse and/or ideal (yet affordable) venues, more comprehensive event sponsorships, greater neighborhood goodwill and much more media exposure -- thereby attracting larger numbers of people to the everyday game and to the sport, and further more rapidly growing a sustainable player base. Though parts of this letter may seem obvious to a few of you, except for a couple of promoters like Alan Cribbs, no one (not even Mary Moore) seems to fully know how to do these things or how much it can benefit them, their tournaments, their player base and even the sport to do so. Funny thing, the process is easy – but I’ve found that many Reg/St Dirs and promoters really need someone to show them how. That’s where this letter, and communication with USTSF’s all-volunteer staff of dedicated, highly experienced player-promoters can be of greatest help. We are here as your knowledge & information resource, not as some isolated “brain trust.”

Certainly, in your own efforts to bring our shared enjoyment in this unique sport of table soccer to more people (and in bringing more enjoyment to those already “hooked”), you have already taken a big step by volunteering to participate in the USTSF’s Regional & State Directors program. But what to do now?

Let’s begin with the words “empower and enable.” In the old days of foosball pro tours, most tournaments of State Championship size and larger were run as part of manufacturers’ promotional tours, and were often enabled by connected volume sales to distributors. But over time the most popular tables became so well built that they could easily last over ten years on location, resulting in market saturation and a slow-down in revenues to manufacturers and distributors. Further, during the last two decades the distributors and many operators have moved away from traditional arcade and pool hall games and into the much higher-revenue “fruit” (gaming) machines such as video poker. This, together with penny-pincher mindset cutbacks in marketing budgets and a lack of single-product sales and promotions focus by those manufacturers that are corporate-owned, and you have full justification for any manufacturer to slash the size of its pro tour & event payouts and focus instead on product lines that have greater profit margins and are less marketing intensive.

At the same time, a number of dedicated player-promoters stepped up to fill the void, and took greater control over their local, state and regional events by just doing it themselves – sometimes with, sometimes without manufacturer support. They were self-empowered more often than not by their love of the sport and in some cases that was all that was needed for their tournaments to grow in player popularity. Eventually, a few of these became every-year events and have taken the place of former pro tour stops. In fact, for the last few years state-level tournaments essentially became the pro tour (with the exception of the remaining Vegas majors).

But despite player popularity, even these have often been run at a loss to the organizers. And one of the worst problems in my view is that many such tournaments are promoted exclusively to existing players – how can the sport attract new players, player and event sponsors, media, and public/new player attention if no one outside of the players attending a tournament knows it’s even happening? And in what way does that narrow focus help build the local player base or increase route sales for an operator/promoter? (Funny thing, even major manufacturers have historically failed in the same way – ex: in 18 months from 1978 to 1980 Tournament Soccer gave away \$450,000 in prizes in Chicago, yet there has never been an active player base there of greater than two dozen players, and no one in the city walking down Michigan Avenue ever

knew those tournaments were going on, much less that there was such a thing as foosball or even foosball tournaments.)

So, here's where this letter may be of most help. That is, manufacturer support at local, state and even regional event levels can be useful, but it's not at all mandatory. Thus, while Warrior may be planning expanded promotions and Brunswick/Valley-Dynamo/Tornado (who I like to call BVDT) hopes to re-expand its tour to 4-5 majors this year (pending Brunswick's possible sale of the VDT division), there is certainly much that Reg/St. Dirs can do to ensure both continuation and growth of the sport and its player base regardless of anything else going on – if they know how. Indeed, I've seen plenty of promoters run good tournaments, but with the exception of Alan Cribbs, I've never really seen anybody engage “the outside world.” But there's so much benefit in doing so it's almost tragic that no one seems to bother.

Who is your key link to the outside world? It's actually not USTSF (though we can guide or assist you in a number of areas). It's your local and state Sports Commissions (SCs) and Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVBs). These are fascinating (and FREE) resources to you in your towns, states and regions. These organizations exist to bring sports and other events to their areas, and are so competitive amongst each other that most even have budgets for “bidding” to host your event (or they can organize competitive bidding by venues in their towns). Example, if you are a USTSF State Director in say, Ohio, and you want to hold a State Championship level tournament you could have Cleveland, Canton, Dayton, Columbus and Cincinnati all competing for your business. And yes, for SC/CVBs even a State Championship foosball tournament is looked at as a marketing opportunity that can bring area and regional tourism and publicity to their towns/states/etc. In fact, as a result of my participation in the TEAMS Conference 2008, I have been directly contacted and/or met with some 50+ city, county and/or state Sports Commissions (SCs) and Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) in the last three months alone.

