2019 Changes to Player Handbook

In 2018 we began to publish a document called the Hearthstone Tournament Player Handbook. The goal of this document was to attempt to unify tournament expectations for our players. The conclusion of the Hearthstone Championship Tour program is an opportunity to update the Tournament Player Handbook with learning from the previous year. Below you'll find a list of significant changes for 2019 and some insights into our philosophy of making them. We have to mention that this is a summary interpretation of the official rules. As such, if this post somehow contradicts the rules document, the official rules document prevails. We also have to mention that this is a summary of changes and that some changes may have been omitted. You can review the full rules document here: blizz.ly/HSrules

Applicability of Rules section

2.2 Applicability of Rules. This changed from the HCT ecosystem to the new Hearthstone Masters ecosystem. As in 2018, we are making efforts in ensuring that players across all tournaments: Master Tour Qualifiers, Master Tours, and Grandmasters have the same general expectations and experiences. In addition, we'll be holding other tournament programs to the same standards of rules. These include any Inn-vitational tournaments, our Collegiate tournaments, and certain third-party licensed tournaments.

Eligibility Section

3.1 Participation and Eligibility. Changes in this section are centered around concepts of invitation-only tournaments. Players who are invited to a Masters Tours can't play in Qualifiers for that Masters Tour and conversely players can't play in the Masters Tour without an invite.

In addition, this section introduces a new concept: Hearthstone Esports Suspended list which can be found here: blizz.ly/suspended. Players on this list cannot play in Hearthstone tournaments for the duration of their suspension. Also, players who may be under the investigation that can lead to a potential suspension may be informed by us that they cannot play pending an outcome of that investigation.

3.2 Residency Requirements. For the HCT ecosystem in 2018, your residency dictated much more with how you engaged with different tournaments. Most players had a home region for which they were trying to gain points in order to go to that region's playoffs. For 2019, we are hoping to create a more open system. Eligible players from any region may participate in any Masters Qualifier and Masters Tour. As a result, section 3.2 lost a few rules that no longer made sense to us: rules that forced you to play matches from the country listed on your Battle.net account and notify when you travel outside of that country of residence.

Tournament Structure Section

4.4 Swiss Pairings Tournament. For 2019 we'll continue to use Swiss Pairings Tournaments (commonly abbreviated as Swiss) for the majority of the tournaments. We believe that Swiss offers the best experience for players: those who are not doing well in the tournament can continue to play, but only if they want. Those who are only specifically looking to make top 8, can drop and go play in the next tournament.

We've also added an explanation of our tiebreakers. This always existed on the platforms we used to run tournaments, but never officially in our rules.

We've cleaned up the table that prescribes how many Swiss rounds are required for specific number of players. We believe that the new player thresholds and top cuts will result in all players with a X-1 win/loss record (or better) making it to the top playoff. In some cases, some players with an X-2 win/loss record will also make it.

Finally, we added a new concept called Feature Matches to the rules document. These are matches that will end up in the tournament broadcast, so we wanted to be a little more specific on what these are and of player's expectations of these.

Tournament Mechanics Section

5.2 Card Collections. We've added a new concept called Tournament Play Accounts (sometimes also called Super Accounts). We've already been using this concept over the last few years, so it made sense to formally document it in the rules.

5.3 Formats. With the announcement of a new format for 2019, this section and subsequent sections changed slightly. [You can read more about the format philosophies here.](#) Section 5.4 covers the mechanics of the Specialist format.

5.10 Written Notes and Deck Tracking Software. In 2018 one of the most common questions we received prior to the tournament is on that specific tournament's policy around using written notes and deck tracking software. For 2019, we've officially codified this into our rules. Players are now able to take and use notes during a match for both online and live tournaments. Players will be able to use deck tracking software for online tournaments so long as it complies with the requirements outlined in the handbook.

5.11 Spectators. Players generally understood that they may not allow spectators to spectate tournament matches. For 2019 we specifically codified this into our rules as well as provided an exception for official tournament admin-controlled accounts.

5.12 Game Ties. This is a new section that attempt to unify a couple of concepts we've had ever since Hellfire and Deadman's Hand were tournament-worthy cards. In observing the application of this rule in 2018, it always felt like tied games, while important, tended to create a negative playing experience for the rest of the tournament field. The ties tended to happen in matchups that were already long, usually going into fatigue, so a replay of that game almost always resulted in this specific match being the longest in the round.

For 2019, the rule for ties changed with the goal of in most cases progressing the match. Now if you tie, both players receive a game win and a game loss simultaneously, which advances the match score. If this happens in the last game and we can't get a clear winner from the match score, that will be the only time when we either apply combined health/armor totals to evaluate a winner or replay the game.

5.13 Hardware and Software Failures. This was a difficult decision to make, but ultimately we believe this version of the rule creates the most fair tournament environment possible. We know that our client is not perfect, and we know that with the thousands of hardware configurations players may bring to a tournament, hardware and client failures may happen. Given the significance of online tournaments

with Hearthstone Masters program, we believe that the only reasonable path forward that does not result in exploitation of the rule is to clearly define the responsibility for hardware, software, and connection on the player participating in the tournament. As such, technical errors and client-side graphical freezes that in the past caused us to replay games will no longer trigger replays of the game.

5.14 Banned Cards List. In 2018, Hearthstone esports saw its first banning of a card from tournament play. This rule officially recognizes the banned cards concept.

Player Infractions and Penalties Section

7.4 Wrong Deck Selection. We've added to the already existing definition of this infraction to accommodate our new format. If you incorrectly select a secondary or tertiary deck during game one, or if you select a deck other than what you indicated you were playing, you committed this infraction which carries a game loss penalty.

7.6 Failure to check in on time. In 2018 this section primarily existed for Playoffs tournaments. With the elimination of Playoffs tournaments in 2019, this section expanded to accommodate more tournaments--both live and online.

7.11 Cheating. We've added a section that tightens up our stance on players seeking match advice from other players. In addition, we made sure that deck tracking applications are exempted from software that is considered cheating.

7.13 Win Trading on Ladder. This is a new section in our Player Handbook but is not necessarily a new process for us. Over the last few years, we've had internal teams evaluate this activity on ladder monthly and suspend accounts of those who we determined to have traded a significant number of ladder games in the monthly season. This rule now formalizes that accounts we find win trading are also suspended or rendered ineligible for participating in our competitive ecosystem for 12 months. We will not be retroactively going back and applying this additional punishment.

7.14 Penalty Investigations Process. This section aims to be more transparent about how we receive and investigate allegations of cheating or other serious misconduct in tournaments. In addition, we outline that players receive a message from us that acts as a wrap-up for our investigation and advises the players if they received any additional sanctions that would preclude them from playing in future tournaments.

General Terms and Conditions Section

11.4 Translations. We've added a clause that explicitly makes the English language version of these rules to supersede other versions in order to ensure that if this document is localized for convenience, players have a common document to reference in case of disagreements.