

USTA JUNIOR TRAVEL AND POINT COMPARISONS BY SECTION

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(MODIFIED FOR WEB)

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This document details the differences in three Boys 16 tournaments in three different Sections – Midwest, New England, and Southern. These differences include: miles to the tournament, hours necessary to drive to the tournament, points received on a per player basis, competition level in each tournament, average matches played per competitor, and the cost on a per point basis.

As I've mentioned in other documents, I am not a fan of the points-per-round system and I was very surprised when talking with a New England father at Zonals that he did not have similar concerns about the system. Now I know why. You will, too.

Even though this document looks at just one gender and age group, I would not expect the differences to be significant if the girls or other age groups were analyzed.

I also have several recommendations on how to improve the current system at the end of this document.

This analysis compares three National Level 5 tournaments. (These tournaments give the champion 88 national points.)

The tournaments in each Sections were:

Section	Location	Date	Tournament Name
Midwest	W. Lafayette, IN	March, 3-5, 2007	USTA/Midwest Junior Designated March Series Boys16
New England	Canton, CT	February 23-25, 2007	Canton Boys 16 Level 5
Southern	Ridgeland, MS	February 3-5, 2007	BullFrog USTA Southern Section Designated

I chose these tournaments because I wanted recent tournaments that were included in the National Ranking. Most of my research was conducted between March 4 and March 11 to accumulate this data.

To compare the levels of competition in each tournament, I used the TennisRecruiting.net site rankings for March 6, 2007. While TennisRecruiting.net (TRNET) does offer a more accurate view of how players are ranked, unfortunately it doesn't offer a single ranking for all of the players. It forces users to look across several "graduation classes" to get a better understanding of how players are ranked. Note that some competitors did not have any TRNET rankings and these competitors were removed from this portion of the computations.

Google Maps was used to compute the distances and the travel time between the tournament site and the players' home cities.

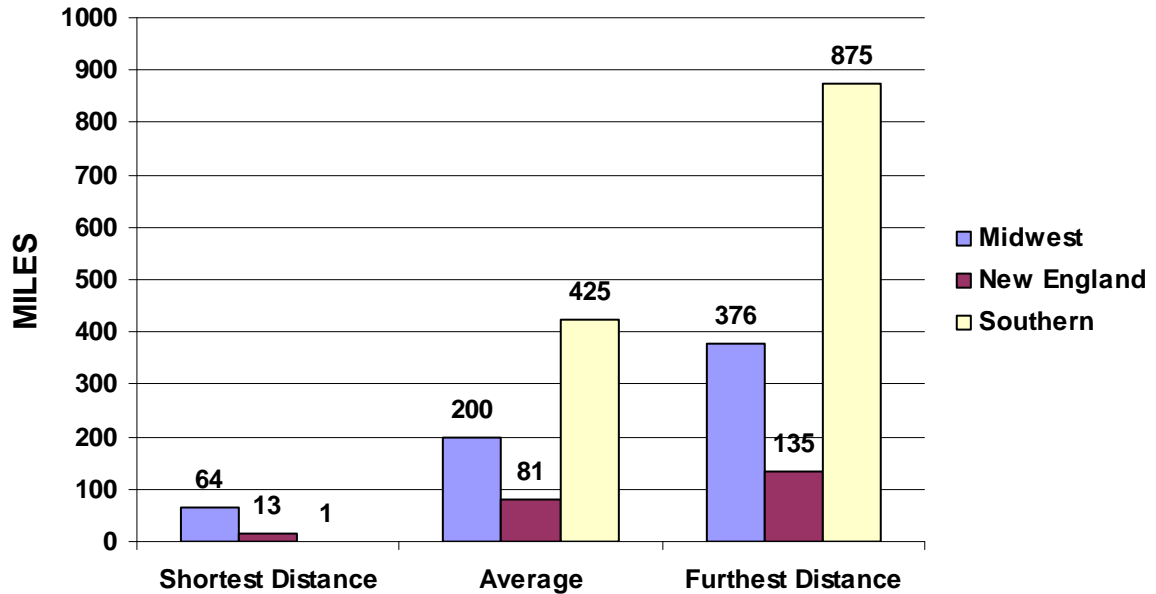
Distances:

First, let's compare the distances traveled to each tournament. The Midwest tournament was fairly centralized within the Section while New England and Southern's were on the southwestern sides of their respective Sections. Note the map below. Southern participants traveled the furthest by a long, long way. The average Southern player traveled more than twice as far as the average Midwesterner who traveled twice as far as those who lived in New England. The *furthest* that anyone traveled in New England was about 67% of what the *average* Midwesterner traveled and just 30% of the *average* Southern player.



