

Rules for Scottish FIRE Sanctioned Competitions

I. GENERAL

- A. A Scottish fiddle competition will be considered FIRE sanctioned if:
- The organizers agree to use FIRE rules and FIRE certified judges.
 - The organizers give information about the competition to Scottish FIRE when requested to do so.
 - The organizers send a competition report form and list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of competitors to the Vice President for Competitions immediately after the competition. Copies of the report form must also be sent to the Newsletter editor and to the organizer of the U.S. National Scottish Fiddling Championships.
 - The organizers should inform all winners of each local or regional Scottish fiddling competition of the requirement of FIRE membership for participation in the U.S. National Scottish Fiddling Championships as a qualification for participation in that competition and should provide the winner with a FIRE membership application if the winner is not already a FIRE member in good standing.

Scottish FIRE sanction is obtained to assure that all Scottish fiddle competitions in the U.S. use the same rules and performance standards. Scottish FIRE sanction is extended by the President to competitions meeting the above criteria; sanction may also be extended to competitions using variants of Scottish FIRE rules if sanction is requested and the organizers seek prior approval of the changes in the rules.

- B. The name of the competition must be approved by Scottish FIRE in advance and may not duplicate or approximate the title of any other Scottish FIRE sanctioned competition.
- C. The rules of the competition and its conduct shall assure that no contestant has a competitive advantage over any other contestant as a result of anything other than ability as demonstrated during the performance in the competition.
- D. The rules of the competition, performance standards, and judging guidelines should be distributed to all competitors before the competition.
- E. The sponsor/host should provide at least one person on its organizational staff (preferably a resident in the area of the event and in proximity to the key logistics officials) whose duties are to serve as steward for the event. See "Guidelines for Competition Organizers and Stewards" for details of specific responsibilities.

II. STAGING AND CONDUCT OF THE COMPETITION

- A. The event should be staged in an area, which, for the duration of the competition, is relatively free of significant conflicting noise (i.e., bagpipes, drums, whistles, horns, heavy machinery, or loud engine noises).
- B. On the day of the competition, the sponsor will provide a sheltered area at or near the site of the competition where the contestants may warm up and relax. This area may also be used by contestants who want to demonstrate the art of Scottish fiddling to interested observers. The location of this site should be made known to the fiddlers and to the public.

C. Competitors are encouraged to become FIRE members, but membership in FIRE is not mandatory - **except for participation in the U.S. National Scottish Fiddling Championships where FIRE membership is required.** Stewards of individual competitions may require FIRE membership for competitors if they choose to do so. Stewards must keep a careful record of all competitors' names, addresses and telephone numbers and send these to the FIRE Vice President for Competitions with the competition report. The names, addresses and telephone numbers of the winners should be sent to the organizer of the U.S. National Scottish Fiddling Championship.

D. Competitors in FIRE sanctioned competitions need not be U.S. citizens, nor need they be residents of the U.S. in order to compete.

E. Order of competition:

1. Competitors are grouped by classes. (For example, all junior competitors play, then all novice competitors, then all open class competitors.)

2. Within each class, the competitors will play in reverse order of registration, that is, competitors whose entries were received earliest play last and those whose entries were received last play first. The steward determines the order of playing in each class by keeping a record of the order in which entries were received. EXCEPTIONS TO THIS RULE: The competitor who won the competition the previous year may choose to play last regardless of when the entry was received.

The order of play for the U.S. National competition will be chosen by lottery.

F. In Scottish style competitions the **Open and Junior** class competitors will first play an air, followed by a pause. Then the competitor will play without pausing between the tunes: a march, a strathspey, and a reel, in that order. **Novice** class competitors will play three tunes, either [1] an air, followed by a pause, then without pausing between tunes, a strathspey and a reel; or [2] a march, strathspey, and a reel played without pausing between tunes. [See part IV, Performance Standards. These should be distributed to all competitors.]

G. The air/march/strathspey/reel open class competition should be supported by prizes or awards significantly greater than those provided for any of the individual tunes or supplemental competitions. Prizes may also be given for individual tunes within the air/march/strathspey/reel competition, i.e., best air, best march, best strathspey, and best reel. Separate supplemental competitions could include laments and slow tunes, jigs, hornpipes, etc.