So what can they do for you? They can help you with everything you could need to make your event a success other than actually run the tournament for you. (Although I even had one CVB offer to have someone do that!) Most all of them can:

1. Significantly support your tournament venue search by getting hotels, local sports centers (such as indoor soccer arenas, tennis clubs, or university gymnasiums/student unions) or large sports bars to provide free tournament spaces or even bid to host your event at their facility.
2. Assist in negotiating venue bids. For example, did you know that you can get cash up front for your event if you request the host hotel provide a rebate of travel agency booking fees? If the average rebate per night is \$15 and if your average number of room-nights booked for the hotel for say, a \$10,000 State Championship is 100, then that's \$1,500 towards your prize fund or organizational/staff expenses. Or what about a percentage of venue concessions? Free ballroom or meeting spaces? Free airport shuttles? (Or if at separate locations, free shuttle between the tournament site and the primary hotel.)
3. If you have multiple cities vying for your event, you can collect multiple bid fees. You'll want to consider both the size of your event (prize money, fairly accurate estimate of total attendees including families & spectators, total number of room-nights booked) and also the size of the cities involved vs. value of services when determining what the bid fees might be.

(Chicago can afford more than Cedar Rapids, IA, but of course in Cedar Rapids you'll get a lot more personalized involvement from local business sponsors, media and charities.) Be careful about jumping the gun on any one inquiry, since the SC/CVBs are very competitive and it's best to play the field when considering towns/venues/etc. And keep in mind that especially for larger events, the CVBs have budgets for actually bidding on hosting events in their towns (or are funded by hotel tax revenues, so the more room nights your event books the better – one reason it's beneficial to start warm-up DYP a night or two early).

4. As a rule, the SC/CVBs will request a “Request For Proposal” (RFP). This is a document stating your event requirements, such as total room-nights needed, square footage needed for your tournament room (figure 100 sq ft per table, plus any staging, lounge, and/or concession areas), public address system, internet access, media coverage desired, type of local business sponsorships and charity involvement needed, etc, etc. (Again, this may also include certain types of concessions for which you could receive a percentage of total or net sales.) I'm attaching a very basic USTSF template to give you an idea...

5. The main thing is, you just have to ask. All the advice, services, assistance and business, charity and media contacts and much more that SC/CVBs can provide is there for you to take advantage of for free. (Just ask!)

To expand on a couple of the factors in #4 above: local business sponsors, media and charities: Whether you do it yourself or gain assistance from a CVB, you absolutely should not neglect the opportunities provided by local business sponsorships and charity involvement. Half the tournament promoters I talk to don't even try to get sponsors anymore (if they ever did in the first place), and nearly none involve charities with their event. Sponsorships can take several different forms, such as:

a) A local coin-op distributor, operator or retailer providing tables (or even donating a table to a charity fundraising raffle, or donating cash-value prizes such as package deals – or full player sponsorships – to a major tour event).

b) Local businesses that can provide the venue (such as large sports bars, bowling alleys, indoor soccer arenas, and of course hotels) which in most cases have built-in concessions.

c) Local businesses that can provide cash or prizes in support of your grand prize, your overall prize fund or your charitable raffle. This is normally one of the most advantageous sponsorship types in that you can already have (a) and (b) above, and this sponsorship on top of it all. Even more important as part of such a sponsorship is the engagement of a local charity – charity involvement attracts media involvement which further attracts greater sponsorship involvement. It's a symbiotic relationship. Say your local charity is the Boys and Girls Club or other youth-oriented organization. By donating a grand prize to your raffle (such as a travel agency donating a Vegas weekend for two (including airfare) or perhaps a 5-day cruise package, or an outdoor recreation retailer donating an ATV) or by having the sponsors match funds raised in your raffle to pay for a new tournament-grade foosball table to be donated to the youth center (keep your future player base in mind!), those businesses are simultaneously receiving media exposure, and contributing to their local communities. And don't forget, on top of your CVB having excellent media contacts that can provide attractive exposure to potential sponsors, your charity organizations thrive on media exposure as well and also come with their own built-in public relations people who will assist you in gaining event coverage. Tie your tournament in with the State Games of America as a competitive event in your state, and you'll be leveraging an

exceptional amount of publicity. Good for the tournament, good for the sponsors, good for the charity, good for the community, good for the kids, good for the sport. On top of all that, the SC/CVB, the charity and the State Games will do almost all the work for you – you just have to get them engaged and then run a good tournament.