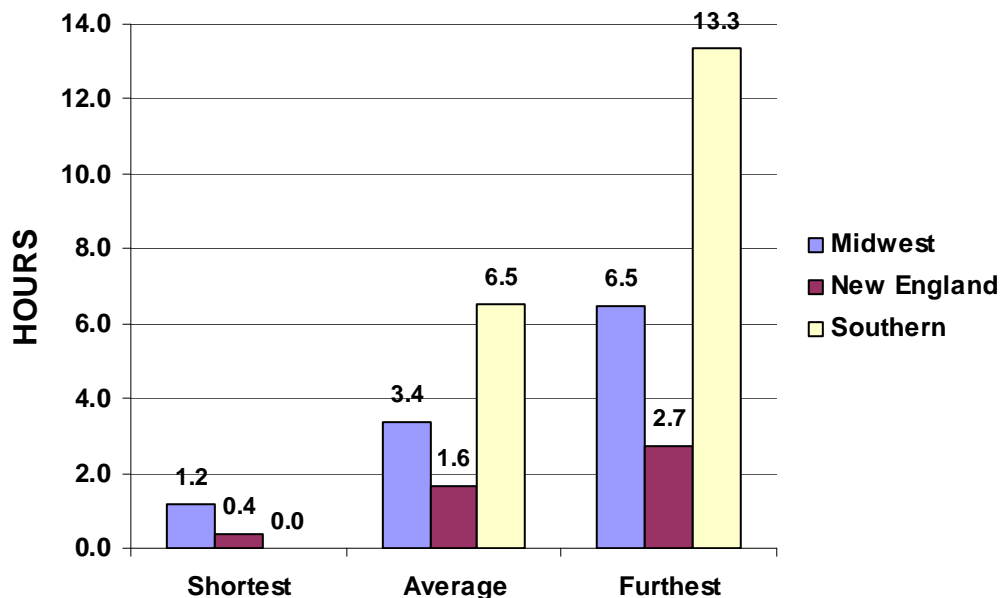
The graph below shows the average *one-way* travel miles to the tournaments.

DISTANCE IN MILES TO TOURNAMENT



As you would expect, the number of hours traveled one-way reveal graphs similar to the miles traveled even though there were likely a few people in the Southern Section who flew to their tournament.

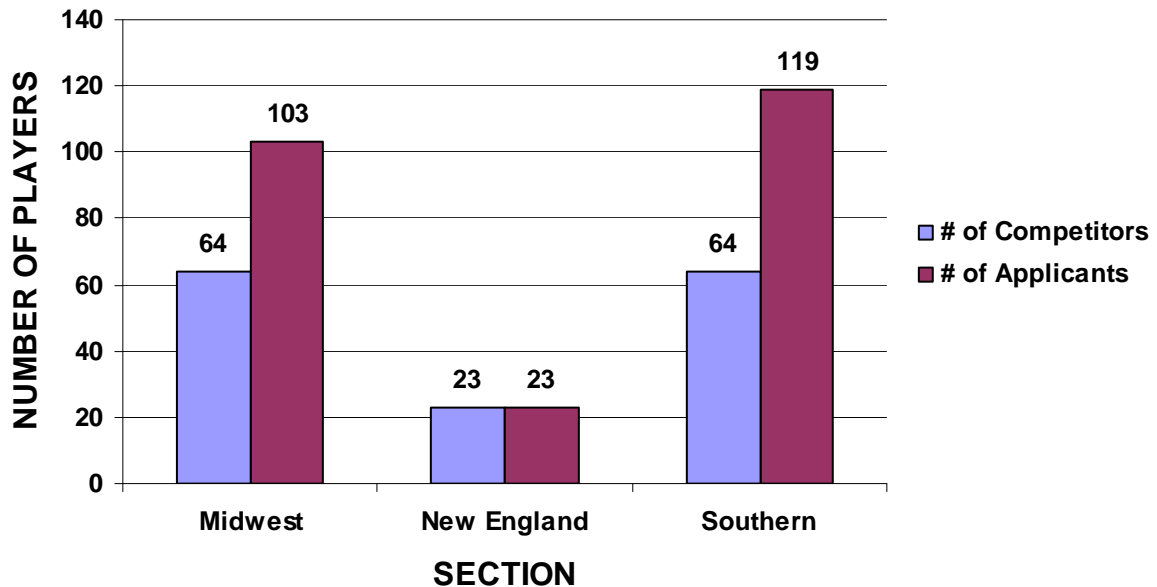
DISTANCE IN HOURS TO TOURNAMENT



Points Per Competitor:

