

# Congress Connection

## How Congress Tournaments Work:

### Demystifying the NFL Congress Manual and District Congress

by Adam J. Jacobi

Holding a Congress can be a rewarding experience, yet some coaches find it daunting because it is distinctly different in mechanics than other debate or speech events (there are many more students in a room at once, there's voting, special forms such as amendments, seating charts, name cards or name tags, etc.)

Procedures for the NFL District Congress were standardized beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, so that the National Office can audit results for each district across the country. That standardization was made possible by taking a look at a variety of mechanisms for determining who advances and qualifies to the National Congress, and determining the lowest common denominator among those methods.

Unfortunately, that has created some confusion, but needlessly so. The first step any coach and member of the District Committee should take is to thoroughly understand the *Student Congress Manual*. This manual was revised summer of 2007, following changes the previous year, to give a logical sequence of guidelines and procedures. An annotated outline of the sections:

1. **General Student Congress Guidelines** (SCM-2-5): the standards and overall explanation. Because Congress has a highly technical structure of simulation, the terminology gives the reader a working understanding of the vocabulary used throughout the rules and procedures later in the manual.

Within these guidelines is a section on drafting **legislation**. In 2007, the model resolution was revised to show the correct way of beginning a "Resolved" clause (it's *not* "Be it Resolved"), as per the United States Congress as well as *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. There's also a handy script for **presiding officers** on how to begin and run a session.

**RESOLVED, That...**  
**Did you know that**  
**"the model resolution**  
**was revised to show the**  
**correct way of beginning**  
**a 'Resolved' clause, as per**  
**the United States Congress**  
**as well as *Robert's Rules of***  
***Order, Newly Revised.*"**

2. **General Rules for Student Congress Debate** (SCM-6-7): these are the overarching rules for Congress, much in the way people understand rules for any other debate or speech event in the NFL. These dictate time limits (including for questioning), speaker recognition, voting and ethics/evidence. Any invitational tournament that claims to use NFL rules should be following these, or should

include a disclaimer as to what is different, so coaches and students are not confused.

3. **Conducting Elections and Determining Winners** (SCM-8): one of the most frequently asked questions about Congress is how to do this. This page outlines the two major methods, and how to proceed with each.

4. **General District Congress Rules** (SCM-9-11): this gives a chronological overview of the District Congress, from start to finish.

5. **District Congress Tournament Procedures** (SCM-11-13): this is the "how it works" section, describing how to run each aspect of the District Congress in detail. This section highlights the "Tournament Selection Methods," which include four methods for determining the **seven finalists**, as well as the five methods for determining the **national qualifiers**. As of the 2008-2009 season, these methods now match up with the corresponding numbered areas of the streamlined reporting forms sent to the National Office following the tournament. Explication of these methods will follow after this outline of the manual. At the end of the district procedures section is an example of how selection of the top three scores determines the **cumulative total** for a particular student.

6. **Base System** (SCM-14): this page explains how the Base System works as a tabulation method, complete with the official chart and examples.

7. **National Congress Procedures** (SCM-15-17): over the years, Harold Keller and Gary Harmon developed a comprehensive handbook for the National Congress, which was distributed with the legislation packet. This section now includes all of those guidelines, as well as the detailed procedures for each level of advancement.

8. **Forms** (SCM-18-26): The first three generic forms can be used at any Congress (NFL or invitational) “Table of Frequently Used Parliamentary Motions,” amendments, and “Chamber Voting Record.” The remaining forms apply to the District Tournament, with all of the reporting forms expressly for the District Chair to send to the National Office.

In the fall, each District Committee must determine its “Tournament Selection Methods,” for the Senate and for the House, so participating coaches and students understand how advancement and qualification to the National Congress will work.

To build a list for consideration for qualification, seven finalists (or “nominees”) are determined by:

1. Judge Score\* factored by the **Base system**.

2. Judge Score\*, based on **cumulative point totals**, based on the highest three scores for a one-day Congress, or five highest scores for a two-day Congress.

