



# ILLINOIS CHESS COACHES ASSOCIATION

[www.ILChessCoach.org](http://www.ILChessCoach.org)

Chess competition enables individuals to recognize the importance of their thought processes and to accept the consequences of their own decisions. The ICCA provides instruction, competition, and camaraderie in which physical power does not control the outcome of the contest and no physical disability prevents any boy or girl from participating.

## JANUARY NEWSLETTER 2026 – VOL 11, ISSUE 02

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### Prepping for the IHSA Series...

The vast majority of our ICCA members are middle or high school coaches, and January is the time to prepare for the IHSA and IESA series. That means a long list of To-Do items as well as end-of-season traditions. Below, I've tried to list out some of those items. If you need support with any of them, reach out to your coach network.

#### **KEY TO-DO ITEMS AND DATES**

*Be sure that your team completes each of the necessary steps below. If you need help, ask!*

- **January 13th (Tuesday) - Deadline to submit roster of all players and coaches in the List of Participants form through the IHSA Schools Center** - This is the date where you must have entered ALL of the players on your team into the IHSA system. You will only be able to pull from this list later when making your Sectionals and/or State Final lineups.
- **January 21st (Wednesday) - Deadline to view online rules presentation** - You, as a coach, must watch the rules presentation in the IHSA Schools Center. It is available NOW, so you can complete it any time between now and the deadline.
- **January 26th**
  - **10:00am - Season Summaries DUE** - You must have entered your team's matches, results, and your comments to the IHSA system by 10am, it's open all season long for you to adjust along the way
  - **11:00am - Sectional Seeding begins** - Coaches must now "seed" the teams in their sectional
- **January 27th**
  - **12:00pm - Sectional Seeding DUE** - Your seeding must be complete by noon.
  - **4:00pm** - Sectional seeding matrices will be posted
- **January 28th**
  - **11:59pm - Strength Order lineups for SECTIONALS are DUE**
- **January 31st** - IHSA Sectional Tournaments
- **February 2nd** - Qualifiers for State Finals is posted by IHSA
- **February 4th**
  - **11:59pm - Strength Order lineups for STATE FINALS are DUE**
- **February 8th** - Seeding meeting occurs
- **February 13-14th** - IHSA State Final Tournament!

***Below, you'll find some tips on how to make it through Championship season. These are written for IHSA events, but most tips apply to all tournaments. Good luck, and if you need more support, please ask your conference coaches or shoot us an email at [Secretary@ILChessCoach.org](mailto:Secretary@ILChessCoach.org)***

- **Seeding Sectionals** – This is a key step in the IHSA series process that is often overlooked by coaches. Be sure to know how to login and complete that procedure. You've only got 25 hours to complete the task, but it only takes a few minutes. There are a ton of resources available to help support your decisions, please ask for help if you feel like you could use a refresher! And set a reminder so you don't forget; every coach's input is critical to making the system work most effectively.
  - Video on "How to Seed Sectionals" - [YouTube.com/watch?v=qBSMqIBuw3Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBSMqIBuw3Y)
  - IHSA Manual, which has all the information needed - [IHSA 2025-26 Chess Team Manual](#)
  - ICCA Team Data Sheet - [bit.ly/ICCAteams](http://bit.ly/ICCAteams)
  - ICCA Conferences page (links to all season information) - [ILChessCoach.org/conferences](http://ILChessCoach.org/conferences)
  - ICCA Results page (links to all ICCA tournament results) - [ILChessCoach.org/Results](http://ILChessCoach.org/Results)
- Book your bus rides to and from Sectionals and State events. It's easier to cancel a bus than to schedule one last minute, so be sure to have your transportation arrangements made.
- Book your hotel rooms in Peoria for the State tournament. This should be done early, but if you haven't done it yet, the time is NOW! I set a reminder in my calendar each Fall to book rooms. This is another situation where it's a lot simpler to cancel reservations than to make last-second arrangements.
- Figure out your food situation! Some Sectional sites will have concessions, some will not. Once you know where your team is going, be sure to figure out what kind of food options you'll have available for lunch and possibly for dinner on the way home. Make some plans to bring healthy snacks and water to keep your team in peak performance shape. For the State tournament, make a plan ahead of time for lunch. The Civic Center concession stand has not been very effective in the past few years, and with limits on bringing in outside food, it's a good idea to make plans ahead of time for feeding your team between rounds.
- Plan for procedures. Does your team have a set plan for what players are supposed to do between rounds? How to communicate with one another? Does your existing protocol need some updating? Now is the time to make sure that your team knows where to go, what to do, who to ask for help, what to bring, etc. (You can use this "[rules and procedures quiz](#)" to help develop your protocols!)
- Build your team culture! Your Sectionals and State Finals plans should include something to make it special for your team. These end-of-season events may be the last time your players compete in team chess, and it can be a highlight of their high school career. All it takes is a basic plan to award players, celebrate the team's memories and accomplishments, or even just a rousing speech. If you don't have any traditions or want to update your own, ask around and see what others do! After the State final, my team has an awards & pizza night followed by a tournament the next day.

