

Western Mass Pinball League

(WMPL)

0. The Short Version

The league costs \$20 for 8 weekly sessions. All money goes towards the prize pool, finals, and trophies. Show up for league and play four games of head-to-head pinball in 3- and 4-player groups to earn points. Each player picks one game to play, and off you go. (Plunge extra balls to save time!)

Total points at the end of 8 sessions determines whether players make A, B, C or D Division for the playoffs. Each player's worst 2 sessions are thrown out.

Every player qualifies for the playoffs, and cash prizes are identical in A, B, C and D. At least the top 4 players in each division win cash and trophies.

End-of-season league results will be submitted to the IFPA, and all players will earn WPPR points for their participation.

1. Introduction

The Western Mass Pinball League (WMPL) rules provide a format for running a friendly league competition for pinball players of all skill levels. These rules are designed for leagues of any number of players, playing on four or more machines. The nature of the league system allows players of all skill levels to play while being fun and competitive for everyone.

The schedule consists of 8 weekly sessions, and a playoff final. Each player may only play at one location in a given week.

A player's overall league score is the total of their six highest session scores. This allows any player to miss two sessions without impacting his or her score, while players who attend all sessions may drop their weakest results. Any missed week receives a score of zero. Players must play at last 5 out of the 8 weeks.

Special thanks to the Pittsburgh Pinball League, the Free State Pinball Association, the IFPA, NEPL, CRAP and the Professional and Amateur Pinball Association, as these rules are modified from their originals.

1.1 League Officials/Site Admins

League officials make decisions on rule interpretation. If possible, rulings of malfunctions or interference should be deferred to an official that is not directly involved in a game. League officials collect dues and score sheets, and are responsible for starting league nights on time.

At least one league official must be present at each league meeting. League officials are eligible to play in the league.

1.2 Discretion of League Officials

These rules are a guide. At times, situations will arise that aren't specifically covered by these rules. In these cases, league officials will make decisions in the spirit of the rules. These decisions will be documented for later reference, and applied consistently should the situation arise again in the same season.

2. Attendance

League officials will set a schedule before league play begins. League players are encouraged to attend every week, but 100% attendance is not required.

2.1 Start Time

A specific start time for league will be announced in advance. Any games in progress by league players at league start time are immediately halted. Players join their assigned group and begin league play immediately.

2.2 Announced Tardiness

If a league official is notified before league start time that a player will be late, then players in all groups will wait up to 10 minutes before beginning play. A player may do this a maximum of twice during a season.

2.4 Unannounced Tardiness

Players who arrive after play has begun may still enter play for the week, providing there are three-player groups with games left to be played. The tardy player will be assigned to the group containing the least amount of players that has the most games remaining. The tardy player will receive a last-place finish for all missed games.

A tardy player may not enter into a game already in progress (the first ball has been plunged).

2.5 Early leaving

Players who leave before play has finished will receive a last-place finish for all missed games.

2.6 Forfeits

If a player does not show up for league night in a given week, that player will be given a score of zero for the week.

2.7 Inclement Conditions

League officials may cancel a league night, due to inclement weather or other conditions, particularly if travel may be unsafe for players. League officials are responsible to notify all players if it is deemed that a league night cannot be held as scheduled. A makeup date will be scheduled for all players affected.

Extra time may be allotted for tardiness in the event of inclement conditions at league officials' discretion.

2.8 Guests

Non-members are invited to attend any league night. Guests are not permitted to play in league matches but are encouraged to come out and see what we are all about.

3. Machine Play Rules

3.1 Extra Balls

Extra balls are not allowed in league play unless declared otherwise by a league official before league play begins.

An earned extra ball will be plunged, not played. When a player plunges an extra ball, they may touch the machine to set up a skill shot before launching the ball. Once the ball is set into motion, the player may no longer touch the machine. If the ball is returned to a launcher lane that requires a manual plunge (e.g. by a ball saver, non-valid playfield), the player may re-plunge the ball. Players should be aware of whether they have earned an extra ball and not walk away from a machine until it has been plunged.

3.2 Replays and Specials

No award is given for credits earned by replays or specials during league play. If a machine awards extra balls for replays or specials, they are plunged.