H. No substitutions of other types of tunes will be permitted in air/march/ strathspey/reel competitions. Please see part V, Judging Guidelines, for types of tunes permitted in each category.

I. Definition of classes of competitors:

1. Open: Any fiddler may compete in this class.
2. Novice: Open to any fiddler new to the art of Scottish fiddling, no age restrictions. When a novice competitor has won first place in three novice class competitions, that competitor will be required to enter in the open or junior class (if under 18).
3. Junior: Open to any fiddler under the age of 18.

J. Eligibility for U.S. National Competition ~ *Competitors must compete on a **4-string violin**. The violin may be tuned as the performer wishes including scordatura.*

1. Open Class

a. First second and third place winners of the U.S. National Competition from the past five years are qualified for the finals.

b. All first place winners from any FIRE sanctioned regional competition held after the most recent past U.S. National Competition. Competitors who qualify within 2 weeks prior to the Nationals have the option of competing in the following year.

c. A second place competitor in a FIRE sanctioned regional competition is qualified for the finals in the following instances: [1] the first place winner was the current U.S. National Champion **OR** [2] if there was a playoff for first place and the judge recommended that the second place competitor be allowed to compete in the finals. In the latter case, the second place winner would not receive any travel money for travel to the U.S. Nationals.

d. The organizer of the U.S. Nationals may stage a preliminary competition immediately before the U.S. Nationals to allow competitors to qualify for the U.S. Nationals. At this special competition, the judge(s) may advance any competitors to the finals that the judge(s) feels are qualified for the Nationals. There is no predetermined limit to the number of competitors who may be advanced to the finals from this special competition only.

e. Eligibility for local competitions held at the National's site immediately prior to the Nationals: Any competitor who has NOT previously qualified for the Nationals in any way may choose to compete at the preliminary local competition held immediately prior to the Nationals at the Nationals site. The local competition is held specifically for the purpose of allowing competitors to qualify for the Nationals if they were unable to do so in other local competitions.

2. Junior Class:

a. The rules for eligibility for the U.S. Nationals junior class are the same as for the open class if the competitor is still under 18 at the time of the U.S. National Competition. If a competitor is under 18 and has qualified for both the open and the junior classes, that competitor may choose to compete in either class (but may compete in only one class).

b. Competitors under 18 who have qualified and played in the open class in the U.S. Nationals may choose to compete in either junior or open class in subsequent National competitions if they are eligible for the finals.

c. Competitors who qualified for the junior class finals of the U.S. Nationals but are over 18 at the time of the Nationals must compete in the open class ***in the year they turn 18. Thereafter, they must qualify for the open class Nationals in regional competitions.***

d. Competitors under age 18 who have won an open class regional competition may compete in either open or junior class at the U.S. Nationals.

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K. Competitors may enter any one class for which they are qualified in any single competition. The judge will assign the competitor to the appropriate class if there is a question about which class is appropriate. The judge may assign the competitor either before or after they play.

L. The use of written music is optional in any class unless otherwise stated in the rules of a particular competition. (This rule is intended to encourage new fiddlers who may need written music.)

M. The steward's decision to accept or reject late entries will be final.

N. Highland attire (such as kilt for men, kilted skirt or dress with tartan sash for women) for competitors is strongly preferred and encouraged.

III. JUDGING

A. All judging shall be performed by people who are themselves competent in the art of Scottish fiddling, or who are internationally recognized by their knowledge of the art. Judges must be certified in advance by Scottish FIRE [see list of approved judges] and should be thoroughly familiar with Scottish FIRE rules and judging guidelines. Stewards may request approval of potential FIRE judges who are not on the approved list, from the President of Scottish FIRE before the competition. Contact the FIRE President or Vice President for Competitions for additional information on the process of judge certification.

B. All performers shall be judged against pre-established and pre-published criteria which must specify the factors to be considered and the relative weight to be given to each factor. The criteria listed in Part IV, Performance Standards, are preferred; any other criteria must have the pre-approval of Scottish FIRE.

C. All contestants in any event shall be judged by the same judge or set of judges. If two or more judges are used, all judges shall agree on the final ranking of the contestants.

