

Updated: Feb 1, 2023

1. ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION.

The National Premier Leagues (NPL) Finals is a restricted competition open to teams in good standing which hold valid US Club Soccer passcards and which participate in an NPL. Qualifiers for the NPL Finals are determined through regular-season and play-off competition (where applicable) in individual NPLs across the country. Beyond the automatic qualifiers, US Club Soccer reserves the right to invite other teams from NPL clubs, or potentially from outside the NPL if no reasonable alternative exists in certain age groups, to manage appropriate competition formats.

- a. Participants shall consist of U-13 through U-18/19 boys and girls. Age brackets may be adjusted by US Club Soccer at any time.
- b. US Club Soccer reserves the right to accept, reject, or review any team's eligibility. All participating teams, staff, and players must be in good standing with US Club Soccer.

2. TOURNAMENT AUTHORITY.

The Competition Director shall have ultimate authority over all details of the competition, including without limitation format, scheduling, team rosters, discipline, and other matters within the confines of the event. The interpretation of the rules and all decisions of the Competition Director are final within the confines of the event, and there shall be no protests or appeals of the Competition Director's decisions. The Competition Director may be assisted by the Discipline Committee (if applicable).

A Discipline Committee shall be appointed by the US Club Soccer VP of Competitions and will minimally consist of the Competition Director and any US Club Soccer Board of Directors member in attendance at the event.

In all matters of discipline within the event, with the exception of an alleged incident of misconduct towards a game official (where US Club Soccer has original jurisdiction), the Discipline Committee shall render a determination, and send a report to the US Club Soccer Discipline Committee pursuant to this section. Decisions of the Discipline Committee within the confines of the event are final and are neither appealable nor subject to a protest.

3. COMPETITION FORMAT.

The competition format will vary by age group and gender depending on the number of participating teams. The number of participating teams may vary from year to year due to changes in or creation of new NPLs across the country. The precise competition format for each age group will be determined by US Club Soccer. Generally, competition will consist of round-robin play, and a single game between group winners on the final day to determine the champion. Where necessary, a semi-final game may be played as well. Consolation games may be included in certain age groups at the discretion of the Competition Director. Please refer to page 8 for brackets description. The Competition Director:

- a. Reserves the right to determine the size of each competitive group, and the right to alter the groups and format to account for larger or uneven numbers of teams in a given competitive division.
- b. Shall determine the schedule and start times of all games and may alter the schedule of one game per day where necessary.

4. ROSTER RULES.

Any player registered with and issued a passcard for a participating club, who is a member of the designated age group or younger, is eligible to be placed on the post season roster (registration must occur before May 1st). No guest players or loan

players are allowed (Players registered with another club). No players may be added to a tournament roster other than pursuant to these rules unless an emergency situation arises and permission is obtained in writing from the Competition Director.

- a. **Maximum Tournament Roster Size:** Up to 26 players. Teams are expected to register all players three weeks prior to the Finals (including submitting paperwork and fees).
- b. **Playing on more than one team:** A player may play on only one team at the NPL Finals competition (team-tied for duration of event).
- c. **Roster Changes for NPL Finals:** For teams that qualify for the NPL Finals, players may be dropped or added to the post season roster without limitation up to the maximum roster size, as long as any new players to be added were registered with the member club during the NPL season or prior to May 1st. If the club has had tryouts since the end of their NPL season, they may add up to three new players from tryouts that have committed to and are registered with the club for the next registration year. Any other roster emergency requests shall be determined by the Competition Director on a case-by-case basis.
- d. **Roster freeze for NPL Finals:** The event roster is “frozen” 2 days prior to the competition. Rosters must be submitted through GotSport Software.
- e. **Game roster size:** Up to 18 players, selected from the tournament roster of up to 26 players. Only 18 players may dress for the game. Players on the tournament roster that are not on the game day roster must be in plain clothes on the team sideline or watch from the spectator sideline. Players in plain clothes must still have an approved passcard and may be asked to move to the spectator sideline at the referees discretion.
- f. **Substitutions: U-13 – U-18/19.** Once a player is substituted in one half of any NPL Post-season Competition, the player may not re-enter the game for the duration of the half. Once a player is substituted in overtime, the player may not reenter the game. There shall be a maximum of seven (7) substitutions in any half or in overtime of any competition. In case of a suspected head injury or serious injury, an additional substitution may be granted by the referee.