3.3 Machine Malfunctions

The Nature of Pinball

The unique charm of pinball lies, in large part, in the physical nature of the game. Unfortunately, this means that unusual events and outright malfunctions cannot be prevented, nor can they be perfectly compensated for. League officials will make all attempts to strike a balance between compensating for malfunctions and accepting the physical nature of the game. In certain cases, malfunctions will be dealt with more strictly during final rounds than during qualifying rounds, at the discretion of tournament officials. Any malfunctions or rulings not covered under these rules will be dealt with according to the IFPAPA combined rule set.

Minor Malfunctions

A minor malfunction is any incident without external cause which deviates from the normal course of gameplay, without directly causing a player's loss of turn and without providing any player a significant advantage over others. A minor malfunction is considered part of normal

play. Tournament officials shall determine what constitutes a significant advantage; in the event that such an advantage is obtained, refer to “Beneficial Malfunctions”.

A minor malfunction that occurs repeatedly, to the extent that it is markedly affecting play of the machine, may be considered a major malfunction (or catastrophic malfunction) at the sole discretion of tournament officials.

Major Malfunctions

A major malfunction is a gameplay problem with a machine that results in the premature loss of ball in play in a fashion that is not a normal feature of the machine’s gameplay. These may be unusual one-time events, or they may indicate a recurring problem.

Examples of major malfunctions include:

- The bonus count begins while the ball is still in play. This can happen if, for example, the machine loses track of how many balls are in the drain trough.
- A lit kickback fails to return the ball to play, ending the player’s turn. This does not apply to other ball saving devices such as timed ball savers, ball traps, gates, or “virtual” kickbacks.
- Any malfunction that results in the loss of one or more balls during multiball play, without losing all balls so as to end the player’s turn, will only be considered a minor malfunction.
- A flipper or other major playfield feature ceases to function properly.
- Loss of Tilt warnings, without loss of ball, shall not be considered a major malfunction. Loss of any lit feature, running mode, or other gameplay specifics, shall not be considered a major malfunction.

Note that unrepeated physical failures, such as kickbacks or balls jumping off ramps, balls flying over flippers, or balls moonwalking into the outlane following a successful shot do not qualify as major malfunctions. This is the physical nature of pinball.

When a major malfunction occurs, it is the player's responsibility to notify an official, calmly and promptly. If the official(s) agree that the incident is a major malfunction, the player will be provided with one additional ball of play at the beginning of a new game, after the current game has been completed. The official(s) may choose to allow the player to play ball 3 or 5 of the new game, if that player has been denied certain features that are freely awarded by the machine. Examples of this include 'Double Bonus' balls on many EM machines, as well as pity Mist Multiball on Dracula should the player have not yet played one. No attempt will be made to re-establish the state of the machine at the time of the major malfunction. The player's total score on the additional ball of play will be added to his or her previous score, and the new game will be terminated.

If a major malfunction occurs early in the play of the first ball by the first player, tournament officials may rule that the current game is voided, and restart. If the machine has continued failures, it will be ruled unplayable, and another machine will need to be chosen.

Known Malfunctions

Any malfunction or unusual behavior that is determined to be relatively minor but unusual enough to merit comment may, at the discretion of tournament officials, be posted for players to be aware of before playing the affected machine. Players who have played the machine before this notice is provided will not be allowed to replay the machine nor to replace it with play of another machine. The occurrence of any posted malfunction will be treated as a minor malfunction unless it worsens or interacts with another feature to yield a major malfunction. Players should notify officials of any game malfunctions during a session.

Catastrophic Malfunctions

A catastrophic malfunction is any event, not caused by a player, which immediately ends play for all players on the machine.

Examples of catastrophic malfunctions include:

- The game system crashes and/or resets due to a software error or component failure.
- Power is lost or interrupted.
- A new game starts.
- The game becomes unplayable.

When a catastrophic malfunction occurs, if the scores are able to be recorded, players will be provided the appropriate number of additional ball(s) of play on a new game once the machine has been repaired. If the scores are not retrievable, players will be forced to start their game over. No attempt will be made to estimate scores, or reestablish state, at any time.

If a machine affected by catastrophic malfunction cannot be repaired in order to continue play, it is considered disabled; please see “Disabled Machines”.

Beneficial Malfunctions

Any malfunction which provides at least one player with a significant advantage over any other player competing on that machine is known as a beneficial malfunction. Tournament officials shall determine what constitutes a significant advantage.

