



# 2025 NATIONAL CUP: Rules

## 1. ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION

National Cup is a restricted tournament open only to those teams in good standing that hold valid US Club Soccer passcards. Those teams that do not currently hold US Club Soccer passcards must obtain them prior to competing in the event.

- a. Participants shall consist of U-13 (2012) through U-18/19 combined age group (2007/2006) boys and girls teams. Please see Attachment C for the age group structure.
- b. Two levels of competition – Super Group (most competitive) and Premier Group – will be available.

Teams can request to play in either the Super or Premier Group, however, a tournament committee will provide input on seeding and review all tournament and league history. If deemed appropriate, teams may be moved to a group more in line with their competitive level.

- c. A \$100 surcharge for National Cup application fee will be assessed should teams miss the registration deadline. In addition, acceptance for teams that miss the deadline will be based on availability and is not guaranteed.
- d. The application deadline is three weeks prior to the first day of each Regional event. Teams should review the website and application for this information. If an age group is over-subscribed, or if the number of applicants cannot be accommodated in an acceptable competitive format, the following criteria can be considered in determining entries:
  - Prior National Cup results
  - Team's competitive level (but at the Super Group level only)
  - If the U-13 age groups are oversubscribed, consideration for entry may be given to clubs that have also entered teams in older age brackets
  - Date of a team's application, regardless of the application deadline
- e. US Club Soccer reserves the right to accept or reject any application.
- f. The application fee is non-refundable. A \$1,000 penalty will be imposed for any team that drops within three weeks of the Regional/Final for which the team applied. This drop free is also imposed if a team drops during the event / fails to compete in any of their scheduled games.

## 2. TOURNAMENT AUTHORITY

The Tournament Director shall have ultimate authority over all tournament competitions and discipline matters. The interpretation of the rules and all decisions of the Tournament Director are final. The Tournament Director may be assisted by Regional Competition Directors and the Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee. For the purposes of these rules, the authority of any Competition Director and the Tournament Director shall be synonymous.

The Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee shall be appointed by the US Club Soccer Executive Director and will minimally consist of the Tournament Director, Competition Director and any US Club Soccer Board of Directors member in attendance. The US Club Soccer Executive Director shall serve as an ex officio committee member and has the authority to appoint additional members to the Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee.

In all matters of discipline, with the exception of an alleged incident of misconduct towards a game official, the Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee shall render a determination and send a report to the US Club Soccer Discipline Committee pursuant to this section.

### 3. COMPETITION FORMAT

Please refer to pages 6 and 7 for more details regarding competition formats for various bracket sizes. In most cases, the competition will consist of round-robin play and a single game between two group winners on the fourth day to determine the champion. The Tournament Director, in consultation with the Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee:

- 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.
- b. Shall determine the schedule and start times of all games, including adequate rest time between games, and altering the schedule of one game per day where necessary.
- c. Champions in both the Super Group and Premier Group in the U-13 (2012) through U-18/19 (2007/2006) age groups from each National Cup Regional and qualifying state cups will advance to the National Cup Finals, to be held July 17-21, 2025 (Boys) & July 20-24, 2025 (Girls). There is no additional entry fee for advancing to National Cup Finals.

### 4. ROSTER RULES

Any player registered with and issued a passcard for a US Club Soccer member club, academy or sanctioned league team, who is a member of the designated age group or younger, is eligible to be placed on the tournament roster. No guest or loan players shall be allowed. 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 Tournament Director.

