



DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE GUIDEBOOK

2027–2028 SEASON

USA HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE (DL)

LEAGUE STRUCTURE & GOVERNANCE

The DL structure and governance is provided for in the USA Hockey 2026-27 Annual Guide, Rules & Regulations, Section III.J, which is set forth below:

RULES & REGULATIONS

SECTION III. TEAM MEMBERSHIP & REGISTRATION

J. USA HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE (DL)

Starting with the 2027/28 Season, USA Hockey will initiate play within the USA Hockey Development League (DL). The DL is being established under USA Hockey's authority as a National Governing Body (NGB) as part of a high-performance national player development program to train and develop USA Hockey players from across the country to advance to high level Junior Hockey programs, College Hockey programs and also to increase the pool of players eligible to play for the United States in International competition. Oversight of the Development League will be under a Joint subcommittee of the Player Development Committee and the Youth Council. The DL Joint Subcommittee will consist of nine (9) subcommittee members. The membership of the DL Joint subcommittee will be the Chair of the Player Development Committee, the Chair of the Youth Council, the Chair of the Registrar's Section, a voting member of the Player Development Committee appointed by the Chair of the Player Development Committee, a voting member of the Youth Council appointed by the Chair of the Youth Council, an Affiliate President Representative appointed by the Chair of the Youth Council, and three (3) athlete representatives with two (2) appointed by the Chair of the Player Development Committee and one (1) appointed by the Chair of the Youth Council. The Chair of the Youth Council shall serve as the Chair of the DL Joint subcommittee. A staff liaison will also serve as a non-voting member of the DL joint subcommittee.

The voting members of the DL Joint oversight subcommittee shall approve a USA Hockey Development League Guidebook, which shall be published and available on the USA Hockey website on or before January 1 prior to the start of DL team formation for the following year. Except as set forth and contrary to any information contained in the USA Hockey Annual Guide, the Development League Guidebook shall be the binding authority

for the selection and application process for participation of teams and programs within the DL, the recruitment, tryout, selection and player agreement of any player participating in the DL, operating requirements for teams participating in the DL, game requirements and any end of season league playoffs.

1. *Player, Coach and Team Registration*

- a) All participants (players and coaches) must complete the USA Hockey registration process and register using the USA Hockey website at usahockey.com. Each participant (players and coaches) will pay the USA Hockey individual membership fee and any applicable Affiliate individual membership fee at the time of the online registration.
- b) All teams registering to participate in the DL must submit their official USA Hockey roster registration form (1-T) to the designated DL Registrar on or before October 15th of the season. A team roster registration form (1-T) shall not be effective until the date it is approved by the DL Registrar through the USA Hockey portal.
- c) All programs with DL teams must also be members of their applicable Affiliate. Programs with DL teams must register those teams in the Affiliate where the DL teams play home games and hold team practices.
- d) All teams registering with the DL must be full season teams with games and practices during the period September-February of the season.
- e) A Development League team may roster and play up to two (2) non-US citizens on that Development League team (excluding goalies, who must be US citizens) provided that the non-citizen player(s) have previously been registered with USA Hockey and played on a USA Hockey team.
- f) The DL will operate as a national league. Teams participating in the DL will be open residency teams with no residency restrictions for players rostered on any DL teams.
- g) Players participating in the DL may not participate with or be rostered or registered on any other hockey team during the same season, with the exception that such players may (i) participate in Tier I and Tier II Junior Hockey games as permitted in the USA Hockey

Youth/Junior Affiliated Player Policy and (ii) play in DL organization games under the DL vertical integration policy.

- h) All DL teams are required to have a team manager, and, at minimum one locker room monitor listed on the DL team roster (1-T). Team managers and locker room monitors listed on the DL team roster must have current background screening and current SafeSport training.
- i) No players may be added to a DL team roster (1-T) after February 15th of the season.

2. Roster Size

A limit of twenty-two (22) players (not more than twenty (20) skaters) may be rostered and Participate in Development League games. All DL teams must roster two (2) Goaltenders on each DL team.

3. Team Age Classifications

Each approved DL organization must field one (1) 15U DL team and one (1) 17U DL team. DL organizations that also have Tier I teams may not field 15O and 16U Tier I teams.

15U DL Teams

- a) 15U DL – Fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) year-old players. No thirteen (13) year-old players may be rostered or play on a 15U DL team.
- b) No more than four (4) fourteen (14) year-old players may be rostered on a 15U DL team.
- c) No more than one (1) fourteen (14) year-old goaltender may be rostered on a 15U DL team. If a DL organization does roster a 14-year-old goaltender on their 15U DL team, that player counts against the four (4) fourteen year old player roster limitation for 15U DL teams.
- d) A 15U DL team may roster and play up to two (2) non-US citizens on that DL team (excluding goaltenders who must be US citizens), provided that the non-US citizen player(s) must have previously been registered with USA Hockey and played on a USA Hockey team during a previous season.

17U DL Teams

- a) Fifteen (15), sixteen (16) and seventeen (17) year-old players. No fourteen (14) year-old or younger players may be rostered or play on a 17U DL team.
- b) No more than two (2) fifteen (15) year-old players may be rostered on a 17U DL team.
- c) No more than one (1) fifteen (15) year-old goaltender may be rostered on a 17U DL team. If a DL organization does roster a 15-year-old goaltender on their 17U DL team, that player counts against the two (2) fifteen year old player roster limitation for 17U DL teams.
- d) A 17U DL team may roster and play up to two (2) non-US citizens on that DL team (excluding goaltenders who must be US citizens), provided that the non-US citizen players must have previously been registered with USA Hockey and played on a USA Hockey team during a previous season.

