



# RULES: 2021 NPL Playoffs and Finals

*Updated: June 21st, 2021*

## 1. ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION.

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

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

## 2. TOURNAMENT AUTHORITY.

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

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

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

## 3. COMPETITION FORMAT.

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

- a. Reserves the right to determine the size of each competitive group, and the right to alter the groups and format to account for larger or uneven numbers of teams in a given competitive division.



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- b. Shall determine the schedule and start times of all games, and may alter the schedule of one game per day where necessary.

## 4. ROSTER RULES.

Any player registered with and issued a passcard for a participating club, who is a member of the designated age group or younger, is eligible to be placed on the post season roster (registration must occur before May 1<sup>st</sup>). No players may be added to a tournament roster other than pursuant to these rules unless an emergency situation arises and permission is obtained in writing from the Competition Director.

- a. **Maximum Tournament Roster Size:** Up to 26 players. Teams are expected to register all players three weeks prior to the NPL Finals (including submitting paperwork and fees).
- b. **Playing on more than one team:** A player may play on only one team at the NPL Playoffs or NPL Finals competition (team-tied for duration of event).
- c. **Roster Changes for NPL Playoffs and NPL Finals:** For teams that qualify for the NPL Playoffs or NPL Finals, players may be dropped or added to the post season roster without limitation up to the maximum roster size, as long as any new players to be added were registered with the member club during the NPL season or prior to May 1<sup>st</sup>. If the club has had tryouts since the end of their NPL season, they may add up to three new players from tryouts that have committed to and are registered with the club for the next registration year. Any other roster emergency requests shall be determined by the Competition Director on a case-by-case basis. For teams advancing to NPL Finals from NPL Playoffs, once the three rosters spots have been used for tryout players, you may only add additional players from the club registered before May 1<sup>st</sup>.
- d. **Roster freeze for NPL Finals:** The event roster is “frozen” at check-in of the NPL Playoffs or NPL Finals. (Rosters must be presented during Team Check-in–See Attachment A).
- e. **Game roster size:** Up to 18 players, selected from the tournament roster of up to 26 players. Only 18 players may dress for the game. All other players must be out of soccer gear.
- f. **Substitutions: 13U – 19U.** Once a player is substituted in one half of any NPL Post-season Competition, the player may not re-enter the game for the duration of the half. Once a player is substituted in overtime, the player may not reenter the game. There shall be a maximum of seven (7) substitutions in any half or in overtime of any competition. In case of a suspected head injury or serious injury, an additional substitution may be granted by the referee.



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g. **Age group structure:** The NPL Finals age group structure is below. Note that this may allow or require adjustment of NPL Finals rosters for teams that played the NPL regular season with a different age group cut-off.

- **13U:** Players born on or after January 1, 2008
- **14U:** Players born on or after January 1, 2007
- **15U:** Players born on or after January 1, 2006
- **16U:** Players born on or after January 1, 2005
- **17U:** Players born on or after January 1, 2004
- **18U/19U:** Players born on or after January 1, 2002

## 5. REQUIRED DOCUMENTS.

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

## 6. COMPETITION RULES.

The following rules shall govern all Tournament competitions:

- a. All games shall be played pursuant to FIFA Laws of the Game, unless stated otherwise in these rules.
- b. Length of Games:  
  
13U/14U: 35-minutes halves  
15U/16U: 40-minutes halves  
17U/19U: 45-minute halves  
  
All halftimes should last 10 minutes.
- c. In excessive heat conditions, water breaks can be allowed by the referee at his/her discretion, after prior consultation with the Competition Director.
- d. In the group stage, games ending in a tie will be recorded as a tie, with each team receiving one point.
- e. Overtime (if needed): No overtime will be played except for semi-finals and finals. When an overtime period is required, it shall consist of two 10-minute halves (five minutes between halves) and then, if necessary, penalty kicks from the mark. There is no "golden goal."
- f. Ball size: Size 5 for 13U and up.



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- g. All players must wear shin guards. All other equipment rules shall be pursuant to FIFA Laws of the Game.
- h. Home team should wear light uniforms / away team should wear dark uniforms. In case of uniform color conflicts, the designated away team shall change uniforms.
- i. No hard casts will be allowed to be worn by players. All other casts will be up to the discretion of the referee and/or medical staff.

## 7. STANDINGS AND TIEBREAKERS.

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

## 8. GAME AUTHORITY AND DISCIPLINE.

- a. The referee's decision in all matters related to the field and the game itself shall be final. There shall be no protests of any referee's decision or game result. Referee Evaluation Forms (to be completed by a coach only) are available inside the team registration packet. No other forms will be provided. Red cards awarded to players during a game, or dismissals of team officials, shall result in that player or team official being suspended for the next game. Red card suspensions, except for violent conduct or misconduct towards a game official, issued in the final game of an NPL regular season or playoffs, shall not carry over to the NPL Finals, but will be served in the next regular-season game in the following season.