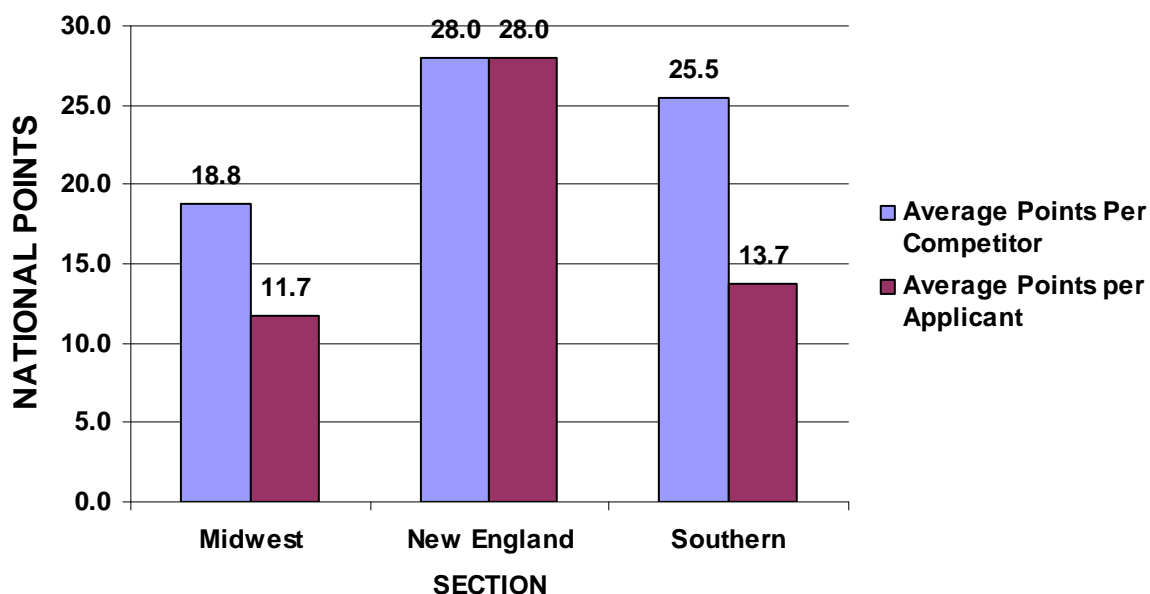
At first glance, many people would expect the points per competitor to be the same since these were all National Level 5 tournaments. That's not the case. New England players received a bonus because they had far fewer applicants in their tournament and all of those applicants got into the tournament. New England players also got 32 points for their first round wins versus 24 for the Midwest and Southern Sections because their players started out in the Round of 32 versus the Round of 64. The number of competitors and applicants in each tournament were as follows:

NUMBER OF COMPETITORS AND APPLICANTS



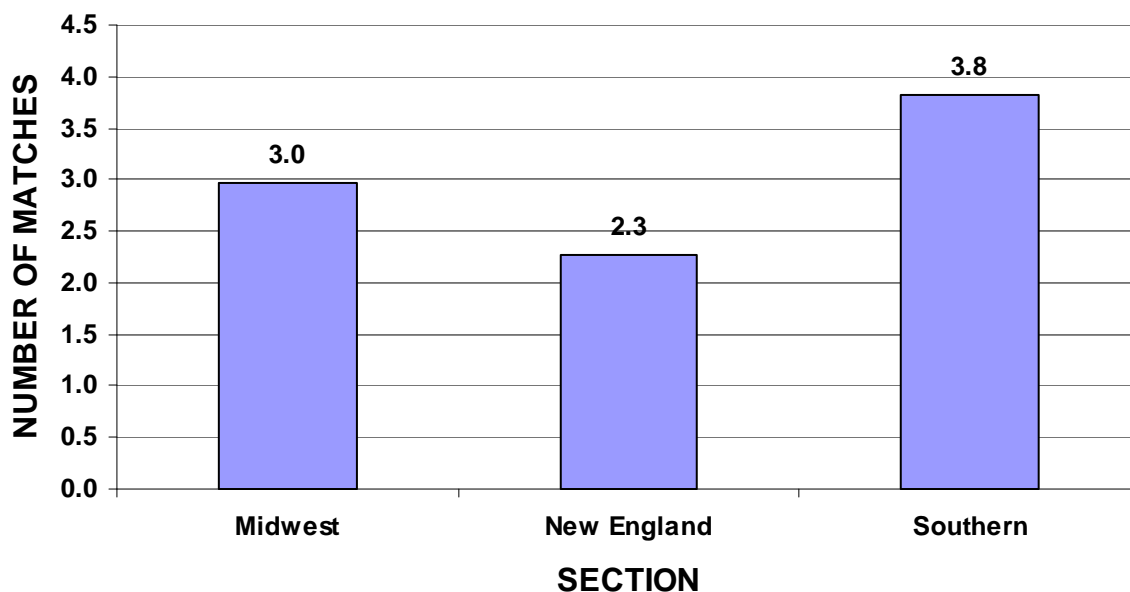
As you can see below, New England competitors received 49% more points than the Midwest competitors received and 10% more than the Southern competitors. For those players who applied but were not ranked high enough in the Midwest / Southern rankings to be included in the draw, New England competitors received more than double the number of points. (Please also note that there would have been far more applicants for the Midwest and Southern Sections if these players had thought that there was a reasonable chance of them getting into the tournament. Many players don't even bother to go through the process.)

