

NorCal Premier Soccer League

Handbook 2024-25 Season

Text highlighted in PEACH indicates changes for the 2024-25 season.



A US Club Soccer Sanctioned League



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NorCal Premier Mission

We elevate soccer by developing Players, Clubs, Coaches, and Referees.

NorCal Premier Core Values

Collaboration

We collaborate with our soccer community to make wise decisions.

Joy

We celebrate soccer and take fun seriously!

Impact

We make a meaningful difference.

Integrity

We strive to do the right thing.

Agility

We move quickly.

Competition

We believe that healthy competition is essential to progress.

Education

We are committed to learning and development.

Guided by our Mission and Core Values, NorCal Premier Soccer's ("NorCal's") purpose is to set the highest standards for soccer Clubs to develop Players to their fullest potential – physically, emotionally, socially, and ethically.

Membership in NorCal is an automatic acceptance of our rules, policies, and procedures. Our competitions are governed by regulations approved by the League Office, which are written in this handbook. The League Office shall rule on all disputes and issues pertaining to NorCal competitions. The League Office may overrule stated rules, policies, or procedures in this handbook if it is determined to be for the good of the game. Additionally, all participants in NorCal events are members of US Club Soccer and, therefore, must adhere faithfully, both to the letter and to the spirit, of US Club Soccer's stated bylaws, rules, and policies.

NorCal's Handbook and Code of Ethics must be adhered to by all teams within a NorCal Member Club, regardless of the specific league a team may participate in. When NorCal's rules and policies directly conflict with the rules of another league or governing body, NorCal may be restricted from implementing certain rules. **This handbook supersedes all prior handbooks.**

Definitions

As used herein, the terms listed below shall have the following definitions:

Adult: Any Coach, Director of Coaching, Trainer, Manager, Official, (Team) Parent, or other individual 18 years of age or older affiliated with a Club and having access to a Player, the Player's parents, or the Player's contact information that is not available publicly.

Club: Any entity (such as a Club or academy) admitted as a member of NorCal Premier.

Coach: Any individual engaged in Coaching or training Players on behalf of a Club, whether in a paid or voluntary, permanent, or temporary capacity.

Director of Coaching: Any individual employed by or volunteering for a Club as a Director of Coaching, Executive Director, Technical Director, General Manager, or assistant to any of the above-listed roles and all Adults filling similar roles regardless of title. A Director of Coaching oversees each team in their Club and each team's involvement in NorCal competitions.

Field or Facility: Any Facility or Field used by a Club to conduct tryouts, Training Sessions, or games (other than tournament games).

League Office: Any individual employed by or volunteering in any capacity for NorCal Premier Soccer, including, but not limited to, the Board of Directors, employees, staff, and committees.

Player: Any Player holding a valid Player pass from US Club Soccer and currently playing for a NorCal Club.

Recruiting:

- Outside the NorCal Tryout Window: "Recruiting" refers to making any contact or communication with a Player who is registered with another NorCal Club, in which the Player is asked or allowed to join a Club, attend a tryout or Club training session, or play or guest play for another Club, without first receiving permission from the Director of Coaching of the Player's Club.
- Inside the NorCal Tryout Window: "Recruiting" refers to making an initial or first contact or communication with a Player who is registered with another NorCal Club, in which the Player is asked or allowed to join a Club, attend a tryout or Club training session, or guest play for another Club, without first receiving permission from the Director of Coaching of the Player's Club.

Referee: Any Referee licensed by the United States Soccer Federation for the current year.

Training Session: Any Club-sanctioned or private training session or practice.

Code of Ethics

As a NorCal Premier Member, your adherence to the Code of Ethics signals your commitment to adhering to the basic laws of the organization and thus upholding the basic moral standards of the soccer community at large.

For All Members

- A. Know, respect, and follow the letter and spirit of the [Laws of the Game](#).
- B. Treat others with respect and courtesy.
- C. Treat all Match Officials with respect at all times - pre-game, during the game, and post-game.
- D. Adhere to the rules and policies of NorCal Premier Soccer, [US Club Soccer](#), and [US Soccer](#).
- E. Recognize the rights, dignity, and worth of all – regardless of gender, ability, cultural background, or religion.

For Clubs

- A. Require sportsmanlike conduct at all times.
- B. Provide a safe playing environment.
- C. Address issues with other Clubs in a professional and timely manner.
- D. Ensure that all Adults and Players in your Club are familiar with the rules and expectations of NorCal Premier Soccer.
- E. Respect the Facilities used by other Clubs.
- F. Actively uphold the Recruiting, Tryouts, and Player Transfer Policies (see Section 4)

For Coaches

- A. Place your Players' physical, mental, and emotional development and well-being ahead of all else.
- B. Continuously seek education on sound Coaching techniques.
- C. Model and teach good sporting behavior.
- D. Coaches are held responsible for the actions of their team's spectators.

For Players

- A. Participate for your own enjoyment and development.
- B. Take responsibility for your sportsmanship and conduct.

