NATIONAL 1

2026-27 LEAGUE HANDBOOK

NATIONAL 1 LEAGUE HANDBOOK & RULES OF COMPETITION

National 1 League (N1) is a new competition organized by US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer as part of the competition pathway as identified by U.S. Soccer, utilizing the existing US Club Soccer National Premier Leagues (NPL) and US Youth Soccer National League (NL) foundation.

The competition is sanctioned and managed by US Club Soccer in alignment with U.S. Soccer's 'Pathway Strategy' and 'In Service to Soccer' initiative.

VISION:

US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer shall establish a new competition with the following principles:

- consolidated competition structure
- incorporated existing US Youth Soccer and US Club Soccer staffing with a league commissioner
- centralized registration platform
- standards-driven operators prioritizing proven existing operators primarily team-based, merit-based competition with promotion and relegation
- exploration of showcase and experiential opportunities for deserving teams and players
- postseason pathways connected to ECNL and the elite pathway
- postseason pathway inclusive of regionalized to national events

SECTION 1. Definitions

1.1. “National 1 League” is the new unified team-based competition bringing together US Club Soccer’s National Premier Leagues and US Youth Soccer’s National League into a single platform. The competition is sanctioned by US Club Soccer with Operators authorized to operate local districts.

1.2. “Authorized National 1 League District(s)” means the district(s) for which Operator shall be authorized to operate, pursuant to the National 1 League Operator License Agreement.

1.3. "Club Pass" player is defined as any US Club Soccer registered player within the same club as a team participating in National 1.

1.4. "Commissioner" is the individual, or their designee, responsible for the oversight of National 1. The Commissioner is vested with all necessary power and authority to manage, regulate, supervise, administer, and conduct National 1.

1.5. “Director” means anyone in a leadership position of a US Club Soccer Member Organization participating in National 1 with authority to represent the organization.

1.6. “District” means the National 1 territory as outlined in Appendix 1.

1.7. “ECNL” means Elite Clubs National League.

1.8. “ECNL Conference League Playoffs” is an integrated postseason managed by ECNL, inclusive of National 1 and Regional League qualifiers.

1.9. “Fixture” means all matches scheduled on the same match week.

1.10. “Game official” means a representative from the competition with authority over the competition but not a referee.

1.11. “National 1 Management Committee” means the Ad-Hoc Committee pursuant to US Club Soccer Bylaw 9.2.3., consisting of representatives of US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer to provide management and guidance of National 1.

1.12. “National 1 Competition” means a National 1 game played in all divisions and age groups, including those qualifying for postseason competition(s).

1.13. “National 1 Game Roster” is the official competition roster available on the GotSport website and used for National 1 League matches.

1.14. “National 1 Rostered Player” means a player registered with US Club Soccer on a National 1 official team roster.

1.15. “Operator(s)” is an entity approved by US Club Soccer to operate in an authorized National 1 District(s) for the limited purpose of participating in the applicable National 1 season pursuant to the National 1 Operator License Agreement and the Rules.

1.16. “Organization Member” means a U.S. Soccer Organization Member as defined by the U.S. Soccer bylaws.

1.17. “Passcard” is the physical or digital card demonstrating an eligible US Club Soccer player or staff registration.

1.18. “Regional League” means ECNL Regional League.

1.19. “Rules” means the then-in-effect bylaws, policies, procedures, rules and directives of US Club Soccer, as well as this National 1 Handbook and other National 1 rules and directives.

1.20. “State Association” is the specific U.S. Soccer Organization Member category defined in U.S. Soccer bylaws.

SECTION 2. OPERATOR STANDARDS

2.1. **Expectations**. Lack of knowledge of the publicly available National 1 rules and policies will not relieve any Operator from the responsibilities and possible penalties herein. These standards are subject to change at any time for any reason at the discretion of US Club Soccer.

2.1.1. National 1 is delivered through a network of approved Operators who are entrusted with administering competition in alignment with the mission, values, and standards of US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer.

2.1.2. Operators must prioritize National 1 as the top level of team-based competition. As a condition of serving as Operator, neither Operator nor Operator's owner(s) may manage any competition that would reasonably be viewed as competing with National 1 or the National 1 pathway.

2.1.2.1. Operators shall not prospect clubs or teams from outside of the defined district for purposes of joining any competition without written approval from US Club Soccer and the other Operator. This shall be inclusive of any competition, regardless of sanctioning body.

2.1.3. Appropriate Operator representatives shall attend all required meetings and events aimed at sharing of best practices, league management and ensuring standards.

2.2. **Eligibility**.

2.2.1. Any entity in good standing as defined in US Club Soccer and/or US Youth Soccer policies, or that is eligible to operate a US Club Soccer-sanctioned league, is eligible to apply to become an Operator through the publicly available application.

2.2.2. Upon recommendation by the National 1 Commissioner, US Club Soccer at its sole discretion may determine the number of Operators and territory of management in any District.

2.2.3. Operators may, at the sole discretion of US Club Soccer, be awarded a license to operate in more than one (1) District.

