

4NCL Rules 2026-27

- 01 Format of the League
- 02 Entry of teams
- 03 Initial registration of players
- 04 Additions to/deregistrations from the registration list
- 05 Transfers during the season
- 06 Wildcards
- 07 Organisation of the divisions
- 08 Team lists and board order
- 09 Submission of team lists
- 10 Reserves
- 11 Default penalties
- 12 Rules governing play
- 13 Promotion and relegation
- 14 Chief Arbiter and management
- 15 Appeals
- 16 Miscellaneous provisions



1 Format of the League

1.1 The format of the League shall be:

- Division 1, consisting of 12 eight-board teams;
- Division 2, consisting of 12 eight-board teams;
- Division 3, consisting of two pools each of 12 six-board teams;
- Division 4, consisting of six-board teams.

New teams may only enter Division 4. Dates and venues will be published on the 4NCL website. Each division will be contested over 11 rounds, played over five weekends, including the early May bank holiday weekend.

1.2 Each team in Division 1 must contain representatives from both of the following categories:

- a. male players;
- b. female players.

Each team in Division 2 must contain representatives from at least two of the following categories:

- a. adult male players;
- b. adult female players;
- c. junior male players born on or after 1st September 2008 (i.e. under 18 years old on 31st August 2026);
- d. junior female players born on or after 1st September 2008 (i.e. under 18 years old on 31st August 2026).

1.3 There is no such restriction on the composition of teams in the other divisions.

2 Entry of teams

2.1 To enter the League, a manager of a club submitting a team or teams should confirm the name of each team and its expected division. The entry fees are listed in the [guidelines](#) and are payable at the same time as the entry is made. If a manager enters more than one team, the teams may play as split squads (where the teams may not interchange players) or as combined squads (where some movement between teams in a squad is allowed subject to the requirements of section 8 of these rules). The decision to play as combined or split squads is irrevocable for the season.

2.2 Teams playing as part of a combined squad shall be clearly named as to show the order of teams within that squad (e.g. being denoted by 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C etc.); the Management Board is empowered to require a change to the submitted team names to ensure the order is clear to opposing captains.

2.3 No team will be allowed to re-enter the League until outstanding fees for that team or any other team under the same management have been settled.

2.4 A team, once it has had its entry accepted, is not entitled to a refund of entry fees should it subsequently withdraw.

- 2.5 A fee of £150 will be payable where a change to a club or team name is made during the season unless otherwise agreed by the Management Board.

3 Initial registration of players

- 3.1 The deadline for initial registrations will be announced in the entry guidelines. Squads failing to meet this deadline will be subject to a fine of 5% of their total entry fee per day overdue, which must be paid prior to the deadline specified in rule 14.3.
- 3.2 A manager may register a squad of up to 16 players per eight-board team and up to 12 players per six-board team, without further fees. These registrations should be made via the 4NCL online registration system. If a manager has received explicit permission in accordance with rule 3.7 to list a player, this should also be stated at the time of registration via the 4NCL online registration system.
- 3.3 Players registered with FIDE other than through the English Chess Federation (ECF) are not required to be members of the ECF.
- 3.4 It is the manager's responsibility to ensure that all players other than those covered by rule 3.3 become Gold or Platinum members of the ECF before the team list in which they are named is published. Players who do not meet this requirement cannot be entered onto a team list or play.
- 3.5 The Management Board may at its absolute discretion refuse to accept a player's registration.
- 3.6 All participants in the League shall consent to their name, gender, nationality, title and rating being shown on the 4NCL website. Those wishing to withhold their consent shall not be permitted to play in the League. Managers and any team captains they appoint are also expected to have their contact details shown on the 4NCL website.
- 3.7 It is the responsibility of the manager of a squad wishing to retain the registration of a player who has agreed to be listed for that squad to obtain firm evidence of explicit agreement (which should be in writing or by email and should record that the player has been informed of the consequences of giving explicit consent), such evidence to be made available to the Chief Arbiter and the 4NCL Board if required.
- A player who has explicitly consented to be listed for a particular squad may not move to another squad unless:
- a. the manager of that squad voluntarily deregisters the player; or
 - b. the Chief Arbiter considers that it would be inequitable to hold the player to the previous commitment, taking into account the circumstances in which the commitment had been given and any relevant evidence subsequent to the giving of that commitment.
- A player who has given explicit consent to be listed for a squad but who wishes to withdraw that consent must contact the Chief Arbiter before the registration deadline for the first weekend.
- 3.8 No player should be registered for more than one squad. Should a player be registered for more than one squad, neither captain claiming explicit consent, the Chief Arbiter need take no action until the player plays for a squad, at which point his registration for all other squads shall be cancelled.

