



*Competition Rules and Regulations*

**2023-2024 Season**

Updated: Aug 1, 2023

# National Premier Leagues

## *Rules and Regulations*

*The National Premier Leagues (“NPL”) are player development platforms for elite boys and girls youth soccer clubs throughout the country. These Rules and Regulations (the “Regulations”) provide the requirements and rules for NPL Competition (as defined below). NPL Leagues may choose to deviate from the base rules listed below and should make clear that their league rule is a deviation of the NPL base rule. Clubs/teams shall consult US Club Soccer’s bylaws, policies and player rules documents, as necessary. These documents can be found in the Members Area section of <https://www.usclubsoccer.org/>*

### **1. Definitions**

- 1.1 “NPL” means the National Premier Leagues.
- 1.2 “NPL Advisory Committee” means a committee consisting of the Director of Coaching from each NPL Club, or another technical representative appointed by the Director of Coaching, to provide feedback and input regarding NPL structure and policies.
- 1.3 “NPL Administrator” is the administrator of the NPL hired and supervised by US Club Soccer.
- 1.4 “NPL Club” means a member club of the NPL as provided in by these Regulations.
- 1.5 “NPL Competition” means a NPL game played during the NPL Regular-Season or NPL League Playoff.
- 1.6 “NPL Game Report” means the official game report that must be completed for all NPL Competitions as provided in Section 4 of these Regulations.
- 1.7 “NPL Registered Player” means a player on a NPL Team’s NPL Roster. NPL Registered Players must be registered with US Club Soccer.
- 1.8 “NPL Roster” means the roster of a NPL Team during the NPL Season when playing in a NPL Competition. A NPL Roster shall only be used for NPL Competitions. NPL Rosters may apply to the 13U, 14U, 15U, 16U, 17U and 19U age groups. Each NPL may have different participating age groups, and not all NPLs will have every age group within the NPL.
- 1.9 “NPL Season” means the competitive season beginning August 1 of each year and ending July 31 of the following year.

- 1.10 “NPL Team” is the team of a NPL Club that participates in NPL Competition. Unless approved by the NPL General Manager, an NPL Team may only play for one NPL league during a competitive season.
- 1.11 “Incident Report” is a form for reporting disciplinary incidents during NPL Competitions.

## **2. NPL Roster Rules**

- 2.1 **NPL Roster Maximums.** A maximum of twenty-six (26) players may be rostered on any NPL Team’s NPL Roster.
- 2.2 **Intentionally Omitted**
- 2.3 **Intentionally Omitted.**
- 2.4 **Player Registration.** All players on a NPL Roster must be NPL Registered Players.
- 2.5 **NPL Game Day Roster.** A maximum of eighteen (18) NPL Registered Players from a NPL Team’s NPL Roster will be eligible for each game in NPL Competition (the “NPL Game Day Roster”). If more than eighteen (18) NPL Registered Players appear on a NPL Roster, the “active” players for the NPL Competition must be identified on the NPL Game Report. An NPL Game Day Roster may include NPL Registered Players from any age group for which the player is age eligible.
- 2.6 **Intentionally Omitted.**
- 2.7 **Roster Freeze Date.** Players may be added to the NPL Roster until May 1 of each year.
- 2.8 **Player / Club Tie.** A player may only be rostered to one (1) NPL Club each NPL Season, except pursuant to the Transfer Regulations provided below. Similarly, a player may only play for one (1) NPL team within any given age group (unless he is a younger player playing up). Regardless, a player may only play 1 game per day.
- 2.9 **Initial Roster Submission.** No NPL Roster will be accepted prior to July 1 of each NPL Season. Additional players may be added to the NPL Roster of each NPL Team as provided in the attached **Exhibit B**.
- 2.10 **Younger Players Playing Up.** A NPL Registered Player may play for any NPL Team in the NPL Club for which the player is age eligible. Younger players on a NPL Team may play on the older NPL teams within their NPL Club, and shall not count towards the roster limit for such older NPL team. Age eligibility is determined by **Exhibit A** of these Regulations. Notwithstanding the foregoing, every NPL Registered Player may only play on one (1) NPL Team per day and may only play one (1) NPL Game per day. A NPL Registered Player may play on different NPL Teams within her NPL Club from game-to-game during the NPL Regular Season.