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- b. There shall be no yellow card accumulations. Note that FIFA Circulars #866 and #821 require that a sendoff for a red card or a sendoff after two yellow cards in a game be treated the same. Thus, in both cases, the player must sit out the remainder of that game and the next tournament game.
- c. If, in the opinion of the referee, it is necessary to terminate a game due to the misconduct of a team or others associated with that team, the game shall be forfeited to the opposing team and the matter shall be referred to the Discipline Committee, which may, among other penalties, suspend the team for the remainder of the tournament or undertake other disciplinary action. If, in the opinion of the referee, the termination is the result of substantially equivalent misconduct by both teams or by persons associated with both teams, the matter will be resolved by the Discipline Committee.
- d. The team official shall serve his/her suspension in a game involving the same team when the dismissal occurred, unless the team has no more such games remaining. In this case, the club official shall serve the suspension on the next available game. The Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee shall have the authority to take further disciplinary action should it be deemed necessary.
- e. Except for violent conduct or misconduct towards a game official, suspensions for normal red cards and staff ejections shall not extend beyond the NPL Finals. Any suspension beyond the NPL Finals shall be at the discretion of the Competition Director or US Club Soccer.
- f. For serious discipline matters with the potential to incur penalties beyond the issuance of a red card or staff ejection, a *Competition Incident Report* and a referee's report shall be completed and sent to US Club Soccer. Also, the referee shall give the delinquent players or staff passcards to US Club Soccer.
- g. At all times, all coaches shall have complete responsibility and control for the conduct of their players, bench area, parents, family and friends. Failure to do so may result in game stoppage.
- h. At the end of each game, the referee's game report shall be submitted to the Competition Director.
- i. In the event a red card is issued, the referee shall obtain the delinquent player's/staff member's passcard and take it to the US Club Soccer headquarters tent. After the suspension is served, the coach may pick up the passcard, unless there is the allegation of referee abuse or the Competition Director/referee feels that additional action is warranted.

## 9. GAME START TIMES AND RESCHEDULING.

- a. All games shall start at the designated time. A forfeit shall be declared if a team cannot field a minimum of seven (7) players at the start time of the game. However, the Competition Director shall have the authority to adjust the schedule in cases where a team's arrival has been delayed due to unforeseen travel or weather conditions, or other circumstances beyond the control of the team.
- b. The Competition Director will make reasonable efforts to complete every game as long as the safety of the participants and spectators is not jeopardized. Should a game not be able to be started or should a suspension of play be required due to safety concerns or unplayable conditions, the referee, coaches, Competition Director and Competition Director shall consult, but the referee shall have the ultimate authority to either suspend or terminate the game.



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- c. If it is not possible to complete a game that has been stopped for the reasons set forth in this section, the Competition Director may require that the game be continued at a different time, or if the first half is completed, may determine that the results shall stand. If the first half is not completed, the Competition Director shall determine whether the game shall be rescheduled and continued, or whether another resolution of the matter shall be implemented based on his or her best judgment. The schedule of remaining games or any impacts on group winners shall be a factor in any determination. Any decisions by the Competition Director under this section are final, and there shall be no protests or appeals.
  
- d. In all cases, the Competition Director has the ultimate authority and sole discretion to adjust the schedule of any or all remaining games, including shortening the length of games, to arrive at an equitable result and in consideration of the overall integrity of the competition.



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## ATTACHMENT A: TEAM CHECK-IN PROCEDURES

### Tournament Check-In Procedures:

As a reminder, even though event registration took place in GotSport, you will still need to manage your roster and player/staff cards on Sports Engine since that is where player registration took place for the 20/21 season.

We have made changes to how we do team check in and what is required. Outlined below is a list of what you will need. These changes will make the check in process much quicker.

1. The check-in times and locations shall be determined by the Competition Director.
2. At check-in, teams shall present the following:
  - Please bring 6 printed copies of your official US Club Soccer roster to team check-in (1 for each potential game played and one for US Club Soccer officials to keep)
    - Players must have Jersey numbers listed on the roster
    - Roster must include coaching staff
    - Roster must show all players as carded
    - Roster cannot have any write ins
    - No guest players are allowed
    - Reminder, rosters can have up to 26 players, but game day roster is limited to 18 players
  - US Club Soccer officials will review your roster and keep a copy as the official event roster. **At this time, the roster is frozen for the event.**
  - We will stamp the other copies of your roster as official event rosters and give those back to you to use at games. We **WILL NOT** need player/staff cards at team check in.
  - Prior to each game, you will provide an official stamped roster to the referee along with the player & staff cards. Referees will check the rosters to the cards (if a player is on the roster but does not have a card or a player has a card but is not on the roster, they are not eligible to play).
  - Please also make sure to have player medical forms available on-site (we will not check them, but in case of emergency you will need to produce those either in hard copy or digitally).
3. A player may only be rostered to one team for the NPL Playoffs or NPL Finals.