Section 1 - Club Policies and Administration

1.1 - Club Definition

For a Club to be considered a member of NorCal Premier, the following conditions must be satisfied:

1. All teams participating in NorCal events must belong to a single legal entity with a single leadership, financial, and governance structure.
2. All teams participating in NorCal events must have a common Club name, logo, and uniform (which should be unique to their Club) and should practice/play games in the same geographical area of operation.
3. All teams participating in NorCal events must operate under a single technical structure/plan and report to a single Director of Coaching.
4. All Players participating in NorCal events must be registered under a single US Club Soccer sanctioned Club.

1.2 - Required Club Contacts

Each Club's GotSport account must be kept up to date with the correct contact information ([Instructions for updating contacts](#)). Please remember that this is the primary method by which NorCal communicates with your Club. Failing to have the correct contact information may result in your Club missing vital league communication. Each Club shall maintain the following contacts with a current email address:

1. Coaching/Technical Director (previously called DOC) AND/OR Executive Director
2. Registrar
3. President
4. Referee Assignor (USSF Certified)

1.3 - Home Field

Clubs should have at least one game-quality Field (5-time slots) per eight teams. It is preferred that all home fields have access to restroom facilities. Teams may ask that they play all away games. In the event of a complaint about the quality of a Field, the League Office shall determine if a Field is game-quality.

1.4 - Club Pass Rule

Each US Club Soccer Player pass can be used for any age-appropriate team in the issuing Club. Thus, Players can move up and down within their Club, allowing individual teams to make changes from game to game due to illness, injury, vacation, or other conflicts. Limitations apply in State Cup and NPL - leagues where Players cannot play on two teams in the same age/division. (See section 8)

It is considered unethical for teams to move Players to teams in a lower-level division within the same Club to create a competitive advantage. If NorCal determines that a Club has moved Players into a lower-level division to create a competitive advantage and this has impacted the integrity of the competition, a sanction may be imposed against the Team and/or Club. This could include, but may not be limited to, declaring the game a forfeit.

1.5 - Merger/Affiliation/Transfer Policy - [Read Full Polic](#)

Section 2 - Team Policies and Administration

2.1 - Team Management

To compete in NorCal events, each team must have at least one team manager whose duties may include, but may not be limited to, scheduling games, Referee payments, travel arrangements, reporting scores, and communication with appropriate league officials. All team managers must have access to a current email address that is checked daily and a telephone number connected to a voicemail system.

2.2 - Communication

Communication between teams is essential for all NorCal events. Teams must have at least two different contacts listed on their GotSport page (Manager and Coach), and ensure that both contacts have a current email address and phone number listed. All team scheduling communication must be done through the GotSport [chat system](#) to have a proper record of the communication. Team contacts must respond to communication within 48 hours. Listing the wrong email or phone number is not a valid excuse for not responding to a communication and may result in a fine if a forfeit or no-show occurs.

Please contact the [event coordinator](#) for assistance if team communication breaks down.

2.3 - Match Scheduling

The NorCal League Office will provide dates for all matches and scheduling deadlines. *Teams are expected to be available to play any time on the game dates provided with the following exceptions (which do NOT apply to NorCal-hosted events):*

- Please do not schedule games before 10 AM if a team is required to travel more than one hour.
- Please do not schedule games for older ages (U15 and up) before 3 pm on SAT/ACT dates.
- [Region 5 Remote Travel Policy](#)
- [Region 6 Remote Travel Policy](#)

All games must be scheduled (time and location) by the deadline provided by the NorCal League Office. Teams unwilling or unable to attend games will forfeit them. League officials will document unplayed games and may remove a Club from NorCal.

Please Note - If the League Office feels that a Club is responsible for the game not being scheduled or communication from the away team is not responded to promptly, teams may lose home-field advantage but still pay for Referees and Field costs.

If a team arrives late for kick-off, there is a 15-minute grace period. NorCal encourages games to be completed, but a late-game start should not impact the subsequent scheduled game(s). If a game is delayed, regardless of the reason, the referee may shorten the match (playing two equally shortened halves) if they inform both coaches before the match. Shortened matches should be automatically played under protest, and may be protested to the League Office via the [PAD Match Report Form](#).

2.4 - Rescheduling Games/Rainouts

Once a game has been agreed on in GotSport Chat, both teams must agree on any scheduling change. After the scheduling deadline, the League Office will freeze schedules. Match details may only be changed through the [GotSport Match Change Request](#) system.

In the event of a forced reschedule (e.g., a rainout), the home team must work with their opponent to reschedule the match on a date that works for both teams. All forced reschedules must be rescheduled within one week of the original match date. If a date cannot be agreed on, the match will result in a “no-contest.”

2.5 - Cancellation/Forfeit Policy

Teams must give their opponent a 96-hour warning if they forfeit a match, or they will incur a \$400 fine. Please remember that this is a Club competition, not an individual team competition.