2.3. **Selection criteria**. The licensing of an Operator is at the sole discretion of US Club Soccer and the National 1 Management Committee, and shall include without limitation consideration of the following factors:

2.3.1. Commitment to collaboration in the best interest of the sport.

2.3.2. Existing US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer sanctioned leagues.

2.3.3. Demonstration of the ability to manage team-based leagues with clear guidelines for promotion and relegation.

2.3.4. Prioritization of National 1 and its affiliated competition pathway.

2.3.5. Proven history of ethical behavior and expertise amongst the leadership group.

2.3.6. Commitment to management and/or support of coach and referee development, talent identification and development, and cup competitions.

2.4. **Requirements and standards**. Operators are required to comply with the Rules.

2.4.1. Completion of the applicable National 1 Operator License Agreement and US Club Soccer League Certification & Sanctioning Agreement is required of each Operator as a condition to serving as an Operator.

2.4.2. Operators are expected to build and maintain a strong leadership structure that supports the full scope of league operations. Each Operator shall designate committed individuals to oversee:

2.4.2.1. Executive leadership

2.4.2.2. Competition management

2.4.2.3. Safeguarding and compliance, including disciplinary processes

2.4.2.4. Referee assigning

2.4.2.5. Coach education

2.4.2.6. Talent identification and development

2.4.2.7. Overall governance with stakeholder involvement

2.4.3. Operators shall ensure a safe playing environment and pledge to support all US Club Soccer safeguarding, compliance, and discipline initiatives as well as establish a process for addressing violations of both U.S. Soccer Policy 531-9 (Misconduct Toward Game Officials) and competition rules.

2.4.3.1. All non-physical yellow and orange level violations and all physical yellow level violations of U.S. Soccer policy 531-9, (according to U.S. Soccer's Penalty Overview) shall be reported to US Club Soccer.

2.4.3.2. Operators shall adjudicate all "non-physical yellow and orange level violations and all physical level yellow violations of U.S. Soccer Policy 531-9.

2.5. **Licensing fee**. Operator shall pay US Club Soccer an annual licensing fee as outlined in the National 1 Operator License Agreement.

2.6. **Postseason team slot fees**. Operator shall pay US Club Soccer postseason per-team slot fees as outlined in the National 1 Operator License Agreement. If a playoff exists within a district involving multiple Operators, these fees shall be split between Operators.

2.7. **Team registration fees**. National 1 is committed to lowering the cost of participation in youth soccer. As such, Operators may charge reasonable fees, which are subject to approval by the National 1 Commissioner.

2.8. **Operator policies**. Operators may, upon approval by US Club Soccer, enact additional reasonable standards, including but not limited to membership eligibility and technical or operational standards. Any standards in addition to those listed in the National 1 Handbook must be published publicly.

2.9. **Pathway representations.** Operator shall not state, advertise, market, or otherwise imply that participation in any league or competition operated by Operator is the sole, exclusive, or only pathway into National 1.

2.10. **Annual participating club/team review**. Operators shall establish a process for providing meaningful feedback and/or evaluation for clubs with teams participating in National 1.

2.10.1. National 1 supports any initiative aimed at improving the game day experience, including imposition of additional overall standards and/or standards related to sportsmanship.

2.10.2. Operators must have a publicly available process for removal of teams or clubs due to violations of the National 1 Handbook and/or Operator policies.

2.11. **Removal**. US Club Soccer may, at its sole discretion: 1) revoke an Operator's license to operate in an Authorized National 1 District(s) pursuant to the National 1 Operator License Agreement; and/or 2) decline to offer Operator a license to operate in a future National 1 season.

SECTION 3. ELIGIBILITY

3.1. **Expectations**. Lack of knowledge of the Rules does not relieve any participant from the responsibilities and possible penalties therein.

3.1.1. All clubs, team officials, parents and players, by participating in National 1, agree that they are bound by these rules.

3.2. **Team eligibility**. The age groups for participation are U13, U14, U15, U16, U17 and U18/19 as defined by US Club Soccer and US Youth Soccer.

3.2.1. Each participating team must be part of a US Club Soccer member organization.

3.2.2. Participating teams shall also satisfy any eligibility requirements of the Operator.

3.2.3. Teams in National 1 shall prioritize National 1 Competition and may not reschedule matches for outside competition.

3.3. **Coach eligibility**.

3.3.1. Beyond the US Club Soccer staff registration requirements, all coaches are required to complete five (5) hours of annual development through an approved method listed below:

- In the ECNL/US Club Soccer Coaches Voice platform before August 1 of the competition year.
- Any course or clinic that qualified for U.S. Soccer Continuing Education Units (CEU)
- U.S. Soccer Licensing Course – at or above the minimum of "D" license or equivalent earned in the past 5 years. (A waiver may be awarded if a coach can show that he/she is on the coaching education pathway. A waiver must be co-signed by the club director and USYS state assn. technical lead, stating the coach's development plan, with timelines. This will be verified by the Operator.

3.3.2. Process. Coaches must upload certificate of completion from any of the approved courses/ clinics with their registration (same process as SafeSport).

3.3.3. Registered coaches are not required to complete education requirements prior to participation in other US Club Soccer sanctioned competitions outside of National 1, in which the annual development requirement does not apply.