- a. **Maximum Tournament Roster Size:** Up to 26 players. Teams are expected to register all known players three weeks prior to their competition (including submitting paperwork and fees). Please note that there may be an increased wait period for passcard processing due to high demand. Individual players may be added to the Roster until the Roster Freeze.
- b. **Playing on more than one team:** A player may play on only one team at any Regional competition, other than as set forth herein. If a Regional or State team does not qualify to National Cup Finals, the player may play on another team for the same club at a later Regional competition or at the Finals. If a player is properly dual-carded to another team with another organization, the same rule set forth above shall apply to such player. Unless properly dual-carded, a player is Cup-tied to his/her first Cup club. Under no circumstances may a player play for one team in the qualifying play, then be released by the club, and play for a second club.
- c. **Coaching staff and team managers:** A minimum of 2 adults must be listed on the official roster and have appropriate passcards. Staff who intend to be on team bench MUST be included on the official roster. A maximum of 3 coaches/team staff will be allowed on a team bench at one time.
- d. **Players at National Cup Finals:** After the Regional competitions and qualifying state cups, for teams qualifying to the Finals, players may be dropped or added without limitation up to the maximum roster size, as long as any new players to be added were registered with the member club or league team at the start of the team's National Cup Regional competition or qualifying state cup. If the club has had tryouts since the Regional or State Cup, they may add up to three new players from such tryouts that have committed to and registered with the club for the next registration year. Any other roster emergency requests shall be determined by the Tournament Director on a case-by-case basis.
- e. **Game roster size:** Up to 18 players, selected from the tournament roster of up to 26 players.

Players on the tournament roster that are not on the game day roster must be in plain clothes on the team sideline or watch from the spectator sideline. Players in plain clothes must still have an approved passcard and may be asked to move to the spectator sideline at the referees discretion.

- f. **Official Roster:** Jersey numbers MUST be included for all players on the Official Roster which is turned in prior to the start of the competition. If during the competition a player jersey number needs to change for any reason, approval from the Tournament Director must be provided prior to playing subsequent games.
- g. **Substitutions (all age groups):** Once a player is substituted in one half of any National Cup 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 re-enter the game. There shall be a maximum of seven (7) substitutions in any half or in overtime of any competition. In case of a serious injury, defined as a player being evaluated and not cleared to return to play by a medical

professional), if, and only if, a team has used all 7 substitutions, an additional substitution may be granted by the referee.

#### Head Injury Substitution Procedure

- A player who is suspected to have suffered a head injury may be substituted while being evaluated by a medical professional. The substitution for the evaluation of the concussion/head injury will not count against the team's total number of substitutions (temporary substitution).
- If the player is deemed by a medical professional to not have suffered a concussion, and can return to play, the player may re-enter the match at any stoppage of play and must replace the temporary substitute; this head injury evaluation substitution will not count as a substitution. Furthermore, the temporary substitute will be able to re-enter the match at a later time if not previously substituted out earlier in the match for a non-head related substitution.
- If the player is deemed by the medical professional to have suffered a possible concussion and is not cleared to return to play, the temporary substitute will be considered a permanent substitute.

#### Policy Principles

- A "concussion substitution" may be made regardless of the number of substitutes already used.
- If all substitutes have been used the "concussion substitute" can be a player who has previously been substituted.

Substitutions may occur at any stoppage. However, the referee shall have discretion over all substitutions, and may refuse to allow any substitution if, in his/her opinion, the purpose is to disrupt the game.

## 5. REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

- a. Valid US Club Soccer player passcards for the 2024/2025 season and a US Club Soccer official roster.
- b. Valid US Club Soccer staff passcards for the 2024/2025 season will be required for all coaches and the team manager.
- c. Teams are expected to register all known players three weeks prior to their National Cup qualifying competition.

## 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 & Playing Format:

U-13/U-14 (2012-2011):	35-minute halves	11 v. 11 Format
U-15/U-16 (2010-2009):	40-minute halves	11 v. 11 Format
U-17/U-18/19 (2008-2006):	45-minute halves	11 v. 11 Format

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. U.S. Soccer Federation Heat Guidelines will be used to define procedure during excessive heat conditions.
- 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, kicks from the mark.
- f. Ball size: Size 5 for U-13 through adult.
- g. All players must wear shin guards. All other equipment rules shall be pursuant to FIFA Laws of the Game.
- h. The home team shall be listed first. The home team shall wear light-colored uniforms and the away team shall wear dark-colored uniforms. In case of uniform color conflicts, the designated away team shall change uniforms.