1. **Forfeit**—A forfeit occurs when a team cannot attend a scheduled game and the teams cannot agree on a time to reschedule (after the scheduling deadline has passed). A forfeit results in a 3-0 win for the team not at fault. A team unable to attend a scheduled game because of an accident or “Act of God” should immediately notify the opponent and the [Event Coordinator](#). The League Office will review and rule on the situation in these circumstances.
2. **No-Show** - A no-show occurs when a team willfully does not attend a game agreed to by the teams and gives no notice to their opponent. The penalty for a no-show shall be a forfeit (unless the opponent agrees to reschedule the match) to the opposing team with a 0-3 score and a fine of \$400 imposed on the Club. Any no-show from a team may result in the offending team being removed from the competition by the League Office.

Teams receiving a Forfeit or No-Show should not enter a score for their game but rather fill out a [PAD Match Report Form](#) to report the Forfeit or No-Show. The PAD Committee will review the report, and an official ruling will be issued, along with any fines and reimbursements. Competition staff will enter the game score and mark the match as a forfeit.

The following is a list of common excuses teams cite for wanting to reschedule or cancel a game. These are not valid rationales to reschedule or cancel a game after the scheduling deadline and may result in a forfeit or re-assigning the home team by the League Office. We recommend the following solutions to frequently posed problems.

1. Too many Players missing (sick, etc.) - Remember that any Player from your Club is available to participate with your team as long as they are of the correct age. In league matches, please use lower team Players or Players from younger teams within your Club to fill out your roster.
2. Missing Coach - Any Adult with a valid pass for your Club can Coach any team. If your Coach has several commitments, teams should have an assistant Coach or another Adult from the Club available to cover games.
3. No Fields or Referees Available - If your team is playing in NorCal, you are expected to have access to quality Fields and licensed Referees.
4. Tournaments/other games - NorCal understands that teams may play in a tournament during the league. However, teams registered for NorCal competitions are expected to play on the game dates published by NorCal before the season. Please plan your schedule well in advance so your schedule does not become so full that you cannot fulfill your league commitment.

2.6 - Fines

The NorCal League Office may impose the following fines:

1. A team drops out of the league after the final brackets are posted: \$250 + forfeiture of application fee
2. A team drops out of the league after the first game is played: \$100 per game missed.
3. No-show/Forfeit within 96 hours of a scheduled game: \$400
4. Failure to report a red card within 48 hours of the match: \$150
5. Illegal Player or Coach: \$500
6. Use of each unlicensed referee: \$500
7. Any Club that does not complete payment within 60 days will be subject to a late fee of 15% (club payment only)

Aside from fines for forfeits (which go to the hosting Club, if appropriate), all fines will be added to the travel fund for teams qualifying for national events via NorCal competitions after deducting admin costs.

2.7 - Play-Up Guidelines

For teams who wish to request to play up an age group, the NorCal League Office will use the following criteria to determine if a team needs to play up:

1. The team is the current State Cup Champion or Finalist within their age group **AND**
2. The team has proven in previous seasons to be a very dominant team within their age group, OR
3. The team does not have appropriate competition locally and needs to travel significantly to find competition within their age group.

Play-up requests ([FORM](#)) must be by the published deadline. The NorCal League Office has the final say on all play-up decisions.

2.8 - Teams Requesting to Play Outside Their Region

For teams who wish to play outside their region, the League Office will look at the availability of competitive divisions within the region to determine if a team needs to play in a different region. Teams approved to play outside their region may be required to play all away matches.

Requests for a team to play outside its region must be reported to the appropriate [League Coordinator](#) by the published deadline. The NorCal League Office has the final say on all decisions.

Section 3 - League Discipline

3.1 - Violation of League Rules

The NorCal Premier Protest, Appeals, and Discipline Committee (“PAD”) and the NorCal League Office have the authority to suspend, fine, disqualify, or otherwise impose sanctions on Players, team officials, or competing Clubs for violating NorCal rules, policies, and Code of Ethics or for any action or conduct not in the best interest of soccer or the NorCal Premier League.

3.2 - Red Cards

If a Red Card is shown, it will result in a minimum one (1) game suspension. This includes a Red Card as a result of two cautions. If a Player is sent off during the weekend, they may not play in any NorCal competition for the remainder of the weekend, regardless of the NorCal event in which the Red Card was issued. Sitting out of a NorCal game or games on the same weekend the card was issued will count against the suspension. Any Player used during a suspension will be considered an illegal Player, and the team, Coach, and Club will be punished accordingly.

3.3 - Reporting Processes

Any breach of NorCal rules or Code of Ethics outlined in this Handbook should be reported to the League Office through the [PAD Reporting process](#).

1. Incidents or breaches of the NorCal rules, policies, or Code of Ethics that occur between two clubs should be reported through the [PAD Incident Form](#). The form may only be submitted by a Club’s Executive Director, Director of Coaching, Technical Director, or President.
2. Any incidents or breaches of the NorCal rules, policies & Code of Ethics that occur during a match should be reported through the [PAD Match Report Form](#). The PAD Match Report Form may be filled out by any team official (coach, manager, etc.) associated with a team playing in the game in question.
3. In any game where a Red Card is issued, a home team official (coach or manager) must report the red card in the [GotSport score reporting area](#). Additionally, the Referee must complete a [Send-Off Report](#) within 48 hours. Failure of the referee or team official to file a sendoff report within 48 hours will result in the home club being fined \$150.