2.10.1 An NPL Registered Player that will “play-up” on an older NPL Team in his NPL Club for a NPL Competition must be handwritten onto the NPL Game Report for that NPL Competition.

2.10.2 For purposes of clarification, no player may be handwritten onto the NPL Game Report at the Under-13 age group. In order to participate in NPL Competition at Under-13, the player must be on the Under-13 NPL Roster and must be a NPL Registered Player.

2.11 **NPL Playoffs and Finals Roster Tie and Added Players.** An NPL Registered Player may play for only one NPL Team within the NPL Club at the NPL Finals (if more than one NPL Team from the NPL Club qualifies for the NPL postseason). Each NPL Team that qualifies for the NPL postseason may add a maximum of three (3) new players to their NPL Finals roster after the May 1<sup>st</sup> roster freeze date. These players must be registered to the NPL Club and may not be Discovery Players. Additional NPL Postseason rules will be sent to those participating in the postseason.

2.12 **Club Loyalty Rule.**

2.12.1 Rule 2.12 applies to all NPL Registered Players except for the enumerated exceptions provided in Rule 2.12.3. After being registered as a NPL Registered Player for a NPL Season, a NPL Registered Player may only participate in competitions with that NPL Club for the duration of the NPL Season (unless released pursuant to the NPL transfer rules herein or otherwise as provided below in this section 2.12). (For purposes of clarification, the NPL Registered Player may appear in any competition in which the NPL Club participates during the NPL Season.) If a NPL Registered Player plays in a competition for a different club besides the NPL Club to which the player is registered as a NPL Registered Player after the date the player became rostered as a NPL Registered Player (“Multiple Club Rostering”), the eligibility of the NPL Registered Player will be reviewed by the NPL General Manager. If it is determined that the NPL Club to which the NPL Registered Player is registered was aware of the Multiple Club Rostering, the NPL General Manager may (i) declare the NPL Registered Player ineligible for the remainder of that NPL Season; (ii) declare all games in which the NPL Registered Player appeared on the NPL Roster as forfeits by the NPL Team on which such player was rostered; and / or (iii) recommend immediate revocation of the NPL Club’s membership in the NPL.

2.12.2 Rule 2.12.1 applies to any NPL Club with franchises in multiple states, affiliates in multiple states, or with agreements licensing use of the trademarks of the NPL Club to youth soccer clubs in multiple states (such NPL Club a “Franchise Club”). Each franchisee of the Franchise Club, affiliate of the Franchise Club, or licensee

of the Franchise Club, shall be considered a separate and independent club for purposes of Rule 2.12.1. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Part-Time Players may be from an in-state affiliate of a Franchise Club.

- 2.12.3 Rule 2.12.1 does not apply to NPL Registered Players that participate in a tournament as a guest player with another club, provided that: (i) the Director of Coaching of the NPL club approves the player for participation in the event; and (ii) the tournament takes place over no more than four (4) days.

## 2.13 **Discovery Players**

- 2.13.1 Each NPL Team may have two (2) Discovery Players on their NPL Roster at each age group.

- 2.13.2 Discovery Players may only play for the NPL Team for which they are initially rostered within the NPL Season. Discovery Players are subject to Rule 2.5, and are club-tied and team-tied for NPL Competition during the NPL Season. Discovery Players may play in any NPL Competition in the NPL Season, including the NPL Playoffs and Finals.

- 2.13.3 A “Discovery Player” is a player that is not a member of the NPL Club, and is not otherwise currently registered to another US Club Soccer team, and is an exception to Rule 2.12 above. Discovery Players are allowed to participate in NPL Competition as provided in this Rule 2.13 in order to provide opportunity for additional players to participate in NPL programming. In order to be considered a Discovery Player, a player must be explicitly designated as such on the NPL Roster before such player participates in any NPL Competition.

- 2.13.4 Discovery Players may not be registered with US Club Soccer to another club during NPL Competitions in which the Discovery Players participate. Discovery Players must be registered with the NPL participating club. Discovery Players may not be from another National Premier League club.

- 2.13.5 Discovery Players may not be added to an NPL Roster after May 1 of the NPL Season.