POINTS PER COMPETITOR / APPLICANT



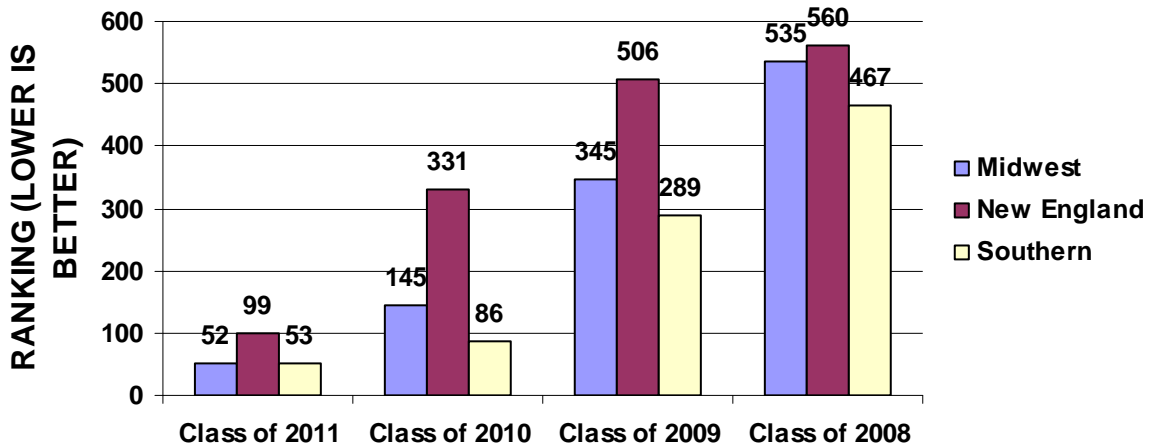
This, of course, should raise the question of why do the Southern players receive more points per player than the Midwest's? It is because Southern used a FIC (feed in consolation) format for their 64 players draw while the Midwest used a FMLC (first match losers consolation) for their 64 players. That provided the average Southern player with 35% more points than the Midwest player. It also gave these Southern players more matches against great competition (122 total matches versus 95 for the Midwest, or 28% more). Meanwhile, New England evidently chose not to play some backdraw matches. The number of matches per competitor in each tournament was as follows:

MATCHES PER COMPETITOR



Another element of having less players pursuing 64 spots in the draw is that the New England competition would be expected to be weaker. This is indeed the case. In the graph below, where *lower is better*, Southern has the best rankings of those competitors who have TRNET rankings, followed by the Midwest, and then New England.