4. *Vertical Roster Integration for DL Teams*

Age-appropriate vertical roster movement between a DL organization's DL teams and that organization's Tier I teams is allowed between September 1 and February 15 of the season, subject to the following restrictions and conditions:

- a) No thirteen (13) year-old players may play in any 15U DL or 17U DL game.
- b) Fourteen (14) year-old players on a DL organization's Tier I 14U team may be vertically integrated during the season on the organization's 15U DL team.
- c) Fifteen (15) year-old players on a 15U DL team may be vertically integrated during the season on the organization's 17U DL team.
- d) Sixteen (16) and seventeen (17) year-old players on a DL organization's Tier I 18U team may be vertically integrated during the season on the organization's 17U DL team.
- e) Any DL organization player participating in a game under the DL vertical integration policy may only play one (1) game per day.

- f) Notwithstanding (a) – (e) above, in games played by any DL team against a Tier I team, the teams must follow the Tier I Vertical Integration Rules as set forth in the USA Hockey Annual Guide.

5. *Post Season Play*

Development League teams are not eligible to participate in any USA Hockey National Championships. Team and player eligibility to participate in any DL playoff or championship will be governed by the USA Hockey Development League Guidebook rather than Section IX of the USA Hockey Rules and Regulations. The League Commissioner will decide on any question on the eligibility of a player, team or coach to participate in any DL playoff or championship based on the Development League Guidebook. Should a player, team or coach be declared ineligible to compete in any DL Regional playoff or League Championship by a final decision of the League Commissioner, the player, team or coach may appeal its ineligibility to the DL Joint subcommittee. Upon receipt of any such appeal the DL Joint subcommittee shall render a decision as soon as possible. Notwithstanding Bylaw 10.E.(1) (b), the decision of the DL Joint subcommittee shall be final.

6. *Player Recruitment, Player Agreements and Tryouts*

Development League teams may recruit and sign players to Player Agreements according to the following timeline:

- a) January 15th-January 31st: Early Signing Period for DL teams to sign their organization's returning players.
- b) February 1st – End of February: DL Open Signing Period.
- c) March 1st – End of National Championships: Blackout Period (no tryouts or signing of players).
- d) End of National Championships – 48 hours after National Championships – DL Open Signing Period resumes
 - i. Players participating in the USA Hockey National Championships may be signed to a DL player agreement once that player's team has been eliminated from National Championship medal games.
 - ii. DL teams (as well as Tier I teams) may begin player tryouts and signing of players 48 hours after the last game of the National Championships.

- e) DL teams are required to release any DL team player from a Player Agreement without any financial penalty if the player is signing with the NTDP, USHL, or NAHL team prior to that DL team's first game. If a player seeks to leave a DL team after that team's first game to play with the NTDP, USHL, or NAHL team the player must satisfy any financial obligation to the DL team or the player and DL team may reach a mutual agreement on any financial obligation of the player to the DL team.
- f) Player Agreements must be executed for all DL players before they can be rostered on a DL team. DL teams may offer Player Agreements and sign a maximum of twenty-two (22) players to a DL team.
- g) A DL team/program must notify the DL League Registrar of the name of any players signed to a Player Agreement and the specific team that the player committed to playing on within 24 hours after the signing of a Player Agreement.
- h) Player Agreements offered by DL teams/programs must provide information as required in the Development League Guidebook.
- i) The execution of a Player Agreement by a player and parent binds and commits the player to that DL team for the entirety of the team's playing season. Likewise, the execution of a Player Agreement by a DL team binds and commits that team to the player and secures a roster position for that player on the signing team for the entire applicable season. Any disputes between the player and the DL team on the application of a Player Agreement may be resolved in the sole discretion of the DL Commissioner as he/she deems proper under the circumstances, with the right to appeal to the National Appeals Committee pursuant to Bylaw 10.E.

7. *Selection of Teams/Programs to Participate in the USA Hockey Development League:*

The specific criteria for team participation in the Development League, the application and selection process, the annual team assessment due to the league, the number of teams in the League, the team operating requirements, the periodic review of team/program performance, and the withdrawal and continuation of teams within the League will be set out each season in the Development League Guidebook on or before January 1 of each year.

8. *Development League Discipline Actions or Administrative Actions/Decisions:*

- a) For any necessary disciplinary hearings involving a DL team, player, coach or representative, the DL Commissioner shall appoint a three (3) person disciplinary hearing panel to conduct a hearing pursuant to USA Hockey Bylaw 10. C.
- b) The discipline hearing panel shall consist of one (1) Affiliate President, one (1) Youth Council member, and one (1) Player Development Committee member. Any appeal of a DL discipline hearing panel must be submitted in writing to the National Appeals Committee within fourteen (14) days of receipt of the decision appealed from, and the appeal shall be decided in accordance with the procedures in USA Hockey Bylaw 10.E. The decision of the National Appeals Committee on the appeal is final.
- c) Notwithstanding (a) and (b) above, in discipline arising from games played between a DL team and a Tier I team, the discipline of the DL team or individual shall be addressed as described in (a) and (b), and the discipline of the Tier I team or individual shall be referred to the applicable Affiliate.
- d) The DL Commissioner will hear all Administrative Actions other than Administrative Actions taken by an Affiliate, which shall be determined by the Affiliate. Any appeals of administrative decisions made by the DL Commissioner must be submitted to the DL Joint subcommittee within fourteen (14) days of the decision or action by the DL Commissioner. Except as specifically set forth in this Section III.J of the USA Hockey Rules & Regulations, the applicable Affiliate shall retain discipline authority over DL teams and players.

DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE GUIDEBOOK

EFFECTIVE FOR: 2027–2028 SEASON

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MISSION STATEMENT

Adopted by the USA Hockey Congress at the January 2026 USA Hockey meeting, the USA Hockey Development League (DL) will be established as part of USA Hockey's high performance national player development program. The goal of the Development League is to identify, train, and develop players from across the country for advancement to our junior hockey partners, the USNTDP, college hockey and the NHL. Under the authority of USA Hockey as a National Governing Body, the DL will provide a high-performance environment focused on long-term athlete development, increased national visibility, direct integration with junior, college, and national team pipelines and increase the pool of players eligible to play for the United States in international competition.

DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

The USA Hockey Development League has been created to promote the development and advancement of American players. Players will engage in a high-performance athletic environment that is commensurate to the athletes' age and ability. The DL will promote long-term processes over short-term results. DL metrics will track player development, not just results. Winning will be evaluated; learning will be celebrated.

A. AUTHORITY

1. The Development League (DL) operates under USA Hockey, the recognized National Governing Body for ice hockey in the United States.
2. The DL is authorized under USA Hockey Rules and Regulations in Section III.J of the USA Hockey Annual Guide.
3. All member teams, players, staff, referees, and volunteers must be registered with USA Hockey and comply with all applicable USA Hockey Bylaws, Policies and Rules and Regulations as well as SafeSport policies.
4. Capitalized terms not otherwise defined in this Guidebook shall have the meaning as defined in the USA Hockey Annual Guide,

B. LEAGUE OVERSIGHT

1. Oversight of the Development League will be under a Joint subcommittee of the Player Development Committee and the Youth Council.
2. Day-to-day operation of the Development League will be managed by a League Commissioner who will be appointed by the USA Hockey Executive Director.
3. League Committees: The DL Joint sub-committee or League Commissioner may appoint individuals to serve on League Committees to advise the Commissioner on planning, development, and operation of league activities. The League Commissioner shall serve as an ex-officio member of all League Committees. The Standing Committees of the league will be, but not limited to, as follows:
 - Player Development Committee
 - Competition Committee
 - Discipline Committee
4. The Development League will have a designated League Registrar. All team rosters and any player changes during the season must be submitted to the designated Development League Registrar.

C. LEAGUE COMPOSITION

1. Initially, up to thirty-two (32) DL organizations, each consisting of a 17U DL team and a 15U DL team will be selected. Organizations will be strategically located nationwide as selected by the USA Hockey DL Joint sub-committee based on, but not limited to, the following criteria:
 - a. History of, and commitment to, player development and advancement
 - b. Success in National-level competitions
 - c. Organizational integrity and operational readiness
 - d. Geographic representation across the national landscape
2. Each approved organization must field one (1) 15U DL team and one (1) 17U DL team. DL organizations that also have Tier I teams may not field 15O and 16U Tier I teams.

3. DL organizations with Tier I teams may field a maximum of up to 5 teams between 13O & 18U (13O Tier I, 14U Tier I, 15U DL, 17U DL & 18U Tier I). DL organizations may choose whether to field 13O, 14U and 18U Tier I teams.

D. EXPANSION

1. The DL Joint sub-committee will meet to discuss expansion annually beginning with potential expansion for the 2029-30 season. In subsequent seasons, the DL Joint sub-committee shall announce whether it will consider expansion on or before August 1 for the playing season in the next year (e.g., an announcement will be made by August 1, 2029 for expansion in the 2030-31 season).
2. Any adjustment to the number of teams and players participating in the DL will be made by the DL Joint Subcommittee based on (a) the overall USA Hockey player population, (b) national player development demand for participation in the DL, (c) the level of player development in the organization being considered, and (d) high-level performance by the organization being considered.
3. Expansion plans will be announced at USA Hockey Winter Meeting in January 2029.
4. The first season for potential expansion teams to start play will be the 2029-30 season.
5. Expansion Consideration Timeline
 - 2027-28: First year of DL operation
 - 2028-29: Second year of DL operation/No expansion
 - o August 1, 2028: USA Hockey to announce whether it will expand in 2029-30
 - o October 1, 2028: Team applications for potential expansion open
 - o October 31, 2028: Team applications for potential expansion close
 - January 2029 Winter meeting: Expansion announcement
 - 2029-30: Third year of DL operation/Potential expansion with any new teams entering league for the 2029-30 season.

- Potential expansion in subsequent seasons would follow a similar schedule and will be included in future editions of the DL Guidebook.

E. PROBATION AND/OR REMOVAL FROM THE DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE

The DL Joint sub-committee shall have the authority to and be responsible for review of any organization's continued eligibility for DL membership.

