

WHAT HAPPENS AT A STRIKING COMPETITION AND WHY YOU SHOULD ENTER

Every time we ring, unless we use a simulator, we give a public performance. We should always therefore strive to produce the best ringing we can (although that's not always possible on a practice night when we're trying out new stuff). The purpose of a striking competition is to concentrate on good striking rather than complex methods, and to get ringers from different towers to meet together, and a bit of competition provides a structure.

Ideally, if you decide to enter a striking competition, you will practise as a team for a few weeks beforehand. Sometimes it is impossible to get a whole band together for the event, and our rules allow for up to three guest ringers so as to encourage smaller bands to enter. Choose your guests wisely: make sure they are good strikers!

In NE District we have effectively two competitions running in parallel: call changes and method. In the method competition bands have to ring 120 true changes, typically an extent of Plain Bob Doubles or Grandsire, but if bobs/singles are a problem you can just ring plain courses if the District Ringing Master agrees. In the call change competition the bells have to ring for 4 minutes, be called to Queens and back, and at some stage 2 bells apart from the treble have to lead. The District Ringing Master has discretion to allow inexperienced bands to dispense with the last requirement about bells leading, and if your band can only ring rounds that's fine as well. Please note that you should not ring call changes if you have a band that can ring a method: it's not fair on less able bands and the Ringing Master may therefore insist that you ring a method if you are able.

On the day of the competition the bells will usually be available for an hour or two before the competition so that you can have your own private practice to get used to the bells you will be competing on. This is the time to work out whether the ropes are the right length (so whether you'll need a knot or a box) and whether any of the bells are odd-struck. If there is a particular bell that proves to be very difficult to strike well, your team leader may decide to change the band placement rather than risk a succession of faults (striking errors), or they may just give the ringer of the dodgy bell instructions on how to deal with it: make sure you comply if it's you!

At the appointed hour one representative from each band will gather for the draw to determine who goes first, second etc. Going first can be a bit daunting but at least it gets it out of the way: going last means sitting listening for ages until it's your turn, but sometimes, if you listen carefully, you may notice that one bell is always quick or slow, and that knowledge can give you an advantage when it comes to your turn.

When it is your turn to ring, you'll get just a couple of minutes' practice. This is just so you can make sure that nobody has shortened all the ropes since you last rang, and so you can ring a few changes to get into the swing. Then off you go! Concentrate hard, do your best, and it will be over in no time.

After some time at the end for deliberations (i.e. adding up the faults) the judges will appear from their lair to give their verdict. The judges are chosen from outside our District because they don't know you very well. They won't be able to listen and say "I bet that's X on the treble, they're always slow at backstroke". All the bands will be anonymous, which means that an inexperienced band ringing well or an expert band ringing badly can (and often does) create a surprise result. Usually the judges note errors (faults) as they go along, and the team

that clocks up the fewest faults wins. Different judges score differently – for some a winning team may score 6 faults while another judge may give the same team 50 faults. Don't be dismayed if your team ends up with 100 faults: it's how you do relative to the other teams that counts. Sometimes judges will translate the faults into a percentage of perfect ringing and give a winning team say 83%. They will usually make a few brief comments about each team, and these can often be very instructive so do take them in a positive spirit. If you have done well enough to win a trophy, please keep your victory speech to a minimum (i.e. nothing). We have a third trophy, awarded by the District Ringing Master, to the most improved team – anyone entering for the first time is automatically in with a chance of this one, so if you are disappointed with your score all may not be lost!

If there are a lot of teams in the competition you will be sitting around for quite a while; use the time well to:

1. listen to the other bands and see if you can judge who is good, who not so good, and why;
2. talk to other ringers from other towers and compare notes – what are their practices like? how did they prepare for this day? You may find that there is a practice near you that would be beneficial for you to attend sometimes to try something you cannot at your tower;
3. enjoy the food!

Striking competitions can be nerve-wracking if you take them too seriously, but remember the reason we have them is to focus on improving striking and getting ringers together. It should be fun! If you come last (someone has to!) then determine to come last but one next year!

If you think it is all well and good in theory but in practice you just can't see how you can manage to get a team from your tower anywhere near up to entering, then feel free to talk to your District Ringing Master who may be able to offer some suggestions. It may be possible to get a couple of ringers the experience of entering as part of a scratch band. Go for it!

TIPS (mostly aimed at the conductor of call change entries)

- Make sure you put good ringers on the treble and tenor so that the leads and general rhythm are as good as they can be.
- Try and keep ringers who aren't very good at leading away from the lead or, if they have to lead, make sure they do so for as short a time as possible.
- Decide on a calling plan in advance and don't change it, so that all the band know what to expect.
- Read the rules thoroughly and make sure you understand what you have to include, in particular:
- The rounds at the beginning aren't judged, so take as long as you like to settle down before the first change.
- If you're back in rounds after only 3 minutes that's fine, but keep ringing rounds until the 4 minutes is up.
- Decide how you would like to use the timekeeper: you can ask them to tell you that 2,3,4 minutes are up, or to cough every 30 seconds or whatever, or you can tell them to clear off and let you do it, but if you DO use the timekeeper, it's one less thing you have to worry about.