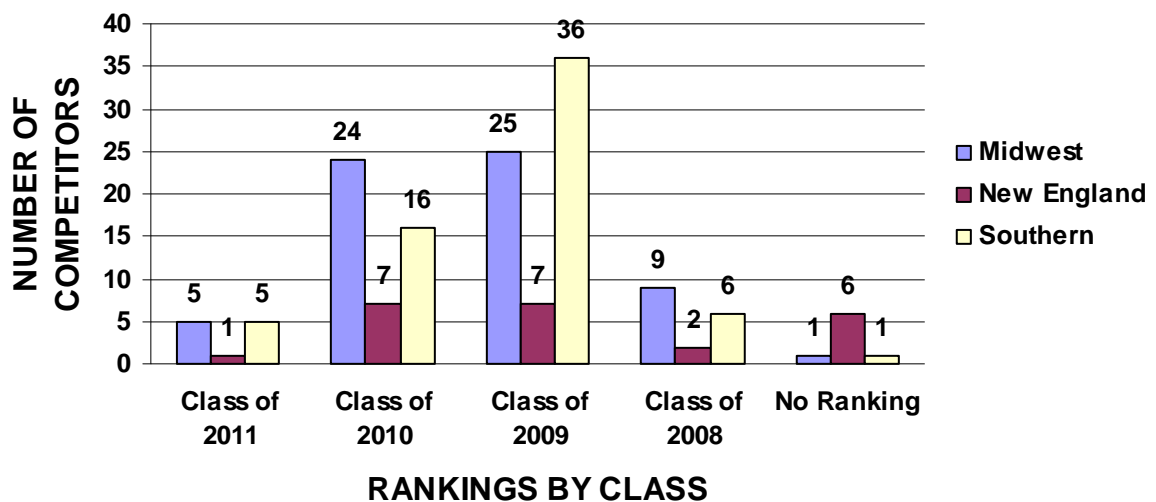
**TENNIS RECRUITING.NET
RANKINGS
FOR MARCH 6, 2007**



RANKINGS BY CLASS

Please also note that New England’s rankings above are not entirely accurate. Six of the 23 (or 26%) of New England competitors have no TRNET rankings at all so I did not factor them into the computations. (Since the rankings go down as far as 1,660, had I assigned 26% of the players with that ranking, it would have greatly affected New England’s rankings.) Both the Midwest and Southern had one player unranked (1.5%).

TENNISRECRUITING.NET NUMBER OF COMPETITORS IN EACH CLASS FOR MARCH 6, 2007



Summary Graph – USTA National B16 Rankings Compared with TRNET's:

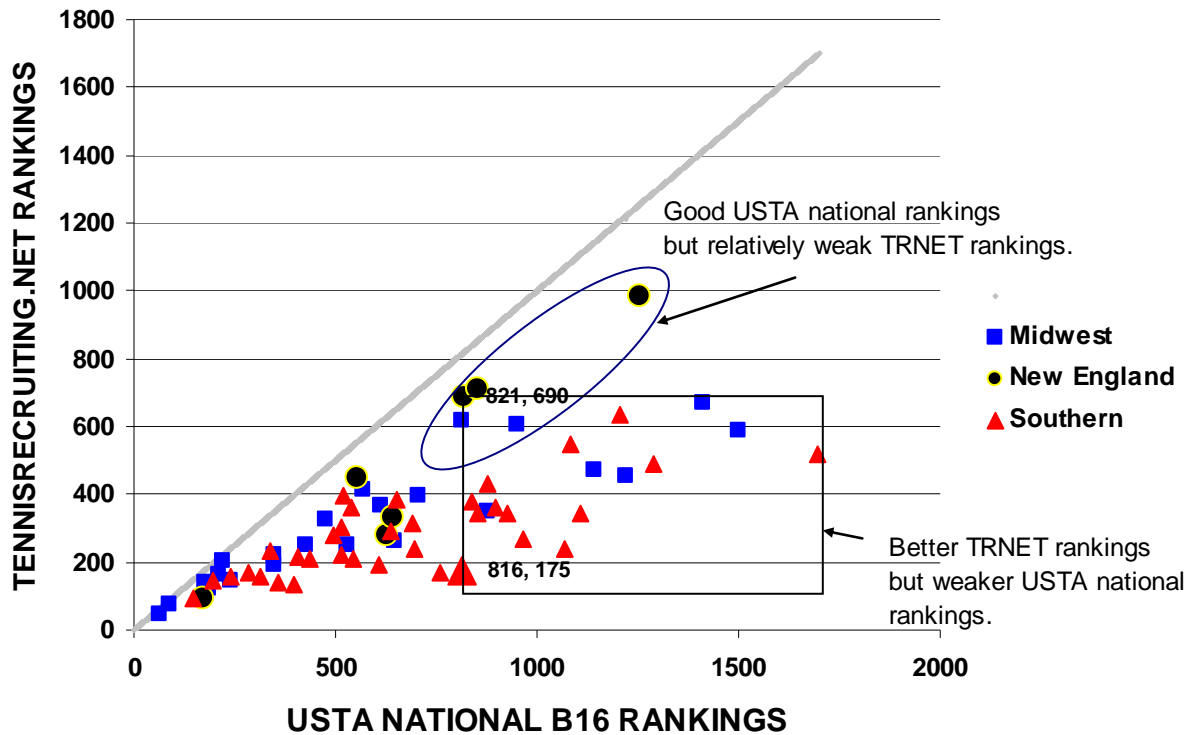
Below is the last graph on competitiveness and you might want to splash a cold energy drink on your face before you dig into it... If the USTA and TRNET's ranking systems were completely in-sync, all of the dots would be lined up on the gray line. For example, a player ranked 500 in the USTA database would be ranked 500 in TRNET's. That will never be the case though since TRNET has fewer players in this graduation class (1,660 for the Class of 2009) versus what the USTA has in its B16 and under database (1,880). This means that most players will fall below the line. (Please also note that I used the Class of 2009 in this analysis because it had the largest number of competitors in these tournaments.)