1. The DL Commissioner along with the DL Joint sub-committee will monitor organizations annually. All DL team players, coaches and team officials must adhere to USA Hockey Rules and Regulations, and Policies of USA Hockey.
2. DL organizations may be subject to both internal compliance audits by the DL Joint sub-committee, or an external entity engaged by the DL Joint subcommittee on an annual basis and at any time during or following the season.
3. Organizations that are in violation of USA Hockey Rules & Regulations, Policies and/or DL developmental principles may be put on probation and at risk of losing their DL designation. The probation will describe the violations that must be cured by the organization and timeline by which they must be cured.
4. Organizations who do not cure the violations within the timeline set forth in the probation notice shall be subject to removal from the DL.
5. An organization that is subject to removal from the DL may contest such removal through a hearing before the members of the DL Joint sub-committee except that the Chair of the Player Development Committee, the Chair of the Youth Council, and the DL Commissioner shall not serve on the hearing panel. Any appeal shall be heard by an appeal panel composed of the Chair of the Player Development Committee, the Chair of the Youth Council, and the DL Commissioner. Hearings and appeals shall follow the process set forth in Bylaw 10.

F. ELIGIBILITY & ROSTER RULES

1. PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

- a. Teams participating in the DL will be 'open' residency teams with no residency restrictions for players rostered on any DL team.

- b. Organizations and teams must follow all USA Hockey Bylaws, Policies, Rules and Regulations regarding billeting and SafeSport policies.
- c. DL organizations that also field Tier 1 teams are required to follow all affiliate, district and national Tier 1 rules for their Tier 1 teams.
- d. Players participating in the DL may not participate with, or be rostered, or be registered with any other hockey team during the same season with the following exceptions:
 - i. Players may participate in USA Hockey Tier I (USHL) and USA Hockey Tier II (NAHL) Junior Hockey games as permitted in the USA Hockey Youth/Junior Affiliated Player Policy.
 - ii. Play in DL organization games under the DI vertical integration policy.
 - iii. Players may participate in NTDP competition as mutually agreed upon between the NTDP and the DL team.

2. 15U DL AGE GROUP

- a. Fourteen (14) and Fifteen (15) year old players as of December 31 of the playing season.
- b. No thirteen (13) year old or younger players may be rostered on a 15U DL team.
- c. No more than four (4) fourteen (14) year old players may be rostered on a 15U DL team.
- d. No more than one (1) Fourteen (14) year old goaltender may be rostered on a 15U DL team. If a DL organization does roster a 14-year-old goaltender on their 15U DL team, that player counts against the four (4) fourteen-year-old player roster limitation for 15U DL teams.
- e. A 15U DL team may roster and play up to two (2) non-US citizens on that Development League team (excluding goaltenders who must be US citizens), provided that the non-US citizen player(s) have previously been registered with USA Hockey and played on a USA Hockey team during a previous season.

3. 17U DL AGE GROUP

- a. Fifteen (15), Sixteen (16) and Seventeen (17) year old players as of December 31 of the playing season.
- b. No fourteen (14) year old or younger players may be rostered on a 17U DL team.
- c. No more than two (2) fifteen (15) year old players may be rostered on a 17U DL team.
- d. No more than one (1) fifteen (15) year old goaltender may be rostered on a 17U DL team. If a DL organization does roster a 15-year-old goaltender on their 17U DL team, that player counts against the two (2) 15-year-old players' roster limitation for 17U DL teams.
- e. A 17U DL team may roster and play up to two (2) non-US citizens on that Development League team (excluding goalies who must be US citizens), provided that the non-US citizen player(s) have previously been registered with USA Hockey and played on a USA Hockey team during a previous season.

4. ROSTER REQUIREMENTS FOR DL TEAMS

- a. All participants (players and coaches) must follow and complete the USA Hockey registration process.
- b. All DL players must have their date of birth, and citizenship verified in the registry prior to being rostered.
- c. All teams registering to participate in the DL must submit their official USA Hockey roster registration form (1-T) to the designated Development League Registrar prior to the earlier of three (3) business days before their 1st game or October 15th of the season. A team roster registration form (1-T) shall not be effective until the date it is approved by the DL Registrar through the USA Hockey portal.
- d. No player may participate in any DL game before they are added to the team roster, and the roster is approved by the designated Development League Registrar.
- e. All teams registering with the DL must be full season teams.
- f. The Development League will operate as a national league. Teams participating in the DL will be open residency teams with no residency restrictions for players rostered on any DL teams.

- g. DL teams are required to have a designated team manager, and at a minimum, one (1) locker room monitor listed on the DL team roster. Team managers and locker room monitors listed on the DL team roster must have current background screening and current SafeSport training.
- h. A maximum of twenty-two (22) players (20 skaters and 2 goaltenders) may be rostered and play in a DL game.
- i. DL teams must have a minimum of 15 rostered players (13 skaters and 2 goaltenders) at the time the initial roster is submitted to the designated DL League Registrar. Both DL teams (15U and 17U) must maintain a minimum roster size of 15 players per team.
- j. All DL teams must roster two (2) goaltenders.
- k. No non-U.S. Citizens may be rostered as a goaltender on a DL team.
- l. No player may be added to a DL team roster (1-T) after February 15th of the season.

5. VERTICAL ROSTER INTEGRATION FOR DL TEAMS

Organizations with DL teams shall be permitted to have players vertically integrate within their organization as set forth in the USA Hockey Rules & Regulations at Section III.J.4.

G. DL SEASON STRUCTURE

1. 15U AND 17U TRAINING STANDARDS

- a. DL teams are required to have a minimum season average of three (3) on-ice practices per week.
- b. DL teams are required to have a minimum season average of two (2) off-ice training sessions per week.
- c. DL teams may begin team practices as of August 1 of each season.