The key in gaining good, lasting and returning sponsorships (whether it's for your tournament, for your charitable raffle, or for your winning teams) is that the sponsor must see/get something more for their investment than “give me money and I'll wear your logo on my shirt and by the way, I need you to give me the shirt too.” Everybody always says to me, “oh, sponsors don't need anything in return, they already get a tax write off.” Wrong. First of all, any write-off they get whether as an advertising expense or as a charitable donation only reduces their taxable income, for a net reduction in taxes paid of about 20% of what the sponsorship/donation cost them. Where do they get the rest of their investment back? They don't unless you can provide:

a) something of value to the sponsor such as media exposure/community goodwill, the result being increased sales, or

b) services-in-kind such as pro sales demos at coin-op distributor open houses, or route table maintenance or table reconditioning training to the distributor's operators, or how to run a foosball league to the operators or location owners/managers, table maintenance or beat-the-pro demos at sports bars, etc., the result being increased sales, or

c) services-in-kind such as pro sales demos at sporting goods retailers (think everyone from Sears to Sportmart or Dick's Sporting Goods or Big Sur Spa & Recreation – regardless of whether they sell tour tables or not), at which you first teach the store's sales reps how to put together their floor models correctly and keep them lubed, and next conduct live “beat the pro” demos during special sales or Christmas holiday rushes at one or more of their stores and give out stickers, buttons, hats, t-shirts (that can frequently be provided for free by manufacturers or the retailer itself), the result being increased sales.

In your off time you can get creative. Say you're a relatively sociable person who can talk to most anybody of any age in a friendly way. (Say you're Rob Mares, for example.) There's no reason you can't look for ways to leverage your passion for the game into both personal, team and tournament sponsorships. Look first for synchronicities with like-minded sports or locations. Contact the parks district, schools district or college athletic field where there a large soccer field areas, and say you (or one of your players) is a pro or pro-master table soccer player, and you'd like to set up a tent and conduct a few free exhibitions next to the fields, with your main intent to introduce your sport to people having a shared interest. Half the time they have no problem with it and/or you can get a free permit, etc. Go do your demo (targeting the kids, but talking it up with the parents). Give away your stickers, key-chains, hats, t-shirts, autographed foosballs, etc. and make sure everyone has a chance to score. Tell the parents about your quest for sponsors, give them your business card and guess what? Kids through adults, every soccer team out on that field has at least one sponsor – before you know it you'll have all kinds of opportunities. Do the same at other like-minded places, like indoor soccer arenas (less the tent!), bowling alleys (again, where all the teams and leagues have sponsors...), family entertainment centers, billiard halls, sports bars with pool and darts, etc. This all works even better if you (or your pro player doing the demo) have an assortment of state and above titles, as it lends credibility and prestige to the demo and for the challengers. And you can almost always do demos in such locations for free or in return for in-kind services, as it results in increased sales. If you don't run your tournament in connection with the State Games, arrange to do your demo

adjacent to one of their major game events as an “exhibition sport” for the following year. In all cases: communicate the fun and limitless possibilities of the game, communicate that you have a sport and communicate that you’ll soon have a great tournament right in your own town or state!

In examining both proven and creative new ways such as these to gain event or individual/team sponsorships, USTSF established a couple of new sections at the Foosball.com forum. I’ve titled them “Sponsorship Best Practices” with two categories: Players, and Tournament Promoters. These are public forums in which anyone can share their ideas, recommendations and/or success stories, so I hope everyone will have a look and contribute as well. I think it could be a great communication tool and information resource and based on the participation level with these, we may also add similar categories such as “Promoters: League Best Practices” or “Promoters: Local Tournament Best Practices” or others as people may suggest.