- i. Casts must be approved in advance of play by referee. Referee will use best discretion in determining if cast is safe for play. If cast is deemed unsafe, player may make adjustments, but must be approved in advance of entering the field of play. Referee Assignor and Tournament Director will have final say in any disputes over cast safety.
- j. Any eyewear worn during games must be sport-approved eyewear.
- k. All injuries should be evaluated by training staff onsite. Head injuries will be evaluated with extreme precaution. In the event that a serious head injury occurs during the tournament, referee or trainer will pull player passcard and bring it to the tournament HQ. Player will only be allowed to return to play after written clearance is provided by independent medical professional and on-site trainer has given the approval.
- l. The use of personal recording devices to record your athletes and teams at our events are permitted, but ask for your cooperation ensuring the safety of yourself and those around you. Team recording devices are not permitted on the team sideline. For clarity, set up is only allowed on spectator sideline. If utilizing an elevated recording device (this includes the use of high pods / anything over 6ft in height) the device MUST be properly secured with weights and stabilizers. You must be courteous to those around you and not block viewing and if a tournament official asks for the device to be lowered at any time, full compliance is expected.
- m. Spectators will be asked to sit on the spectator sideline. No spectators will be allowed behind goals or on the team sidelines. Spectators will be asked to sit on the half of the field across from the bench for the team they are supporting.

## 7. STANDINGS AND TIEBREAKERS

- a. Game Points: 3 points awarded for a win; 1 point for a tie; zero (0) points for a loss.
- b. Forfeits: In a case where a team forfeits one or more matches, the score will be recorded as a 3-0 win. The Competition Committee can also choose to remove all game results versus the forfeiting team (those played and those yet to be played).
  - In the event a game is in progress and is abandoned during the play for any reason, the team getting the forfeit win will either utilize the process outlined above or the score at the time play concluded, whichever is in their benefit.
- c. Tiebreakers: For teams tied in points at the end of a round-robin 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) 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.
- d. Uneven number of games: If a tiebreaker calculation between two or more teams would be based on a different number of games, points, total goals and fewest goals allowed will be converted into a percentage per game.
- e. Only the Super Group and Premier Group winners from each age group should report to the specific award area after the completion of the team's final game at Regional competition.

## 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 at [usclubsoccer.org](http://usclubsoccer.org) or via the administrative/HQ location on-site. No other forms will be provided.
- b. Red cards awarded to players or substitutes during a tournament game or dismissals of team officials shall result in that player or team official being suspended for the next tournament game. 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.

- c. 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.
- d. Suspensions for normal red cards and staff ejections shall not extend beyond the National Cup Regional, state cup or Finals unless disciplinary committee deems otherwise.
- e. At all times, all coaches shall have complete responsibility and control for the conduct of their players, bench area, parents, family and friends. A maximum of 3 coaches / team staff will be allowed on a team bench.
- f. 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 Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee, which may, among other penalties, suspend the team for the remainder of the tournament. 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 Tournament Rules and Discipline Committee.
- g. There are specific procedures in place for reported racial or bigoted language/behavior. Please review Attachment D for the full overview of procedures.
- 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 distributed, 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 come pick up the passcard, unless there is the allegation of referee abuse or the Competition Director/referee feels that additional action is warranted.
- j. 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 should give the delinquent players' passcards to US Club Soccer.
- k. Discipline for the Tournament shall be under the jurisdiction of US Club Soccer.

## **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 Tournament 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. Every reasonable effort will be made to complete a 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, Tournament Director and Competition Director shall consult, but the referee shall have the ultimate authority to either suspend or terminate the game.
- c. If it is not possible to complete a game for the reasons set forth in this section, if the first half is completed, the results shall stand. If the first half is not completed, or if the game is tied, the Tournament Director or Competition Director shall determine whether it shall be rescheduled or another resolution of the matter shall be implemented. The schedule of remaining games shall be a factor in any determination. The teams involved shall be consulted, but the ultimate decision on such resolution shall rest with the Tournament Director and Competition Director and there should be no protests or appeals.
- d. In all cases, the Tournament Director has the ultimate authority 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.