2. SCHEDULING

- a. DL teams will play a minimum of forty (40) games and a maximum of fifty-five (55) games during their regular season.
- b. A minimum of sixty percent (60%) of regular season DL team games must be played against other DL teams.
- c. The Regular season for DL games will run from September to March of each season.

- d. DL teams/organizations are responsible for building their own schedules.
- e. DL teams are responsible for scheduling certified USA Hockey officials for all games.
- f. The DL playoff and championship structure will be released at a later date.
- g. NO DL team or DL player may play more than one (1) game per day.
- h. Any player participating in a Junior Tier I or Tier II game under the USA Hockey Youth/Junior Affiliated Player Policy may only play one (1) game per day.
- i. Any team who does not meet the DL scheduling requirements set forth in this section may be deemed ineligible for DL playoffs or championship events, provided that the DL Commissioner may allow an exception to the scheduling requirements for good cause shown.
- j. Any team that is deemed ineligible for the DL playoffs or championship events may contest such ineligibility to the DL Joint subcommittee, which decision shall be final and not subject to appeal.

3. DL REGIONAL PLAYOFFS AND LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP

The DL Commissioner has final authority to determine any playoff schedule and location for DL Playoffs and the DL Championship.

4. GAME FORMAT FOR 15U AND 17U DL GAMES

- a. All DL games will be played in three (3) twenty-minute periods.
- b. There will be a warm-up of at least five (5) minute before the start of each DL game.
- c. The ice will be cleaned before warm-up or before the first period of each game and between each period.
- d. If a DL regular season game is tied at the end of regulation time, there will be a five (5) minute sudden death three-on-three overtime period followed by a three (3) player shootout and then a sudden death shootout. There will be no ice cut before the start of any overtime period in any regular season.
- e. Game format for the DL Playoffs and DL Championship will be released at a later date.

5. GAME REPORTING

- a. Game results, game scoring, and penalties assessed will be recorded for all DL games by a digital scoring system. All DL teams must utilize the designated digital scoring system.
- b. Each game result will be recorded in the league records using a three-point system with a regulation win equaling 3 points, an overtime/shootout win equaling two points, an overtime/shootout loss equaling 1 point, and a regulation loss equaling 0 points.

H. DL TEAM OPERATIONS

USA Hockey Development League (DL) teams shall pay an annual team assessment as determined each season by the voting members of the DL Joint subcommittee. A Development League annual team assessment shall be set forth each season in the USA Hockey Development League Guidebook.

1. FINANCIAL POLICY

- a. DL teams shall pay an annual team assessment as determined for each season by the DL Joint Subcommittee.
- b. The annual team assessment for the following season shall be announced by the DL Joint sub-committee by January 1.
- c. The DL team assessment for the 2027/28 season is \$5,500.00 per team.
- d. DL team assessments shall be used for DL operating expenses, DL playoffs or championship tournaments expenses, DL player and coach development resources, etc.
- e. DL organizations will be required to sign a DL agreement annually, which will include the payment of team assessment.
- f. DL teams are responsible for their own operational costs (travel, coaching, ice cost, game officials, equipment, and apparel, etc.).

2. TEAM OPERATIONS

- a. DL organizations are responsible for ensuring that all DL team coaches meet the required USA Hockey coaching education certification (clinic level, continuing education requirements and appropriate age-specific module training) for the applicable age classification for the current season.

- b. DL teams are responsible for determining that all coaches, team managers, locker room monitors, and all adults in a billet home have a current background screen and current SafeSport training certification.
- c. DL teams must appoint a Head Coach and Assistant Coaches.
- d. DL teams must provide qualified goaltender coaching and strength & conditioning coaches.
- e. DL teams must obtain an executed Player Agreement for all players. No player may be rostered on a DL team before that player has executed a Player Agreement.

I. PLAYER RECRUITMENT, TRYOUTS AND PLAYER AGREEMENTS

1. PLAYER RECRUITMENT AND TRYOUTS

Development League teams may recruit and sign players to Player Agreements each season according to the following timeline:

- a. January 15th - January 31st: Early Signing Period for DL teams to sign their organization's returning players.
- b. February 1- end of February: DL Open Signing Period.
- c. March 1 - end of National Championship: Blackout period (no tryouts or signing of players)
 - i. Players participating in the USA Hockey National Championships may be signed to a DL Player Agreement once that player's team has been eliminated from National Championship medal games.
 - ii. DL teams (as well as Tier I teams) may begin player tryouts and signing of players 48 hours after the last game of the National Championships.
- d. DL teams are required to release any DL player from a Player Agreement without any financial penalty if the player is signing with the NTDP or a USHL or NAHL team prior to the DL team's first game. If a player seeks to leave a DL team after that team's first game to play with the NTDP, a USHL or NAHL team the player must satisfy any financial obligation to the DL team or the player and DL team may reach a mutual agreement on any financial obligation of the player to the DL team. Any mutual agreement by the parties to resolve any financial obligation must be reduced

to writing. In the event of a dispute over what is owed by the player to the team, the player may submit relevant information to the DL Commissioner, in which case the DL team shall be required to submit any pertinent information in its possession, and the Commissioner may make a ruling in the Commissioner's discretion as to amount the player must pay to satisfy the financial obligation to secure the player's release.