Any player suspected of suffering a head injury must be evaluated prior to returning to play. If player is being evaluated on-site by a health care professional with possible return to play, the player may temporarily be substituted without the substitution counting against the team’s total number of substitutions / regardless of whether team has a remaining substitution available. If the player is cleared to return to the field of play, they must replace the substitute player that entered the field as a temporary substitute when the injury occurred.

Substitutions may occur at any stoppage. However, the referee shall have discretion over all substitutions, and may refuse to allow any substitution if, in his/her opinion, the purpose is to disrupt the game

- g. **Age group structure:** The NPL Finals age group structure is below. Note that this may allow or require adjustment of NPL Finals rosters for teams that played the NPL regular season with a different age group cut-off.
 - **U-13:** Players born on or after January 1, 2010
 - **U-14:** Players born on or after January 1, 2009
 - **U-15:** Players born on or after January 1, 2008
 - **U-16:** Players born on or after January 1, 2007
 - **U17:** Players born on or after January 1, 2006
 - **U-18/19:** Players born on or after January 1, 2004
- h. **Coaching staff and team managers:** A minimum of 2 adults must be listed on the official roster and have appropriate passcards. Staff who intend to be on team bench **MUST** be included on the official roster. A maximum of 3 coaches/team staff will be allowed on a team bench at one time.

- i. **Official Roster:** Jersey numbers MUST be included for all players on the Official Roster which is turned in prior to the start of the competition. If during the competition a player's jersey number needs to change for any reason, approval from the Tournament Director must be provided prior to playing subsequent games.

5. REQUIRED DOCUMENTS.

- a. Valid US Club Soccer player passcards and a US Club Soccer official roster.
- b. Valid US Club Soccer staff passcards will be required for all coaches and the team manager.
- c. See *Attachment A: Team Check-In Procedures* for more information.

6. COMPETITION RULES.

The following rules shall govern all Tournament competitions:

- a. All games shall be played pursuant to FIFA Laws of the Game, unless stated otherwise in these rules.
- b. Length of Games:
 - U-13 and U-14: 35-minutes halves (11v11 Format)
 - U-15 and U-16: 40-minutes halves (11v11 Format)
 - U-17 and U-18/19: 45-minute halves (11v11 Format)All halftimes should last 10 minutes.
- c. In excessive heat conditions, water breaks can be allowed by the referee at his/her discretion, after prior consultation with the Competition Director. U.S. Soccer Federation Heat Guidelines will be used to define procedure during excessive heat conditions.
- d. In the group stage, games ending in a tie will be recorded as a tie, with each team receiving one point.
- e. Overtime (if needed): No overtime will be played except for semi-finals and finals. When an overtime period is required, it shall consist of two 10-minute halves (five minutes between halves) and then, if necessary, penalty kicks from the mark. There is no "golden goal."
- f. Ball size: Size 5 for 13U and up.
- g. All players must wear shin guards. All other equipment rules shall be pursuant to FIFA Laws of the Game.
- h. Home team should wear light uniforms / away team should wear dark uniforms. In case of uniform color conflicts, the designated away team shall change uniforms.
- i. Cast must be approved in advance of play by referee. Referee will use discretion in determining if cast is safe for play. If cast is deemed unsafe, players make adjustments, but must be approved in advance of entering the field of play. Referee Assignor and Tournament Director will have final say in any disputes over cast safety.
- j. Any eyewear worn during games must be sport-approved eyewear.
- k. All injuries should be evaluated by training staff onsite. Head injuries will be evaluated with extreme precaution. In the event that a serious head injury occurs during the tournament, referee or trainer will pull player passcard and bring it to the tournament HQ. Player will only be allowed to return to play after written clearance is provided by medical doctor and on-site trainer as given the approval.

- l. The use of personal recording devices to record your athletes and teams at our events are permitted, but ask for your cooperation ensuring the safety of yourself and those around you. If utilizing an elevated recording device (this includes the use of high pods / anything over 6ft in height) the device **MUST** be properly secured with weights and stabilizers. You must be courteous to those around you and not block viewing and if a tournament official asks for the device to be lowered at any time, full compliance is expected.

