



US YOUTH SOCCER NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS GENERAL PROCEDURES as of August 24, 2020

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the US Youth Soccer National League Rules (2.05), these National League Playoffs Operating Procedures shall be an extension of the National League Rules. When National League Rules are referenced or summarized in these Operating Procedures, they are meant to mirror the National League Rules in every respect. These Operating Procedures are specific to the US Youth Soccer National League Playoffs.

SECTION 1. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – TEAM SELECTION

1.01 Team Eligibility

Any team selected for entry into the National League Playoffs must meet the eligibility requirements in accordance with the National League Rules.

1.02 Registration System / Application Process

GotSport shall be the official team registration system of the National League Playoffs. Any eligible team must register their team into the National League Playoffs using GotSport. No registration will be received or accepted in any other system.

Eligible teams must have a GotSport account in order to register into the National League Playoffs. Team accounts must have accurate information regarding the coach and manager at the time of submission. In completing any registration into the National League Playoffs, teams are required to submit accurate information on team accomplishments. Misrepresentation of team accomplishments may result in the team being disqualified from National League Playoffs participation.

1.03 Registration Deadlines

Deadlines will be published on the National League Playoffs homepage on the US Youth Soccer website, found here: <https://www.usyouthsoccer.org/national-league-playoffs/>

1.04 Registration Agreement

Any team registering to play in the National League Playoffs agrees to accept, abide by, and comply with all policies, rules, and decisions of the National League and further agrees to pay all fees that are due to the National League for participation in the National League Playoffs by the registration deadlines.

1.05 State Association Registration

To be eligible for participation in the National League Playoffs, a team must be properly registered with their respective member State Association prior to acceptance into the National League Playoffs.

1.06 Fees and Other Expenses

The Team Entry Fee to participate in the National League Playoffs is \$950 per team for 13U/14U and \$1200 per team for 15U and up (paid to US Youth Soccer) and is non-refundable if a team is accepted into the National League Playoffs and later drops out.

1.07 Communication

E-mail will be the primary means of communication within the Playoffs. It is the responsibility of each team to ensure that accurate contact information is on file.

SECTION 2. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – STRUCTURE AND QUALIFICATION

2.01 Structure

The 2020-21 US Youth Soccer National League Playoffs will include the following Boys and Girls age groups:

- 14 and Under (14U) – for players born on January 1, 2007 or later
- 15 and Under (15U) – for players born on January 1, 2006 or later
- 16 and Under (16U) – for players born on January 1, 2005 or later
- 17 and Under (17U) – for players born on January 1, 2004 or later
- 18 and Under (18U) – for players born on January 1, 2003 or later
- 19 and Under (19U) – for players born on January 1, 2002 or later*

*Due to the impact COVID-19 has had on our 19Us, the Board has approved our request to allow all players aging out to play one additional season. Therefore, USYS will allow the 20Us (born on or after January 1, 2001) to play with 19Us during the 2020-21 season only.

National League Playoffs include up to sixteen (16) teams in each 14U-19U gender age group. Each team will be scheduled to play three (3) games in the National League Playoffs. Structure and bracketing will be determined by the Director of Competitions.

2.02 Qualification for 2020-21

Top Tier Conference Champion will get playoff spot unless unable to determine. If unable to determine, the following criteria will take place within each gender age group:

1. Recognized all the conference champions as provided by League Managers (from 2019-20 season) – up to 12 clubs.
2. Recognized all the National League division winners (highest ranked non-Conference winner from each National League division) – up to 4 clubs.
3. For conferences that did not have a season/champion, we took the conference's highest-ranked National League club to be the conference representative.
- 3a. Clubs had to average at least 1 point per game (AKA a tie per game) in the National League to be considered.
4. If a conference had no season/champion and no qualifying representative in National League, then we took the highest overall ranked National League club remaining.

