Vega Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

Issue 6 of Arbiting Matters contained a useful comparison of pairing programs by Alex Holowczak. This summarised the capabilities of Swiss Master, Swiss Manager and Tournament Director/UTU Swiss. Missing from the comparison was the Italian program Vega (http://www.vegachess.com). This was a significant omission, although Vega is relatively little-known in the UK. This report aims to correct that omission and to evaluate its performance based on recent use at the May 2015 Frome Congress.

This report does not aim to be comprehensive or to describe all of Vega's capabilities. In particular, no attempt has been made to evaluate Vega's use for team tournaments[1] or to exercise all the alternative pairing methods available. There is a much more complete description in the Vega User Manual (http://www.vegachess.com/tl/tl_files/music_academy/distrib/vega_en.pdf) which also has plenty of screenshots of the user interface, which I have not reproduced in this report.

2. Vega

 Vega is the work of Luigi Forlano, a FIDE Arbiter, and is a FIDE endorsed tournament management program (http://pairings.fide.com/approved-programs.html). It is widely used in Italy (obviously) but also in a number of other countries as diverse as Spain and New Zealand (where the national federation insists that it must be used for all FIDE tournaments[2]). The pairing engine for the Swiss (Dutch) system is Roberto Ricca's JaVaFo, (http://www.rrweb.org/javafo/aum/JaVaFo_AUM.html) which is the same pairing engine as that used by Swiss Manager.

Possibly, the reason why Vega has had little use in the UK is that until recently the interfaces to the ECF grading system, although present, were not quite correct, rendering it unusable in practice. However, with version 7.1.6 (the current release) those interfaces are fully functional and worked correctly when used for the Frome tournament.

One advantage of Vega is that it is relatively inexpensive. The Linux version is entirely free, whilst the Windows version is free for tournaments of up to 30 players. An unrestricted Windows licence is 50€.

3. Quick Comparison with Other Programs

In issue 6 of Arbiting Matters Alex Holowczak compared different tournament management programs using the following table. Copied below it is a bit hard to read and the original is slightly clearer in Arbiting Matters.The colour code is that Green means the requirement is met fully, yellow means the requirement is partially met and red means the capability is not present at all.

In fact , Luigi Forlano now recommends his new program Orion for team tournaments
http://www.vegachess.com/tl/index.php/downloaden.html
[2] http://www.newzealandchess.co.nz/NZCFdocs/VegaNZInstructions.pdf

Types of Tournament	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
Individual Swiss				
Individual All-Play-All				
Team Swiss		Pairs by MP, loses individual results		
Team All-Play-All		Pairs by MP, loses individual results		
Importing Players for Tournament	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
Import players from FIDE rating list				
Import players from ECF grading list				
Import players in bulk	Use (e.g.) ECF list format	Customisable CSV file		Write them out individually
Producing Pairings	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
British Pairing System			Inaccurate	
Dutch Pairing System (FIDE)				
Speed of Producing Pairings				Must be done manually
Quality of Presentation	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
Website Presentation	Has Google Ads			
Customisable Pairing Printouts	Choose options every time	Adjustable Excel template	Only two alternatives	
Quality of Pairing Printouts			Text-file based	Need to show cards
Prints Result Slips with names				
Prints Match Cards with names		Not team-orientated	Not team-orientated	
Variety of other Printouts	Large Tournament? Print board list!		Very limited options	Need to produce separately
Rating Reports	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
FIDE-rating files			Not all required data included	
ECF-grading files			Reports clubs unnecessarily	
Note that the ECF Grading Checker has the functionality to covert FIDE-rating files into ECF-grading files.				
Usability Issues	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
Speed of adding players			One-by-one only	One-by-one, no lookup for grades
Adding byes in advance		Treats Byes & Withdrawals the same		
Changing default pairings				
Calculating variety of Tie-Breaks			Limited Choice	Must calculate manually
Player Limit	1500	300	999	Infinite
Round Limit	23	Not explored	Not explored	Infinite
Other	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
Web Output	Upload to Chess-results.com	Creates HTML files you then upload	Upload to UTU Result Service	
Export PGN Files				
Licencing	Swiss Manager	Swiss Master	Tournament Director/UTU Swiss	Pairing Cards
Cost of Standard version	150 Euros	50 Euros	£50	Card, pen, ink/time intensive
Number of Installs	No practical limit	No practical limit	Not explored	Installation not required

Using the same metrics, Vega performs as follows:

Category	Sub-category	Yes (✓) or No (✗)	Comment
Types of Tournament			
	Individual Swiss	✓	
	Individual all-play-all	✓	Single or double round. Max 24 players
	Team Swiss	✓	Max 10 boards per team
	Team all-play-all	✓	Single or double round. Max 24 teams
Importing Players for tournament			
	From FIDE rating list	✓	
	From ECF grading list	✓	Either the web-site CSV text file or the graders' master list (after conversion to CSV format)
	Importing players in bulk	✓	From any formatted CSV file
Producing Pairings			
	British	✗	
	Dutch (FIDE)	✓	Other pairing systems (e.g. Dubov) available
	Speed	✓	
Quality of Presentation			
	Web-site	✓	
	Customisable pairing print-outs	✓	
	Quality of pairing print-outs	✓	
	Prints results slips with names	✓	
	Prints match cards with names	✓	
	Variety of other print-outs	✓	
Rating Reports			
	FIDE	✓	
	ECF	✓	
Usability Issues			
	Speed of adding players	✓	
	Adding byes in advance	✓	Either 0 or half point byes
	Changing default pairings	✓	
	Variety of tie-breaks	✓	
	Player limit	999	
	Round limit	20	
Other			
	Web output	✓	Creates html files for upload by the in-built ftp client (or external ftp program)
	Output PGN files	✓	Template PGN files created. When PGN files are complete games can be displayed on the web-site using pgn4web (http://pgn4web.casaschi.net/home.html)
Licencing			
	Cost of standard version		Free (Linux); Free (Windows < 31 players); 50€.(Windows, unrestricted)
	Number of installs		No practical limit

4. Evaluation

4.1 Preamble

This evaluation should come with the caveat that this is the first tournament management program I have used, so I have no first-hand comment to make on how well usability compares with other programs. The comments below simply reflect whether the program did what I needed it to do and my impression of its fitness for purpose.

