

NATIONAL LEAGUE COMPETITIONS WORKSHOP AGENDA

Meeting to be held on Saturday 7th June 2025

- 1 Items for Noting
 - a. Association Cup Forfeits (NLMC)
 - b. Division 3 Referees (NLMC)
 - c. PADACC Fees (Board)

- 2 National League Items for Discussion
 - a. Padding on Posts (UCD)
 - b. Association Shield – Direct entry for D3 teams (and D2) (NLMC)
 - c. Fixtures Scheduling Conflicts (NLMC)
 - d. Players called up for National Camps (NLMC & Santry)
 - e. Coaching Regulations – coaches to only coach/play at one club (Net Force)
 - f. Assistant Coach Regulations – is there a need to clarify coaching level etc (Net Force)
 - g. Eligibility for Premier Division play-offs (NLMC)
 - h. HP Commission Proposal re Ireland Teams in the NL

- 3 Youth Competition Items for Discussion
 - a. Youth Competition Age Eligibility (BMP)
 - b. Youth Competition Structures (BMP)

Each of the items above is outlined on the following pages, for ease of reference.

ITEM 1 – ITEMS FOR NOTING

The items in this section are those for noting and will be introduced for 2025/26.

1a Association Cup Forfeits (NLMC)

The NLMC identified a potential integrity issue within the Association Cup, whereby a team losing its first round match in the Cup drops into the Shield. There is the potential for a team to achieve this by forfeiting that first match, which the NLMC believes is against the spirit of our competitions.

Therefore, the NLMC propose to introduce a rule whereby any team who forfeits its first-round match in the Association Cup, for whatever reason, also forfeits their place in the Association Shield – that place in the Shield would become a bye.

1b Division 3 Referees

Following feedback received both during the season, and in the Division 3 survey circulated to competing clubs after the season, concerns have been expressed over the requirement for only one Level 1 referee for Division 3 matches. Whilst the requirement for just one referee was well-intentioned, it is clear that the standard of play in Division 3 requires more. In addition, it was very clear that a number of Level 1 referees in Division 3 were not conducting the pre-match checks, which caused issues after matches, often resulting in matches being forfeited.

The NLMC intends that, from next season, all Division 3 matches must be refereed by two Level 1 (minimum) referees, and that the 2nd referee will be appointed by the away team – this shares the burden of finding referees between the two teams and avoids doubling the problem for the home team. In addition, the two referees will be encouraged to conduct the pre-match checks together to ensure both teams are compliant with the relevant competition rules.

1c PADACC Fees

The Board discussed the issue of fees to invoke the PADACC process. It felt strongly that the levels were currently too low and encouraged clubs who had no substantial case within the competition rules to protest, on the basis that the “risk” was just €30. In addition, it noted that the administration time involved in following the PADACC process was not insignificant.

Therefore, from next season, a club wishing to submit a protest to PADACC will be required to pay €150, which includes a €50 non-refundable administration fee (the remainder will be returned should the protest be upheld or PADACC rule that such should happen). This reflects the workload involved in administering such matters, and ensures that clubs are protesting for genuine, rules-based reasons.

ITEM 2 – NATIONAL LEAGUE ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

For all matters below, each will be discussed by Clubs at the Workshop, and an indicative position will help the NLMC/Board to determine how such matters will be resolved for next season.

2a Padding on Posts (UCD)

UCD are proposing that padding on posts be made mandatory in the National League. Whether this has merit, and the divisions to which this might apply, is for discussion.

2b Association Shield – Direct entry for D3 teams (and D2) (NLMC)

Clubs are asked to give consideration to allow direct entry into the Association Shield for Division 3 (and Division 2) teams, from next season.

Entering a knockout competition is a positive for both the teams and the sport in general, but the NLMC were unsure as to whether the low take-up from lower division clubs was due to the fact that they needed to enter the Cup competition, in order to play in the Shield.

Clubs are asked to consider whether this suggestion has merit and, if so, the teams that would be able to benefit from it.