- e. Except for tryouts with the NTDP, USHL, or NAHL, a player may not participate in any tryouts for any other team or program during the term of the Player Agreement.
- f. Except as specifically set forth in the DL Guidebook, no DL player that has a signed player agreement for the current season can be recruited for the current season by another DL team.

2. PLAYER AGREEMENTS

- a. Player Agreements are written agreements entered into between a player/parent and a DL team/organization for the purpose of binding a player to a specific DL team for the entirety of the playing season. The Player Agreement also binds the signing team to that player and secures a roster spot on a specific team for the entire playing season.
- b. Player Agreements must be executed for all DL players before they can be rostered on a DL team. DL teams may offer and sign a maximum of twenty-two (22) players to a DL team.
- c. A DL team/program must notify the DL League Registrar of the name of any player signed to a Player Agreement and the specific team that the player committed to playing on within 24 hours after signing of a Player Agreement.
- d. All Player Agreements must be signed by the player/parent and an authorized representative of the DL team/organization.
- e. Prior to offering a Player Agreement to any player or signing a Player Agreement an authorized representative of the signing DL team must present and provide a Team Fact Sheet to the player and their parent, which must include all the information, provisions and requirements that the player and family will be committing to by signing the Player

Agreement and becoming a member of the Signing Team. The Team Fact Sheet must be signed by the team and parent(s) and must be provided to the player's parents. The required elements of the Team Fact Sheet must include at least the following information:

- i. The specific DL team upon which the player will be rostered;
- ii. The Signing Team's anticipated fees for the season, which includes team fees to participate on the Signing Team for the season, uniform and equipment fees, and any anticipated travel fees (to the extent known or planned) for the player and any required travel for the parents, and any other anticipated fees that are required to be paid as a condition of participation on the team;
- iii. The required payment schedule or payment options for the team fees;
- iv. The anticipated or planned number and average per week of practices, games and off-ice sessions;
- v. Any player code of conduct and/or parent code of conduct required for participation on the Signing Team, and
- vi. The player and parents and the Signing Team acknowledge and agree to be bound by the terms of the Team Fact Sheet and the Player Agreement.

3. VIOLATIONS OF RECRUITMENT OR TRYOUT RULES AND PLAYER AGREEMENT DISPUTES –

- a. Players violating the DL tryout rules or the terms of the Player Agreement may be subject to disciplinary action by the Signing Team or by the DL Discipline Committee. Any discipline action against a player must follow the procedures set forth in USA Hockey Bylaw 10.
- b. In the event that a player who has signed a DL team Player Agreement has been found to have participated in any Tryout for another DL team/program or a Tier I team/program, then the player will be ineligible to sign a Player Agreement or participate with that program for a period of 18 months from the last date of the Tryout.

- c. If a player leaves their DL Signing Team and attempts to play for another DL or Tier I team during the playing season (other than as permitted below), the player will not be permitted to be rostered on the new team for the remainder of the current Playing Season and the following Playing Season.
- d. The Player Agreement will not restrict a player from moving to or participating with another team under the following circumstances:
 - i. The Player Agreement would not restrict a player from leaving a Signing Team and playing for another DL or Tier I team, if the Signing Team and the player mutually agree for the player to be released by the Signing Team;
 - ii. If the player was released by the Signing Team for violation of the Player Agreement requirements or other violation by the player of the Signing Team's or its program's written Code of Conduct, and is released following any required hearing and appeal process required under USA Hockey Bylaws or Rules, or through mutual agreement of the team and player, then the Player Agreement would not restrict the player from joining another team for that season;
 - iii. The Player Agreement would not restrict player from playing with another team, including DL or Tier I teams, if the player files a grievance pursuant to USA Hockey Bylaw 10 and a hearing is held where it is determined that the Signing Team, its coaches or other participants have violated USA Hockey Safe Sport Policies or other USA Hockey, Affiliate or Signing Team policies and which violation(s) justify the player's release from the Player Agreement and eligibility to sign with another DL or Tier I team (but still subject to any rostering rules and timelines).
- e. Incidents in which coaches, others involved in a DL program or a DL Program have tampered with a player who is signed to a Player Agreement with another DL team or violated roster or Player Agreement requirements set forth in this DL Guidebook or other policies of USA Hockey will be referred to the DL Discipline Committee for disciplinary action. DL Programs must ensure compliance with all requirements of DL Guidebook and USA Hockey policies and requirements.

- f. Any suspensions imposed following a hearing by the DL Discipline Committee shall be appealable to the USA Hockey National Appeals Committee in the manner set forth in USA Hockey Bylaw 10. E.

J. COACHING AND OFFICIATING DEVELOPMENT

DL coaches, goaltending coaches, strength and conditioning coaches and officials will have access to high-level coaching support and developmental opportunities which will be provided by USA Hockey and our partners.

1. DL COACHING REQUIREMENTS

- a. All DL coaches must comply with all USA Hockey Coaching Education Program requirements.
- b. All DL coaches are required to be familiar with the USA Hockey Sports Concussion Management Program.
- c. Coaches are expected to participate in DL specific High Performance coaching programs.

2. OFFICIATING DEVELOPMENT

- a. All DL officials must comply with all USA Hockey Officiating Education Program requirements.
- b. Officials assigned to DL games will have access to video feedback and evaluation support.
- c. USA Hockey will integrate the Advanced Officiating Development Program within the DL.