3.4 - Suspensions

It is the team’s and/or Club’s responsibility to ensure that their Red-Carded Player/Coach serves a minimum one-game suspension. They are also responsible for ensuring that their Player/Coach serves any additional suspension determined by the NorCal PAD committee. More information on suspensions, processes, and timelines for decisions can be found on the [NorCal PAD Website](#).

Suspensions for Players and Coaches shall be served immediately in upcoming NorCal games, regardless of the NorCal competition. Players shall serve their suspension with their “Primary Team” regardless of which team they received their red card with. Players may not compete for another team in their Club in NorCal competitions until their suspension is served in full. However, Coaches may Coach another team in their Club during their suspension but must serve their suspension in full with the team with whom the violation occurred only if the suspension is a fixed amount of games (as opposed to a period of time). A suspended Coach may not have any contact with their team starting 1 hour before kick-off and until after the game is completed.

The NorCal League Office can postpone or re-allocate suspensions in the best interests of the game and the integrity of the competition. To avoid doubt, Play Date games count toward suspensions for both Players and Coaches, but tournament games (in or out of state) do not. Forfeits do not count toward suspensions being served.

[PAD Disciplinary Matrix](#) (updated 24/25)

3.5 - Suspension Appeals

Clubs may appeal the suspension length for any suspension given to a Coach or Player.

1. Coach and Player suspensions may be put on hold pending a correctly filed appeal.
2. Suspension appeals must be received before 10 am on Friday.
3. [Appeals Process](#) (with forms)

3.6 - Clearing a Suspended Player or Coach

Once reported, players will be redlined on all rosters they appear on. Suspensions must be served with a player's "Primary Team," and they will be suspended from all other teams until they have served their suspension. The system will automatically count the number of games served with the primary team and the player's suspension will be removed following the number of games served. Players need not be present at a match to serve their suspension.

3.7 - Pending Legal Action

For any matter with an open criminal investigation or a pending civil lawsuit, the PAD Committee will stay any ruling until the criminal and/or civil cases are resolved. However, NorCal retains the right to suspend an individual indefinitely if the PAD Committee or Board of Directors believes that an indefinite suspension is in the best interests of the game and/or the safety of the participants.

3.8 - Use of Video in Disciplinary Proceedings

The standard for using video as evidence in PAD investigations or appeals is that it is clear and convincing. When sending the PAD Committee video for an investigation or appeal, the entire video and time marks for the incident in question will be required. If the video is edited in any way, it will not be reviewed.

Section 4 - Recruiting, Tryouts, and Player Transfers

4.1 - Open Tryout Window

1. The period when any Player, regardless of Club affiliation, may try out with any NorCal Club without requiring permission from their current Club DOC. The NorCal Tryout Window applies to all teams within all NorCal member Clubs.
2. The Open Tryout Window shall occur within a period determined by the NorCal League Office. Details can be found [HERE](#).
3. Each RAC may further define its window by adapting the dates within the Open Tryout Window. RACs may set tryout periods outside of the Open Tryout Window for Players currently registered with Clubs in their region ONLY if approved by the NorCal Board of Directors.

4.2 - Winter Recreational Tryout Window

1. There is a period for Clubs to hold open tryouts to add Players not currently registered with a competitive team in a NorCal Club (in any league). This ensures that Clubs can continue to provide a pathway from recreational soccer to competitive Club soccer at the end of a Player's typical recreational season.
2. The Winter Recreational Tryout Window shall open on the first Monday of November and remain open through the first weekend of February.
3. Competitive Players currently registered in other NorCal Clubs are not permitted to attend a tryout at this time. The only time that this is permitted is during the Open Tryout Window. All marketing of a Club's Winter Recreational Tryout must include language to reflect this.

4.3 - Spring Transfer Freeze

Any Player transferring between NorCal Clubs after April 1 will be ineligible to play in NorCal competitions for their new Club until the end of all games in the current Spring season.

4.4 - Recruiting

1. All NorCal rules pertaining to Recruiting shall be strictly observed by all Adults as well as all official and unofficial team representatives. Unofficial team representatives include all parents of Players.
2. Adults must never encourage Players or other Adults to violate NorCal recruitment, eligibility, or other rules and policies.
3. Adults shall not attempt to entice a team or Player to leave a Club to come to another Club.
4. It is unethical for a Team or groups of Players to be Recruited from one Club to another Club by an Adult working in the Team's present Club, an Adult from another Club, or any Adult or representative from inside or outside the Club.
5. Inviting a Player to guest play without first submitting the proper US Club Guest Player Form shall be considered Recruiting.