## 2.14 **Recruiting; Try-Outs; Registration.**

- 2.14.1 **Recruiting; No-Tampering.** NPL Clubs may recruit players for participation on NPL Teams from any geographic region at any time during the year (subject to these Regulations). Notwithstanding the foregoing, NPL Clubs may not train or tryout a player from a NPL Team of another NPL Club during the NPL Season until May 1 of each NPL Season. *Note: NPL coaches and administrators may be subject to the rules of other U.S. Soccer organization members regarding*

*recruiting. In addition, local NPL may have additional recruiting / tryout rules that override NPL Base competition rules.*

2.14.2 **Try-Outs; Registration for the following year.** The months of May and June shall be considered “open” months for player movement between NPL Clubs. During these months, players from one NPL Team may train or try-out with teams of another NPL Club. No roster for any NPL Team for the upcoming NPL Season will be accepted by US Club Soccer prior to July 1. In the case where tryouts take place locally outside of those two months, the NPL in the market should decide on additional tryout rules.

### **3. Competition and Participation Rules**

3.1 **General.** Unless otherwise provided in these Regulations, all NPL Competitions shall be played in accordance with the FIFA Laws of the Game in force at the time of competition as provided by the International Football Association Board.

#### **3.2 Club Commitment Requirements.**

3.2.1 **Minimum Age Groups.** The NPLs are club-based leagues (which may have team scheduling). As such, acceptance into the NPL is based on a club commitment to participate may vary within the NPL. Each NPL may have different required age groups, as determined or agreed to by US Club Soccer. US Club Soccer reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to allow limited exemptions for individual participating clubs due to exceptional circumstances, as solely determined by US Club Soccer. Notwithstanding the foregoing, any club that does not meet the minimum required age group commitment, and that does not receive an exemption from US Club Soccer for any reason, may face sanctions from US Club Soccer, including without limitation, forfeiture of points, ineligibility for post-season play, or immediate removal from the NPL.

3.2.2 **Play-Offs and Finals Commitment.** All clubs participating in the NPL are required to complete all scheduled competitions for which they are scheduled or for which they qualify in the post-season, including without limitation participation in post-season play-offs and the NPL Finals. US Club Soccer reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to allow limited exemptions for individual participating clubs due to exceptional circumstances, as solely determined by US Club Soccer. Notwithstanding the foregoing, any club that does not participate in all required competitions, and that does not receive an exemption from US Club Soccer, may face sanctions from US Club Soccer, including without limitation, forfeiture of points, ineligibility for post-season play for the relevant team or the entire club, or immediate removal from the NPL.

- 3.3 **Scheduling Competitions.** US Club Soccer shall identify and/or agree to the dates and locations of all NPL Competitions for each NPL Season.
- 3.4 **Number of Competitions.** US Club Soccer shall determine the total number of NPL Competitions during the NPL Season. An NPL Team may only play one (1) NPL Competition per day. An NPL player may only play one game per day.
- 3.5 **Cancelled Competitions.** If a NPL Competition is suspended by weather and at least the first half was played, the game will be considered a full game. If any NPL Competition is cancelled, the participating clubs shall attempt to reschedule the NPL Competition. If the participating clubs cannot agree on a reschedule date, the NPL General Manager shall determine if and how such NPL Competition shall be rescheduled. If the NPL General Manager finds that it is impossible to reschedule such cancelled NPL Competition, the NPL Competition shall be considered a non-played game, and neither team shall be awarded any points. In the event that any games are cancelled pursuant to this Rule 3.4, the NPL General Manager shall alter the method by which NPL standings are determined for impacted age groups (for example to change to a point-per-games basis).
- 3.6 **Competition Scheduling.**
- 3.6.1. The dates, home team, and opponents for NPL Competitions are set by the NPL Director or Administrator. The venue and time for all NPL Competitions must be agreed upon by the participating NPL Clubs and reported to the relevant NPL Administrator: (i) no later than August 1 of each NPL Season for fall NPL Competitions, and (ii) no later than February 1 of each NPL season for spring NPL Competitions (collectively the “Final Fixture Venue Date”). No changes to dates and locations of NPL Competitions may be made after the Final Fixture Venue Date, absent exceptional circumstances outside the control of the NPL Clubs, as determined by the NPL Administrator. No changes to NPL Competitions may be made within 72 hours of kick-off, except due to bad weather or as permitted by the NPL Administrator.
- 3.6.2 NPL Clubs hosting NPL Competition should have a back-up turf field for NPL Competitions in the event that rain makes grass fields unplayable. If a host NPL Club does not have a turf field back-up, and the grass fields are unplayable due solely to rain, the NPL Club hosting the NPL Competition shall lose the home game for the replayed game, and may have to travel to the opponent for the rescheduled game if mandated by the NPL General Manager.
- 3.7 **Competition Referee Assigning.** It is the responsibility of the home club (or host club for neutral venues) to contact and pay the club’s referee assignor(s) to schedule referees for all NPL Competitions. Any leagues varying from this rule must communicate with all league members in writing.
- 3.8 **Referee Fees.** Each NPL shall submit a proposed referee pay scale for NPL Competitions to US Club Soccer for approval prior to the beginning of the NPL Season.