4 Additions to/deregistrations from the registration list

- 4.1 Additional names of players expected to play during the season may be added to a squad's list of registered players via the online registration system. The information required is the same as for the initial registration process. The date of registration shall be taken as the date when the registration is received.
- 4.2 To play as a registered player at a particular weekend the player must be registered no later than 11.59pm of the Thursday nine days before the first round of the weekend for the division in which the player is to play.
- 4.3 A fee of £5 shall be due for each registration above a squad's allocation (see rule 3.2), to be paid after the following weekend in accordance with rule 14.3. Players previously registered for a squad may only be deregistered if they have not yet played or won/lost by default during the current season; such deregistrations must be made in writing directly to the Chief Arbiter.
- 4.4 If a player has not been registered by the deadline, that player will only be permitted to play as a wildcard and must satisfy the requirements of section 6 of the rules.

5 Transfers during the season

- 5.1 A player who is named on a squad's list of players may transfer to another squad provided that the player has not played during the current season and has not given explicit consent to be listed for that player's original squad.
- 5.2 The Chief Arbiter will inform the player and the managers of the relevant squads whether or not the transfer has been accepted.
- 5.3 The squad to which the player is moving must fulfil all the requirements for additional registrations, plus the payment of a £5 administration charge (see rules 4.1-4.4 above).
- 5.4 The player must be registered for the new squad no later than 11.59 pm of the Thursday nine days before the first round of the weekend for the division in which the player is to play. Transfers later than this deadline will be subject to the wildcard rules. In this instance, a wildcard fee is payable in addition to a £5 administration charge.
- 5.5 If a team withdraws from the League, players who have played only for that team become free agents and may choose to play either for other teams in the squad if applicable or to join another squad. In such cases no transfer fees are payable, but wildcard and additional registration fees will apply if appropriate.

6 Wildcards

- 6.1 A wildcard is a player who is not registered for any squad in the League. No player whose registration has been refused may be a wildcard.
- 6.2 Wildcards must provide a FIDE identification number (FIN) before the weekend at which they will be playing if they are not English. In the absence of a FIN a player will be registered with FIDE as English and allocated a FIN by the ECF when the appropriate rating file is submitted. The player may incur costs from FIDE to have this subsequently changed.
- 6.3 A fee of £10 (Divisions 1 and 2) or £5 (all other Divisions) shall be incurred for each wildcard who plays during a weekend (regardless of how many games they play in that weekend), payable by the deadline laid down in rule 14.3. If a wildcard plays in more than one division over the course of a weekend, the fee charged will be for the highest of the divisions in which they play.
- 6.4 A wildcard is not required to be a member of the ECF, but players registered with FIDE as English must take out ECF Gold or Platinum membership before playing at any subsequent weekends. A player will become fully registered after the weekend at which the player appears as a wildcard, and any players registered in this manner do not count towards a squad's allocation in rule 3.2.
- 6.5 A team in Division 1 may play one wildcard in each match.
- 6.6 A team in Division 2 may play up to two wildcards in each match provided not more than one of the wildcards plays in the top half of the team.
- 6.7 A team in any other division may play up to four wildcards in each match provided not more than one of the wildcards plays in the top half of the team.
- 6.8 Except when a transfer has been allowed or a captain voluntarily de-registers the player, a player named on a squad's list of players is not available as a wildcard for other squads.
- 6.9 No player may play as a wildcard on more than one weekend during the season.