SECTION 3. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – TEAM ROSTERS

3.01 Team Rosters

The official Team Roster for the National League Playoffs shall be in GotSport. Teams are responsible for ensuring that their GotSport National League Playoffs Team Roster is identical to their Official State Association Roster. The GotSport roster must be accurate by 24 hours prior to a team's first match of the season. A team's State Association may impose an earlier deadline. Additions to the Team Roster, subject to the requirements of a team's State Association, must be updated in the GotSport roster no later than 24 hours prior to a National League Playoffs match.

National League Playoffs teams may create a Club Pass Roster in GotSport, which is the pool of Club Pass players designated for use by a specific team. Any club pass player must be added to the Club Pass Roster and Match Line-Up Card no later than 24 hours prior the National League Playoffs match in which the club pass players will participate. Any club pass player, once added to a team's Club Pass Roster, cannot be removed until the completion of the Conference season. A Club pass player may only play for one (1) playoff team each seasonal year.

3.02 Player Eligibility and Limitations

All players must be current US Youth Soccer members and have member passes that have been approved by their respective State Association.

A player in the National League Playoffs may only play for one (1) team in an age group. For example, if a club has two (2) teams in one age group, primary and club pass players may only play on one (1) of those teams during the National League Playoffs, not both.

A player may play for only one (1) National League Playoffs team during any single day. Once a player is on the roster of a team in the National League Playoffs in a gender age group and such team has played one (1) match in National League Playoffs competition, such player may not appear on another team's roster in such gender age group during the remainder of the National League Playoffs or Showcase event.

The National League Playoffs do not allow Goalkeepers to play for more than one (1) team per day.

3.03 Team Match Day Line-Ups

Up to eighteen (18) players (inclusive of both primary players and club pass players) are eligible to play in each National League Playoffs match. Eligible players must be listed on the Team Match Day Line-Up (i.e. GotSport Game Card). The GotSport Game Card will be the used as the official Team Match Day Line-Up prior to each National League Playoffs match, and the official Match Report following each National League Playoffs match. The process, timing, and verification of the Team Match Day Line-Up must be done in accordance with Section 8 (Match Day Procedures) of this document.

Players on the team roster who are not eligible/participating in a National League Playoffs match are allowed in the team bench area, but must not be in uniform.

No more than four (4) team bench persons (being only team coaches, team administrators, and team medical staff) shall be permitted at the team bench area during a match. Also, those players listed on the match lineup card are permitted at the team bench area during a match.

3.04 Playing of Ineligible Player

In accordance with National League Rules, a team that plays an ineligible player shall be subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to: (a) forfeiture of the match; and (b) suspension of the team's coach from National League Playoffs competition. Additional disciplinary action could include (a) expulsion of the team from the Conference; and/or (b) any further action(s) as determined by the National League director.

Accusations from teams of an ineligible player must be extensively substantiated and is incumbent on the accuser to provide concrete evidence of ineligibility.

3.05 Player Information

The National League Playoffs may require participating teams to provide information on players for use in promoting the National League Playoffs and/or its teams and players. Upon request, teams are required to submit information regarding personal player history, competition history, roster history, and any other information that may help promote the league, player, or team.

SECTION 4. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – SCHEDULING AND MATCH MANAGEMENT

4.01 Number of Matches

Each team will be scheduled to play a maximum of three (3) matches at the National League Playoffs in a single round-robin format.

4.02 Host/Travel/Hotels

To ensure the quality of service provided at Playoff events, Anthony Travel has been appointed the Official Housing Provider for the US Youth Soccer National League Playoffs. Teams located 100+ miles beyond the USYS designated field location of the Playoffs are required to book their hotel accommodations through Anthony Travel. National League Playoff Series teams will be required to secure 6 rooms per team per night. Any teams that do not comply with the National League Playoffs housing requirements are at risk of penalty.

4.03 Match Schedule and Rest Periods

It is the intent of the National League Playoffs to play only one (1) match per day; however, when circumstances dictate, no more than two (2) matches a day may be scheduled. Every effort will be made to provide for a minimum of three (3) hours rest between matches. Most circumstances involving teams playing two (2) matches in a day will be related to rain-out reschedules.