Next, please see: [http://ustsf.foosball.com/images/Videos/tsabana\(ITSF2008PromoVideo\).fly](http://ustsf.foosball.com/images/Videos/tsabana(ITSF2008PromoVideo).fly). This is an exceptionally well-done multi-table video by ITSF that shows the diversity, intensity and sport aspects of table soccer competition and tournaments. You can download it for free from the USTSF website (it’s a huge file) and/or burn it to a DVD; it requires Flash Player to view. I would strongly recommend burning multiple copies and including it with any tournament RFPs (USTSF RPF template attached) or sponsorship proposals, or playing it continuously at any pro demo you might do. Add to this the attached “USTSF Foos Data Sheet” and whether approaching individual/event sponsors or talking with media reps (television, newspapers, web news, etc.) you’ll have set of really great, informational promo tools. And of course, feel free to direct them to the USTSF and ITSF websites to further help verify that table soccer is a legitimate sport/endeavor.

As for tables used at your tournaments, State Directors should probably be the ones to contact the manufacturers/their reps/agents, distributors or area operators to determine what’s best for their local or target player base. As many of you know, in order for your event to be ITSF sanctioned, you would have to use current tour edition ITSF tables, with ITSF events historically drawing a large number of pro-masters and/or international players. However, for USTSF sanctioning alone it really can be any table – ITSF or not. Again it’s all based on the goals of you and your player base. (Kathy Brainard/other USTSF staff have produced a sanctioning criteria document for non-ITSF tournaments sanctioned by USTSF; see the USTSF website “Sanctioned Tournaments” main menu link.)

One other thing: far above I mentioned that I’ve recently met with over 50 SC/CVBs (and a number of hotel chains on top of that). Since I have SC/CVB information packets for multiple cities/counties for a number of states, I can mail the info packets to the respective State Dirs, let them determine which city can provide the best support for their event, and let them liaison directly with those SC/CVBs. In states where there is more than one State Director, I will try to split the SC/CVB packets based on proximity to each wherever possible. Otherwise, I’ll just pick one to send the packets to and they’ll have to share/coordinate. In order to send out the packets, I’ll need all your mailing addresses. Hopefully Kathy Brainard or Mark Winker can consolidate a list of all Reg/St. Director and promoter mailing addresses or if you’re in a hurry to get started please send your address directly to ustsf@foosball.com. Once everybody has read this letter and received all these, the timeframes are up to you all.

Getting started this year may work for many, but advance planning for larger, more successful events for 2010 is fine as well... However, if you intend to run a state championship-level tournament or higher, please advise USTSF and Regional Directors of your proposed timeframes so that we can not only list/advertise them as early as possible, but also try to coordinate the minimum possible of conflicts between states/regions. If you are planning to run it as an ITSF event for 2009, we need to know right away because it involves international scheduling, approval, coordination & advertising. Again, email USTSF staff at ustsf@foosball.com.

Finally, USTSF hopes to conduct a formal USTSF State Directors and National Assembly meeting in March at the Tornado Hall of Fame Classic International Series tournament in Las Vegas. We are actively seeking agenda items for inclusion. Feel free to submit recommendations to ustsf@foosball.com, attn: Pat Ryan. I hope many of you can participate. Hopefully we'll be able to use a good meeting room for a larger meeting. Please remember that all of what USTSF does or wants to do is an open, participatory process -- all players, promoters, operators, distributors, manufacturers and player associations are welcome to contribute in any ways they can or see fit. It's a player-run organization that's all about growing the sport and whether it's from the top down or from grass roots up it's all about sharing the love (obsession?) we all have for this crazy game and communicating that to and with as many others as we can. Those receiving this email are among the most likely to exactly understand this, and also the most likely to be able to extend that enthusiasm to new people and the grass roots players that may be local sportsbar, frat/dorm or arcade players or even future World Champions. The key is proactive participation. As I often say, keep up the open, two-way communication, and: "Ask not what the sport of Foosball can do for you; ask what you can do for the sport of Foosball."

STILL BUSY, BUSY, BUSY!!

Thanks to all for your ongoing support, and as always, take care!!

Larry Davis, for USTSF

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P.S. One last item: Don't forget that one of the first tasks we charged Regional/State Directors to do (Bruce Nardoci sent an email back when the distribution list was first established) was to keep an up-to-date listing of playing locations and local/weekly tournaments on the USTSF State area of the Foosball.com board. USTSF seems to be getting regular emails from players (new and old) about finding playing locations around the country, and we'd sure like to help both the players and you by keeping this forum area full and up to date!!