The program was used at Frome for managing four sections, one of which was FIDE-rated. The tournaments were set up so that FIDE ratings were used for the Open and ECF ratings used for the other three sections. As this was the first time the Congress had used Vega, and it was to some extent a trial, Vega's automatic pairings were used for the Open (but checked manually), whilst manual pairings were retained for the other sections (but the results management handled by Vega). All the player data, pairings and results were input into Vega for display on the Congress web-site and to generate the required grading/rating files.

4.2 Tournament Set-Up and Player Input

Initially setting up the tournament (number of rounds, pairing system and tie-break methods etc.) was quite simple and straightforward.

Inputting the players as the entries came in was also quite simple. The program comes ready configured to use the grading database that can be downloaded in csv format from the ECF web-site. This database can be used 'as is' without any modification, but is more limited than the graders' master list. However, there is an option in Vega to use any other customised database of choice. Since the graders' master list was available, this was converted from Excel to csv format and used as the input database.

To use the master list It was only necessary to define a 'filter' to tell Vega that (for example) the national ID was field 0, player name field 1, ECF grade field 5 etc. which was simple and straightforward to do using the interface Vega provides for this purpose. The filter was set up to read in player name, ECF and FIDE codes, ECF grade and club code. The filter is a simple text file which I copied back to the program's author and it has now been incorporated into the library of national filters supplied with the program.

The 'Federation' field in Vega was used to display club name for the non-FIDE rated sections, whereas for the Open this field was necessarily the 3-character FIDE federation code. Dates of birth were read from the grading database in ECF format (dd/mm/yyyy), but necessarily had to be converted manually to FIDE format (yyyy.mm.dd) for the Open section. Any of the data fields in the input player list can be manually edited. In particular, FIDE ratings and FIDE titles had to be input by a manual edit as these are not contained in the ECF database.[3]

The option to use any customised database would be especially useful when there is an existing set of players to be imported en bloc.

One not-so-obvious 'wrinkle' is that a customised database has to use the semi-colon character ';' as the field separator and not the comma ',' as is standard in the UK. Fortunately, the standard separator is customisable in the Windows control panel using the regional differences tab, and with that set appropriately Excel had no difficulty in saving the master list in the required format.

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[3] The Vega User Manual says that when a player doesn't have a FIDE rating the program will use the national rating instead. Rather than rely on that statement, and because it wasn't clear how/if the program would convert between ECF and FIDE grades, I preferred to manually calculate the FIDE equivalent rating and insert it as an edit.

Vega automatically generated html files so that the evolving player lists could be displayed on the Congress web-site as the entries came in. Each player name was hyper-linked to their FIDE profile so data like current rating could be easily checked.

There is a 'player status' setting that allows byes or withdrawals to be pre-set. The player list has a coloured marker indicating those players that will not be included in the next round's pairings because of the player status setting.

Once player registration is closed, the player list held by Vega is automatically sorted into descending rating order and the first round pairings can be made. It is, however, possible to re-open registration to cater for the unexpected very late entry (and we had one of those).

4.3 Pairings

Automatic pairings are carried out in accordance with the Dutch system using the same pairing engine as that used by Swiss Manager. The automatic pairings used in the Open section worked just fine. The pairings were as I and (more importantly) the players expected.

It is possible to 'customise' the automatic pairings to some extent, e.g. to avoid pairing two players from the same club. The pairings can also be modified manually or, indeed carried out completely manually.

Manual input of the pairings that were generated the old-fashioned way using cards was quite quick and it was easy to correct any errors, swap colours, move pairings up and down the board order etc.

Pairings (and other reports) can be passed to an in-built text editor. From that editor they can be printed directly or edited first (e.g. to change the point size of the printed text).

4.4 Rating Reports

Vega generates both FIDE and ECF rating reports. Very little manual editing of the files is required.

In the case of the FIDE rating file, the time control used has to be added manually. In the case of the ECF files, the Treasurer's multi-line postal address, if required, has to be inserted manually as Vega will accept only a one-line email address. Also, the Event code is too restrictive in the number of characters allowed (6). But these are comparatively trivial edits to the header information – the bulk of the results files are perfectly fine.

Both the rating reports for Frome were submitted the same evening as the Congress finished and both were accepted first time.

4.5 Web-site Generation

Web-site generation is completely automatic, apart from the need to upload the 'www' folder. The style of web-site generated is best appreciated by looking at the Frome Congress web-site, i.e. http://www.somersetchess.org/frome_congress/2015/wwwFrome%20Open%202015%20%28Vega%29/index.html

Player names in the cross-tables are hyper-linked to the player's history card showing opponents, their grades, the results and the calculated player performance rating for the tournament. The latter is calculated according to ECF grading rules using the ECF grades.

A nice feature is the ability to link to a pgn viewer for display of the games (see the link above for an example)

5. Conclusion

I quite enjoyed using this program and it was definitely worth the effort required to gain familiarity with it. It did everything that I required it to do and I can thoroughly recommend it. An additional positive comment is that I have found the author Luigi Forlano to be very responsive to any comments received and helpful in implementing suggested bug-fixes/improvements.