Each NPL Team playing at home shall be responsible for payment of referee costs for each NPL Competition based on the pay scale set forth by the league and approved by US Club Soccer. If any NPL Competition is played at a neutral location, the NPL Clubs shall agree on which NPL Club is responsible for payment of referee costs. If no agreement is reached, the NPL Teams playing at a neutral site shall split the cost of the referees. Any leagues varying from this rule must communicate with all league members in writing.

- 3.9 **Competitions in Conjunction with Other Events.** In the event that NPL Clubs agree to play an NPL Competition in conjunction with a tournament or other non-NPL competition they may do so under the following conditions: (i) there shall be no entry fee paid for the NPL Competition except a fee that covers the cost of the referees per the NPL referee pay scale (if agreed to by the visiting teams); and (ii) all NPL Competition rules related to roster limits, game length, substitutions, etc., must be followed.
- 3.10 **Deadline for Regular Season Competitions.** All regular season NPL Competitions must be played by *June 8, 2024* of the NPL Season. The NPL Administrator may extend this date under extreme circumstances at the NPL Administrator's sole discretion with NPL General Manager's approval.
- 3.11 **Substitutions.** Once a NPL Registered Player is substituted in one half of any NPL Competition, such NPL Registered Player may not re-enter the game for the duration of the half. Once an NPL Registered Player is substituted in one period of overtime of any NPL Competition, such NPL Registered Player may not re-enter the game for the duration of such overtime period. There shall be a maximum of seven (7) substitutions in any half or in any overtime period of any NPL Competition. Substitutions can be made at any stoppage. Any leagues varying from this rule must communicate with all league members in writing (each league may decide to modify this rule).
- 3.12 **Yellow and Red Cards (Players).** Any NPL Registered Player receiving a red card in a NPL Competition will be suspended for the remainder of that NPL Competition and also for the next NPL Competition played by the NPL Club at all age groups. For purposes of clarification, if a NPL Registered Player receives a red card in a NPL Competition, the NPL Registered Player will not be eligible to participate in the next NPL Competition for any team within the NPL Registered Player's NPL Club.
- 3.13 **Yellow and Red Cards (Coaches).** Any coach receiving a red card in a NPL Competition will be suspended for the remainder of the NPL Competition and for that NPL Team's next NPL Competition. US Club Soccer may add additional games to any red card suspension at its discretion.
- 3.14 **Yellow and Red Card Carryover.** Red card suspensions will carry over into subsequent NPL Seasons if the red card is received in the final NPL Competition of the current NPL Season. In a case of a violent conduct or multiple game suspensions, NPL leadership could apply the sanction at the NPL Finals.



- 3.15 **Accumulation.** There shall be no yellow card accumulation policy for NPL Competitions.
- 3.16 **Player Transfers.** A NPL Registered Player may not play for more than one NPL Club during the NPL Season, unless the following conditions are satisfied: (i) the Director of Coaching of both the prior NPL Club and the proposed new NPL Club consent to the transfer in writing; (ii) the new NPL Club has an available spot on a NPL Roster; and (iii) the NPL General Manager consents to such transfer in writing (such player referred to as a “Transferred Player”). A Transferred Player shall be removed from the NPL Roster(s) of the “old” NPL Club.
- 3.17 **Points.** In each NPL Competition during the NPL Regular Season, teams shall be awarded three (3) points for a win, one (1) point for a tie, and zero (0) points for a loss. A forfeit shall be considered a 3-0 loss for the forfeiting team and a 3-0 win for the non-forfeiting team.
- 3.18 **Standings.** The standings in each age group shall be determined at the end of the NPL Regular Season (the “Regular Season Standings”).
- 3.19 **Tie-Breakers.** The following tie-breakers will be used for resolving ties between NPL Teams in determining the Regular Season Standings, in the following order:
1. Most Points
  2. If Two Teams are tied, head to head. If more than Two Teams are tied, this tie-breaker shall not apply.
  3. Goal Difference
  4. Goals For
  5. Goals Against
  6. Coin Toss

There shall be no cap on goal difference in any NPL Competition.