3.4. **Removal**. Participation in National 1 is a privilege and not a right. Any team, club or participant may be removed from participation for violation of the Rules, in compliance with any U.S. Soccer due process requirements, if applicable.

SECTION 4. REGISTRATION AND ROSTER RULES

4.1. **Player and staff registration**. US Club Soccer player and staff registration (whichever may be applicable) via the applicable club/organization is required for all National 1 participants prior to any participation (including without limitation training and team activities), pursuant to the Rules.

4.1.1. A player is considered bound to an organization (club/team) for purposes of participating in National 1 when a player or the player's parent/guardian accepts placement with the organization in writing, electronically, or on-line for the applicable Seasonal Year and pays a deposit required by the organization at the time of acceptance.

4.2. **Roster minimum**. Teams must register a minimum of 15 primary rostered players by the date designated and published for each district and maintain that minimum number of players throughout the Seasonal Year.

4.3. **Roster maximum**. A maximum of thirty (30) primary players may be rostered on any National 1 team's roster (in any one age group). Once a player is added to a National 1 team's roster, that player shall be counted against the roster maximum for that team, even if the player is later released, transfers, or is dropped, unless the Commissioner in their sole discretion grants an exception due to unique and exceptional circumstances. (Use of a club-passed player as outlined in Section 5.4 does not count against the 30 primary players.)

4.4. **Player drops**. Operators may establish regulations related to player releases or transfers, subject to the requirements of Section 4.3.

4.5. **Roster freeze date**. Operators may establish a roster freeze date.

4.6. **Postseason roster tie**. The National 1 rules of competition shall govern player movement and rosters, respectively, once a team qualifies for postseason summer competition. ECNL Postseason Roster Tie date will apply to a specific team and age group at check-in of the first ECNL Postseason stage in which they appear.

4.7. **Recruiting; Tryouts; Registration**. Operators may establish recruitment and/or tryout regulations in addition to the rules seen below. Additional regulations may not contradict the rules below.

4.7.1. **Recruiting; No Tampering**. National 1 clubs and teams may recruit players for participation on a National 1 team at any time during the year (subject to these Regulations) and subject to the following restrictions.

4.7.2. National 1 clubs and/or teams may not train, invite a player to train, tryout, invite a player to tryout, or have play in any tournament or competition as a guest player any National 1 registered player from another National 1 club prior to the designated tryout date of that season, unless the player has been released (or it has been expressly approved in writing) by their current National 1 club or team to do so.

4.7.3. Clubs/teams may not invite a player to train, invite a player to tryout, or promote their club to players or their parents or guardians during any National 1 competition in which the player is currently participating.

4.7.4. Once a player is registered as a National 1 registered player within the designated National 1 player registration system for the subsequent National 1 Season, the

National 1 Registered Player may no longer be contacted or recruited by other National 1 Clubs, per this Rule 4.7.

Note: National 1 coaches and administrators may be subject to the rules of other U.S. Soccer organization members regarding recruitment and tryouts if they compete in other competitions or leagues outside of National 1.

4.8. **Tryouts**. Any team may conduct publicly announced, open tryouts to acquire players on or after the date established in each District, which will be published on the National 1 and Operator websites. Any player and/or his/her parents or guardians may initiate direct contact with any coach or team/club official for the purpose of joining that team.

4.9. **Transfers**. A player rostered to a National 1 team member club is ineligible to transfer to any other National 1 team within the same seasonal year except when all of the following criteria is satisfied: 1) the player has moved to a different District; and 2) the player's new location is beyond a reasonable travel distance from the player's current club; and 3) both Directors agree to the transfer.

4.9.1. Within a seasonal year, Registration with a new team participating in National 1 after release from a previous team participating in National 1 does not make the player eligible for transfer to a subsequent team participating in National 1.

4.9.2. A player's right to choose allows for a player to transfer clubs mid-season provided all obligations are met; however, the player shall not be eligible to participate with the new club in National 1 for the remainder of the seasonal year, unless approved by the Commissioner, in consultation with the operator.

4.9.3. US Club Soccer may provide a waiver of transfer restrictions if in its sole discretion a transfer is in the best interest of the player or of a player's sibling in the same club.

4.10. **Violation of recruiting rules**. Coaches and/or team/club officials who violate rules related to transfer and release set forth in this Section 4 may be subject to consequences assigned by an Operator-appointed committee.

4.10.1. Allegations of recruitment in violation of this Handbook shall be submitted in writing to the Operator within 30 days of the alleged violation.

4.10.2. The complaint shall be reviewed and adjudicated by an Operator-appointed committee.

SECTION 5. COMPETITION RULES

5.1. **General**. All National 1 matches will be played in accordance with the FIFA/U.S. Soccer Laws of the Game except as modified in these Competition Rules.