4.04 Inclement Weather and Unplayable Field Conditions Prior to Match

If matches on scheduled fields are unable to be played due to field closings or inclement weather, the League Director, in consultation with the host complex, will make every effort to determine the status of matches by the Wednesday prior to the day of play.

4.5 Referee Jurisdiction

Once the referee has jurisdiction of a match, the match may be stopped, suspended, or terminated as provided in the "IFAB Laws of the Game."

4.6 Emergency Match Management Procedures

On an emergency basis, the League Director reserves the right to impose emergency Match Management Procedures. These procedures shall be limited to those items that are necessary, in the sole opinion of the League Director, in order for a match to be played. Such procedures could include, but are not limited to, the following.

- (a) Shortening match lengths or half time due to inclement weather, lack of light, or other extraordinary circumstances.
- (b) Moving a match to earlier or later in a day.
- (c) Establishing additional match day(s) due to excessive rain-outs.
- (d) Approving the use of less than a 3-man referee crew or approving use of a "club" linesman.
- (e) Approving an alternate method to validate eligible players.

SECTION 5. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – NATIONAL COMPETITIONS

5.01 Advancement to US Youth Soccer National Championship Series

The top team in each group, the 13U-19U gender age groups, in the National League Playoffs will qualify for 2021 National Championships that same seasonal year as the National League Playoffs representative. To be eligible for advancement to the 2021 National Championships, the qualified National League Playoffs team must have participated in their state association's State Cup competition. Should a team qualify for the National Championships through both the National League Playoffs and State Cup/Regional Championship competition, the team will advance to National Championships as National League Playoffs representative.

5.02 Qualification to USYS National Championships

On an annual basis, the Director of Competitions/National League Director shall determine the structure of the 14U-19U USYS National League Playoffs to determine four (4) positions in the USYS National Championships designated for 14U-19U National League teams. Such process will be outlined in the Playoff Operating Procedures.

5.03 Failure to Accept Qualification Slot to National Championships

A team that achieves a qualification slot from the Playoffs is expected to honor the commitment to participate in the National Championships competition. Failure to field a team in such National Championships competition may result in fines as determined by the Director of Competitions.

SECTION 6. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – RULES OF PLAY

6.01 Applicable Rules and Laws of the Game

Matches will be played under the applicable policies and rules of National League Playoffs and US Youth Soccer. Teams are responsible for obtaining and abiding by the IFAB Laws of the Game as they govern play subject to the modifications noted the National League Rules.

6.02 Substitutions

Matches in the 15U, 16U, 17U, 18U and 19U age groups will operate under the FIFA-7 players "per half" substitution system (limited substitution). Once replaced, players cannot re-enter the game during that half of play. Substitutions may be made at any stoppage of play with the approval of the referee. If a player is removed from the match and no substitute enters the match for the player (team plays short), the original player may reenter the match. Reentry shall be at a normal substitution point (with approval of the referee) or at any point during the match if the referee signals for the player's reentry. Matches in the 13U and 14U age groups shall have unlimited substitutions.

During a match is that is part of a National League Playoffs event using neutral Health Care Professionals (HCP) or neutral Athletic Trainer Certified (ATC) to monitor the fields, if a player is suspected of suffering a head injury, such player may be substituted for evaluation. The substitution for the evaluation of a concussion/head injury will not count towards the team's total allowed substitutions in a half. However, the team must have at least one substitution available to implement this temporary substitution.

If the player is deemed by the neutral HCP or neutral ATC to not have been diagnosed as having a possible concussion, the player may re-enter the game at any stoppage of play and must replace the original substitute. This head injury evaluation substitution will not count as a used substitution in the half. Furthermore, the temporary substitute will be able to re-enter the game in that half at a later time. If the player is not cleared to return to play by the HCP or ATC, the replacement player will no longer be considered a temporary substitute and the team will be charged a substitution.

