

Proposal: Temporary Pairing Scoring for cEDH Tournaments

By LF Cruz (Aug 2026)

I have been working on an alternative tournament scoring structure for cEDH that could potentially reduce some recurring problems of competitive four-player games without changing any Magic rules.

TL;DR

Each player still plays individually to win, but is also assigned a temporary paired player for that pod. Winning yourself remains the primary objective; if your own chances of winning become low because of seat position or the way the game develops, your paired player's success becomes a secondary objective.

That gives you something meaningful to play toward instead of becoming strategically irrelevant, playing only to deny someone else, or preferring a draw. The pairing changes every Swiss round, so it creates a temporary alignment rather than a permanent team.

A possible scoring model is 5 points for your own win, 2 if your paired player wins, 1 for a draw, and 0 otherwise. The rest of this proposal explains the incentives, risks, and possible benefits in more detail.

Core structure

- Seat 1 is paired with Seat 4.
- Seat 2 is paired with Seat 3.
- The pairing lasts only for that game.
- In the next Swiss round, players are placed into new pods and receive new temporary partners.
- There are no permanent teams unless a tournament specifically wants to experiment with that separately.

A possible scoring system would be:

- 5 points: You win the game.
- 2 points: Your paired player wins.
- 1 point: The game ends in a draw.
- 0 points: A player from the opposing pair wins.

Normal cEDH gameplay rules remain completely unchanged.

Why introduce this?

One of the fundamental difficulties of competitive Commander is that four players are trying to apply a competitive mindset to a multiplayer game.

This creates situations involving:

- kingmaking;
- priority bullying;
- political pressure;
- seat-position advantages;

- players with little incentive left to participate constructively;
- and draws caused by players preferring a draw over allowing another player to win.

The temporary pairing system attempts to give every player a clear secondary incentive.

Your first objective is always to win yourself.

But if your own win becomes unlikely, you still have something meaningful to play for.

"I can probably no longer win this game, but if my paired player wins, I receive 2 points instead of 0."

This means losing your own winning position does not automatically make you strategically irrelevant.

Winning still matters much more

The difference between 5 points and 2 points is important.

The system should not make players indifferent between winning themselves and helping their paired player.

"I can protect my own win for 5 points, or protect my partner's win for 2 points."

The rational choice should normally still be to pursue your own victory.

The paired player represents a fallback objective, not an equal objective.

This is why something like 5/2/1/0 may work better than 3/2/1/0.

Potential effect on draws

One area where I think this could be particularly interesting is intentional or negotiated draws.

A common cEDH situation can look something like this:

Player A attempts to win.

Player B can stop A, but doing so leaves Player C almost guaranteed to win.

Under normal scoring, B may prefer to tell A:

"Don't attempt the win. If you do, I'll stop you and C wins. Let's draw instead."

If C happens to be B's temporary paired player, the calculation changes.

B may now think:

"If I stop A and C wins, I get 2 points. A draw only gives me 1."

There is now an incentive to let the game reach a natural winner instead of preserving the draw.

This would not eliminate draws, but it could make them less attractive in situations where the game already has a likely winner.

Temporary alignment rather than permanent teams

This should not be considered a traditional team format.

Your paired player changes every Swiss round.

Someone who was on the opposing side of your pod in Round 1 could become your paired player in Round 2.

There is therefore no persistent team score or tournament-long alliance.

The structure exists only inside each individual game.

For example:

Round 1:

Player A ↔ Player D

Player B ↔ Player C

Round 2:

Player A may now be paired with Player B in a completely different pod.

The tournament remains individually ranked.

How this could affect politics and kingmaking

The system would not completely remove kingmaking.

Instead, it could make some of the incentives that already exist in multiplayer Magic more explicit and predictable.

Rather than wondering:

“Why is this player helping them?”

there may be a clear strategic reason:

“That player is temporarily paired with them and receives 2 points if they win.”

This could potentially reduce some of the frustration around unclear alliances, personal politics, grudges, and priority pressure.

Players still negotiate and interact, but everyone understands the incentive structure before the game begins.

Why Seat 1 could be paired with Seat 4

Seat position already affects cEDH, and pairing Seat 1 with Seat 4 could create an interesting counterweight to turn-order asymmetry.

Because Seats 2 and 3 both act before Seat 4 gets another opportunity to meaningfully develop, Seat 1 may have a stronger incentive to remain capable of interacting with them.

“Seat 4 has barely developed yet, so I may need to keep mana and interaction available for Seats 2 and 3 instead of committing everything to advancing my own board.”

In other words, Seat 1 may naturally slow down its own development or avoid tapping out because the paired Seat 4 is not yet well positioned to help control what Seats 2 and 3 are doing.

Once Seat 4 has developed enough mana and resources to participate in interaction, that pressure on Seat 1 may decrease.

This does not mean Seat 1 should avoid interacting with Seats 2 or 3. It means the pairing may create a reason for Seat 1 to preserve interaction specifically because Seats 2 and 3 act consecutively before the underdeveloped Seat 4.

Whether 1+4 / 2+3 is actually the best pairing would need to be tested against real seat-position data. It should be treated as a hypothesis rather than an assumption.

Potential benefits

If the incentives work as intended, the system could potentially produce:

- fewer negotiated draws;
- fewer players becoming strategically irrelevant;
- clearer political incentives;
- less arbitrary kingmaking;
- less priority bullying;
- more incentive to continue playing toward a meaningful result;
- additional strategic depth without modifying the rules of Magic;
- and potentially a more understandable multiplayer competitive structure for newer cEDH players.

It could also create interesting decisions such as:

“Do I spend this counterspell protecting my own future win, or help my paired player now?”

or:

“My paired player is attempting to win, but I have a realistic line to win myself next turn. Is 2 points now worth giving up my chance at 5?”

Those decisions are where I think the format could become particularly interesting.

Main risk

The biggest risk is that temporary pairing becomes too powerful and games begin to feel like 2v2 rather than four-player free-for-all cEDH.

That is why the scoring difference matters.

If a personal win is worth 5 points and a paired win only 2, the system still strongly rewards selfish play.

The central question would be:

“Does the secondary incentive improve multiplayer cEDH, or does it overpower individual competition?”

That is something theory alone probably cannot answer.

It would need actual games.

How I would test it

I would initially treat this as an experimental tournament structure rather than a replacement for existing cEDH.

Run normal cEDH games with:

5 — win
2 — *paired player wins*
1 — draw
0 — loss

Track:

- win rates by seat;
- number of draws;
- average game duration;
- frequency of intentional draws;
- how often players actively assist their paired player;
- whether players feel the game became too team-oriented;
- and general player satisfaction.

After enough games, the scoring or pair structure could be adjusted.

The attractive part of the experiment is that nothing about cards, decks, priority, combat, life totals, or Magic's Comprehensive Rules needs to change.

Only the tournament incentives change.

Central idea

“Keep cEDH as an individual four-player game, but give every player a temporary secondary alignment so that even when their own win becomes unlikely, they still have a meaningful competitive reason to help the game reach a winner.”

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