5.2. **Game length**. National 1 Matches shall be played with the following game length:

- **U13:** 2 x 35 minutes with 10-minute half-time
- **U14:** 2 x 35 minutes with 10-minute half-time
- **U15:** 2 x 40 minutes with 10-minute half-time
- **U16:** 2 x 40 minutes with 10-minute half-time
- **U17:** 2 x 45 minutes with 10-minute half-time
- **18/19U:** 2 x 45 minutes with 10-minute half-time

5.3. **Game day roster**. A maximum of eighteen (18) players may be rostered on a game day roster.

5.4. **Club pass**. Subject to Operator policies and the Rules, any US Club Soccer registered player within a club or team participating in National 1 or approved affiliate may participate in a National 1 game, except as outlined below. The team shall follow the procedures published by the Operator for adding a player to the game day roster.

5.4.1. Any player rostered or having participated in the current year in an official ECNL competition or equivalent is ineligible to participate in any official National 1 matches for the same club. (The player may become eligible to participate if transferring to a new club under the transfer rules outlined in this Handbook.)

5.4.2. A maximum of four players rostered or having participated in the current year in an official ECNL Regional League competition may participate in any National 1 match.

5.5. **Player limitations.** A primary rostered player may only play for one team in a District Division in which their primary team is participating. In situations where a club has multiple teams participating in the same District Division, at no time may such primary players appear on both District Division rosters. Under no circumstances may a player be listed on multiple team rosters if such teams are from different clubs.

5.5.1. During the National 1 season, a player may play for only one (1) District team per day. During the National 1 season, a Goalkeeper may be listed on up to two (2) National 1 game cards per day from the same club, with the written consent by the Operator. A Goalkeeper must play as a Goalkeeper in both matches and may not play on more than one team in the same gender age group of a District Division and is subject to the same standards as club pass players.

5.6. **Trapped U15 player**. A player registered to a team participating in National 1 who is in 8th grade, but who is age appropriate for the U15 age group is classified as a "Trapped U15 Player." A Trapped U15 Player is eligible to participate in U14 National 1 Competition that is played during the player's sanctioned high school soccer association's competition season. No more than two (2) Trapped U15 Players may participate in any individual U14 National 1 Competition.

5.7. **Substitutions**. (Operator Rules may supersede these substitution rules for 2026-27.) Substitutions may be made at any stoppage with the approval of the referee. Any substitution during play is considered a moment regardless of the opponent's substitution.

5.7.1. **U13-14**. Unlimited over three (3) moments in each half plus halftime.

5.7.2. **U15-18/19**. Unlimited over four (4) moments per match plus halftime.

5.7.3. **5.7.3 In situations where there are multiple Operators within a National 1 District, the Operators substitution policy's shall align as agreed by both operators and the Commissioner**

5.7.4. Coaches may not agree to changes to the substitution policy.

5.8. **League scheduling**. The Operator shall determine the dates for competition, along with the corresponding scheduling deadlines, provided all matches are completed by the established date for the respective District.

5.8.1. Teams are expected to be available to play at any time on the scheduled game dates

5.9. **Rescheduling.** Operator policies shall govern reschedule process.

5.10. **Team communication**. Communication between teams is vital for the smooth operation of the league.

5.10.1. Teams must have at least two different contacts (manager and coach) listed on their GotSport page (Manager and Coach) and ensure that both contacts have a current email address and phone number listed.

5.10.2. Once published in GotSport, all team scheduling communication shall take place through the GotSport chat system to have a proper record of the communication. Team contacts are expected to respond to communication within 48 hours. Listing the wrong email or phone number is not a valid excuse for not responding to communication and may result in a fine if a forfeit or no-show occurs.

5.11. **Postseason qualification**. A team shall only be eligible for one league-based postseason pathway. If a team competes in more than one competition in the pathway (i.e. ECNL RL and National 1), it shall declare the pathway in which it is participating in writing to the Commissioner and operator in writing prior to the first scheduled match of the season. Failure to proactively declare the pathway may result in ineligibility for any in which it participates.

5.12. **Outside competition**. National 1 Competition must be the priority competition for all teams participating in National 1. National 1 matches may not be rescheduled to accommodate outside competition, except as approved by the Operator.

5.13. **Athletic trainer.** The home team is strongly encouraged to provide a certified athletic trainer at the home club's expense.

5.13.1. If no certified athletic trainer is available, a player suspected of a head injury by the referee is not permitted to return to the match.

5.13.2. Any player removed from a match with a suspected concussion is ineligible to return to play without clearance from an appropriate medical professional.

5.14. **Failure to appear and forfeits**. Failure to appear for a scheduled match will result in a forfeit. A team must be present and ready to play (7-player minimum) within 10 minutes of scheduled match time.

5.14.1. Consequences for failure of a team to appear for a National 1 match or forfeit of a match shall be determined by Operator policies. Operator penalties imposed under Operator policies pursuant to Section 5.11 above, any team forfeiting a match may be

deemed ineligible for post-season competition and/or automatically relegated by the Commissioner.

5.15. **Red card (player)**. Any player sent off or non-player dismissed will be automatically suspended for the remainder of the day and the next National 1 match played by that team.

5.15.1. Any player sent off from a National 1 match must leave the field of play but may remain in the team bench area under the supervision of a team official, but only if a parent/guardian is not available to supervise the player. If the sent off player commits further misconduct or further disrupts the match, the referee may require the removal of the player from the entire field area. If such a player is removed from the field area, a team official or parent must supervise the player away from the field area.