2c Fixture Scheduling Conflicts (NLMC)

One of the biggest issues that arises each year relates to disagreements between clubs in respect of rescheduling matches. Whilst the NLMC would rather clubs reach an agreement between them, it is clear that this isn't always the case; that said, the NLMC doesn't wish to be the first port of call either. A club who has an issue with a fixture clearly wants a resolution – the club who isn't affected is potentially going to have to be inconvenienced to reach such a resolution, which is how the conflict is created.

Clubs are asked to consider how such situations should be managed in the future, but are asked to bear in mind that, in any such situation, they may be on either side of the equation. They may be the club needing to reschedule a fixture, but they may also be the club who has no such issues with the original date of the match.

2d Players called up for National Camps (NLMC & Santry)

With the increase in National Team activity, there is a need to better manage those situations where players are called up from clubs to represent their country. In such cases the player's club is entitled to a rescheduling of any match affected by the player's absence.

The play-up rule means that a player required for National Team duties could potentially play in several teams; it is the intention of the NLMC to limit the number of matches affected by restricting reschedules to the team to which the player is registered for at the time of the request (it is the NLMC's intent that other matches in which the player could choose to play are not rescheduled).

Note that Santry VC has proposed a rule change with similar intent to this and that, following a proposal from Ballymun Patriots, whatever decision is reached on this item, this rule will be replicated for Division 3.

2e Coaching Regulations (Net Force)

There are currently no restrictions preventing coaches from participating with multiple clubs during the same season. This creates potential conflicts of interest, particularly if a coach is also registered as a player in another club within the same division.

Net Force proposes the introduction of a rule limiting coaches to representing only one club per season in any coaching or playing capacity at the same level of competition (e.g., Premier or Division 1). Exceptions could be considered only under strict conditions and with prior written approval from the NLMC.

Allowing exceptions would be problematic for the NLMC to administer unless such a rule was absolutely clear.

2f Assistant Coach Regulations (Net Force)

The current Competition Rules do not clearly outline licensing requirements for assistant coaches. Rule 6.4.5 mandates that all coaches at Premier and Division 1 levels must hold a Level 1 coaching licence, but there is no such requirement for assistant coaches. Rule 6.4.6 permits a maximum of two assistant coaches per team but, again, does not stipulate their qualification requirements.

Net Force proposes updating the Competition Rules to include a specific licensing requirement for assistant coaches at Premier and Division 1 levels. It proposed that all assistant coaches at Premier level must hold at least a Level 1 coaching licence and, at Division 1 level, at least one assistant coach per team must hold a Level 1 licence, while the second may be in the process of obtaining certification (e.g., within one season).

NLMC would need clarity on how the “process of obtaining certification” would work – does this follow the lead of referees, in that the assistant coach can be one level lower than the coach i.e. at least foundation level?

2g Eligibility for Premier Division play-offs

For this season’s end of season play-offs, players were eligible if they played in four league matches in the Premier Division. Players were permitted to play up as well. The minimum threshold was introduced to avoid clubs registering “ringers” and them being eligible, without contributing on the court to the team’s season.

However, this creates an unintended consequence whereby a player in a Club’s Division 1 team could have played in the Premier Division play-offs, having not played up in that team during the season, whereas a Premier player had played three times in the team playing in the play-offs could not.

Clubs are asked to consider how best to resolve this loophole, mindful that a minimum number of matches does ensure players who have played a reasonable number of league matches during the season are eligible.

2h HP Commission Proposal re Ireland Teams in the National League

Overview: To best prepare and enhance the technical, mental and tactical skills of Ireland’s youth national teams, the High Performance Commission proposes to include, as an additional team, Ireland’s u20 & u18 National Teams into the VLY Premier Division & Division One respectively, for the 2025/26 season on a 1-year trial basis.

Selected players will still train and compete for their National League club. Matches will typically take place on National Squad weekends.

These youth squads will become the 9th team in each division, playing 1 match against each team in that league. The squads will not gain points, but the regular teams in the Division will, meaning each Premier & D1 team now plays 15 matches, instead of 14.

Rationale: Feedback from youth players, and coaches reasons that young players, especially those currently playing in the Youth or lower league teams, would benefit from playing regularly at a higher level, giving them

exposure and experience against players of a higher level, at a critical time in their development. From a team perspective, having regular and competitive matches will help the squads bond and form tactically, giving Ireland's youth teams the best chance of success at international level. (This is a key finding from end of season reviews with players and coaches).