Here are a couple of examples that help illustrate how this graph works. For example, there are two dots marked with their values. The black dot on the left identified with "821,690" means that the national ranking for that player is 821 while his TRNET rank is 690 as a sophomore. The red triangle below the blue circle is for a player with a national ranking of 816 but a TRNET ranking of 175. This means that both players have similar national points and rankings but the player below is a much better player as shown by his TRNET ranking. The players in the blue oval likely indicate that these players have more easily obtained national points (or have traveled greatly to obtain them) and have achieved a reasonably good national ranking, **but** their abilities haven't provided them with a high TRNET ranking.

Now look at the black rectangle. The problem is that if all of these players were to apply to participate in a National Open, Midwest Open, etc. and the cutoff was a national ranking of 824 (which, at the time of my research was 128 points) then all of the players in the black box would not get into the tournament but the weaker player identified as "821,690" would. **Since it is easier for New England players to amass national points, all of the players in the Southern and Midwest Sections who are**

in this box have legitimate concerns on why they are being prevented from participating in the more prestigious, National Level tournaments.

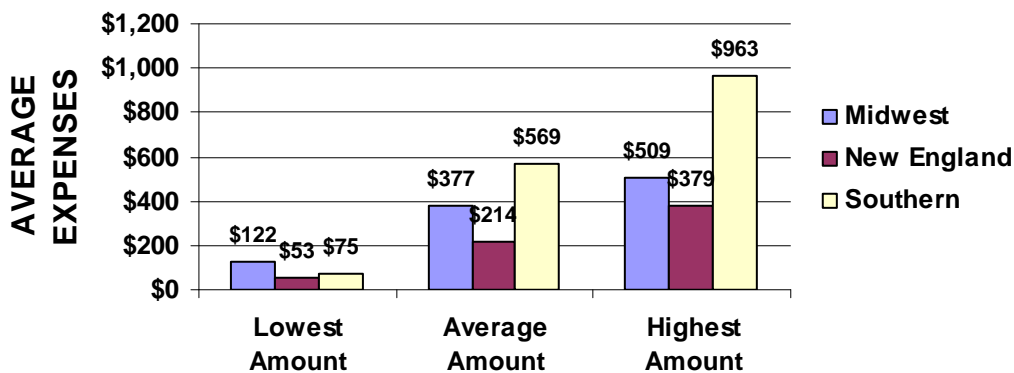
USTA NATIONAL B16 RANKINGS COMPARED WITH TENNISRECRUITING.NET'S



Costs to Compete:

Now, let's look at costs. More assumptions are necessary for this portion of the analysis. I used the same cost for travel (\$.35/mile) across all Sections. I varied the hotel costs slightly based on the price of a Fairfield Hotel room near each tournament location. I also had to estimate the number of nights that each participant stayed in a hotel based on how far they traveled to the tournament and how many matches they played. I used the actual amounts for the tournament fee (Midwest - \$77.36, New England - \$43.50, and Southern - \$74.36). I included no food expenses.