6.03 Match Length

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Length of Each Half</u>
17U, 18U and 19U	45 minutes
15U and 16U	40 minutes
14U	35 minutes

6.04 Team Uniforms

Team Uniforms must be in accordance with National League Rules. Every team in the National League Playoffs must have two (2) sets of jerseys and socks. The expectation is for the team listed first in the schedule to wear their lighter/white colored jersey and socks, while the team listed second in the schedule to wear their darker colored jersey and socks. If, in the opinion of the Referee, a team color conflict exists, the team listed second in the schedule should change.

Every player on the field must have a unique number (from the rest of the team) affixed on the back of their jersey, with the exception of goalkeepers. Goalkeeper jersey numbers are optional, but if a number is affixed, it must be a unique number (from the rest of the team).

US Youth Soccer, National League, or other US Youth Soccer related logos/patches are allowed on uniforms, in addition to the team name, team sponsor, or shirt manufacturer. No other patches/logos are permitted without the written approval of the National League Director.

6.05 National League Playoffs Protocol for Send Offs and Dismissals

Protocols for send offs and dismissals shall be in accordance with National League Playoffs Rules. In the National League Playoffs, should a player be sent off from a match, the designated area for the ejected player shall be the Team Bench Area and will remain there under the supervision of the player's Coach. If the sent off player cannot be controlled by the Coach, the Referee may require the removal of the player from the entire field area. If such player is removed from the field area, the Coach must designate a parent or Team Official to supervise the player away from the field area.

6.06 Team Coaches – Coaching Education Requirement

Coaches of teams within the National League Playoffs must have obtained a US Soccer National D License or the United Soccer Coaches equivalent (National Diploma) level of coaching education. All coaches and team officials in the Team Bench Area must have proper credentials issued by their State Association.

6.07 Coaching from Sidelines

Limited coaching is permitted only from one touch line from the team's respective technical area (if marked) or from the center-line to no more than 5 yards from the end of the team bench closest to the goal line (if no technical area is marked). Team bench persons may not enter the field without permission from the referee.

SECTION 7. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – REFEREES

7.01 Four-Person System

Matches shall be officiated in accordance with National League Rules. The National League Director may, in extreme circumstances, approve exceptions to the use of the four-person system.

7.02 Referee Assignor

The National League Director will determine which referee assignor will assign each event hosted. Referee assignors must be a certified US Soccer assignor. The referee assignor shall be paid according to US Youth Soccer Policy (via the Expensify App).

7.03 Filing of Referee Match Report

Prior to each National League Playoffs match, each team shall present a GotSport “Game Card” to the Referee, which shall serve as the Official Match Line-Up Card prior to the game and the official Match Report following the completion of the game. The Referee shall select one of the Match Line-Up Cards and use it to check-in the players from both teams. The selected Match Line-Up Card will become the official Match Report.

Following the completion of each National League Playoffs Match, the Referee shall accurately report all scores and cards issued onto the selected Match Report (provided to the Referee by each team prior to the match). Once the scores and cards issued are written on the Match Report, it should be presented to both coaches for their signature. It is recommended that each team take a picture of the final Match Report for their own records. The Referee shall then submit the Match Report to the on-site National League Playoffs Official or referee assignor.

If a player is sent off for Violent Conduct, Spitting, or Abusive Language, a US Soccer Supplemental Report must be filled out and submitted to the on-site National League Playoffs Official or referee assignor with the Match Report. Additionally, a US Soccer Supplemental Report must be filled out and submitted to the on-site National League Playoffs Official or referee assignor for situations involving Referee Abuse or Referee Assault. The on-site National League Playoffs Official or referee assignor shall submit all Match Reports and US Soccer Supplemental Reports to the National League Director.

SECTION 8. NATIONAL LEAGUE PLAYOFFS – MATCH DAY PROCEDURES

8.01 Match Day Procedures

The National League Playoffs Match Day Procedures apply to all matches played in the National League Playoffs, unless otherwise instructed by the League Manager.