### Pre-Game Check-In Procedures:

1. Twenty (20) minutes prior to the start of each game, the coach shall present his/her team (up to 18 players) to the referee for check-in. The referee shall check player passcards against the individual players, and the official US Club Soccer stamped roster.
2. Passcards shall be held by the referee or his/her designee and returned to the coach at the end of the game, except for any red cards, which shall be kept together with the game report. Red cards shall be turned in to the scorer's tent, and held until the player has sat out the required game.



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3. In the case of other disciplinary matters, the player's passcard shall be held by the Competition Director until the matter is adjudicated by the Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee or US Club Soccer.
  
4. All cards shall be returned to the coach at the end of the tournament, unless a questionable card has been confiscated by the Competition Director or his/her designee, an allegation of misconduct against a game official has been filed or in the event of violent conduct or other behavior that warrants a Competition Incident Report to be filed.



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## **PLAYING FORMATS**

### **NPL Playoffs Format and Advancement (Boys)**

B13 Age Group – Competition will end at the East or West Playoff event and winning team will be determined the East or West NPL Champion. Bracket sizes will vary per event. There is no second stage.

B14, B15, B16, B17 Age Groups - 2 teams will advance from the East Playoff and 2 teams will advance from the West Playoffs. Bracket sizes will vary per event. At the Finals, teams will play a round robin game followed by a final to determine the NPL Champion.

B19 Age Group – All 16 teams will compete for an NPL Championship in a one-stage post season.

### **NPL Playoffs (Boys) - Bracket of 8:**

Played as 2 groups of four. Each of the 2 group winners and the 2 second-place team (Based on tiebreakers) advance to the Knockout Round. Winner of Bracket A will play the second place of Bracket B and the winner of Bracket B will play the second place team of Bracket A.

### **NPL Playoffs (Boys) - Bracket of 10:**

Played as 1 group of four (Bracket A) and one group of six (split into Bracket B and Bracket C). The group of six crosses over and plays three games. The group of four winner, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will advance (Bracket B and C are viewed together as a group of 6 – so 2 out of those 6 advance). In addition, a wildcard from the remaining 7 teams will be selected based on tiebreakers.

In a case where three teams from the group of 6 win all three matches, a mini playoff will take place between the second and third place of that bracket (Based on tiebreakers). Rest will be taken into consideration, as well as the final match time. Teams advancing to the knockout rounds (wildcards #1-#4) will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two teams have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (#1 Seed vs. lowest seed).

### **NPL Playoffs (Boys) - Bracket of 12:**

Played as 3 groups of four. Each of the 3 group winners and the best second place team (Based on tiebreakers) advance to the Knockout Games. Teams advancing to the knockout games will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two teams have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the knockout games (#1 Seed vs. lowest seed).



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### **NPL Finals (Girls) - Bracket of 10:**

Played as one group of four (Bracket A) and one group of six (split into Bracket B and Bracket C). The group of six crosses over and plays three games. The group of four winner, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semifinal games (Bracket B and C are viewed as a group of 6 – so 2 out of those 6 advance). In addition, a wildcard from the remaining 7 teams will be selected based on tiebreakers.

Winners of Semi-Final games will advance to the Finals. In a case where three teams from the group of 6 win all three matches, a mini playoff (or PKs) will take place between the second and third place of that bracket (Based on tiebreakers). Rest will be taken into consideration, as well as the final match time. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (#1 Seed vs. lowest seed).

### **NPL Finals (Girls) - Bracket of 12:**

Played as 3 groups of four. Each of the 3 group winners and the best second place team (Based on tiebreakers) advance to the Semi-Finals. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (#1 Seed vs. lowest seed).

### **NPL Finals (Girls) - Bracket of 14:**

Played as two groups of four and one group of six. The group of six crosses over and plays three games. Each of the group of four winners, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semifinal games. Winners of Semi-Final games will advance to the Finals. In a case where three teams from the group of 6 win all three matches, a mini playoff will take place between the second and third place of that bracket (Based on tiebreakers). Rest will be taken into consideration, as well as the final match time. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (#1 Seed vs. lowest seed).

### **NPL Finals (Boys and Girls) - Bracket of 16:**

Played as four groups of four. The four round-robin winners will play a semifinal and final game to determine which team is declared the champion. Teams advancing to the semifinals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semifinalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semifinals (#1 Seed vs. lowest seed).