## ATTACHMENT A: Playing Format – NATIONAL CUP REGIONAL COMPETITIONS

The group winners, which advance to the championship match, will be determined as follows:

### **Bracket of 4:**

Played as a single group of four teams in a round-robin format, with the team accumulating the most points declared the champion. [Round Robin]

### **Bracket of 5:**

Played as a single group of five teams in a round-robin format, with the team accumulating the most points declared the champion. A limited number of teams will likely play more than one game per day. [Round Robin]

### **Bracket of 6:**

Played as a group of six. The group of six will see 3 teams play the other 3 teams in round robin play. The two teams accumulating the most points from all six teams will play a final game to determine which team is declared the champion. In a case, where 3 teams have won all three games, a semi-final game will be scheduled between the second and third place teams (based on tie-breakers). If a semi-final game cannot be schedule due to rest considerations, as well as the final match time, kicks from the mark will determine which team advances. [Round Robin, Final]

### **Bracket of 8:**

Played as two groups of four. The winner of each group following round-robin play will compete in a final game to determine which team is declared the champion. [Round Robin, Final]

### **Bracket of 10:**

Played as one group of four and one group of six. The group of six will see 3 teams play the other 3 teams in round robin play. The group of four winner, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semi-final games. In addition, a wildcard from the remaining 7 teams will be selected based on tiebreakers, which may result in additional kicks from the mark. Teams playing the semi-finals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semi-finalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semi-finals. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

### **Bracket of 12:**

Played as three groups of four. The three group winners after round-robin play and the team with the next highest point total will play in semi-final games. Teams playing in the semi-final will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semi-finalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semi-finals. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

### **Bracket of 14:**

Played as two groups of four and one group of six. The group of six will see 3 teams play the other 3 teams in round robin play. The two groups of four winners, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semi-final games. Teams playing the semi-finals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semi-finalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semi-finals. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

### **Bracket of 16:**

Played as four groups of four. The four group winners after round-robin play will compete in semi-final games. Teams playing in the semi-final will be re-seeded based on points. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

## ATTACHMENT B: Playing Format – NATIONAL CUP FINALS

The National Cup Finals champions will be determined as follows:

### **Bracket of 4:**

Played as a single group of four teams in a round-robin format, with the two teams accumulating the most points advancing to a final game. [Round Robin, Final]

### **Bracket of 5:**

Played as a single group of five teams in a round-robin format, with the two teams accumulating the most points advancing to a final. Teams may play more than one game per day. [Round Robin, Final]

### **Bracket of 6:**

Played as a group of six. The group of six will see 3 teams play the other 3 teams in round robin play. The two teams accumulating the most points from all six teams will play a final game to determine which team is declared the champion. In a case, where 3 teams have won all three games, a semi-final game will be scheduled between the second and third place teams (based on tie-breakers). If a semi-final game cannot be schedule due to rest considerations, as well as the final match time, kicks from the mark will determine which team advances. [Round Robin, Final]

### **Bracket of 8:**

Played as two groups of four. The winner of each group following round-robin play will compete in a final game to determine which team is declared the champion. [Round Robin, Final]

### **Bracket of 10:**

Played as one group of four and one group of six. The group of six will see 3 teams play the other 3 teams in round robin play. The group of four winner, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semi-final games. In addition, a wildcard from the remaining 7 teams will be selected based on tiebreakers, which may result in additional kicks from the mark. Teams playing the semi-finals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semi-finalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semi-finals. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

### **Bracket of 12:**

Played as three groups of four. The three group winners after round-robin play and the team with the next highest point total will play in semi-final games. Teams playing in the semi-final will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semi-finalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semi-finals. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

### **Bracket of 14:**

Played as two groups of four and one group of six. The group of six will see 3 teams play the other 3 teams in round robin play. The two groups of four winners, and the top two teams (based on points or tiebreakers) in the group of six will play in semi-final games. Teams playing the semi-finals will be re-seeded based on points. In a case where two semi-finalists have played against each other during round robin play, teams will be split into each of the semi-finals. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

### **Bracket of 16:**

Played as four groups of four. The four group winners after round-robin play will compete in semi-final games. Teams playing in the semi-final will be re-seeded based on points. [Round Robin, Semi-Final, Final]

## ATTACHMENT C: Birth Year Age Groups

Eligible age groups to participate:

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- 2006 – Players born on or after January 1, 2006 (U19)
- 2007 – Players born on or after January 1, 2007 (U18)
- 2008 – Players born on or after January 1, 2008 (U17)
- 2009 – Players born on or after January 1, 2009 (U16)
- 2010 – Players born on or after January 1, 2010 (U15)
- 2011 – Players born on or after January 1, 2011 (U14)
- 2012 – Players born on or after January 1, 2012 (U13)

Teams that earn a berth to the National Cup Finals must follow these guidelines:

Teams winning a Regional in the 2007/2006 through the 2012 age groups are eligible to participate at the National Cup Finals.