7. STANDINGS AND TIEBREAKERS.

- a. Game Points: 3 points awarded for a win; 1 point for a tie; zero (0) points for a loss. Any forfeit shall be recorded as a 3 – 0 win, with three goals being credited. Note: In the event a game is in progress and is forfeited during play for any reason, the team getting the forfeit win will be credited with either the forfeit score or the score at the time play concluded, whichever is in their benefit. The Competition Director has the ultimate decision regarding handling of forfeits.
- b. Tiebreakers: For teams tied in points at the end of a round-robin or any other group stage competition, tiebreaker criteria shall be: 1) head to head competitions (but not in the case of a three-way tie); 2) goal differential (max of 5 per game); 3) total goals (max of 5 per game); 4) fewest goals allowed; and 5) penalty kicks from the mark.
 - In a case where three teams are tied in points, but one team has defeated the other teams tied in points, the winner of the two games will advance.
 - In addition, once a tiebreaker is used to eliminate one team (i.e. head-to-head, goal differential, etc.), the next tiebreaker in line will be used to determine the winner or team that advances.
- c. Uneven number of games: If a tiebreaker calculation between two or more teams would be based on a different number of games, points, goal differential, total goals and fewest goals allowed will be converted into a percentage per game.
- d. Both finalists should report to the specific award area after the completion of the team's championship game for Finalists and Champions awards.

8. GAME AUTHORITY AND DISCIPLINE.

- a. The referee's decision in all matters related to the field and the game itself shall be final. There shall be no protests of any referee's decision or game result. Referee Evaluation Forms (to be completed by a coach only) are available at usclubsoccer.org or via the administrative/HQ location on-site. No other forms will be provided.
- b. Red cards awarded to players during a game, or dismissals of team officials, shall result in that player or team official being suspended for the next game. Red card suspensions, except for violent conduct or misconduct towards a game official, issued in the final game of an NPL regular season, shall not carry over to the NPL Finals, but will be served in the next regular-season game in the following season.
- c. There shall be no yellow card accumulations. Note that FIFA Circulars #866 and #821 require that a sendoff for a red card or a sendoff after two yellow cards in a game be treated the same. Thus, in both cases, the player must sit out the remainder of that game and the next tournament game.
- d. If, in the opinion of the referee, it is necessary to terminate a game due to the misconduct of a team or others associated with that team, the game shall be forfeited to the opposing team and the matter shall be referred to the Discipline Committee, which may, among other penalties, suspend the team for the remainder of the tournament or undertake other disciplinary action. If, in the opinion of the referee, the termination is the result of substantially equivalent misconduct by both teams or by persons associated with both teams, the matter will be resolved by the Discipline Committee.

- e. The team officials shall serve their suspension in a game involving the same team when the dismissal occurred, unless the team has no more such games remaining. In this case, the club official shall serve the suspension on the next available game. The Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee shall have the authority to take further disciplinary action should it be deemed necessary. *The team official can not be present (within the facility) during the suspension match.*
- f. Except for violent conduct or misconduct towards a game official, suspensions for red cards and staff ejections shall not extend beyond the NPL Finals. Any suspension beyond the NPL Finals shall be at the discretion of the Competition Director or US Club Soccer.
- g. For serious discipline matters with the potential to incur penalties beyond the issuance of a red card or staff ejection, a *Competition Incident Report* and a referee's report shall be completed and sent to US Club Soccer. Also, the referee shall give the delinquent players or staff passcards to US Club Soccer.
- h. At all times, all coaches shall have complete responsibility and control for the conduct of their players, bench area, parents, family and friends. A maximum of 3 coaches / team staff will be allowed on a team bench.