K. DISCIPLINE AND ELIGIBILITY ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

1. Purpose And Authority

- a. Purpose. These Discipline Guidelines are issued in accordance with Article III, Section J of the USA Hockey Rules and Regulations and are intended to provide guidance to Development League (“DL”) member programs on suspensions and other discipline affecting participants. These procedures apply to alleged violations of USA Hockey Bylaws, Rules & Regulations, Policies, Codes of Conduct, Codes of Ethics, and USA Hockey SafeSport Handbook Policies involving DL programs, players, participants and team officials.
- b. Non-DL Discipline Matters. Disciplinary issues from games involving one team from the DL and one team from outside

the DL will have the potential discipline for the DL Team and its members addressed under the DL disciplinary procedures, and for the team from outside the DL, the potential discipline for the team and its members will be addressed by the team's USA Hockey affiliate.

- c. DL Commissioner/DL Discipline Chair Authority. All DL discipline matters will be handled by the DL Commissioner or a DL Discipline Chair appointed by the DL Joint subcommittee ("DL Discipline Chair"). The DL Discipline Chair shall have the same powers or authority granted to the DL Commissioner for DL discipline related matters.

2. Game-Related Discipline, Appeals, And Protests

- a. Game Misconducts. There is no appeal of any Game Misconduct penalties assessed to a player or team official during a DL game; provided however, that nothing herein shall restrict the DL Commissioner from investigating any matters related to Supplementary Discipline in accordance with USA Hockey Playing Rule 410.
- b. Supplementary Discipline. Supplementary Discipline requests, for potential review will only be accepted/ considered if presented to the DL Commissioner by a DL program President or Club Director. Submissions from any coach, parent or other person must first be submitted to the program's President or Club Director, who shall determine whether to submit the request to the DL Commissioner. No DL program may institute Rule 410 Supplemental Discipline unless authorized by DL Commissioner on a case-by-case basis.
- c. Protests. The only protest allowed to any DL game is limited to questions related to participation by an ineligible player or team official by a DL team. Any such protest must be submitted by the program President or Club Director to the DL Commissioner within 72 hours of completion of the game along with the factual basis for such protest. All decisions of the DL Commissioner on protests are final and not subject to appeal, provided that any discipline assessed in connection therewith shall be subject to the provisions of Bylaw 10.
- d. Resolution in Lieu of Hearing or Appeal. The DL Commissioner shall have the authority under Bylaw 10.C.3(a) propose to a player or team official that is subject to potential discipline, a pre-hearing offer of a suspension,

probation, warnings, or other sanctions or conditions, in lieu of a disciplinary hearing, and if the Party subject to the discipline accepts such terms and waives their right to a hearing and any appeals in writing, which may include acceptance by email, then the hearing and appeal procedures under Bylaws 10.C.(4) and 10.E. shall not be necessary, and such decision cannot be later challenged or appealed. Notwithstanding the foregoing, no resolution in lieu of a hearing may offer discipline that is less than is required under the USA Hockey Playing Rules, Bylaws, or Rules & Regulations (e.g., the 30 day suspension for a coach not wearing a helmet in practice may not be lessened; a match penalty for physical abuse of officials under Rule 601(e)(1) shall have a minimum suspension of one year).

3. Suspended Players & Team Officials.

- a. Ineligibility. Players and team officials serving any suspensions will be considered “ineligible players/coaches” for every game of the team they were on when the penalty was incurred until their suspension is served, may not play/coach for any other team during such time, and shall be subject to the provisions of USA Hockey Playing Rules related to suspensions including Rules 401(c), 404(c) & 405(d).
- b. Next Scheduled Game. All suspensions will be served during the team’s next scheduled game(s) appearing on the team’s schedule prior to the game in which the suspension was incurred.
- c. Game Scoresheet. In order to receive credit for a game suspension being served, the player or team official must be noted by a team official on the game scoresheet as serving a suspension for the game in which the suspension is being served.
- d. Additional Discipline for Non-Compliance. If a team official or player violates his suspension, they may be subject to additional discipline, including, but not limited to individual suspension, team suspension, and game forfeitures, subject to the hearing and appeal process of Bylaw 10.

4. Match Penalty.

- a. League Notification. If a Match penalty is called on a DL team player or team official, the designated DL team head coach for that game must notify the League Commissioner

in writing within 24 hours after the game providing the name of the player or team official receiving the match penalty, and the specific penalty called. Failure to provide the required notice may result in additional discipline imposed against the team official or DL program for failing to report.

- b. **Pre-Hearing Match Penalty Discipline.** In the event of a Match Penalty, the DL Commissioner shall have the authority, pursuant and in accordance with the Standardized Discipline Process, to review the Official's Incident Report and determine if the player or team official may be offered an opportunity to accept a pre-hearing suspension under the USA Hockey Standardized Discipline Policy for Match Penalties, in lieu of a hearing. If the Party subject to the discipline accepts such terms and waives their right to a hearing and any appeals in writing, then the hearing and appeal procedures under Bylaws 10.C.(4) and 10.E. shall not be necessary, and such decision cannot be later challenged or appealed.

5. Discipline Committee Panelists. Annually, the DL

Commissioner shall appoint committee of hearing panelists for discipline hearings which shall include a minimum of three (3) Affiliate Presidents, three (3) Youth Council Members and three (3) Player Development Committee members to serve on the DL Discipline Committee. Each hearing panel shall include one Affiliate President, one Youth Council Member and one Player Development Committee member, each selected by the DL Commissioner. In the event of the unavailability of DL Discipline Committee members, the DL Commissioner shall have the authority to appoint additional committee members to serve as disinterested parties on any discipline panel.