6. It is unethical for a Player to be recruited from any outside program, including but not limited to PDP, IDP, ODP, High School, or the US Soccer Training Center, either by a Coach working for such program or any other Adult, Player, parent, or Official present at said event.
7. No Club will hire an Adult from another Club and, within one (1) year, allow this individual to work with any Players he or she Coached in his/her previous Club in the previous year without the written permission of their former Club. A Club's lack of knowledge regarding an Adult's previous association with another Club is not an excuse from sanction for violating this provision. Notwithstanding the foregoing, serving as a Director of Coaching, Age Group Coordinator, or another similar role shall not constitute Coaching for the purpose of this rule.
8. It is inappropriate to Recruit Player(s) unless the Director of Coaching of the Player's current Club provides written permission before the initial approach to the Player. If a Player or parent of a Player initiates contact with any Adults of another Club expressing intent to move to that Adult's Club, it is the responsibility of that Adult or the Adult's Director of Coaching to inform the Director of Coaching of the Player's current Club.
9. When discussing the advantages of his/her Club with a Player or a Player's parent, the Adult has an obligation to be forthright and refrain from making derogatory remarks regarding other Adults, Teams, and Clubs.
10. It is unethical for any Adult to make a statement to a prospective Player which cannot be fulfilled, illegal to promise any kind of compensation or inducement for play, and immoral to deliver the same.
11. It is unethical for adults to attend tryouts for other clubs for the purpose of promotion or recruitment unless invited by the club conducting the tryout in writing or having players attend tryouts at other clubs to recruit players from the club conducting the tryout.
12. Clubs will not accept any Player from any other Club if that Player has outstanding fees with another Club. Unpaid fees shall include fees for services already rendered and shall not include, by way of illustration, fees for services not rendered, reimbursement for scholarships given, or penalties.
13. In accordance with US Club Soccer policy, Clubs will release Players who request their release from the Club.

Section 5 - General Competition Rules

5.1 - Playing Rules

All games under league jurisdiction shall be played according to the rules and regulations recognized by the NorCal Premier League, which shall be the same rules set by [FIFA](#)/U.S. Soccer (USSF) except for those exceptions authorized by FIFA or USSF.

5.2 - Equipment

1. Player Uniforms

Opponents must wear colors that distinguish them from each other, the Referee, and the assistant Referees. It is recommended that the home team wear dark uniforms while the away team wears light uniforms. Each goalkeeper must wear colors that distinguish them from the other Players, the Referee, and the assistant Referees. All Players on a team except the goalkeeper shall wear identical uniforms (shirts, shorts, and socks).

- a. If there is a conflict in the uniform color, the home team shall change uniforms.
- b. Player numbers must be affixed to the back of the uniform shirt. Each Player on a team shall wear a unique number.
- c. If undershirts or shorts are worn, they must match the jersey's or shorts' primary color. If tape or other material is applied externally to the socks, it must be the same color as the part of the sock to which it is applied.

Captains are not required to wear armbands.

2. Safety

Additional player health and safety information may be found at the [NorCal Player Health and Safety Page](#). A Player must not use equipment or wear anything dangerous to themselves or another Player.

- a. **Casts**—Orthopedic (hard) casts, air splints, or metal splints may not be worn. At the discretion of the referee, players will be allowed to play in a soft cast.
- b. **Jewelry**—No jewelry, including rings, chains, watches, hair clips, bobby pins, earrings, bracelets, rubber bracelets, or excessively long fingernails, may be worn while participating in NorCal games. Only Medical Alert Warning Bracelets may be worn and taped to secure them to the Player's body. Earrings and other piercings cannot be taped and must be removed.
- c. **Shin Guards**—All Players are required to wear shin guards at all times. They must be properly worn, professionally manufactured, and unaltered. Socks must completely cover the shin guards. **Players/ parents/ guardians are responsible for the size and suitability of player shinguards.**
- d. **Braces** (e.g., knee, elbow) - For the safety of the Player, it is strongly recommended that a Player does not wear a brace during NorCal games. Braces are allowed as long as the Referee decides that the brace will not or cannot hurt the Player wearing the brace or any other Player. All metal, metal-like, or plastic brace supports are to be adequately covered for the duration of the match. Elastic-type supports without any metal, carbon fiber, hard plastic, or like devices are permitted, provided the Referee does not deem the support to be potentially harmful to other Players.
- e. **Eyeglasses** - Players who must wear eyeglasses are encouraged to wear sports goggles. Lenses must be unbreakable, and frames must be unbreakable plastic or sturdy metal.

5.3 - Game Details

	U8-U10†	U11	U12	U13	U14-U16	U17-U19
Field Size (yds)	55/65 L 35/45 W *	70/80 L 45/55 W*		100/120 L 50/80 W		
Penalty Area (yds)	12x24	14x36		18 x 44		
Goal Area (yards)	4x8	5x16		6 x 20		
Goal Size (ft)	6.5x18.5 - 7x21			8x24		
**Minimum # of Refs	1					3
Number of Players	7v7	9v9		11v11		
Game Day Roster Size	14	16		18		
Minimum # of Players	5	6		7		
Goalkeeper	Yes					
Playing Time	2x25	2x30		2x35	2x40	2x45
Half-Time	5 mins	10 mins				
Ball Size	4			5		
Offside	Yes					
Substitutions	At Any Stoppage					
Free Kick clearance	8 yd			10 yd		
Penalty Kicks	Yes (mark at 10 yds)			Yes (mark at 12 yds)		
Build-Out Line	Yes	None				

†US Soccer Player Development Initiatives

* Use of cones for lines allowed

Required **minimum number of Referees - NPL games require three officials in all age groups (U13-U19).