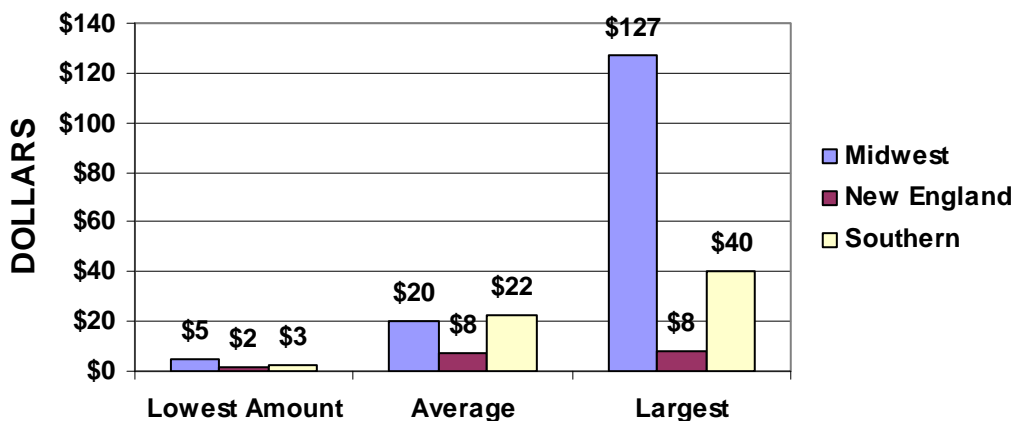
AVERAGE AMOUNT SPENT ON TOURNAMENTS



COSTS BY SECTION

Below is the cost per national point. Here New England benefits substantially not only because their costs are lowest but also because the number of points each player receives is the highest of the three Sections.

COST PER NATIONAL POINT



COSTS BY SECTION

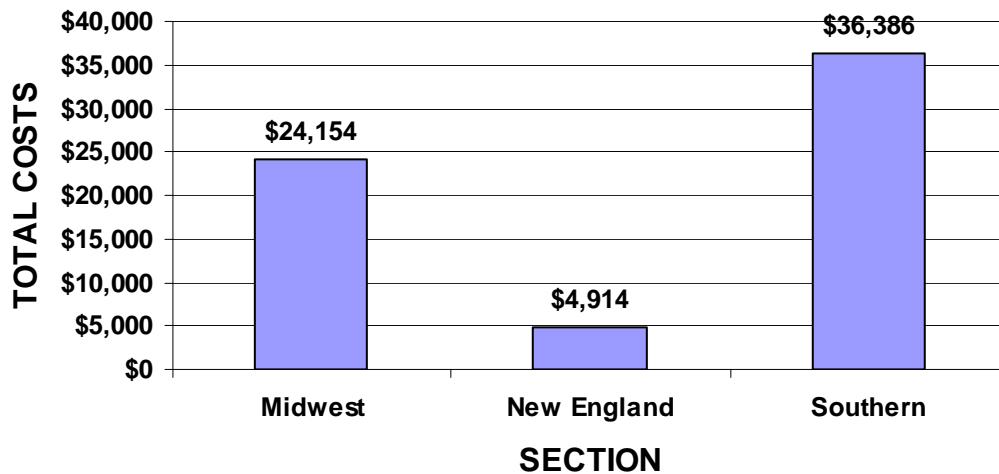
Unfortunately some players leave tournaments without any national points. Below are the costs that these families incurred. The costs might be even a bit higher if you included the families that traveled to the site in the Midwest and Southern Sections as alternates in hopes of getting into the tournaments but could not. The "X 16" refers to the number of players in each Section who received no points.

COST PER PLAYER FOR NO NATIONAL POINTS



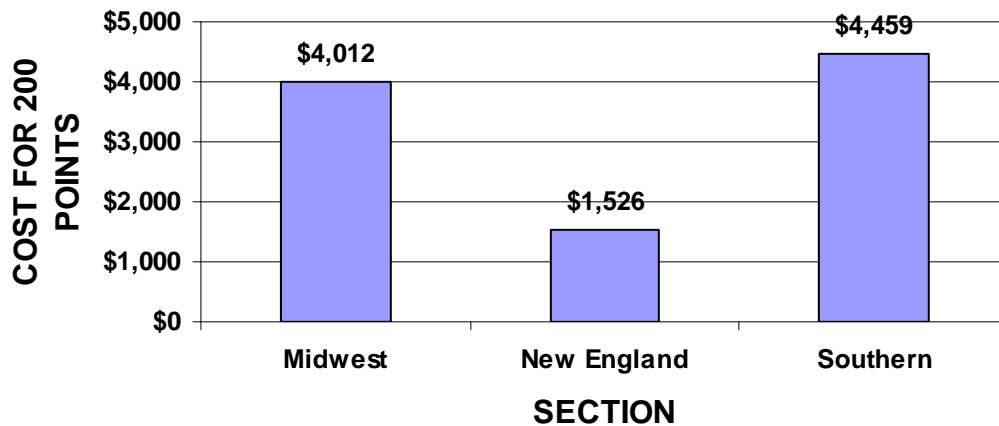
The following graph shows the total costs that all parents incurred for all three tournaments.

TOTAL COSTS FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS



The last graph is perhaps the most significant of all of the cost-related graphs. It combines all of the information acquired above and shows how much money it would require in each Section for an average player to earn 200 national points. (Currently, 200 points would place a boy approximately 600th in the nation.) Yes, there are other ways in which players can earn national points but these tournaments are typically more accessible than many other national point tournaments.