8.02 Team Match Day Line-Up Card

The GotSport generated Game Card shall be the official Team Match Day Line-Up Card for the National League Playoffs. The Match Day Line-Up Card for each National League Playoffs match should be printed no earlier than 24 hours prior to the scheduled start of that match. This timing will ensure the most accurate information for each team line-up. The eighteen (18) eligible players (inclusive of both primary and club passed players) should be listed on the Match Line-Up Card no later than 24 hours prior to a National League Playoffs match.

- (a) Instructions for printing a match day line-up card through GotSport will be posted on the National League Playoffs webpage, under Rules & Info.

Link: <https://www.usyouthsoccer.org/national-league-playoffs/>

8.03 Match Day Line-Up Players

The Team Match Day Line-Up Card may include the eighteen (18) eligible players (inclusive of both primary and club pass players) a team will use in a National League Playoffs match. Should more than eighteen players appear on the card, the Coach or Team Official must manually strike through the players that will not participate (prior to check-in by the referee) for a maximum of eighteen (18) eligible players.

- (a) Instructions for preparing a match day line-up through GotSport will be posted on the National League Playoffs webpage, under Rules & Info.

Link: <https://www.usyouthsoccer.org/national-league-playoffs/>

8.04 Club Pass Roster

Any Club Pass Players must be listed on the Club Pass Roster (i.e. pool of club pass players) and Match Day Line-Up Card to be eligible to participate. A Primary or Club Pass Player may only appear on one (1) National League Playoffs Primary Roster/Club Pass Roster in a gender age group during the National League Playoffs event. The maximum Club Pass Roster for a National League Playoffs team is 30 minus

the number or primary rostered players (i.e. a team with 18 rostered players has a Club Pass Roster maximum of 12).

- (a) **IMPORTANT:** The National League Playoffs will use the “Guest Player” function in GotSport, not the “Club Pass” function. Since the State Associations do not register through GotSport, the Guest Player function is the easiest and simplest way to get US Youth Soccer defined “Club Pass Players” onto a National League Playoffs Match Day Line-Up. While using the Guest Player function, teams need to understand that this functionality is to be used to put eligible club pass players onto their National League Playoffs Match Day Line-Up.
- (b) Adding a Club Pass Player that does not yet have a GotSport player account:
 - STEP 1: In order to be added to a Club Pass Roster, a player must first have a GotSport Player Profile. Instructions for creating a player account can be found via the below link: <https://GotSport.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115002461088-Creating-Player-Account>
 - STEP 2: Within the new Player Profile, the player must be designated as a “Guest” Player for the National League Playoffs Event. Instructions to do this can be found via the below link: <https://GotSport.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115000773927-How-do-I-register-my-child-as-a-guest-for-an-event>
 - STEP 3: Add the “Guest” player to the team’s Club Pass Pool (i.e. pool of players being used as eligible Club Pass Players for the team). Instructions for adding the player to your pool can be found via the below link: <https://GotSport.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115002705527-How-to-add-a-guest-player-from-a-different-club>
- (c) Adding a Club Pass Player that already has a Player Profile in GotSport, but is not affiliated with the current club.
 - The parent/player must contact GotSport (904-746-4446) to get the Player Profile affiliated with the correct club account, then follow 9.04(d) below. Alternatively, the eligible club pass player could be added to the Club Pass Roster following 9.04(b) above.
- (d) Adding a Club Pass Player that already has a Player Profile in GotSport and whose account is already affiliated with their current club.
 - The Coach or Team Official must simply add the “Guest” player to the Club Pass Roster through their GotSport Team Account. For instructions on how to add the player to the Club Pass Roster, see the below link: <https://GotSport.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115005212407-Adding-a-Guest-Player-From-the-same-Club>

8.05 Team/Player Check-In

Prior to the start of a National League Playoffs match, each team shall present the referee with the copy of the Team Match Day Line-Up Card and their properly prepared US Youth Soccer Player Passes.