5.4 - Match Officials

Match officials must be current-year USSF licensed Referees. The match officials shall consist of the Referee and two assistant Referees, except 7v7 and 9v9 formats of play may be played with one Referee. For U13-U16 age groups (non-NPL), every effort should be made to secure 3 referees, but matches may continue with one Referee and two Club Linesmen or one Referee, one Assistant Referee, and one Club Linesman. If no match officials are present, NorCal encourages both teams to play a friendly, which will not count as an official match. The away team should file a Competition Committee Report to receive an official ruling on the outcome of the match. The use of an unlicensed referee will result in a forfeit for the home team.

No match officials, other than Club Linesmen, may have family members in the game they are working. Club Linesmen may only signal when the ball has left the Field of play; they may not call offside or fouls. If one or more of the assigned Match Officials are missing, the game may be played with a Referee and up to two Club Linesmen. Clubs should not use the dual referee system if Match Officials are missing.

Coaches, managers, players, and spectators shall not approach game officials prior to the game, during half-time, at or after the end of a match to discuss or lobby for a certain call, discuss the approach to the game, or criticize a game official's performance; nor may they attempt any of these while executing administrative duties with the referees. Club leadership should provide referee feedback to the referee assignor of the match.

5.5 - Assignment of Match Officials

Match officials shall be assigned and paid by the home Club for each match. Each Club must have a current year certified USSF Referee Assignor active in the assignment of Referees for all NorCal games in their Club and listed in their GotSport account. Failure to do so will result in Club sanctions from NorCal, which may include a review of a Club's membership.

5.6 - Protests

Protests regarding the match must be made via the [PAD Match Report Form](#), and a photo of the signed game card must be included. On-field Referee decisions cannot be protested. No match condition protests will be allowed at NorCal-hosted events.

5.7 - Point System

All NorCal Premier Leagues operate under a point system. The system awards three points for a win, one for a tie, and no points for a loss.

5.8 - League Standings

Official standings of teams, which is the responsibility of the League Office, are tabulated regularly and displayed on each competition page of the NorCal website.

5.9 - Ties

If a league game is tied after regulation, the tie stands and will be posted as a tie.

5.10 - Tie Breakers

In case of a tie on points in the standings within a league, the following will be used as tiebreakers:

- f. "Head to head" points (win/lose/draw) between teams
- g. Overall Goal Differential (up to 4)
- h. Goals for (up to 4)
- i. Goals against (up to 4)
- j. Most points against the highest non-tied team in the group
- k. Best goal differential against the highest non-tied team in the group
- l. Most shutouts
- m. Fewest red cards
- n. Coin toss

If more than two teams are tied, the tie-breaking process will be used until a winner is determined. The tie-breaking procedure does not revert to the previous criteria if one team is eliminated.

In a situation where a season/group can not be completed due to exceptional circumstances and teams have played an unequal number of games, NorCal may use Points Per Game (PPG) to decide standings.

5.11 - Incomplete games

If a game cannot be completed due to events outside of the team's control, the game will stand if at least half of the game is played. Games not completed for all other reasons may be ordered to be replayed.

However, if any team is directly responsible for the termination of the game, no matter how much of the match remains, due to poor sportsmanship towards a Referee, opposing fans, or opposing Players, the team will be required to forfeit the match. This could also lead to other NorCal League Office or NorCal PAD Committee sanctions. If a match is suspended before the expiration of one half, the game shall be replayed at a time agreed upon by the competing teams in consultation with the NorCal League Office. In the event of an incomplete game, the home team shall fill out a [PAD Match Report Form](#), while the away team should fill out a [Game Report Form](#) and indicate that the game was incomplete. The NorCal League Office will then make a ruling on the game result. *Referees must also submit a Referee Match Report for all matches that end early.*

5.12 - Heading Game Rule

For U11 and below, when a Player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense. Exceptions: a) if the deliberate header is committed by a Player within their own goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred, b) if the deliberate header is committed by a Player within the opponents' goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken from anywhere in that goal area. *This rule shall apply to the age groups of U11 and below. Players who are playing up will play according to the rules of the age group in which they are playing.* It is the Club's responsibility to understand the effects of this rule on Players playing up.

5.13 - No Re-Entry Protocol (for Head Injury and SCA)

In accordance with the US Club Soccer return to play guidelines and State of California legislation, any Player removed from the Field for a suspected head injury or SCA (sudden cardiac arrest) will not be allowed to return to the Field of play for the remainder of that same day and must be cleared by a Licensed Healthcare Provider before returning to play in the future. If a Licensed Healthcare Provider (as defined in California Health and Safety Code Section 124235(b)(2)) is present at the game for the purposes of the evaluation and management of concussion or cardiac conditions (they must be identified to the Referee prior to the start of the game), they may clear a player to return to the Field of Play in the same game, if the Licensed Healthcare Provider no longer suspects a concussion or SCA.