- 3.20 **Game Length.** NPL Regular Season Competitions shall be played with the following game lengths. Leagues may play under different time lengths based on their local regulations and should be detailed on a separate attachment.

U-13\*: 2 x 40 minutes

U-14: 2 x 40 minutes

U-15: 2 x 40 minutes

U-16: 2 x 40 minutes

U-17: 2 x 45 minutes

U-18: 2 x 45 minutes

\*Some league may choose to play 35 min halves at the U13 age group, especially when multiple games are played in a weekend.

#### **4. League Administration Software**

- 4.1 Each NPL League should choose a Software that fits the league's needs and should follow protocols for score reporting. All scores must be completed within 48 hours of completion.

#### **5. Miscellaneous**

- 5.1 **Disciplinary Matters.** Any disciplinary matters brought before the NPL General Manager through submission of an Incident Report shall be addressed and responded to at the discretion of the NPL General Manager. Before any disciplinary action is taken by the NPL General Manager, the impacted coach, player, or administrator will be provided the opportunity for a hearing, either in person or via teleconference. Testimony will be allowed by principal parties, eyewitnesses, and authorities on the subject at hand. Other rules regarding the hearing will be as provided in US Club Soccer and U.S. Soccer Federation policies and procedures, available at <https://www.usclubsoccer.org/bylaws-policies-guidelines>
- 5.2 **Protests and Appeals.** There will be no protests or appeals of decisions made in NPL Competitions or by the NPL General Manager. Notwithstanding the foregoing, any decision by the NPL General Manager that results in a suspension of a player or coach that is not due to a red card is appealable to US Club Soccer, and then to the U.S. Soccer Federation. Any hearing for such appeal shall be conducted pursuant to US Club Soccer and U.S. Soccer Federation policies and procedures, available at <https://www.usclubsoccer.org/bylaws-policies-guidelines>
- 5.3 **Matters Not Provided For.** Any matter not provided for in these Regulations shall be decided by US Club Soccer. All such decisions are final.

**Exhibit A:**  
*NPL Age Group Eligibility*

Age groups for the 2023-24 Season are provided below – Boys and Girls:

U-13 Age Group: Players born on or after January 1, 2011

U-14 Age Group: Players born on or after January 1, 2010

U-15 Age Group: Players born on or after January 1, 2009

U-16 Age Group: Players born on or after January 1, 2008

U-17 Age Group: Players born on or after January 1, 2007

U-19 Age Group: Players born on or after January 1, 2005

Players may play for their own age group and for “older” age groups

## **Exhibit B:**

*Registration; Player and Staff Passes; Roster Add Process*

### **Types of Player and Staff Passcards for NPL Clubs and NPL Competition**

**US Club Passcards** are passcards validated by US Club Soccer on the US Club Soccer website, and then printed and laminated by the NPL Club for use in NPL Competition and other US Club Soccer competition.

### **Player Add Process**

**NPL Competition:** NPL Registered Players may be added to a NPL Roster for NPL Competition at any time, provided that they appear on the official NPL Roster prior to the game. No player may participate in NPL Competition without a pass.

### **Player and Staff Fees and Expiration Dates**

**Player Passes:** For the NPL Season, individual player fees for players registered to NPL Clubs (at any age group) shall be as described in US Club Soccer's Registration Fee page.

[Fees - US Club Soccer Website](#)

**Staff Passes:** Staff passcards for any staff member in a NPL Club shall be issued as described in the above link. For staff registration purposes, all coaches who will coach a NPL Team, as well as the NPL Team manager, shall be required to have a staff passcard. All staff shall submit to a background check as well.

Player Health and Safety initiatives are being implemented as part of US Club Soccer's Players First philosophy ahead of the registration year. The standard of background screening and SafeSport are being substantially increased. For details, please visit the [Staff Registration page](#).

Registration fees are paid annually. Player passcard prices are based on the player's date of birth at the time the passcard is requested. Fees are non-refundable.