The Referee shall select one of the Team Match Day Line-Up Cards and check-in each team’s players using both the Match Day Line-Up Card and the US Youth Soccer Player Passes. Only a maximum of eighteen (18) players may be checked in for a National League Playoffs match. Any player not present at the time of check-in may not enter the field of play until the Referee can properly check-in the player. The National League Director may designate an on-site National League Playoffs Official to perform any required check-in.

8.06 Team Bench / Spectator Areas

The teams will occupy the same side of the field. Teams are to remain on their half of the field between the halfway line and eighteen yards from their goal line. Spectators are to only occupy the opposite side of the field from the teams on the same end of the field as their team bench area. Coaches/Managers are required to maintain control of their players and their team’s fans on the sideline.

8.07 Post-Match Protocol

Following the conclusion of the game, the Referee shall fill out the official Match Report, which is the Referee selected Match Day Line-Up Card. The Coach or Team Official from each team is required to

sign the completed Game Report prior to leaving the field area. It is advised that each team take a picture of the Match Report for their records.

The signed Match Report will be kept by the Referee and submitted to the Referee Assignor or National League Playoffs official.

8.08 Reporting of Scores (GotSport)

A National League Playoffs Official will input scores on-site upon collecting it from Referee assignor or Referee Crew.

8.09 Protests

Protests must be made in accordance with US Youth Soccer National League Rules, Section 20. To be valid and eligible for consideration, a protest must be noted on the Match Report and orally lodged by a team official with the match referee and the opposing coach at the game site before leaving the field of play. All protests must be submitted in writing and filed by the Director of the Club or the Director of Coaching of the Club that the team is a member with the appropriate fee to the National League Director or on-site National League Playoffs Official. The protest must be submitted no later than three (3) hour after match completion in accordance with the Filing Procedures listed in Rule 20.06. The referee is the final authority on the field of play. All decisions of the referees with respect to matters of fact, including judgment matters, are final.

8.10 Final Authority

The National League Director shall have final authority to act in the best interest of the National League Playoffs, which may include but not limited to adjusting Match Day Procedures for specific matches or making decisions to address situations not covered in the National League Playoffs Operating Procedures.

8.11 Tie Breaker in Group Play

Tiebreakers—Two Teams are Tied

If two teams are tied on the basis of points earned, the team's placement will be determined in accordance with the following sequential criteria:

- a) Winner of head to head competition
- b) Winner of most games (all games)
- c) Best Goal spread (goals scored minus goals against) in all games
- d) Fewest goals allowed
- e) Kicks from the Mark – Best of 5, if kicks are still tied after 5 then sudden death. May only have 11 eligible players to take kicks.

Tiebreakers—Three Teams That Are Tied

If three teams are tied on the basis of points earned, the final rankings will be determined in accordance with the following sequential criteria. If a criterion creates a situation where the three-way tie is broken, then the tiebreaker for the teams that are tied resorts to the two team tiebreaker specifically for those teams.

- a) Points earned in head to head competition among the teams
- b) Winner of most games (all games)
- c) Best Goal spread (goals scored minus goals against) in games among the tied teams
- d) Best Goal spread (goals scored minus goals against) in all games
- e) Fewest goals allowed in games among the tied teams
- f) Fewest goals allowed in all game.
- g) Drawing of lots

Tiebreakers—Four Teams That Are Tied

If four teams are tied on the basis of points earned, the final rankings will be determined in accordance with the following sequential criteria. If a criterion creates a situation where the four-way tie is broken,

then the tiebreaker for the teams that are tied (either two or three teams) resorts to the two or three team tiebreaker specifically for those teams.

- a) Points earned in head to head competition among the tied teams
- b) Winner of most games (all games)
- c) Best Goal spread (goals scored minus goals against) in games among the tied teams
- d) Best Goal spread (goals scored minus goals against) in all games
- e) Fewest goals allowed in games among the tied teams
- f) Fewest goals allowed in all games
- g) Drawing of lots