A Licensed Healthcare Provider is defined by CA law AB-379 as an individual:

“who is trained in the evaluation and management of concussions and is acting within the scope of the provider’s practice for evaluation and management of concussions or other head injuries” and/or an individual “who is trained in the evaluation and management of cardiac conditions and is acting within the scope of that provider’s practice for evaluation and management of sudden cardiac arrest, fainting, and shortness of breath.”

5.14 - Substitutions

As per FIFA guidelines, unlimited substitutions are allowed in all age groups (except for ECNL RL and NPL Matches- see [ECNL RL Handbook](#)/ [NPL Handbook](#)). However, teams may substitute only with the Referee’s permission. Substitutes must wait at the halfway line (off of the Field of play) until the Field Player has left the Field of play and/or the Referee has indicated the substitute may enter the Field of play.

Substitutions by either team are allowed at any stoppage of play with the permission of the Referee.

Referees will be instructed not to allow substitutions deemed “excessive” or of a “time-wasting” nature.

Please respect the integrity of the game and do not use the free substitution rules to disrupt the match.

Section 6 - Rosters

6.1 - Player Registration

Players shall be registered through GotSport according to US Club Soccer rules.

6.2 - US Club Soccer Player Pass

All Players and Coaches must present their US Club Soccer pass to the Referee prior to the match. Physical (laminated and non-laminated) and electronic passes are allowed. Electronic passes must be displayed within the GotSport mobile website system. Screenshots of passes are not allowed.

Guidance on Team Participant Verification

6.3 - Game Roster

Each team must create an official NorCal roster in their GotSport account. Only Players listed on the official Game Card will be eligible to play in NorCal Premier League matches. If any Player is not listed on the NorCal Game Card, he/she must be added electronically to the roster before the Player is eligible to play. Names from an electronic Game Card may be handwritten by the Referee. Team rosters may contain up to 26 Players, and there is no limit to the number of changes that can be made to the roster, provided the Players are active in the team's Club and are not on another Club's US Club Roster. No matter how many Players are listed on a team's roster, only 18 for U13 and up, 16 for U11-U12, and 14 for U8-U10 may be used for NorCal Premier League matches.

Players may not play for two teams in the same division of play (a division of play is a combination of age group and level, i.e., two teams from the same Club may not share Players if they're playing in the same set of division standings).

A coach holding a valid US Club passcard may coach ANY team in the club for which they hold the card. They are not required to be printed on the game card; however, if they are not listed, the referee must write the coach's full name and card number on the game card.

6.4 - Guest Players

No guest Players (Players with a Player pass from another Club) can play in NorCal Premier League competitions.

6.5 - Illegal Players

Any Player who does not appear on the official NorCal Game Card and does not have a valid US Club Soccer Player Pass issued by the same Club at the time of the match or is suspended from NorCal competitions at the time of the match shall be considered an illegal Player. Any team using, or attempting to use, an illegal Player shall forfeit the game, the coach may be suspended for up to one year, and the Club will incur a \$500 fine.

Section 7 - Game Day Procedures

*See additional instructions for State Cup (section 8), Pre-NPL, NPL, ECNL RL & Super Rec (section 9)

7.1 - Pre-Game (ALL Comps)

Home Team Responsibilities:

1. Schedule and post-game time/location in the GotSport system
2. Provide a quality Field equipped with goals, nets, flags, and proper lines
3. Assign qualified current-year licensed Referees
4. Provide a copy of the Game Card to the center Referee
5. Provide a US Club Soccer Player pass for each Player and nonplayer in the technical area
6. Change jersey colors if there is a color conflict (NorCal encourages home teams to wear their dark colors, while away teams wear light colors)
7. Provide game balls

Visiting Team Responsibilities:

1. Respond to any communication requests from the home team regarding match scheduling within 24 hours
2. Have a copy of the Game Card in case it is needed
3. Provide a US Club Soccer Player pass for each Player and nonplayer in the technical area

7.2 - Post-Game (ALL Comps)

Following the game, a representative from each team and the referee should gather to review and sign the game card. Additionally, each representative should take a photo of the signed game card for their records.

Home Team Responsibilities

1. [Post score](#) within 24 hours
2. Report goals and red cards from both teams as recorded on the game card
3. Upload a copy of the signed game card in the score reporting form

Visiting Team Responsibilities

1. If the home team does not post the score within 24 hours, the away team should post the score along with goal scorers and red cards and upload a copy of the match card.
2. Fill out the NorCal Online [Game Report](#) and upload a copy of the signed game card.

7.3 - Field Set-Up

The home Club may set up both team benches on the same side of the Field or on opposite sides of the field. However, this is up to the discretion of the home Club to decide upon and communicate to the away Club before the game. It is not the responsibility of the referee to either inform or enforce this. The away Club is expected to adhere to the field setup decided by the home Club.