D. In the event the judge(s) is/are unable to decide the ranking of contestants from the first performance:

1. The judge(s) may require a play-off. In this case the competitors concerned each play a strathspey and a reel without pausing between tunes. The competitor may choose to play any strathspey/reel set.

2. The judge(s) may declare a tie.

E. The opinion of the judge(s) shall be final as to all aspects of competitors' performances. The points awarded during judging are necessarily somewhat arbitrary and are used as a tool, not the sole deciding factor.

F. Following the competition, each competitor will be provided with a copy of each judge's score sheet and comments. [This may be the original, a carbon or NCR sheet, or a photocopy of the original.] Competitors wishing to have the judging sheets mailed to them must provide the steward with a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

IV. **PERFORMANCE STANDARDS** (Distribute to all competitors)

A. For the opening air and the march/strathspey/reel sequence, the following factors will be considered and weighted as follows:

TIME, 30 points: Tempo, continuity of music, rhythm. The tempo must be appropriate both to the tune chosen and to the style of execution. The rhythm must be appropriate to the tune chosen (i.e., strathspey, reel, etc.). While some variation may be appropriate for proper interpretation, the overall context and structure of the tune should not be lost to specific techniques of execution of expression.

EXECUTION, 30 points: Command of the instrument, both fingering and bowing, and technical skill in the playing or ornamentation, in correct intonation, and in the mastery of effects.

EXPRESSION/INTERPRETATION, 40 points: The quality of the performance that appeals to the listeners' feelings, reflecting the performer's judgment and ability in capturing and conveying the sentiment of the composer or the traditional associations of the tune. In the march/strathspey/reel sequence, the following additional factors will be considered as part of expression:

Transitions: March to strathspey and strathspey to reel. Does the transition suit the tunes and provide an effective bridge for the listener in terms of melodic flow, tonal and rhythmic punctuation?

Overall coherence and effect: Extent to which the tunes as played stand together as a coherent musical statement.

B. In all aspects, performance in the traditional Scottish style will be the significant element in distinguishing otherwise technically comparable performances.

C. Fiddlers will perform without any other accompanying instruments (guitar, piano, etc.) unless prior approval for the competition to allow the use of accompanying instruments is obtained from both Scottish FIRE and from the judge(s) for the competition. If accompaniment is allowed, that fact and the rules relating to accompaniment should be well publicized. Competitors will not be required to use accompaniment, but should be provided with an accompanist if they want one.

V. **GUIDELINES FOR JUDGES** in addition to rules and performance standards

A. Factors to be considered in scoring each piece:

Rhythm/Time, 30 points. Each piece should be played at the appropriate tempo. Competitors often play airs, marches and reels too fast.

Execution, 30 points. Intonation, technique, bowing control and good tone are important. Try to judge bowing not on specifics, but on results.

Interpretation, 40 points. Playing in the Scottish idiom is important, but try not to be prejudiced as to Northeast, Highland, or any other regional style.

Comments: Try to write as many helpful comments as you can. The idea of competitions is to encourage fiddlers, not to scare them off!

B. While judges are encouraged to use numerical scores in their assessment of the competitors' performances, numerical scores are still, in the end, only a guideline. Numerical scores alone are not used to rank competitors. If more than one judge adjudicates a competition, the judges must agree on how they will award points and determine winners before the competition begins, keeping in mind that performance in the traditional Scottish style is the significant element in distinguishing otherwise technically comparable performances.

C. Types of tunes permitted in each category:

The main criterion for the acceptability of any particular tune in any category should be how the tune is played, not how it was originally written. Transpositions from the original key and original tunes in the Scottish style are both permitted. Specifically permitted in each category are:

1. Air: any slow air, pastoral, slow strathspey, lament, or other tune played as an air.
2. March: any march (pipe march or other) whether 2/4, 4/4, 6/8, (or any other time signature) or any other tune played as a march.
3. Strathspey: any dance strathspey or other tune played as a strathspey.
4. Reel: any reel, Scots measure, hornpipe, or other tune played as a reel.
5. Waltzes, jigs (6/8 and 9/8) and hornpipes played in the original manner will NOT be allowed as substitutions for any of the categories above.