As you reflect on the season, if you find that there are any aspects of your program that need improvement, let us know how we can support your efforts. The ICCA has a ton of resources, including the best chess coaches in the country. If we don't have the support you need already in place, let us know and we'll get to work on it!

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### **IHSA State Chess Team Final Tournament Seeding**

The IHSA State Chess Team final event is seeded by committee, and coaches are always asking about how it works, why they're seeded where they are, so it's about time we write this up.

The basics: the committee is made up of conference representatives ([ILChessCoach.org/conferences](http://ILChessCoach.org/conferences)). Each conference has its own system of determining who to send. All of the committee members receive a copy of the ICCA data sheet as well as all of the season summaries submitted to IHSA. This includes the coaches predictions for how many wins they think their teams will win at State. Then, each committee member predicts a number of wins for teams and sends that back to the IHSA Chief TD. He compiles all of these predictions, averages them together, and that gives the committee a rough starting point for the meeting. At that meeting, the reps will take that list, and seed teams according to the IHSA rules. The first 16 teams are seeded individually by the committee.

The next groups of 8 are seeded by group and then randomly assigned a seed within that group. The bottom half (65-128) are seeded by groups of 16 and then randomly assigned a seed within that group.

So how does the committee actually seed teams? Discussion. The group discusses each team's record from the season, all of the info provided for that team. By comparing teams one to the other, checking their records, looking at who played whom at what point in the year, etc, the committee discusses until they reach a consensus about the team of the moment. It's a lot of information, but committee members are well versed in the data all season, so it's not all that cumbersome. Each year's seeding meeting flows a little differently, but usually the biggest chunk of time and discussion is spent on the top 16 teams. Everyone is very careful to get it right, to the best of their ability. Then the teams seeded by groups are discussed at length by comparing the current group with the next group. The questions that guide the committee are, "Are there any other teams that need to move into this group? And if so, which teams need to move to a lower group?" By this process, teams are moved into a group or out of a group based on what the committee members suggest. Preference is usually given to the coach representing that team's conference; the idea is that this rep has the most access to the most accurate information about that team.

So what does this mean for you?

Input all of your data. Talk to your conference rep. Be sure to provide as much accurate information as possible so the committee can compare your team to others. And of course, all questions! Your team is seeded based on how it played throughout the season. Every match, every point, every win and loss can be considered in this process.

Questions? Comments? Concerns? Confusions? Share them all: [Secretary@ILChessCoach.org](mailto:Secretary@ILChessCoach.org)

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### **ICCA Division Awards**

Every year, the ICCA awards teams that do not score IHSA awards. Since IHSA only awards teams with 6.0 points and trophies for the top 3 teams, teams with 5.5 or below deserve some recognition from the ICCA. Consequently, each year, we divide the field of teams into 6 divisions by population (as measured by the IHSA) and award the best performance in each group. To include all participating teams, the ICCA divisions will be sorted out once we have a final list of teams participating in the Sectionals.

The complete list of teams in each Division will be found on the ICCA Tournament Results page, on the IHSA State Chess Team Tournament Results page ([found here](#)). That page will be updated at various points and completed after the IHSA State Final Tournament to reflect the results of Sectionals and the Final tournament.

ICCA Division Award winners will receive a plaque and an official letter at their buildings, sent from the ICCA. Good luck to all teams, and if you have any questions about how the ICCA Division Awards work, please don't hesitate to reach out and ask!

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### **Individual Awards for IHSA State Final – Glenn Panner, Coach**

Individual medals are back again this year! Thanks to [Chess Weekend](#) for sponsoring and continuing to provide these awards. The Zacate Individual Achievement Award will be given to individual players who have performed well at the IHSA State Chess Team Tournament. Players scoring 6.5 or 7.0 points will get a Gold medal, those scoring 6.0 points are awarded a Silver medal, and players with 5.5 points will get a Bronze medal.

To claim these awards, Coach Glenn Panner will have a table set up at the IHSA event. After your player has finished their final game, you can claim the medals immediately by verifying the final score for the player. You may also pick up your award the following weekend in Schaumburg at the [US Amateur Team-North Championships](#). Glenn can be reached at [glennpan@gmail.com](mailto:glennpan@gmail.com).

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### **Coach of the Year, Nominations are Open**

Every year, the ICCA nominates and elects a Coach of the Year. It's an honor bestowed upon coaches who do great work with their teams, with their conferences, and with the ICCA. We are still accepting nominations for the 2025-26 season. Please go to the ICCA website, click on the "Coach of the Year" tab, and read previous submissions and winners. Then click the link to nominate a coach that you think deserves recognition. If you're ready to nominate someone, got to: <https://goo.gl/XbiY8D> and submit your nomination. Voting happens during the State tournament, so look for your ballot in February. Be sure to read the nominations and vote!

