

PREFERENTIAL VOTING AND THE NATIONAL FORENSIC LEAGUE

by
Harold C. Keller

Many organizations utilize the preferential voting process in an attempt to save time and to offer a greater credibility to election results in their organizations. The method is not new nor is it unique to the NFL. It dates back over 100 years and was originally developed to deal with the problems created by time and travel constraints.

The process is not complicated but it does take time and practice to develop an expertise in the conducting of the preferential vote.

Step 1: Once the final candidates are determined record these names in alphabetical order and disseminate the names of the candidates to the electorate.

..."preferential voting definitely saves time and most people feel it guarantees a more professional and credible result..."

Step 2: Instruct the electorate to give serious consideration as to their preference of one candidate over another. Stress the fact that the ranking of last and next to last candidates on their ballot could be their final preferential choice. With that in mind instruct the voters to rank their candidates as to their 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th choice and so forth. Every name on the preferential ballot must be ranked and no tie in rank placing is allowed. This will indicate how any voter notes their

preference between any two candidates on their ballot. Instruct the voters to fold their ballot in half and either have them bring their ballot forward or collect the ballots by walking around the room.

In short, the process answered the fundamental question of knowing how a voter would vote for a given candidate in a field of three or more candidates to guarantee a winner, by a majority vote, in an election. The answer was simple - have the voter rank their choice of candidates as 1st, 2nd, 3rd and so forth. Such a ranking would indicate how a given voter would cast his or her ballot regardless of the number of candidates on the ballot.

Note that it is advisable to prepare special ballots for this process. Simply generate a form not larger than 4¼ inches wide by 11 inches long. On each ballot (or half sheet of paper) type 1st choice followed by a line for the name of candidate, 2nd choice followed by a line for the name of candidate, 3rd choice line on through a 10th choice line for candidate names. The number of lines needed is determined by the number of candidates. Seldom would there ever be more than ten and in the National Forensic League preferential voting process, seldom (if ever) more than seven. The last page offers you a sample Preferential Ballot.

The pragmatic issue then becomes: how does one determine who wins the election? It is crucial that the election official determine who placed first in the election as their first priority. If the election officials think they should determine who came in last as their first priority, they are conducting the preferential process erroneously. If the tabulating officials think that by adding all of the candidates' rankings as if determining who placed first in an individual event round where a panel of judges was utilized they are in error. The tabulating officials must follow a protocol that adheres to the goal of fairness and equity for all candidates and in meeting the ethical goal that all placing in the election were determined by a majority vote of all voters casting a ballot.

Step 3: In Student Congress, have the Parliamentarian of a Chamber vote, noting that his/her ballot will be used only to break an unbreakable tie. Make sure this ballot is so marked, avoiding the possibility of it getting mixed in with the student ballots.

Step 4: Once the students have completed their ballots, take those ballots, along with the indicated Parliamentarian's ballot, to a quiet tabulation room.

Step 5: Separate the ballots into as many stacks as there are names receiving 1st place votes.

Step 6: Count the number of 1st place votes in each stack and note the number with a pencil on a separate piece of paper.

Step 7: Take the stack with the fewest number of 1st place votes and distribute these ballots to the voter's next choice candidate. Place the distributed ballots under the stack for their next choice candidate. Do not place them on top as it is easy to confuse who has actually been eliminated in that round of balloting and who advances.

- A. If two or more candidates have a combined total of less than next lowest candidate, more than one stack may be redistributed.
- B. If there is a tie there are several methods of breaking that tie.
 - a. Separate all ballots to determine how the voters would prefer one of the two candidates thus breaking the tie.
 - b. Advance that candidate receiving the most 1st place votes and award the advancement accordingly.
 - c. Use the Parliamentarian's ballot to break a tie.
- C. This process continues until one of the candidates has a majority vote and he or she is declared the winner.

Step 8: Once the 1st place winner is determined, cross the name of the winner off of the ballot even if they were voted last by a voter. Use a pencil. Do not cross it off so completely that it cannot be reread as one may have to go back and double check the results in an audit.

Step 9: Not counting the crossed off name(s), or creating a stack for those names crossed off, repeat the process to determine which candidate places 2nd in the election. Once the 2nd place Superior candidate is determined, cross that name of the ballot and proceed in the same manner until all candidates have been ranked. A voter's preference is noted on the list of names that have not been crossed off.

It is strongly recommend that two, if not three, conscientious people conduct the ballot counting process. Once the process is learned it can be very time efficient taking less time than it would to vote in the Chamber as if voting for a Presiding Officer. In essence it is the same process in which candidates are eliminated based on the fewest number of votes gleaned. In the one-person one-vote process, however, the Chamber must vote a second time to determine the second place candidate and this process would continue through the

entire list of candidates on the ballot. The similarity is that either method determines the first place person first and works with the premise that the first place winner is determined and no one is ranked until which time they receive a majority vote of all voters in that assembly. The big difference is that one preferential ballot could potentially replace 28 individual ballots if a single balloting process was utilized for ranking six nominees 1st through 6th.

The most common error that I have observed is where the tabulators declare the person with the fewest 1st place votes as having placed last in the election. This is wrong! Tabulators must determine the 1st place first and then work their way through a recounting of the ballots to determine who placed second by a majority. The process continues on through the next to last place.

A method that I have used to teach this process, or to explain it to others, is to have a group of people (preferably not less than 15) answer the question, "Which of the following US Presidents was the best President?" I then offer last names, such as Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Harding, Clinton, and Bush. Obviously Bush must be noted as Bush G.H. or Bush G.W. The students then rank the names as 1st best through 6th best. As the teacher I complete a ballot in like manner as the Parliamentarian would in a Congress. This process gives me a number of ballots that I can then practice and demonstrate with.

I believe that once the value of using the preferential voting process is understood the process is easily utilized and accepted. It is really no different than using individual ballots other than the voting is done at one time and each preferential ballot indicates the voter's preference for one candidate over any other candidate. While the preferential voting process is over a century old, it is resisted primarily due to a lack of understanding. It definitely saves time and most people feel it guarantees a more professional and credible result. It definitely minimizes the "playing of games" and a lot of hurt feelings when multiple balloting is used.

(Harold C. Keller, is a member of the NFL Executive Council, a five diamond coach and everyone knows him as "Mr. Congress")



National Forensic League

Preferential Ballot

Chamber: _____

Print the name of your Chamber above.

Please rank the final Outstanding Congress people in your Chamber 1st, 2nd, 3rd, through last. Give serious thought as to how you rank your fellow Congress Candidates. There can be no ties.

After voting, fold your ballot in half and return it to your voting official.

Print the names of the Candidates as posted by the election official.

— fold here — fold here — fold here — fold here —

1st: _____
Most Outstanding

2nd: _____
Most Outstanding

3rd: _____
Most Outstanding

4th: _____
Most Outstanding

5th: _____
Most Outstanding

6th: _____
Most Outstanding

7th: _____
Most Outstanding

8th: _____
Most Outstanding

9th: _____
Most Outstanding

10th: _____
Most Outstanding

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Most Outstanding

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Most Outstanding

8th: _____
Most Outstanding

9th: _____
Most Outstanding

10th: _____
Most Outstanding