7 Organisation of the divisions

- 7.1 Divisions 1, 2 and each pool of Division 3 will be played as all-play-all divisions.
- 7.2 Division 4 will be played as a Swiss tournament with pairings based on pairing guidelines as determined and published by the Chief Arbiter which may be amended from time to time if deemed in the best interests of the League. If there is an odd number of teams playing in a round, a triangular pairing will be used. The Chief Arbiter will publish guidelines for triangular pairings, which will in some areas supersede the main rules.

8 Team lists and board order

- 8.1 In all divisions a team can choose which of the following ratings to use for each individual player to determine the order of strength within a team:
- FIDE standard rating;
 - ECF standard rating (categories A and K only);
 - Other national rating (on request by the team captain).

This decision may be varied between weekends, but the same rating must be used for a player for all rounds of a single weekend, including both halves of a split weekend. If a team does not explicitly choose which rating to use, the first choice in the above list available to a player will be used.

- 8.2 The rating lists that are active on the day of the earliest registration deadline for the weekend as in rule 4.2 will be used for all divisions for that weekend, unless the Chief Arbiter decides to use the lists for the month immediately before or immediately after that registration deadline and communicates this decision at least 14 days before the first registration deadline for the weekend.
- 8.3 A player who has no official national or FIDE rating will be assigned an estimate by the Chief Arbiter.
- 8.4 The average rating of a team is calculated as the average of the top seven boards in Divisions 1 and 2. In the other divisions the average rating is calculated using all six players. A higher team in a squad must have an average rating greater than that of a lower team in that squad for each round.
- 8.5 Within a team, if any two players are rated more than 100 points apart, the higher rated player must play on the higher board. Between teams in a combined squad, if any two players are rated more than 100 points apart, the higher rated player must play in the higher team.
- 8.6 Exceptionally, if there is a conflict between the 100 point rule and any applicable age/gender requirements of Divisions 1 and 2, a single player may be lower rated than would otherwise have been necessary. However, no player may break the 100 point rule when compared with another player of both the same gender and age category.
- 8.7 The Chief Arbiter is empowered to require a change to team lists if there is a breach of the spirit of rule 8.6.
- 8.8 A complaint about the composition of a team must be made at least 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the round.
- 8.9 Where both managers agree in advance and the Chief Arbiter consents, the requirements of the 100 point rule within a team may be waived, if this is in the best interests of the League. Where the requirements of the 100-point rule would be breached between two teams in a combined squad, only the agreement of the opposing captain of the lower team and the Chief Arbiter is required.
- 8.10 Known defaults must be on the lowest boards of the lowest possible team having regard to the age/gender requirements of Divisions 1 and 2, unless otherwise authorised by the Chief Arbiter in exceptional circumstances.

9 Submission of team lists

- 9.1 For all fixtures in a given weekend, team lists must be submitted using the online registration system by 10.00 pm of the Thursday immediately before the weekend, with any defaults declared to the opposing manager by the same deadline.
- 9.2 Submission of team lists after the deadline will result in the imposition of a penalty of £10 per team per round, payable by the deadline laid down in rule 14.3.
- 9.3 Any changes to these lists may be made without penalty (provided they do not introduce further defaults) up to 10.00 pm of the day before the fixture. Such changes should be made using the online registration system. All team lists must give the full names of the players clearly in board order.
- 9.4 Team lists may be amended without penalty (providing further defaults are not introduced) for circumstances beyond captains' control provided this is done at least two hours before the scheduled start of play and the Sector Arbiter is notified of the change.
- 9.5 If, between two hours before the scheduled start of play and the publication of pairings, a team wishes to change its team list, the team must request this directly to the Sector Arbiter, who shall either accept or decline the change at their discretion depending on the practicality of the request.

