

## **Towards a Court Congestion Strategy and Policy for Sir Winston Churchill Park Tennis Club**

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#### ***Introduction***

This memorandum takes some first steps towards addressing court congestion at Sir Winston in an organized and analytical fashion. Some principles are covered, and then Sir Winston's court congestion picture is compared to that of other clubs via a survey. Congestion management policies in other clubs are reviewed, and potential changes that Sir Winston could make are discussed. A general finding is that Sir Winston could improve its management of congestion by forming a set of policies on it. The paper ends with a detailed list of **recommendations**.

## **Principles**

The following is from Draft # 18 of the City of Toronto Policies for Tennis Club Operations

*The Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Department will endeavor to provide fair and equitable access to its facilities to organizations and individuals across the City of Toronto.*

*To reduce barriers to access, each community organization using Parks and Recreation Division permitted space will support the creation of an equitable society through the organization's effort to undertake planned, monitored and coordinated activities aimed at enabling diverse communities to participate fully in their services, programs and decision-making.*

Club executives have the difficult problem of trying to ensure “fair and equitable access” while reconciling the interests of the three broad groups of players: competitive team players, players in club programs, and casual members. This is especially challenging at Sir Winston which is a large club where the members of these three groups do not always know and understand each other well.

### **Sir Winston's Congestion Issue**

Congestion has been a recurring concern at Sir Winston. The summer of 2004 may have been particularly so as the rainy weather reduced the number of court hours available to all potential users of the courts.

The summer began with a strong inflow of new members but the lack of access to courts in the June and July period apparently convinced some of them that their membership fees were not providing good value.

### **Survey of Toronto Community Clubs**

While Sir Winston's congestion problem is real, and may in part reflect its location within the city, a better understanding and approach to the issues can be gained by gathering facts from other community clubs in Toronto. A survey was designed to do this. It asks for basic information on club size in terms of number of courts and membership, and then for information on programming such as teams, house league, socials and lessons. The survey also asks whether congestion is a problem for the club in question, and what, if any, policies have been implemented at the club in order to mitigate it. The survey has yielded a lot of useful information and ideas that has been helpful in leading to the recommendations on a congestion management strategy for Sir Winston.

### **Discussion of Survey Results**

So far 7 responses to the survey have been received.

*Members per court and Teams per court*

One goal of the survey research is to compute the ratios “members per court” and “teams per court” for each club and see how they interact in generating an answer to the question “Do you consider court congestion to be a problem at your club”. The member per court ratio gives a general index of how intensely the courts at a given club are used. The teams per court ratio indicates the demand team programming in particular places on courts. It would seem natural to expect that a club that has both a high members per court ratio and a high teams per court ratio is more likely to report that congestion is a problem – holding constant other forms of programming. Also, these two ratios would be expected to trade off. A club with a lower members per court ratio should be able to support a higher teams per court ratio, again holding constant other forms of club programming.