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## IESA State Chess Tournament

Two weeks after the IHSA State Chess Tournament, the IESA holds their annual final tournament at the Peoria Civic Center. The tournament has 3 sections scored by the Individual/Team Medley format. Sections are divided by grade level: 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade section allows 5<sup>th</sup> graders to play, as well. Teams can allocate their players in each section to give themselves the best chance of winning, with the restriction that no player can play beneath their grade level.

The tournament began in 2011 and it is quickly growing. It's a great way to introduce competitive chess to hundreds (or thousands!) of middle school students. This great program is helping to push Illinois Scholastic Chess to greater heights. If your district or area has an elementary and middle school chess program, be sure to encourage them to check out the IESA event. More information about it can be found here: [IESA Chess page](#). If you need help setting up a K-8 chess program in your area/district, please let the ICCA know. We're here to help support your players and your programs.

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## Upcoming Tournaments

Coaches can always see a full list of tournaments on the [Tournament Schedule](#) page of the website. That list contains all the ICCA/IHSA related tournaments and occasionally, we post USCF-rated, ICA-related events as well. For more information on USCF or ICA events, visit [il-chess.org](#). If you're interested in which teams typically compete at each tournament, click on the "Results Page" links to view previous years' results and participating teams. January and February are the "post-season" of the Scholastic Chess world, but there are also several great rated events that you should be aware of. Check out the list below:

- *There are still several open ICCA/IHSA-qualifying tournaments happening in January...*
  - *January 10th*
    - [Brimfield Invitational](#) - Brimfield, IL
    - [Winter Castle Classic](#) - Joliet, IL
    - [Naperville Central Chess Tournament](#) - Naperville, IL
  - *January 17th*
    - [CICL Classic](#) - Normal, IL
    - [West Chicago Tournament #2](#) - West Chicago, IL
- **Conference Tournaments** – January 17<sup>th</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> – Each conference holds their own conference tournament using their own desired format. Many conferences run their tournament as a qualifying event for the IHSA Series. Be sure to ask your conference how to register and play in your conference event.
- **IHSA Sectionals** – January 31<sup>st</sup> – You'll receive information about your assigned location from IHSA, you'll need to win 2 out of 4 rounds to advance to the State Final in February. Of course, several 1-win teams will also advance, based on their IHSA Tie-break score. Every board counts!
- **IHSA State Final Tournament** – February 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> – When you qualify at Sectionals, you'll advance to the annual State Final Tournament. This is the big one!
- **US Amateur Team Championship-North** – February 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> – USChess hosts 4 regional team tournaments each year, and Illinois is usually a host location for the North event. This year Chess Weekend is organizing the event in Schaumburg. Teams of 4 (+1 alternate) compete in 5 rounds for a fantastic experience. This is a truly wonderful annual event. If you've never been, you should! Your players can attend, or maybe you want to organize a team of fellow coaches. Either way, don't miss this rated event!
- **IESA State Chess Tournament** – February 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> - This 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade event has been running for several years and is well worth the trip! Schools may enter a limited number of players in each section, and each section runs as an Individual/Team Medley with the Top 4 scores from each team combining to a team score to determine the top teams in each section. Talk to your K-8 programs to see how you can support their attendance at this State Final event!

- **Looking ahead...** at March and beyond, there are some important events to put on your calendar! These state- and national-level championship events are for individuals and/or teams. There are no qualifying events for these, everyone is welcome and can play! If you have questions, let us know!
  - March 6th-8th - [Illinois K8 Championships](#) in Schaumburg, IL
  - March 14th - [HS Nationals Warm-Up](#) at Benet Academy (Lisle, IL)
  - March 27th-29th - [2026 High School Chess \(K-12\) Nationals](#) in Chicago, IL
  - April 10th-12th - [All-Girls Nationals](#) in Chicago, IL

This is just a part of the list, and there are several more events throughout the season. For ICCA and IHSA-qualifying events, it's best to register early and report a lineup/roster closer to the event. Rated chess events often have entry fees that increase closer to the event date, so be sure to register as soon as you can!

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### **Call for Newsletter Submissions**

We're hoping that this newsletter will be a space for coaches to help other coaches get connected with resources, coaching ideas, and information they need to run a successful chess program. If you've got anything regarding coaching tips, resources to use, or other specific areas of interest, great. If not, then just write whatever you think other coaches would benefit from knowing! We're hoping to establish an archive that new coaches in years to come will be able to browse through to learn about the ICCA, our history, and our ideas on being Illinois Chess Coaches.

If you're willing to write an article or have ideas on how to improve the newsletter, please send those ideas to the ICCA Secretary ([Secretary@ILChessCoach.org](mailto:Secretary@ILChessCoach.org)). We want to make sure that the newsletter is more than just a listing of important information, we want it to be something you look forward to reading! We've got the talent in our ranks, just send us your thoughts, and we'll help turn it into a high-quality article.