- 9.6 For split weekends (when some divisions play on different weekends from others) team lists for squads with fixtures on both weekends must be submitted by 10.00 pm of the Thursday immediately before the earlier of the two weekends. If subsequent amendments render the composition of a team or teams illegal, the Chief Arbiter may apply game point penalties to correct for any injustice caused. No players may play on both Saturdays of a split weekend, nor on both Sundays.

10 Reserves

- 10.1 If after the publication of pairings a team does not expect a player on their team sheet to be able to play, then it may substitute that player with an eligible reserve. The reserve shall directly take the place of the player they are substituting, with no change to the rest of the board order for either team.
- 10.2 Up to two players, who must be registered or eligible to play as a wildcard, may be nominated as reserves for each team when the team list is submitted.
- 10.3 A player who has not been nominated as a reserve may be used as such provided they are registered or eligible to play as a wildcard, and are rated at least 100 points lower than the player they replace.
- 10.4 The substitution must meet any applicable age or gender requirements, must have the prior approval of the Sector Arbiter, and must occur not more than 55 minutes after the scheduled start of the round or such later time as the two captains concerned and the Sector Arbiter at the venue may have agreed before commencement of the game.
- 10.5 The clock of the reserve shall be adjusted to show the elapsed time subject to a minimum reduction in available time of 30 minutes.
- 10.6 The improper use of reserves may result in the Sector Arbiter refusing the substitution, and/or the Chief Arbiter imposing a penalty as he deems appropriate on the offending team.
- 10.7 A player cannot play as a reserve if they have been named in another team list for that round, including for a match in the same round to be played on a later date in a split weekend. An unused named reserve in the first half of a split weekend may subsequently be added to a team list for the second half of that split weekend.

11 Default penalties

- 11.1 A team will incur half a game point penalty per default in addition to scoring zero on each affected board if the information about the defaults is communicated to the Chief Arbiter and, when the pairings are known at that time, to the opposing manager at or before 10.00 pm of the Thursday before the round. When the pairings are not known in advance notified defaults for later in the weekend will be published with the team lists for the first round of the weekend. It is permissible for the player affected by the notified default not to appear for the round in which the default occurs.
- 11.2 If a team receives a win(s) from a notified default, it may choose which player(s) receive(s) the default win(s) on the bottom board(s), provided that they are eligible to play in that team or a higher team in a combined squad under the 100-point rule as in rule 8.5. The 100 point rule still applies to the order of players with an opponent, unless otherwise agreed under rule 8.9.
- 11.3 A team will incur one game point penalty per default in addition to scoring zero on each defaulting board for each player, having been named on a team list, who fails to appear for the match in question within one hour after the start of play or arrives but is not prepared to play, or if a default is not notified until after the deadline.
- 11.4 Appeals against any fines relating to rule 11.3 will be considered only in exceptional circumstances. Car breakdowns, traffic delays, public transport delays or cancellations, bad weather (except where a severe weather warning can be shown to have been issued by the Meteorological Office) etc. will not normally be considered exceptional circumstances.
- 11.5
- When a team indicates that it has a default after the initial team submission deadline in rule 9.1 but earlier than two hours before the start of the round, at the discretion of the Sector Arbiter the opposing team may be permitted to amend their team composition and board order for the round later than the deadline in rule 9.3, but no later than two hours before the start of play.
 - When a team indicates that it has a default later than two hours before the scheduled start of the round but before the start of the round the opposing team may adjust its board order, but not the overall composition of the team, to minimise any inconvenience caused.