Any beneficial malfunction which results in a player being able to continue play of a ball that normally should have ended is normally allowed once per game. Examples of this would include an unexpected software ball save, a ball that bounces back into play without player action, or a ball that comes to rest on an unlit kickback in the outlane. Any such behavior shall not be allowed if it repeats, meaning that tournament officials may require players to allow the repeatedly-saved ball to drain, or play on the machine may be terminated in accordance with catastrophic malfunction rules, at which point the machine will be considered disabled.

Any beneficial malfunction which provides one or more players with a significant scoring or strategic advantage in a way that is not part of normal gameplay will void the score of the affected player(s), unless all immediately-affected players and tournament officials can agree on a suitable adjustment of the score or other elimination of the advantage. If the beneficial malfunction has been specifically avoided by the player, it is unlikely that a penalty is necessary. If any player score(s) are voided, the affected player(s) may then replay the game after the other players have finished, and the new score(s) are used for the affected player(s).

Examples of beneficial malfunctions would include a jackpot switch that registers when a different target is hit, a valuable switch that scores repeatedly without the ball contacting it, a failed Tilt sensor, or a ball stuck during multiball. See also "Stuck Balls".

Any situation which indicates the presence of a beneficial malfunction should be brought to the attention of a tournament official.

If the issue cannot be easily addressed by a tech, then the machine shall be considered disabled, and a new game will need to be played in its place.

Stuck Balls

During the course of play, it is possible for one or more balls to become stuck on a playfield feature, usually after becoming airborne. If this happens during single ball play, the player must wait for automatic ball searches to occur. The expiration of any timed feature during this period is not considered a malfunction.

If the stuck ball has not been freed after four such searches, or if the machine is not performing searches for some reason, the player must have a tournament official brought to the machine. The player must remain alert and at the machine, as he or she is responsible for the ball if it becomes freed at any point.

A tournament official may initially choose to try to free the stuck ball through judicious nudging, tapping, etc. The player must remain ready to resume play at the machine during this attempt. If actions by the official result in a Tilt, this will be treated as a major malfunction (not the fault of the player). If the official frees the ball but the player does not successfully continue play, this is normal play (the fault of the player). Loss of Tilt warnings due to tournament official nudging is considered normal play.

If the tournament official is unable to free the stuck ball, the machine will be opened, and the stuck ball freed and placed either in the plunger lane, if it is manually controlled, or on the upraised flipper of the player's choice, with the flipper button held by the player. In the event this is not possible, the official may select another location or feature where the ball can be placed safely while the machine is being closed in order to resume normal play. If more than one ball is stuck, all freed balls will be placed on the flipper(s) of the player's choice before play resumes, or in the plunger lane if the flippers are inactive while the machine is open.

If the ball is inadvertently freed while the machine is open and drains without the player regaining complete control (stopped on a flipper), this will be treated as a major malfunction. If the machine cannot be opened successfully, or if opening or closing the machine terminates the game(s) in progress for any reason, this will be treated as a catastrophic malfunction. If the ball is freed and the machine closed without the player's loss of ball, play continues as normal. If the game is in multiball play and one or more balls are lost as a result of freeing stuck balls, possibly ending multiball but not ending the ball in play, this will be considered no worse than a minor malfunction. If any feature or mode that is lit or active times out while one or more balls are stuck, this will not be considered a malfunction.

Any player who chooses to shake or bump the machine in order to free a stuck ball does so at his or her own risk. No allowance will be made for a player who tilts while attempting to free a stuck ball, whether or not tournament officials are present.

If a ball becomes stuck during a multiball mode, the player should attempt to trap the other ball(s) in play and request assistance. A stuck ball during multiball often represents a significant beneficial malfunction, and intentionally taking advantage may result in a penalty. Please note specifically that a ball ending up in the plunger lane during multiball on a machine where there is no autoplunger (or where the autoplunger for some reason refuses to fire) counts as a stuck ball, and the player must plunge the ball back into play.

Any player who misuses a game feature in order to intentionally trap a ball during a multiball mode, such as holding in the plunger on Tommy in order to defeat the autoplunger, may be given a warning and/or have his or her affected game disqualified by tournament officials.