7.4 - Technical Area

The technical area is for players and team officials only. A maximum of 3 team officials are allowed in each team's technical area. Team officials must have a US Club pass to sit in the technical area. It is highly recommended that teams have several credentialed Coaches or managers with passes for the team just in case something happens to the Head Coach. A US Club pass makes a person eligible to Coach any team in the Club for which that Coach or manager is credentialed.

Section 8 - State Cup Rule Adjustments

8.1 - State Cup Rankings & Draw | Group Stage

Once teams are placed in appropriate divisions, teams are ranked according to their results in the fall league, state cup, and spring league from the previous year. Team placement for the upcoming fall season is also taken into account. For the U9-U10 and U11-U12 divisions, teams are placed in groups of 4 geographically. Teams in the U13-U14 and U15-U19 divisions are placed in Regions (North, South, East, and West) and Pots (based on results from the previous season). Teams are drawn randomly by region to create groups of 4 for the Group Stage.

8.2 - Ties in Group Round

If a NorCal State Cup Group Stage match (U11-U19) and the First/Second Round (U9-U10) are tied after regulation, the tie stands and will be posted as a tie.

8.3 - State Cup Tie Breakers

In case of a tie on points in the standings within a group, the following will be used as tiebreakers:

1. "Head to head" points (win/lose/draw) between teams
2. Overall Goal Differential (up to 6)
3. Goals for (up to 6)
4. Goals against (up to 6)
5. Most points against the highest non-tied team in the group
6. Best goal differential against the highest non-tied team in the group
7. Most shutouts
8. Fewest red cards
9. Coin toss

If more than two teams are tied, the tie-breaking process will be used until a winner is determined. The tie-breaking procedure does not revert to the previous criteria if one team is eliminated.

When a group can not be completed due to exceptional circumstances and teams have played an unequal number of games, NorCal may use Points Per Game (PPG) to decide standings.

8.4 - Matches Needing a Winner

For matches that need a winner, the team with the most goals after regulation time will be the winner. Two full-time 5-minute extra time periods will be played if the match is tied after regulation. If the game is still tied after two extra time periods, then penalties (Penalty Shootouts) per FIFA laws of the game will determine the winner.

Make sure you arrive for your game knowing if the game can end in a draw or if a winning team is required.

8.5 - State Cup Championships

Only the "NorCal State Division" Champion in each age group will be considered State Champion. All other Championship teams must affix the divisional category in front of their Championship (i.e., 2023 Gold Cup Champions).

8.6 - State Cup Rosters

All State Cup participating teams must create an official NorCal State Cup Roster on their GotSport team account. Teams can roster a maximum of 26 players prior to the Roster Freeze date. Following the Roster Freeze date, teams may only use players from their official State Cup Roster for State Cup matches.

Gameday rosters will be capped accordingly:

- U9-U10: max of 14 players per game
- U11-U12: max of 16 players per game
- U13-U19: max of 18 players per game

8.7 - State Cup Roster - Open Window

Following the completion of the Group Stage, State Cup participating teams may add/remove players from their official State Cup roster. All State Cup roster updates must be processed using the [State Cup Roster Update Request Form](#). State Cup Roster Adds must follow the NorCal Cup Tied Rule outlined below.

8.8 - Cup Tied Rule

Players may only compete for one team per age group in the NorCal State Cup. A Club may place Players on more than one 26-player team roster, but Players may not play on two different teams in the same age group (exceptions can apply when players “transfer” State Cup rosters from lower to higher divisions after the lower division’s State Cup has ended). A Player may play up in an older age group while competing in their actual age group. Once a Player plays for a team in a specific age group, that Player is “Cup Tied” to that team in that age group. The Player may not play for any other team in that age group for the remainder of the team’s NorCal State Cup.

8.9 - Emergency Player Rule

Teams may request an emergency player based on the following criteria:

- **Emergency Player Add (Not a Full Team)** - Teams that drop below 12 Players for U13-U19, 10 for U11-U12, and 8 for U9-U10 may request emergency player adds. Roster adds will only be approved to provide a max of 1 sub for the upcoming State Cup match: 12 players for U13-U19, 10 players for U11-U12, and 8 players for U9-U10.
- **Emergency Player Add (Goalkeeper)** - Teams that do not have a goalkeeper (due to injury or illness) may request an Emergency GK Add.

Teams may request from the NorCal League Office the ability to add Players registered with their Club prior to the roster freeze date but not on the State Cup roster. All requests must be processed using the [Emergency Player Add Form](#).

8.10 - Note about No-Shows/Forfeits in State Cup

The League Office will handle all forfeit situations in the State Cup to ensure that the gaining or losing of points by forfeit does not elevate or lower teams into divisions that will harm the event.

Section 9 - Other Competition Handbooks

9.1 - [Super Rec Handbook](#)

9.2 - [ECNL RL Handbook](#)

9.3 - [NPL Handbook](#)

9.4 - [Futsal State Cup Handbook](#)