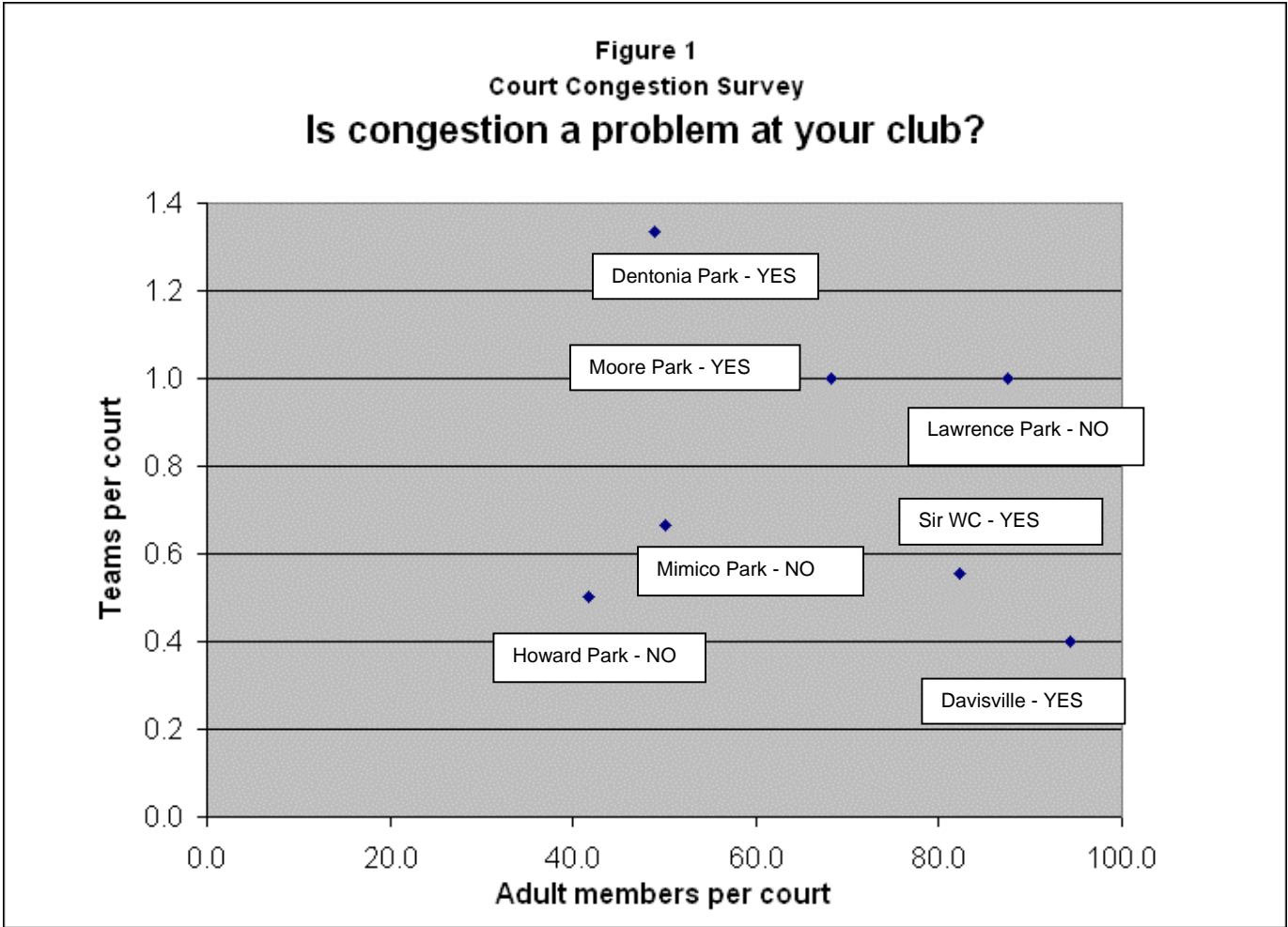
The numbers reported do seem broadly consistent with the expectations discussed above. Four clubs have relatively high members per court and teams per court ratios and all report that congestion is a problem. Two clubs have relatively lower ratios here and report that congestion is not a problem. One club, Lawrence Park, has anomalous results: it has high numbers but indicates that congestion is not a problem. (See Table 1 and Figure 1 below). This club’s survey response indicated that in Lawrence Park’s case members just did not turn out to play very much, and they experienced a negative congestion problem – more non-members were coming out to use the club than members were.

Table 1

Members per court and teams per court<sup>1</sup>

Club Name	Adult Members per Court	Teams per Court (Prime Time)	Congestion a problem?
Sir Winston	82.2	0.6	yes
Howard Park	41.7	0.5	no
Davisville	94.4	0.4	yes
Dentonia Park	49.0	1.3	yes
Mimico	50.0	0.7	yes
Lawrence Park	87.5	1.0	No
Moore Park	68.3	1.0	Yes

<sup>1</sup> Note that the number of courts used in the “Members per court” and “Teams per court” ratios in Table 1 and Figure 1 are non-teaching courts. Therefore Sir Winston’s number of courts for this purpose is 9.