5.15.2. Official reports involving racism, spitting, discriminatory incidents or use of banned words as outlined in 7.2 will be subject to a minimum four (4) match suspension

5.15.3. For situations involving Referee Abuse or Assault, the U.S. Soccer Referee Abuse Policy (RAP) will be utilized to help determine additional suspensions and sanctioning.

5.15.4. Send-offs and dismissals shall be reviewed by the Operator which, in consultation with the Commissioner, may impose an additional suspension, including suspending the player or non-player from participating with other teams participating in National 1 during the suspension period. An additional one (1) match suspension cannot be appealed.

5.15.5. If the red card is issued in the last National 1 match of the season, the sit-out will be taken in the next National 1 match of the following season.

5.15.6. No substitutions may be made for the ejected player during the match in which the red card is issued.

5.15.7. It is the duty of the coach to withhold the red-carded player from the next game even if the player appears eligible on the game card.

5.15.8. Any organization, club, team, or individual allowing participation of a disqualified or suspended individual in a National 1 match shall forfeit the match in which the suspended individual(s) participates and shall be subject to additional penalties.

5.15.9. Red cards earned in outside competition or tournaments do not carry over to National 1 Competition unless an additional suspension is issued by the Operator, US Club Soccer, or State Association.

5.16. **Red card (coach)**. A coach or team official receiving a red card from the referee must leave the field and the area surrounding the field (out of sight and hearing) for the remainder of the match.

5.16.1. Any team official who is dismissed is prohibited from communicating with his/her team during a match, including but not limited to cell phone use, texting, or other means of communication.

5.16.2. Official reports involving racial, spitting, discriminatory incidents or use of banned words as outlined in 7.2 will be subject to a minimum four (4) match suspension

5.16.3. Send-offs and dismissals shall be reviewed by the Operator which, in consultation with the Commissioner, may impose an additional suspension, including suspending the player or non-player from participating with other teams participating in National 1

during the suspension period. An additional one (1) match suspension cannot be appealed.

5.16.4. For situations involving Referee Abuse or Assault, the U.S. Soccer Referee Abuse Policy (RAP) will be utilized to help determine additional suspensions and sanctioning.

5.16.5. The team official is ineligible to participate with any team for the remainder of the day and is prohibited from participating in the next match, including playoffs, and is not allowed to be present at the field or in the area surrounding the field for the respective team in which the red card was received.

5.16.6. It is the coach's duty to comply with the assigned suspension. If a suspended coach participates, enters the field of play, or the area surrounding the field while under suspension, or communicates with the team/team officials via electronic or other means, the team shall forfeit the match and the club sponsoring the team shall be liable for any referee's fees incurred and is subject to additional penalties.

5.16.7. Because of the seriousness of such instances, red cards or sanctions issued after the end of the match or as a result of physical assault, are subject to review and additional penalties by the Operator and Commissioner.

5.16.8. Red cards earned in outside competition or tournaments do not carry over to National 1 Competition unless an additional suspension is issued by the Operator or US Club Soccer.

5.17. **Yellow card accumulation**. There shall be no yellow card accumulation policy for National 1 league matches.

5.18. **Standings**. League standings will be used to determine post-season qualification.

5.18.1. Teams shall be awarded 3 points for a win, 1 point for a tie, and 0 points for a loss.

5.18.2. In a situation where a season/group cannot be completed due to exceptional circumstances and teams have played an unequal number of games Operator may use Points Per Game (PPG) or equivalent results to determine final standings.

5.19. **Tiebreakers (two teams).** The following tiebreakers will be used for resolving ties in the standings:

5.19.1. Points earned in head-to-head in competition.

5.19.2. Winner of most matches (all divisional matches played)

5.19.3. Goal Difference (all divisional matches played, no limit)

5.19.4. Fewest goals allowed (all divisional matches played, no limit)

5.19.5. Total goals for (all divisional matches played, no limit)

5.19.6. Coin toss

5.20. **Tiebreakers (more than two teams).** The following tiebreakers will be used for resolving ties in the standings. The tiebreaking procedure does not revert to the previous criteria if one team is eliminated.

5.21. :

5.21.1. Results earned in head-to-head in competition among the tied teams.

5.21.2. Goal Difference (matches among the tied teams, no limit)

5.21.3. Goal Difference (all divisional matches played, no limit)

5.21.4. Fewest goals allowed (matches among the tied teams, no limit)

5.21.5. Fewest goals allowed (all divisional matches played, no limit)

5.21.6. Total goals for (matches among the tied teams, no limit)

5.21.7. Total goals for (no limit)

5.21.8. Coin toss

5.22. **Facility standards.** Operator policies shall govern facility standards.

5.23. **Rainouts**. Operator policies shall govern rainout procedures.

5.24. **Referee decision of unplayable conditions.** A referee may suspend or terminate a match due to weather conditions, i.e., lightening, rain, fog, etc. before or during a match. Under these conditions, the referee's decision is final.