In situations where a ball is trapped in a way that it can be released through player action other than shaking or bumping – for example, a ball at rest underneath a flipper which the player controls – this is not deemed to be a stuck ball. Balls trapped in this fashion during multiball modes are not generally considered to be a rules violation, although the ruling will depend on the exact machine and situation.

Any ball that comes to rest in an outlane, where any portion of the ball is below the outlane post, is not deemed a stuck ball. In these instances, players will have the option of attempting to free the ball themselves or to ask a tournament official to place the ball in the drain for them without triggering any additional switches. Please note that when this happens in multiball, in no way will a player be allowed to take advantage of this situation by continuing to play any other balls currently available. The situation of this ball that has come to rest needs to be dealt with immediately by either the player or tournament director.

A ball which has come to rest on top of a center post, an inlane-outlane post/guide or a lamp insert/playfield divot directly above an outlane will not be considered a stuck ball. Players may choose to free balls resting in these positions through nudging of the machine, or request that an official end the ball in play by manually placing it in the drain for center post incidents, and the outlane for inlane-outlane incidents. If an automatically-triggered kickback exists that will send the ball back into play upon draining it in the appropriate outlane, that feature will be manually triggered, and the ball will be treated as a stuck ball from that point and placed on a flipper or other suitable location. Player-controlled kickback features, such as mini-flippers, posts, or manually-controlled kickbacks that send the ball back into play, do not count toward establishing stuck ball status in this case, and the player will not be permitted to utilize these features or touch the game until the ball has reached the ball trough.

One highly debatable stuck ball situation has to do with setting up Dirty Pool on Attack From Mars. Players will often avoid hitting the ball stuck behind the visor and sacrifice the ability to advance a saucer through Dirty Pool, and instead continue to play multiball. For this situation on Attack From Mars, this is not considered a stuck ball and players will continue to play on.

Disabled Machines

In the event of a machine breakdown, a new machine shall be chosen. If a machine keeps having either catastrophic, or major malfunctions, it will be considered broken down for the event.

It will be repaired by the location when they can attend to it.

3.4 Machine play promptness

If a league player does not begin their turn in a reasonable amount of time (two minutes), other players may plunge the ball for them, and the player may not play the ball. If a machine has an auto-plunge, and it activates, no other player may attempt to save the ball.

3.5 Practice Games

Once league play starts, a player may not play or practice games. They should remain with their group. If they must leave they should inform another player in their group.

3.6 Non-League Players

League players do not take precedence over other pinball players. A non-league player may accidentally play your ball: this is considered a distraction, not interference or a malfunction. If this happens, regain control of the ball as quickly and politely as possible. Pay attention to your game and this won't happen.

3.7 Rulings

Rulings shall be made by league officials, which include event coordinators and any person(s) designated as officials by the coordinators. Any designated official or event coordinator is excluded from ruling on any play situation that directly affects his or her actual or potential standing as a player. Such persons may also be recused where their decision affects a close friend or family member, at the discretion of other league officials.

4. Bad Stuff \ Player errors

A player error is any player action, purposeful or accidental, which affects the normal play or outcome of a game in progress.

4.1 Playing An Extra Ball

Don't do this! If a player nudges, flips, or otherwise plays an extra ball, they receive a score of zero for the game. However, a player may use the flippers to set up a skill shot, once the ball has been plunged a player may not touch the machine.

4.2 Playing An Opponent's Ball

Don't do this! If you play someone else's ball, trap the ball on a flipper as soon as you realize the mistake. The penalty for playing an opponent's ball is a zero score for the game. It is your responsibility to know when it's your turn and when it isn't.

The victim may choose one of two options: continue playing the ball (if control can be recovered) or drain the ball and play an additional ball through an extra ball. The player must decide immediately. If the player allows the ball to drain without deciding, then it is presumed that he wishes to continue the game and play an additional ball.

4.3 Interference

Definitely don't do this!! Interference includes (but isn't limited to) tilting an opponent's ball or nudging the machine during another player's ball. It also includes intentional distraction of a player during his play.

Talking to or coaching of any player at the machine during a game, in any round, is not allowed. Informing player 1 too many or too few games have been entered into the machine will not be penalized as coaching.

If a player interferes with another player, causing a drain and/or loss of turn, this is treated as a major malfunction.

Intentional interference is a serious violation of league play rules and could result in expulsion from the tournament.

