

The New ICU Rating Program 1999

In 1989, the then ICU executive decided to commission a computer program to automate the national rating system. Up until then, ratings were done with pen and paper and required a huge amount of time and skill to keep them updated properly. Computers were just starting to become affordable but it must be remembered that the technology that was available back then was nothing like as sophisticated as what we have come to expect today. Windows 2.0 was just released and most people were still using Dos.

The old program was written for us by Timeout Software and was in use up until July 1999. In terms of software, it was a grandfather! The life of most software packages is between four to six years. The timeout rating system was ten years old, Dos based, and had the drawback of not being able to introduce players to the system at their initial rating performance. Instead all new players joining were given a base rating of 1000. This caused problems.

The time had come to replace it and so the executive laid out it's requirements and commissioned a new rating system. At first the idea of buying a foreign system was discussed but in the end it was decided that a system written specifically for us within Ireland, offered a better long-term solution. It would be far easier to avail of technical support from someone at home than someone in far off shores.

By the time you read this, the new system will already be in use. I realise that ratings form an essential part of the ICU overall service to its members and so I have tried to anticipate the questions you may have about the new rating program:

1. Does this program calculate the ratings in the same way as its predecessor?

Yes, basically there was nothing wrong with the original programs calculating routines, so they were kept. The bonus scheme also remains, although its implementation has been improved.

2. How does it calculate the new player's ratings?

After establishing a new code for the player, the program examines his performance against rated opposition only, and based on that, gives him a performance rating. His new rating will be based on his performance rating over his initial twelve games.

3. Does the rating officer still have to input tournaments game by game?

No, tournament input has been greatly improved.

4. How has it improved tournament entry?

The program has the facility to import text files. The text files it is designed to import are the cross- tables from Swiss Perfect. Once imported, the system can automatically rate the tournament.

5. Does this mean that all weekend events will have to use Swiss Perfect?

Yes, the ICU now has Swiss Perfect and it is much easier to learn and use than any other pairing program I've seen. For the moment tournaments already run can be submitted in Protos but from next year on, tournament organisers will have to make the switch. It will be an easy switch to make because of the many advantages of Swiss Perfect.

6. Can leagues be rated automatically?

Unfortunately not yet, but plans are well advanced to make this possible.

7. Do events have to be rated in chronological order?

It is not necessary, the program will rate events in any order, but it is always better to do so.

8. Will this program halt the deflationary effect that the rating pool has been suffering?

I believe it will, however there will be an audit of the system and it's performance next year. This audit will answer the question then.

The new system will have many advantages over the old system to everyone;

Advantages to the ICU

The main advantage to the ICU from an administrative point of view is that tournaments can be rated automatically. This saves many hours of painstaking work for the rating officer. The system itself should also be more accurate because it will now handle new players ratings properly. The new system is also easier to learn and use than the old Dos based program was.

Advantages to the tournament organisers

At the moment, most organisers are still using the old Dos based Protos, an awkward program by today's standards. The ICU will provide tournaments with Swiss Perfect and also with our membership on a database disk. This means that as entries are taken, all the organiser needs to input is the players ICU code and his name, current rating and club will all be entered automatically. When the tournament ends, the organiser just sends a disk to the ICU and the event's rating report will be sent back to him.

Advantages to the players

Tournaments will become more efficient just by switching to Swiss Perfect, so that can't be bad. Other benefits include;

1. Newly joined players can have a provisional rating within days of their first event.
2. The deflationary effects of the old system should be halted. It may even be possible to rate every game played since 1989 with the new system. The ICU have all the records on computer. If this were done successfully, then the inflationary effects would be reversed.
3. Annual rating list could not only show a players rating, but it could also show his rating performance over all his rated games since the previous 1st September.
4. The bonus scheme has been improved. Let us imagine a rapidly improving player, named John Smyth enters a tournament. His current rating is 1400 and his K factor is 40. The event is an under 1600 tournament and John wins on 6/6. He entered the event as a 1400 player and his rating rises to 1490, but he then gets a bonus of 36 points, this gives him a new rating of 1526! Let us also imagine that you, the reader, played John in this event. You did, of course, lose to him, so did you lose to a 1400, 1490 or a 1526 player? Under the old system it would have been the 1400 John Smyth you lost to but the new program re-rates events after bonuses have been applied. This means that you lost to the 1526 John Smyth, a much fairer System.

Overall, I believe the new ICU rating system will be an improvement for all concerned and it will certainly make for an easier life for the ratings officer of the ICU.

Acknowledgments

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Main technical rating advisor:	Pat Reynolds, Bray Chess Club.
Beta Testing:	Gerry Graham, Limerick Chess Club.

If you have any more questions on the program, please feel free to contact me through the Journal and we can discuss the issue here.

Gerry Graham, Limerick Chess Club, November 1999.