5.25. **Official game**. A game terminated due to weather shall be considered complete if the first half is completed.

5.26. **Abandoned game**. Any game abandoned at any point due to behavior by coaches, players and/or spectators shall result in a forfeit against the offending team. If the Operator determines both teams are at fault, the match will be considered a no contest if the game has not reached half-time or considered complete if the first half has been completed.

SECTION 6. GAME DAY PROCEDURES

6.1.1. **Uniforms.** Each team is required to attend each match with two (2) sets of jerseys and socks (kits): a light-colored kit and a dark colored kit. The home team shall confirm the uniform colors for each team prior to the match.

6.1.2. The team listed first on the schedule (i.e. home) is to wear their light kit and the team listed second on the schedule (i.e. away) is to wear their dark kit.

6.1.3. The Referee shall define what constitutes light vs dark color. If, in the opinion of the referee, there is a conflict in uniform color, the offending team causing the conflict should change into their other kit.

6.1.4. All players must have uniforms with individual numbers on the shirt that corresponds with the number on the team's game day roster. Emergency uniforms may be used temporarily until a replacement jersey is available. The referee shall indicate the use of a temporary jersey on the game card.

6.1.5. The goalkeeper's shirt must be easily distinguishable from all other players and referees.

6.2. **Game ball.** The home team shall provide at least two (2) quality game balls.

6.3. **Score reporting**. Operator shall establish and publish the process for score reporting and submission of required post-match reports.

6.4. **Additional equipment.** Players may wear additional equipment if in the determination of the referee it meets the standard of safety for all players.

6.4.1. Players who are wearing corrective glasses may be allowed to play at the discretion of the referee.

6.4.2. Casts are permitted if approved by the Referee and Athletic Trainer (if available).

6.5. **Pre-Game procedures**. National 1 intends on utilizing a digital administrative game day experience. Teams are expected to prepare for technical outages.

6.5.1. Referees or an agreed designee shall confirm eligibility of all participants prior to the start of the match.

6.5.2. The home team should print and make available a copy of the game card. (Away teams are encouraged to print a backup.)

6.5.3. Digital passcards shall be utilized when available. Each team should make available printed and laminated cards for all players and coaches in the technical area or a downloaded copy of the official roster during the match.

6.5.4. Both teams must have available an official National 1 team roster available for review upon request.

6.5.5. Unless otherwise approved by the Commissioner or his/her designee, players and coaches who do not have a passcard will not be permitted to participate in a National 1 match.

6.6. **Spectator and technical areas.** Home teams shall provide clear direction for spectator areas.

6.6.1. All coaches, players, and spectators will remain eighteen (18) yards from the goal lines.

6.6.2. Where possible, coaches and players are to take opposite sides of the field from the spectators.

6.6.3. No coaching, either from a coach or spectator, may take place within 18 yards from the goal line or from behind the goal lines.

6.6.4. All coaches and spectators shall remain at least two yards from the touchline.

6.7. **Official match/Referee report**. The referee's authority begins when they arrive at the match site and continues until they depart the match site or 30 minutes post-match has elapsed.

6.7.1. Matches should be officiated by the three-person FIFA/U.S. Soccer Referee System, but some may be officiated by less than a three-person FIFA/U.S. Soccer Referee System based on unique circumstances. In these unique cases the Referee may appoint "Club" Assistant Referee(s). Club Assistant Referees will be limited to decisions only on the touchlines and possession.

6.7.2. Operator shall establish the process by which licensed U.S. Soccer Referees are assigned to each match.

6.7.3. Operator shall establish the process by which all referees/assignor fees are collected and paid.

6.7.4. The officials are responsible for conducting the matches in accordance with FIFA/U.S. Soccer Laws of the Game and/or this National 1 Handbook, which shall take precedence.

6.7.5. Referees' pre-game responsibilities shall be provided to the appropriate referee organization or assignor by the Operator or the club with whom National 1 teams are participating prior to the beginning of each season.

6.8. **Referee failure to appear.** A licensed center referee must be present for an official league match.

6.8.1. The Operator shall determine appropriate next steps when a request for referee assignment was made and no referee is available.

6.8.2. A forfeit for the home team shall be recorded when a request for assignment was not made or was not confirmed by the home team, and no referee is available.

6.8.3. In case of a dispute, Directors are responsible for providing written confirmation from a referee assignor to verify that a request for services was made.

SECTION 7. CONDUCT

7.1. **Standards of conduct.** National 1 exists to provide youth the opportunity to acquire and develop soccer skills through a higher level of competition. These skills, as well as the individual growth of the players, cannot be nurtured in an environment that permits confrontation, poor sportsmanship, and verbal and physical abuse among spectators, game participants, and game officials. While National 1 cannot dictate the internal administrative rules and regulations of the clubs with teams participating in National 1, it must provide a framework for addressing violations of the Rules, including without limitation US Club Soccer's risk management policies, including its Prohibited Conduct Policy. Players are expected to perform in a manner consistent with the principles of good sportsmanship. Coaches and spectators should act in a manner that reinforces the concepts of good sportsmanship.