 Failure to do so may result in game stoppage. US Club Soccer is enforcing a **zero-tolerance policy** on the sideline. Any spectators removed from one game are also prohibited from returning at any point during the event. At all times, coaches shall have complete responsibility and control for the conduct of their players, bench area, parents, family and friends. Failure to do so may result in game stoppage.
- i. At the end of each game, the referee's game report shall be submitted to the Competition Director.
- j. In the event a red card is issued, the referee shall obtain the delinquent player's/staff member's passcard and take it to the US Club Soccer headquarters tent. After the suspension is served, the coach may pick up the passcard, unless there is the allegation of referee abuse or the Competition Director/referee feels that additional action is warranted.
- k. For serious discipline matters with the potential to incur penalties beyond the issuance of a red card or staff ejection, a *Competition Incident Report* and a referee's report shall be completed and sent to US Club Soccer. Also, the referee should give the delinquent players' passcards to US Club Soccer.

Discipline for the Tournament shall be under the jurisdiction of US Club Soccer.

9. GAME START TIMES AND RESCHEDULING.

- a. All games shall start at the designated time. A forfeit shall be declared if a team cannot field a minimum of seven (7) players at the start time of the game. However, the Competition Director shall have the authority to adjust the schedule in cases where a team's arrival has been delayed due to unforeseen travel or weather conditions, or other circumstances beyond the control of the team.
- b. Every reasonable effort will be made to complete every game as long as the safety of the participants and spectators is not jeopardized. Should a game not be able to be started or should a suspension of play be required due to safety concerns or unplayable conditions, the referee, coaches, Competition Director, shall consult, but the referee shall have the ultimate authority to either suspend or terminate the game.
- c. If it is not possible to complete a game that has been stopped for the reasons set forth in this section, the Competition Director may require that the game be continued at a different time, or if the first half is completed, may determine that the results shall stand. If the first half is not completed, the Competition Director shall determine whether the game shall be rescheduled and continued, or whether another resolution of the matter shall be implemented based on his or her best judgment. The schedule of remaining games or any impacts on group

winners shall be a factor in any determination. Any decisions by the Competition Director under this section are final, and there shall be no protests or appeals.

- d. In all cases, the Competition Director has the ultimate authority and sole discretion to adjust the schedule of any or all remaining games, including shortening the length of games, to arrive at an equitable result and in consideration of the overall integrity of the competition.

NPL
NATIONAL PREMIER LEAGUES

CHECK IN PROCEDURES (NPL FINALS)

1. Deadline & procedures coming soon.

Tournament Check-In Procedures:

1. Procedures coming soon.

Pre-Game Check-In Procedures:

1. Procedures coming soon.

NATIONAL PREMIER LEAGUES

PLAYING FORMATS

NPL Finals - Bracket of 8 (Girls):

Played as 2 groups of four. Each of the group winners advance to the Finals.

NPL Finals - Bracket of 10(Girls):

Played as one group of four and one group of six. The group of six crosses over and plays three games. The group of four winner, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semifinal games. In addition, a wildcard from the remaining 7 teams will be selected based on tiebreakers, which may result in additional shots from the mark.

Winners of Semi-Final games will advance to the Finals. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points and tiebreakers. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (Highest Seeded Team vs. lowest seeded team).

NPL Finals - Bracket of 12(Girls):

Played as 3 groups of four. Each of the 3 group winners and the best second place team (Based on tiebreakers) advance to the Semi-Finals. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points and tiebreakers. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (Highest Seeded Team vs. lowest seeded team).

NPL Finals - Bracket of 14(Girls):

Played as two groups of four and one group of six. The group of six crosses over and plays three games. Each of the group of four winners, and the top two teams (based on points and tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semifinal games. Winners of Semi-Final games will advance to the Finals. In a case where three teams from the group of 6 win all three matches, a mini playoff or kicks from the mark will take place between the second and third place of that bracket (Based on tiebreakers). Rest will be taken into consideration, as well as the final match time. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (Highest Seeded Team vs. lowest seeded team).

NPL Finals - Bracket of 16 (Boys and Girls)

Played as four groups of four. The four round-robin winners will play a semifinal and final game to determine which team is declared the champion. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points.

NPL Finals - Bracket of 20 (Boys):

Played as 5 groups of four. The five round-robin winners will advance to quarterfinals. In addition, the best 3 teams finishing in second place will complete the 8 teams advancing to the quarter finals. Winners will play a semifinal and final game to determine which team is declared the champion. Teams advancing to the quarterfinals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (Highest Seeded vs. lowest 2nd place team).