The 2007/2006 age group will be played as a combined age group at both the Regionals and the Finals. No over age or trapped players are eligible to compete.





## Procedures for Racial/Bigoted Language / Behavior

### OVERVIEW

US Club Soccer is implementing the following procedures and actions in an effort to address and remove Foul and Abusive Language with the caveat of racial, ethnic, or gender identity from our sport. This document supplements [US Club Soccer's Prohibited Conduct Policy](#) (available as Section 13.04/Appendix A of US Club Soccer's Policy Manual), which more broadly addresses maintaining an environment that is free from all forms of discrimination.

### STATEMENT

There is no place for racism, bigotry and any form of verbal abuse and disrespect. Soccer builds character, teaches perseverance and opens opportunities. While we believe competition is a catalyst for those life skills, we too often witness intentional harm that some participants - players, coaches, parents, and families - inflict on others when they lose perspective of what's most important. US Club Soccer has no tolerance for such behavior and considers any number of consequences to eliminate abusive language. Players: remember that your actions today will follow you tomorrow. Coaches: remember that you are role models. Parents and families: remember that you are your child's first cheerleader. Thank you to all those who maintain perspective; they are advancing the game and reaping the benefits.

### IN-GAME PROCEDURES FOR ALL SCENARIOS OF A REPORT OF RACIST OR BIGOTED LANGUAGE

- Match immediately suspended.
- Both teams sent to respective benches.
- AR 1 & 2 move toward respective benches.
- Coaches meet with referee AND tournament official to report what was said.
- Coaches meet with team to confirm and address.
- Match resumes.
- Time added at discretion of tournament official.
- Referee report filed with US Club Soccer and sent to leadership from both clubs.

### SCENARIO 1: LANGUAGE BY REGISTERED MATCH PARTICIPANT

*A registered match participant includes a player, coach, manager, or other registered staff member.*

#### **Scenario #1a. Confirmed/heard by referee, assistant referee, or tournament staff. Participant identified.**

- Red card issued to offending participant. Ineligible for remainder of competition, including participation with other teams. Suspended from all US Club activities pending a hearing.
- Follow In-Game Procedures for All Scenarios.

#### **Scenario #1b. Confirmed/heard by referee, assistant referee, or tournament staff. Player/coach not identified.**

- Follow In-Game Procedures for All Scenarios.

If the individual is not identified, the match may be abandoned at discretion of tournament official.

- Once identified. Red card. Ineligible for remainder of competition, including participation with other teams. Suspended from all US Club activities pending a hearing.
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**Scenario #1c. Reported by player, coach, or spectator. Not confirmed/heard by referee, assistant referee or tournament staff. Player/coach accused or suspected.**

- Follow In-Game Procedures for All Scenarios.
- If the report cannot be corroborated, the match shall continue without sanction. If corroborated, see 1a or 1b.

**SCENARIO 2: LANGUAGE BY MATCH SPECTATOR NOT REGISTERED WITH US CLUB SOCCER**

**Scenario #2a. Confirmed/heard by referee, assistant referee, or tournament staff. Spectator identified.**

- Yellow card to head coach. Spectator removed from facility for remainder of event.
  - Follow In-Game Procedures for All Scenarios.
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**Scenario #2b. Confirmed/heard by referee, assistant referee or tournament staff. Spectator not identified.**

- Yellow card to head coach. Spectator must be identified to reasonable satisfaction of tournament officials and removed from facility for remainder of event. Failure of spectator to be identified and leave facility or the return of the spectator will result in match abandoned and potential forfeit for the respective team.
  - Follow In-Game Procedures for All Scenarios.
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**Scenario #2c. Reported by player, coach, or spectator. Not confirmed/heard by referee, assistant referee, or tournament staff. Spectator accused or suspected.**

- Follow In-Game Procedures for All Scenarios.
- If the report cannot be corroborated, the match shall continue without sanction. If corroborated, see 1a or 1b.