Accidental interference is regrettable but can happen. Any player or non-player who accidentally interferes with the play of any tournament game will be warned. If the interference was sufficient to cause the loss of ball, this will be treated as a major malfunction. If the interference terminated play for all players (for example, tripping over a power cord and pulling it from the wall), this will be treated as a catastrophic malfunction.

Tournament officials will be the sole determiners of what constitutes interference and whether or not it is accidental or deliberate.

4.4 Slam Tilts

Please don't do this! A slam tilt is caused by an aggressive and excessive shove of the machine, or by an attempted bang back or death save, and is considered illegal. The violator will receive a zero score for that game. For other players whose games are incomplete, this is considered a catastrophic malfunction.

4.5 Not Starting the Proper Number of Games

It is the responsibility of all players in a group to make sure a game is started with the correct number of players. If mid game it is found that an incorrect number of players have been entered into the machine all scores become voided and the game is to be restarted with the correct number of players.

4.6 Death Saves and Bang Backs

Techniques known as "Death Saves" and "Bangbacks" are sometimes employed by certain advanced players. Because of the effectiveness of these techniques varies from machine to machine, and because of the risk of injury to either player or machine, these techniques are banned from tournament play. In the event that a drained ball bounces back into play without deliberate player action, such as in the case of a "lazarus", this is considered the mechanical nature of pinball and the ball may be played. If this situation occurs repeatedly, and there is

question as to whether the lazarus ball was naturally occurring or induced by the player, tournament directors may end the game in progress and award a score of zero.

4.7 Cheating

Pinball can often be frustrating, especially during competition. Violation of any rules with the clear intent of preventing another player from fairly playing the machine or of unfairly increasing one's own score can only be described as cheating, and is not tolerated. The penalty for cheating will be determined by league officials based on the severity of the offense, and could result in expulsion but is not limited to it.

4.8 Serious Violations of League Rules

Serious violations such as slam tilts, interference, and other "bad stuff" listed above are cumulative over an entire season, not just one match. For these violations, the following penalties are assessed:

First and second offense: Forfeit the current game with a machine score of zero.

If the violator's group does not have a game in progress, this penalty will be assessed against the game of the current match for which the violator has the highest league points. If there is more than one such game, the last such game of the match will be penalized.

Third offense: Forfeit of all games in the session with machine scores of zero.

Behavior which causes a player to be ejected from the location hosting any league session will be penalized as an automatic third offense, even if it occurs before or after league play.

Fourth offense: Forfeit of season. The player's scores are wiped, and the player will be suspended from the league for the season.

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Violence of any kind against fellow players, theft, and vandalism of pinball machines or other property will be penalized as an automatic fourth offense.

5. Scoring

It is each player's responsibility to be sure that their machine scores are recorded correctly on the score sheet as each game is finished. Any possible scoring errors should be brought to the attention of league officials immediately, and all players in the group must agree before any requested change is accepted. Please make sure that the name of the game is being captured on your score sheet as well.

5.1 Player Groups

All players who are in attendance at league start time will be randomly assigned to 3- and 4-player groups. A 5-player group will not be used unless there are exactly five players.

Ideally, all groups will have 4 players. When the number of players is not a multiple of 4, one through three 3-player groups will be assigned. For example, if there are 15 players, the group sizes will be 4, 4, 4, and 3. If there are 17 players, the group sizes will be 4, 4, 3, 3, and 3. When assigning players to groups, 4-player groups will be assigned first.

5.2 Game Selection and Play Order

In 4-player groups, each player will select one machine to be played, and those four machines will make up the group's schedule for the session. In 3-player groups, the fourth game will be chosen by the player currently in last place. If there is a tie the lower player number of the tied players will choose the last game. No machine may be selected more than once each week..

The group score sheet will show the play order for each game. The player who selected a game plays as Player 1 on that game.

Order of play for 5-player groups: 1-2-3-4-5, 2-3-4-5-1, 3-4-5-1-2, 4-5-1-2-3

Order of play for 4-player groups: 1-2-3-4, 2-3-4-1, 3-4-1-2, 4-1-2-3

Order of play for 3-player groups: 1-2-3, 2-3-1, 3-1-2 1-2-3

5.3 Scoring

In each game, a player scores points for their finish against their opponents. The winner of a game gets 7 points, and last place gets 1 point. Specific points available depend on the size of the group:

3-player group:

1st = 7 points

2nd = 4 points

3rd = 1 points

4-player group

1st = 7 points

2nd = 5 points

3rd = 3 points

4th = 1 points

5-player group (rare)

1st = 7 points

2nd = 5 points

3rd = 3 points

4th = 2 points

5th = 1 points

The maximum number of points a player can earn in a session is 28.