7.1.1. Allegations of misconduct shall be reported to the Operator and the Commissioner and participants committing misconduct in violation of US Club Soccer policies are subject to additional penalties beyond those that may be imposed by the Operator.

7.1.2. Under no circumstances shall a player, coach, parent or spectator enter the field of play during the match unless invited by the referee.

7.1.3. The coach is responsible for the actions of parents and spectators on the sidelines. Coaches may be sent off the field or even banned from future games for their misbehavior or inciting spectator behavior in violation of this standard.

7.1.4. Parents and spectators can be asked by the referee to leave the playing site, and if the request is refused, the referee can, at his/her discretion, terminate the match.

7.1.5. Except as outlined in 5.15.1 (player) if any player or coach refuses to leave the playing site immediately after an ejection by the referee, the referee may terminate the match, and the match will be scored as a forfeit with the offending team losing by a score of 3-0, unless the offending team is losing by a margin greater than 3 goals in which case that score shall be recorded. The referee has the discretionary power to suspend or terminate a match whenever, by reason of the elements, interference by spectators, or other causes, he/she deems such stoppage necessary.

7.1.6. Clubs with teams participating in National 1 shall ensure that this Handbook, including the conduct standards in this section, is distributed and adopted. Repeated occurrences of misconduct may result in prohibition of a team from further participation in National 1.

7.2. **Banned words**. Any official reports from a referee or league/event official regarding the use of any listed banned word(s) shall be subject to a minimum four (4) match suspension and may be subject reporting to the U.S. Center for SafeSport if required by the SafeSport Act and the SafeSport Code. Subsequent incidents by the same player, team official, or team will result in additional sanctioning.

7.2.1. The following is not an exhaustive list of prohibited language words or phrases but rather is intended to provide examples of language prohibited in National 1 and under US Club Soccer's Prohibited Conduct policy. Use of the asterisk (*) is utilized to prevent the actual word in print.

7.2.2. 5.15.3. Use of banned word shall be reviewed by the Operator which, in consultation with the Commissioner, may impose an additional suspension, including suspending

the player or non-player from participating with other teams participating in National 1 during the suspension period.

National 1 Banned Words List (non-exhaustive)					
B*tty Boy	Cr*cker	F*ggot	K*ke	P*to	Sl*nt
Be*ner	C*nt	G*y	Mar*con	P*ssy	Sp*c
Black Boy/Girl	D*ck	H*mo	N*gger / N*gga	Rag He*d	Wetb*ck
Ch*nk	F*g	Jewb*y	N*gro	R*tard / R*tarded	White Boy/Girl

SECTION 8. PROTESTS

8.1. **General**. A protest is a formal written objection of any violation of established policies, rules, or procedures related to a specific match. Only the teams involved are permitted to protest a match result. Third parties, i.e., coaches from other teams, state administrators, cannot file protests on a specific match. Protests must be based upon a violation of the published rules of National 1, or IFAB Laws of the Game. All decisions of the referees regarding matters of fact, including judgment matters, are final and cannot be protested.

8.2. **Submission**. Operator policies shall govern protest procedures subject to appeal to the Commissioner.

SECTION 9. GRIEVANCES

9.1. **General**. Grievances address potential violations of the National 1 Handbook or Operator policies.

9.2. **Submission**. Any Director who believes an Operator has violated the policies included in this National 1 Handbook may submit a written grievance containing the allegations of policy violation and requesting their desired remedy. The written grievance must be accompanied by a check in the amount of $250 payable to US Club Soccer. The grievance may be sent electronically to the Commissioner and is not considered received until receipt has been confirmed by the Commissioner or their designee.

9.3. **Determination of submission.** The Commissioner shall determine whether the grievance has been properly filed and evaluate the nature of the allegations therein. If the Commissioner determines the grievance is validly submitted, the Commissioner shall initiate action to resolve the issue. This may be accomplished by consulting other members of the staff and/or Board of Directors of the parties to the grievance or by holding a hearing. The Commissioner has sole discretion to determine how the grievance is resolved.

9.4. **Grievance Committee.** A Grievance Committee, if appointed, shall consist of the Commissioner or Commissioner's designee and two (2) other members appointed by the US Club Soccer CEO. The Grievance Committee shall hear the grievance within 30 days of the date the Grievance Committee was appointed.

9.5. **Sustained.** If the grievance is sustained, the check shall be returned. If the grievance is denied, the check will be retained by US Club Soccer.

9.6. **Final decision.** The decision of the Grievance Committee is final and is not appealable.

9.7. **Legal costs.** If the aggrieved party remains dissatisfied after having exhausted all requirements concerning grievances, or, if not having exhausted all requirements concerning grievances, if he/she invokes the aid of the courts of any state or the United States, should the person bringing the action not prevail in such court action, he shall then be liable for all expenses incurred by NATIONAL 1 in defending such action including, but not limited to, the following:

- Court Costs
- Attorneys' fees

9.8. **Compensation.** Reasonable compensation for time spent by US Club Soccer employees in responding and defending against allegations in the action, including responses to discovery and court appearances.

- Travel expenses

- Expenses of any special meeting(s) necessitated by the action.