6. Discipline Related Appeals

- a. **Suspension Appeals.** A DL participant may appeal discipline involving a suspension imposed after a hearing at the league level in accordance with the appeal procedures set forth in USA Hockey Bylaw 10.E. The DL Commissioner shall convene an Appeal Authority, pursuant to Bylaw 10.E. comprised of (1) Affiliate President, one (1) Youth Council member and one (1) Player Development Committee member.

- b. Standard of Appellate Review. USA Hockey Bylaw 10.E(2)(c) states the Appeal Authority's standard of review for appeals of hearing panel decisions.
- c. National Appeals Committee Appeals. Pursuant to Bylaw 10.E, appeals of a DL Appeal Authority decision involving a suspension must be submitted to the National Appeals Committee within fourteen (14) days of receipt of the decision appealed from. The decision of the National Appeals Committee on the appeal shall be final.

7. Administrative And Other Non-Game Violations

- a. Administrative Actions. The DL Commissioner will appoint a hearing panel to hear all Administrative Actions, related to any action or decision by USA Hockey or any DL program that affects any DL Program, player or team officials' eligibility to participate in the DL.
- b. Administrative Action Appeals. Any appeals of Administrative Actions made by the hearing panel must be submitted to the DL Joint Oversight Subcommittee within fourteen (14) days of the decision or action by the DL Commissioner. The decision of the DL Joint Oversight Committee shall be final, with no further appeals.
- c. Team Rule Violations. Any team or program-imposed discipline for violations of Applicable Rules or that team's or Member Program's rules that do not exceed the lesser of one game or seventy-two (72) hours shall not require a hearing.
- d. Other Discipline Matters. DL Players, parents, team officials and any team representative who are found in violation of league rules, codes of conduct, USA Hockey Rules and Regulations or eligibility standards may face sanctions from the DL Commissioner, subject to the requirements of Bylaw 10, which may include:
 - Probation
 - Suspension
 - Expulsion from the DL

8. Summary Suspensions

Summary Suspensions may only be issued by the DL Commissioner, DL Discipline Chair or a USA Hockey SafeSport Coordinator in accordance with USA Hockey Bylaw 10.D.3.a.

9. Amendments to Disciplinary Process

The DL Joint Oversight Subcommittee shall have the right, in its sole discretion, to review, revise, modify, or amend these Discipline Guidelines from time to time as it deems necessary or appropriate. Any such revision, modification, or amendment shall become effective immediately upon distribution to the member programs, unless otherwise stated in the notice of distribution.

L. SAFESPORT MATTERS.

1. **Compliance.** Any DL Program or Team Official, or any adult Participant involved in a DL program shall comply in all respects with the USA Hockey Safe Sport Program and policies of the US Center for SafeSport. Each DL Program shall be required to sign and submit a “USA Hockey Member Program Agreement To Adopt And Comply With Safe Sport Program” to the DL League Registrar on or before September 1 of each league season.
2. **Mandatory Reporting.** If a DL Program or Team Official, or any adult Participant receives a report that is required by the U.S. Center for SafeSport (“Center for SafeSport”) involving allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct (as defined in the USA Hockey Safe Sport Program Handbook), the matter must be reported the Center for SafeSport for investigation, discipline and adjudication. It is requested that such reports also be made to USA Hockey and/or the DL Commissioner so that prompt action can be considered pending investigation.
3. **Investigation/Discipline/Adjudication.** In the event the Center for SafeSport declines jurisdiction or authority to investigate allegations or reports that a Participant has engaged in conduct violated the USA Hockey Safe Sport Policy, USA Hockey shall refer the matter to : (i) the USA Hockey affiliate where the Participant is registered; or (ii) to the DL Commissioner who may have a Safe Sport coordinator or other qualified person investigate the allegations for possible discipline in accordance with the procedures set forth in Bylaw 10.

M. CHANGES IN MEMBER'S STATUS

The DL Joint Subcommittee will meet to review and determine an organization's continued membership status in the DL should any of the following occur:

- Change in all or part ownership of the DL Program.
- Transfer of the team/organization's DL designation
- Change in the organization's corporate structure – Officers or Board Structure
- Changes in the organization's tax structure (e.g., going from a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation to a profit corporation).
- Revocation of the organization's corporate status or the corporation's 501(c)(3) not for profit status

DL organizations must notify the League Commissioner of any change as described above and cooperate with the DL Joint Subcommittee to provide any requested information regarding changes in that organization's ownership or structure. Any DL decision changing a program's membership status in the DL shall be an Administrative Action and subject to the provisions of Bylaw 10.

N. CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP STATUS WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE

Acceptance of a team/organization to participate in the USA Hockey Development League does not guarantee continued participation of that team in the Development League from year to year. All teams are expected to comply with USA Hockey Annual Guide requirements as well as requirements contained in the Development League Guidebook. The Development League reserves the right to audit the year-to-year performance of teams within the Development League to ensure a high standard of development for the players participating. Significant issues such as SafeSport violations may be immediately addressed by the Development League. If operational concerns and/or deficiencies are identified, the Development League will notify the organization and request that the operational concerns and/or deficiencies be rectified to the satisfaction of the DL Joint Sub-committee. Failure to address issues of concern may result in consideration of removing the organization's removal from the DL as set forth in Section E above.

NOTES