An interesting feature of Figure 1 is the almost linear downward sloping relationship traced out by the “YES” dots.

### *Other Programming*

As for other forms of programming, the clubs generally seemed fairly similar. All 7 clubs have a pro offering lessons, social round robins, and a junior program. Five of the 7 clubs have a house league. These broad similarities in other forms of programming seem to make the “other forms of programming held constant” assumption more reasonable.

### ***Some Congestion Policies in Other Clubs***

Several of the clubs have made policy decisions on club programming in order to mitigate congestion problems.

Davisville, the club with the highest adult members per court in the survey, has done the most in terms of explicit limits on programming in order to deal with congestion. Davisville's policies are:

- A club by-law provides that a maximum of two teams are organized by the club
- Club pro teaching is restricted on league nights
- Communications – ensuring that all events are well communicated to members ahead of time.

Howard Park, although not a club that experiences serious congestion problems, has a policy that at least three (of a total of seven) courts must be available for general member use at all times. Also, on busy nights, singles playing is discouraged.

Moore Park restricts the number of teams to four. This club also does not allow house league to start up until later in the season when team playing has concluded.

Mimico restricts club pro teaching to Monday nights for two hours.

Dentonia Park does not allow team practices during prime time.

Our own club, Sir Winston, reduced the numbers allowed into house league to 48 in order to reduce congestion. Also, the Sir Winston website has proven to be effective at communicating information to members about court usage and availability.

Although High Park Tennis Club and Kew Gardens club are not in this survey, they are known to pursue some interesting congestion management policies. High Park, which has only three courts and three teams, plays all House League and Team matches offsite, usually at Eglinton Flats. Kew Gardens, which has ten courts and eleven teams, plays some team matches offsite at Mayfair Lakeshore. This can be particularly convenient when bad weather threatens. As

Mayfair Lakeshore is an indoor facility the opportunity exists to play a league match as scheduled even if it is raining. This results in a win/win, as the team does not have to delay its match, and no rainout match need be rescheduled and therefore contribute to court congestion.

### ***A Review of Policy Choices for Sir Winston***

Sir Winston could derive some improvements in its congestion picture by thinking about it in an organized or holistic way, and developing a congestion management strategy involving several elements. Possible elements for a congestion management strategy are discussed below.

#### *Guarantee Court Availability*

Over the past summer some scheduling of events was occurring without apparent regard for availability implications. On some weekday evenings only 2 courts were available for tagging. Event scheduling should be tightened up and conformed to a policy such as “at least 5 courts available during weeknights”. Overriding such a policy for a special event should require the approval of an executive.

#### *Better Communications / Manage Expectations*

Sir Winston is a high demand club and is likely to experience some congestion no matter how programming is managed. Better and more frequent communication on what programming is occurring, and when courts are more, or less, available could help all members plan their tennis activities more effectively. The calendar on the new website has gone a long way to accomplishing this objective. Building on this success by including more information on the calendar would be a good idea.

#### *Move House League to a Weekend Afternoon*

Moving House League to, say, Saturday afternoon would open up Wednesday nights to full 9-court availability. It would also open up possibilities for re-designing the format in a way that could increase participation. For example, adopting the Eglinton Flats format of four divisions (each one including 8 doubles teams – each division playing bi-weekly for 2 straight hours)<sup>2</sup> would increase

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<sup>2</sup> The Flats format provides for four divisions, all playing by-weekly on Thursday nights. On one Thursday night the women’s 3.0 division plays from 7-9 p.m. followed by the men’s 3.0 from 9-11 p.m. On the other Thursday night the women’s 3.5 - 4.0 division plays from 7-9 p.m. while the men’s 3.5 - 4.0 division plays from 9-11 p.m. In this format the teams in each division meet and play all at the same time. Each team gets to know all the other teams in its division, leading to a much better competitive and social experience. Sir Winston could adapt this to Saturday afternoons, one division playing from 2-4 p.m., the next playing from 4-6 p.m. On the following Saturday the other two divisions would play. The divisions would be classed by skill level but probably with no gender restrictions.

participation to 64 people from our current 48. Using 5 courts instead of 4, and therefore allowing a division to include 10 doubles teams, would increase possible participation to 80 people.