SECTION 10. BOARDS OF INQUIRY OR HEARINGS

10.1. **General.** Periodically, it may be necessary for the US Club Soccer and/or the Operator to conduct inquiries or hearings on breaches of the Rules.

10.2. **Notice.** Unless waived by both parties, inquiries and/or hearings may be announced at least seven (7) days in advance. An effort shall be made to schedule such activities at the convenience of the majority of the participants, whether members of the hearing panel or persons to appear before the panel.

10.3. **Appearance.** When established in accordance with notice pursuant to Section 10.2, persons to appear before a hearing panel shall be so notified. Their personal appearance, or the appearance of an individual(s) acting on their behalf, shall be mandatory.

10.3.1. Once notified, persons requested to appear shall have 48 hours to submit in writing matters in extenuation or mitigation that may preclude their appearance. The convening authority shall have sole authority to rule on such matters.

10.3.2. Failure to appear, unless duly excused, shall be grounds for additional sanctions.

10.4. **Report to US Club Soccer.** If an inquiry or hearing is conducted by the Operator, they shall provide US Club Soccer information concerning sanctions and suspensions it has levied.

10.5. **Recruiting violations.** If the hearing panel finds a recruiting violation has occurred, the panel may impose one or more penalties including, but not limited to: forfeiture of one or more games, fines, and temporary or permanent suspension from National 1 club activities.

10.6. **Appeals.** Any aggrieved party may appeal any decision or the imposition of any penalty or fine to the CEO.

10.6.1. A $250 appeal fee shall accompany the appeal. If the appeal is upheld, the appeal fee shall be returned. If the appeal is denied, the fee shall be retained by National 1.

10.6.2. Upon receipt of an appeal, the CEO, working with the Board Chair, shall convene a board of inquiry.

10.6.3. The decision of the Board of Inquiry is final within National 1.

SECTION 11. FINES.

11.1. **General**. The implementation of fines is intended to mitigate situations that would negatively impact the participant game day experience and negative impacts on the competition, opponents, and the league.

11.2. **Fee schedule**. The fee schedule outlined below is a guideline with maximum amounts collected by the Operator. The fees schedule may be superseded by Operator policies provided they are publicly available and approved by the Commissioner.

OFFENSE	MAXIMUM AMOUNT
TEAM ACCEPTANCE	
Failure to claim acceptance by league deadline	$200 per team
Team drops after team declaration deadline & prior to release of schedules	Application fee
Team drops after schedule release prior to first match	$350 + application fee
Team drops after first match or failure to complete league schedule	$500 + application fee
SCHEDULES AND RESCHEDULES	
Failure to schedule matches by league deadline	$50 per game
Failure to reschedule a canceled match within 48 hours	$50 per game
Reschedule: At least 2 weeks from original schedule.	$50 per game
Reschedule: Two weeks to 96 hours from original schedule.	$100 per game
Reschedule: 96 to 48 hours from original schedule.	$250 per game
Reschedule: Withing 48 hours from original schedule (no-show).	$500 + referee fees
MATCH DAY	
Failure to provide appropriate game day requirements (e.g. bench, shade/tents for both teams) – if applicable per Operator Standards	$50 per occurrence
Team forfeits more than 48 hours prior to kickoff (each occurrence)	$300
Team forfeits less than 48 hours prior to kickoff (each occurrence)	$400 + referee fees
Team no-shows for match (each occurrence)	$500 + referee fees
OTHER VIOLATIONS	
Qualifying team failure to attend post-season.	$1,500 + event fee
Playing unregistered player.	$500
Playing unregistered or overage/ineligible player.	$1,000
Participation of unregistered coach.	$1,500
Home team fails to report score within 24 hours.	$25 per game
Failure to provide three certified referees at a game.	$100 per referee

APPENDIX 1 | DISTRICTS

DISTRICT	GEOGRAPHICAL TERRITORY
Northeast District 1	ME, VT, NH, MA, RI
Northeast District 2	NY-E, CT
Northeast District 3	NJ, PA-E
Northeast District 4	NY-E Upstate
Mid-Atlantic District 1	DE, MD, DC
Mid-Atlantic District 2	VA
Mid-Atlantic District 3	NC
Mid-Atlantic District 4	TN
Southeast District 1	GA, SC
Southeast District 2	FL
Southeast District 3	AL, FL Panhandle
Southeast District 4	LA, MS
South District 1	OK, AR
South District 2	TX-N, OK
South District 3	TX-S
South District 4	TX-W, El Paso, NM
Central District 1	MN, WI-W
Central District 2	MO, KS, NE, IA
Midwest District 1	OH-N, PA-W, NY-W, WV
Midwest District 2	OH-S, IN-S, KY
Midwest District 3	WI, IL
Midwest District 4	IL-Chicago
Midwest District 5	MI, IN-N
Northwest District 1	ID, MT
Northwest District 2	OR
Northwest District 3	WA
Northwest District 4	AK
Northwest District 5	HI
West District 1	CO, WY-Cheyenne
West District 2	AZ
West District 3	CA-S
West District 4	CA-N
West District 5	NV-Las Vegas
West District 6	UT