

Q&A About Ratings

Following are answers to common questions about players getting ratings. More details can be found in the *Cincinnati Scholastic Chess Series Participant Handbook*, which can be downloaded from our website, www.chesscincinnati.com.

What is a rating?

A rating is a numerical measure of a player's playing strength. A player earns a rating by playing in a tournament section for which the game results are reported to the US Chess Federation (USCF). Based on these results, the USCF calculates one or more of several different ratings depending on the form of play (over-the-board, correspondence, Internet) and time control (blitz, quick, regular). A player is officially rated once the results of four or more of his or her games have been reported to the USCF. A rating is provisional (but still official) until the USCF has processed the results of 25 games for the player.

What is the difference between “non-rated” and “unrated”?

“Non-rated” describes a *tournament* or *section* in which the results of the games played are not reported to the USCF. “Unrated” describes a *player* who has not yet earned a rating. An unrated player may play in either a non-rated or a rated section. The player will earn a rating by playing in a rated section but not by playing in a non-rated section.

What about the ratings shown for the players in the Series non-rated section?

Our tournament software uses player ratings to generate pairings. Because the players in the non-rated section don't have official ratings, we need to supply unofficial ratings for them. For a player's first tournament we assign an arbitrary “rating” equal to his or her grade times 100, or 90 for a kindergartner. After that we use the player's most recent “final rating” as calculated by the tournament software. Nevertheless these players are still *officially unrated*. For that reason, any player who moves from the non-rated section to a rated section will begin play in the rated section as an unrated player regardless of his or her last “final rating” in the non-rated section.

How can I know that my son or daughter is ready to play rated chess?

Different people have different (and very strong) opinions on this question. Our view is as follows. Playing in a non-rated section is a great way for someone to participate in tournament chess without incurring the expense of a USCF membership, but it's only an entry point. When a player decides that tournament chess is something he or she wants to do and to get better at, he or she should move to rated chess. We believe that any player is ready to play rated chess as soon as he or she is familiar with tournament rules and procedures, comfortable with using a clock, competent at taking notation, and genuinely interested in becoming a better chess player. When a player is at this point, there is little or nothing to be gained by continuing to play non-rated. Because a player usually improves faster when he or she plays against competition comparable to or above his or her own skill level, continuing to play against weaker opposition in a non-rated section can actually retard his or her development. We urge all of our veteran players who have until now played only non-rated not to pass on the opportunity to play in this tournament.

If a player gets a rating, can he or she ever play in a non-rated section again?

Once officially rated, a player can never go back to being unrated, but that does not necessarily mean that he or she can never play non-rated again. Tournament organizers are free to set different requirements for playing in a non-rated section. For our Series, we chose to conform to the USCF definition of unrated; therefore no officially rated player can play in our non-rated section. Some other tournaments allow certain rated players to play in a non-rated section. For example, the Queen City Classic allows players to play non-rated as long as they have played ten or fewer rated games. Overall, however, because many tournaments do not offer a non-rated section, there are more opportunities to play *rated* chess than to play *non-rated* chess whether a player is rated or not.