Whilst hosting and playing friendly matches is greatly appreciated, the competitive environment with 'points on the line' will better prepare young players for competition in the future.

This development provides numerous benefits to support the wider VLY eco-system including the training and assessment of Referees, and coach education opportunities.

Providing a better environment to develop players will benefit those clubs that nurture them for youth national teams.

Technical Points:

1. All matches will be played during National Squad weekends, unless otherwise agreed by both parties, and approved by the National League Management Committee.
2. Clubs will be given the option to host the National teams at their home venue or travelling to play the National Team. If the club team hosts the fixture, they will incur the hall hire costs and provide scorers. If the National squad hosts the fixture, the National squad will incur hall hire costs and provide scorers.
3. A full fixture list with selected dates will be circulated to relevant clubs with the National League fixture list for the 2025/26 season. Clubs will inform Volleyball Ireland through the normal fixture list confirmation schedule whether they wish to host the National team or play at the National team venue, and the associated match time and day.
4. If the club chooses to host the match at their venue, then they must make a 2hr booking for National team training in advance of the match, at the expense of the national team.
5. The National Squads will organise referee appointments and cover all referee expenses, regardless of match location.
6. Typically National Squad hosted matches will take place in Maynooth, Dublin or Portlaoise.
7. Points will be awarded to the club team as per normal competition rules*. As National Squads are not eligible for promotion or relegation, no points will be awarded to the National team.
8. Clubs that have players selected for the national team, will have the option to retain those players for the match, or permit them to represent the National team. A list of selected National team players will be submitted to the clubs at least 4-weeks in advance.
9. The u20 and u18 National Teams are not eligible for promotion or relegation.
10. Volleyball Ireland's International teams operations manager Gabriel Akinwande will act as the National squad secretary and will deal with fixture related arrangements.
11. For 2025/26 eligible players will be:
 - U20 National Team - those born in 2007 or later, plus a maximum of 2 players born 2006.
 - U18 National Team - those born in 2009 or later, plus a maximum of 2 players born 2008.
 - Having a maximum of 2 players slightly older gives the National team flexibility in case several players are retained by the respective club team and may ensure competitive credibility of the teams.

*Competition rules state that 3pts are awarded for a 3:0 or 3:1 win, 2pts for 3:2 win, and 1pt for 2:3 defeat.

ITEM 3 – YOUTH COMPETITION ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

For all matters below, each will be discussed by Clubs at the Workshop, and an indicative position will help the Youth Committee to determine how such matters will be resolved for next season.

3a Youth Competition Age Eligibility (Ballymun Patriots)

BMP proposes a change or date of birth/eligibility for Youth Leagues to be consistent with national leagues in respect of U18 players. Premier/D1/D2 Competition Rules and Division 3 rules both state U18 age eligibility as ‘aged less than 18 years on 1st September of the year in which the league commences’

In youth leagues the age eligibility is stated as turned 16/18 years of age on or after June 1st in the year the competition ends e.g. if 16/18 before the 1st June 2025, then the player is NOT eligible. However, the U18 Youth Championship held in January 2025, had a different rule, ‘Youth Championships players had to be U18 on the day of the competition’. As we discovered this season, Ballymun Patriots does not believe the youth league age is not in the best interests of players.

For consistency and fairness, and to ensure more opportunities and clarity the rule should be same across all competitions and thus we propose all youth players must be aged less than 18 (or less than 16) on the 1st September of the year in which the league commences’.

3b Youth Competition Structures (Ballymun Patriots)

BMP proposes that Youth Leagues become defined by levels NOT age (other than being U18 on the 1st of September in year league commences) similar to schools, namely:

- Level 1: Junior Youth League (suitable for existing U16 Beginners)
- Level 2: Intermediate Youth League (suitable for existing U18 Division 1)
- Level 3: Senior Youth Leagues (suitable for existing U18 Premier)

In addition, for the Youth Leagues to come under the normal national leagues structure, and all fixtures set/issued at same time as other fixtures. We also propose a dedicated resource within VI for Youth Competitions (participation) and to assist the National Development Officer.