COST FOR AVERAGE PLAYER TO ACQUIRE 200 NATIONAL POINTS



Please also note that I did not include any opportunity costs and time requirements associated with parents / guardians of the players. Because of the travel distance, parents of competitors in the Southern and Midwest Sections must devote themselves to tennis for the entire weekend. That's not necessarily the case for the New England parents.

Kudos to the Southern Section:

Also worth noting is that the Southern Section does something that is extremely beneficial for parents. They bring boys and girls, ages 12 through 18 into the *same city on the same weekend*. That means the entire tennis family can drive to one location and share one hotel room. I would expect that there is quite a bit of ride-sharing taking place as well. I understand that this approach also makes it easier for coaches and recruiters to come as well.

I realize that Southern has the ability to acquire a large number of outside courts but I don't understand why at least some bundling (i.e. B16 / B14, G14 / G12) isn't done by other Sections, especially in the Midwest. This also makes it possible to dramatically reduce the Cost per National Point because costs are shared among several children. From an analysis standpoint, those parents with two kids may have been able to drop their cost per national point in half.

Summary:

From a points-per-round perspective, it's great to live in Sections that have low populations that occupy a small area. Not only is it cheaper to participate in tournaments but it's also much easier to acquire national points.

And likewise, the parents in the big Sections get the double whammy of paying considerably more to compete and getting far less in return. At least the Southern Section helps parents a bit by aggregating the Level 5's in one location. Needless to say, if you are a tennis family with three, tennis-playing children in a large Section

(which doesn't aggregate tournaments), the time requirements and the playing costs make it extremely difficult to continue playing high-level, junior tennis.

Going from head-to-head to points-per-round was an enormous change. From an outsider's viewpoint, I didn't see many changes in the structure of junior tennis (i.e. modifying Sections or Districts) to accommodate for this enormous change. It appears that it was largely "plugged-in" without thoroughly examining what would happen next – not only from a customer cost viewpoint but also from a "What will some parents do to help their kids?" viewpoint as kids and their parents started to travel the nation for these scarce, precious points that expire after a year. (Of course, we won't know for years if we are really helping or hurting our kids since some of our kids have largely become one-dimensional tennis players.)

I don't think many people would argue that the *current* kids in the system are playing more frequently. Yet, I don't know how much *better* these kids have gotten. What's the cost / benefit? Certainly businesses would require this type of analysis but that's because a business spends its own money. With the USTA, the customers (or parents) are financing this process. Is this the most efficient and cost effective way to improve our juniors? Are the high monetary and enormous time costs driving kids and parents out of competitive tennis and discouraging others from becoming involved?

Please also note that there may be some Sections which could have it far worse than Southern and the Midwest and much better than New England. Hopefully, you can make comparisons between your Section and one of the Sections that I analyzed to draw your own conclusions.

Recommendations:

I hope this information is helpful and confirms some of the thoughts that many of you have been having. Personally, I don't know what happens from here. If consumers aren't happy with Target, they can write to the CEO or simply shop someplace else. I don't know how changes are made within the USTA.

However, there certainly needs to be some quick changes to this system to address the many disadvantages that the large Sections (in area and population) have versus the smaller ones, and hopefully because they have far greater clout due to their large membership numbers, this will happen quickly.

Some of these changes should include:

- Give the large Sections additional national point tournaments. To make them equal to New England, the Midwest and Southern Sections could easily have three or four Level 5 tournaments during the *same* weekend. If this is done during the same weekend, far more players could be involved and the distances traveled could be much less. If they aren't held during the same weekend, then I would suggest that players be limited to attending a portion of the Level 5's in their Section (so these players and their parents won't feel compelled to go to that many more tournaments).
- Give the large Sections two or three more Jr. Davis Cup / Wightman teams.

- Encourage the larger Sections to use more “age bundling” as Southern does by providing them with additional resources to coordinate multiple age groups in the same city.
- Encourage all tournaments to use the FIC format not only to increase the number of points players get but also to increase the number of quality matches that they play.

Please let me also add that I know that the USTA is working very hard at many levels to make U.S. juniors as good as they can be and I don't want to be critical of these efforts. However, I believe that even if the USTA had a “point-czar” who could make changes to the system on a weekly basis to make the system better and fairer (as a VP at Target would make changes to product pricing), this system would still fall short. We need a system or process that doesn't rank players based on their points but rather by how good they are. There are other ways to encourage players to play more matches.

At some point, I'll probably create another document with suggestions.

Please also note that I'm not being compensated for these reports so please give me proper attribution if you use any of my analyses.

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