5.4 Ties

In the rare case where two or more players have tied for machine score (this is common on EMs and NBA Fastbreak) a one ball match will be played on the same machine to break the tie. If after one ball there is still a tie another ball will be played, etc.

5.5 League Standings and Dropped Scores

Each player's total weekly points are added to their season total every week. All players will have their lowest two scores from the season dropped from their final standings.

Two players tied in the standings will automatically be broken by the highest single week score by a player. If that results in a tie it will go to the second highest single week score and so on until the tie is broken.

League standings will be updated and posted each week.

6. Finals

6.1 Finals Divisions

All players compete to enter a common playoff for prizes. The league is divided into four divisions, A, B, C, and D. Sizes of each division will be as follows:

A Division: 16 players

B Division: 16 players

C Division: 16 players

D Division: All remaining players.

Any divisional unbalance required by the number of finals attendees will be settled by expanding the D division first.

No division will run larger than 16 except for D if needed.

The site of the playoff will be at the Western Mass Pinball Club, Three Rivers MA

All players qualify for the finals, which also serves as the end-of-season party. The cash prizes in each division will be identical, and will be determined when the total number of league players is known. Cash prizes will be awarded to at least the top four finishers in each division.

Division qualification is determined by total adjusted points at the end of the season.

6.2 Finals Pre-registration

Players must also check in on finals day no later than the time specified in the announcement (normally 10:30am). If you do not check in by that time, you will not be able to play, NO EXCEPTIONS!

Finals will have a firm start time.

6.3 Finals Format

The finals format is identical to the regular league format but played in several rounds with the highest-scoring players advancing to the next round of playoffs and eventually winning cash prizes and trophies. The games will be computer assigned for smooth and timely operation of finals.

Players will have qualified for a division through league play which also determines seeding. For finals players will now compete exclusively within that division. The only change to divisions is if open spots develop above you, all divisions will run full, so players may get bumped up if needed.

Depending upon the number of players in each division, after round one the field will be cut, either by the top two scoring players from each group moving on to round two, or by the overall top half scoring players moving on to round two. Then each round after that the top two from each group will advance to the next round. This will happen right up to the final four, where they will battle it out for placing.

The Z division is for individuals who do not get 5 minimum weeks of play in. There is no trophy or cash prizes for Z division, you are playing for pride here.

6.4 Ties in Finals Qualification

If a tie in total adjusted league points would determine what divisions the two or more players would play in, these ties will be broken based on each player's best weeks. The tie is first

broken by the player's highest single week score. If the tie is still unresolved, the next tiebreaker will be the next highest single week score, and so on. If a tie still exists, a single randomly game will be played to break the tie.

If there is a tie that affects only seeding in a division, the tie is first broken by the player's highest single week score. If the tie is still unresolved, the next tiebreaker will be the next highest single week score, and so on. If a tie still exists, a dice roll with the higher numbers will be the higher seeds.

6.5 Finals Scoring and Machine Selection

Scoring will be handled with the same system used in the regular season. Machines will Be preselected by the computer for each group.

6.6 Ties in finals Results

If two or more players are tied in points after a playoff round has been played, then a one game playoff is played to break the tie. The machine will be randomly picked by a league official. The play order will be determined by original seeding.

6.7 Tardy or Missing from Finals

Tardy players may request a 10-minute delay in their match start time per section 2.3. They may do so by calling league officials and informing them they will be late before the scheduled start time.

6.8 No Practice during

Once you are assigned to a group, there will be no further practice on games. If you are seen playing a game, that game will no longer be available as a game you can choose.

7. Dues and Private Sites

7.1 League Dues

League dues are \$20 per season. Of this money, \$19 goes into the prize fund and trophies for the season and 1\$ goes to pay the 1\$ IFPA sanction fee per person each season. League

officials collect dues from players. All dues must be paid in full by the 2nd week of each league season. The only exception are players who start after the 2nd week, and dues are then due at that moment