House League is a program for which there is heavy excess demand, and serious disappointment among those members who fail to get in on Opening Day in April. Moving House League to Saturday afternoon both frees court time on Wednesday night, and expands possibilities for participating.

#### *Place a Cap on the Number of Teams Playing Weeknights*

Each Intercounty Team plays a home game one week followed by an away game the next week. Therefore, as far as weeknight congestion is concerned, to have the same effect as moving House League to the weekend would require the elimination of two teams. This would be a serious “amputation” measure that would gravely disappoint our competitive team players. Eliminating one team would only have half the effect of moving House League. A more harmonious approach is to ensure minimum 5-court availability via the scheduling policy discussed above.

#### *Play some League Matches Offsite*

A good opportunity exists for Sir Winston to reduce court congestion by playing some league matches at an indoor facility that might otherwise be rained out. A team captain could assess weather prospects about two days in advance of a match, make a decision to go indoors, and book the needed courts at Mayfair Lakeshore or Mayfair West. The captain would then notify all team members, the opposing team captain, and the Sir Winston webmaster or Communications director who would then post this information on the website. This match would then be played indoors whether the rain occurred or not. If it does not rain, casual members have increased access to courts that night. If it does rain – no rainout match need be scheduled in the future. The advantages for both teams and casual members are obvious.

The court booking costs for this policy would be borne by the club. The executive could decide on a budget cap per year for team use of indoor facilities. A cap of \$1,200 would purchase at least 4 league matches (Mayfair courts charge \$25 per court per hour). This very significant contribution to reducing court congestion would cost about \$1.70 per adult member of Sir Winston.

#### *Move Programming to Full Cost Recovery*

Programming such as house league, tournaments, and teams provides their subscribers with privileged access to the courts, and other benefits such as pro coaching, balls and food. The costs of the other benefits are substantial and heavily subsidized by the membership who are, vis-à-vis the programs, last in

line for court access. It is hard to see how this arrangement furthers “fair and equitable access”. Cost-recovery pricing for programs might not greatly affect congestion, but is consistent with the broader principle of fair and equitable access.

*Ensure Team Selections are Transparent and Based on Merit*

While perhaps not directly impacting on congestion, this issue is certainly related to the broader theme of fair and equitable access. It appears that in at least one case Sir Winston teams have become private clubs where newcomers do not have a realistic chance of getting on the team even if they demonstrate superior skills. This is clearly an unfair and improper state of affairs. It should be addressed as part of a congestion management strategy, and would have to be addressed were the executive to contemplate other restrictions on team programming.

## **Recommendations For Congestion Management**

### **And Fair and Equitable Access**

- 1) A guarantee of minimum five courts availability during the summer on weeknights (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday). Exceptions to this policy for special events requires approval of one of the president, vice president or courts director.
- 2) House League is moved to Saturday afternoons to free up Wednesday nights for 9 court availability.
- 3) The option exists for teams to play matches at an indoor facility when bad weather threatens the cancellation of a match. The budget for this option would be set annually by the club executive.
- 4) Continue to develop the website as a communications tool for court availability and congestion, so as to manage member expectations and enable better member planning.
- 5) House League and Teams programming are moved to a cost recovery basis. The executive should decide on a minimum cost recovery percentage (recommended 75%) leaving the respective directors discretion to set the exact fee within this guideline.
- 6) Teams selection is to be done in a transparent and fair manner with a mandatory tryout. Teams will be selected by a panel consisting of the Club Pro and two executives. The panel will consider input from prospective team captains.