3. Judge **Nomination**: judges serve the duration of the Congress and then write the names of their

most preferred legislators.

4. **Combination** of Judge Nominations and Scores: combines either #s 1 and 3 or #s 2 and 3 (since both use #3, judges must serve the duration of the Congress).

The seven finalists determined by one of the four methods above then becomes the basis for selection of the national qualifiers, through one of the following five methods:

1. Student Voting only (preferential **balloting** – counted by physical redistribution of ballots as described in the procedures)
2. Order of judges’ **final Base score** total (see #1 above).
3. Order of judges’ **cumulative score** total (see #2 above)

4. Judges’ preferential **ranking** – tabulated in the same manner as speech/individual events are done.

5. **Combination** of Judge/ Student selection for the Senate or Super House (but not normal House chambers where no super session is held).

Tools, including sample forms and ballots, spreadsheets, etc. for conducting both invitational and District Congresses can be found at [www.studentcongressdebate.org](http://www.studentcongressdebate.org).

Example of how to use the form (p. SCM-20) to tally Student Voting in elections for presiding officer or for determining advancement/winners.

SCM-20



**Chamber Voting Record**

Form may be used for any Congress; instructions on p. SCM-8.

Chamber: <u>Senate</u>	Session: <u>District</u> (no super session)	Date: <u>February 6, 2009</u>										
Election for: <input type="radio"/> Presiding Officer – Session:		<input checked="" type="radio"/> Advancement to: <u>Nationals</u>										
<b>Name</b> <i>(list in alphabetical order by last name)</i>	<i>Enter the tally for each vote taken; the total of each column must equal the number of ballots.</i>											
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12
Jackson, Andrew	2	2	3	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Jefferson, Thomas	3	3	—	3	3	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Lincoln, Abraham	5	5	—	7	7	7	12	/	/	/	/	/
Roosevelt, Franklin	4	4	—	4	6	6	/	/	/	/	/	/
Roosevelt, Theodore	2	2	19	2	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Wilson, Woodrow	1	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Washington, George	5	6	—	6	6	9	10	/	/	/	/	/
(there are 22 students)												
<b>Total</b> (should be equal to # of ballots)	22	22	22	22	22	22	22					
Abraham Lincoln – 1st Place	Jimmy Stewart						Jimmy Stewart					
Election Winner	Parliamentarian or Congress Director						Parliamentarian/Director Signature					

This example just shows tabulation for first place. Note the runoff vote between Jackson and T. Roosevelt, because they were tied with two ballots apiece, which is more than the next highest vote-getter.



**Chamber Voting Record**

Form may be used for any Congress; instructions on p. SCM-8.

Chamber: <u>House 2</u>	Session: <u>District</u> (no super session)	Date: <u>February 6, 2009</u>										
Election for: <input type="radio"/> Presiding Officer – Session:		<input type="radio"/> Advancement to: <u>Nationals</u>										
<b>Name</b> <i>(list in alphabetical order by last name)</i>	<i>Enter the tally for each vote taken; the total of each column must equal the number of ballots.</i>											
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12
Jackson, Andrew	2	2	3	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Jefferson, Thomas	3	3	—	3	3	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Roosevelt, Franklin	7	7	—	7	9	9	/	/	/	/	/	/
Roosevelt, Theodore	2	2	19	2	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Wilson, Woodrow	1	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Washington, George	7	8	—	10	10	13	/	/	/	/	/	/
(there are 22 students)												
<b>Total</b> (should be equal to # of ballots)	22	22	22	22	22	22						
George Washington – 2nd Place	Jimmy Stewart						Jimmy Stewart					
Election Winner	Parliamentarian or Congress Director						Parliamentarian/Director Signature					

This example shows tabulation for second place. The same runoff vote happens between Jackson and T. Roosevelt.

To see the “actual student” ballots that were tabulated in this example, as well as tabulation of the remaining five places, see the **Preferential Balloting** section of the **Tournament Resources** at [www.studentcongressdebate.org](http://www.studentcongressdebate.org).