- 11.6 A team defaulting a game for whatever reason will incur a penalty of £30 per defaulted game unless a successful appeal has been made. See rule 15 for the appeals process, and 14.3 for the payment deadline. A team will be exempt from paying a default fine if: (a) the team is able to provide a player not otherwise eligible to play in the team (e.g. an eighth player of the same category in Division 1 or 2) to play a game against the opponent under the provisions of rule 12.9; or (b) the opposing team defaults on the same board; or (c) the game is the first one defaulted by a team during the season that does not arise because of either (a) or (b).
- 11.7 A Division 4 team may withdraw from an entire weekend without financial penalty so long as the intention to do so is notified to the Chief Arbiter no later than the Division 4 registration deadline as in rule 4.2. If a squad has multiple teams in Division 4, if it wishes to withdraw one or more of its teams the lowest team(s) must be withdrawn. A team withdrawing after the above deadline will be penalised as in 11.8 as if they had defaulted all matches in that weekend.
- 11.8 If a team defaults an entire match for whatever reason in any other circumstances it will incur a fine of £250 (Divisions 1 and 2), £125 (Division 3), or £75 (Division 4), unless a successful appeal has been made. See rule 15 for the appeals process, and 14.3 for the payment deadline. Where a Division 4 team defaults a match other teams will be re-paired as necessary.

12 Rules governing play

- 12.1 The FIDE Laws of Chess will apply to all games and the [4NCL Fair Play Policy](#) will apply to the event.
- 12.2 The starting times shall normally be 2.00 pm on the first day of the weekend, 1.00 pm on the middle day of a three-day weekend and 11.00 am on the final day of the weekend. Captains and managers should make their team colleagues aware of these start times and any changes to venues, should they arise.
- 12.3 The Sector Arbiter at a venue will endeavour to publish individual pairings both in the venue and online ninety minutes before the start of play, and in any event no later than one hour before the start of play.
- 12.4 If the late submission of all or part of a team list causes one or more pairings to be published late, the Sector Arbiter may, at their discretion, deduct time from the clock of each member of the team whose name was not published on time.
- 12.5 The first-named team in each pairing shall have the white pieces on the odd-numbered boards and black on the even-numbered boards.
- 12.6 The time control shall be 40 moves in 90 minutes plus 30 minutes for the rest of the game, with a 30 second increment per move from move 1.
- 12.7 The default time shall be one hour after the start of play.
- 12.8 A player may ask their captain or an arbiter for any score in any match at any time. No other information may be provided by a captain to any player. Players must not ask their team managers about whether or not they should offer, or accept the offer of, a draw.
- 12.9 Any players without an opponent will wherever possible be offered a FIDE rated and ECF rated game against another player in a similar position. Pairings for these games will be matched in strength as far as possible. The starting time of the game and the time control will be set by the Sector Arbiter, and the time control for these games will be either the main league time control as in rule 12.6 or all moves in 90 minutes plus 30 seconds per move. The Sector Arbiter shall agree the terms of the game with both players before the game commences.
- 12.10 Players are assumed to consent to having their photographs taken; if they object to this they should raise the matter either with the arbiters or the photographer concerned. Copyright to photographs remains with the photographer.

13 Promotion and relegation

- 13.1 End of season team placings will be decided in the first instance on match point totals. If at the end of the season teams are tied on match points, the tie shall be broken using:
- a. the game points totals;
 - b. provided all possible matches between teams still tied have been played:
 - (i) the match point totals in the results between the teams which remain tied;
 - (ii) the game point totals in the results between the teams which remain tied;
 - (iii) the lower board count in the results between the teams which remain tied;
 - (iv) the game points remaining after elimination of the bottom board or boards as necessary.If at any stage the number of tied teams is reduced this rule is reapplied, starting with (i), to the reduced number of teams;
 - c. Olympiad-Sonneborn-Berger (the sum of game points scored against each opposition team multiplied by the total match points scored by that team, excluding the results against the two lowest scoring opponents in a Swiss division and counting all results in round robin divisions);
 - d. (i) for positions that affect promotion and/or relegation, drawing of lots;
(ii) for all other positions (including the Division 1 Champion), they shall remain tied.

Tie breaks shall be applied in this order until all ties are broken.

- 13.2 The following number of teams will be promoted and relegated from each division:

- Division 1 – 3 relegated
- Division 2 – 3 promoted, 4 relegated
- Division 3 (in each pool) – 2 promoted, 2 relegated
- Division 4 – 4 promoted

The allocation of teams between the two Division 3 pools will be at the discretion of the Management Board. Arrangements for Divisions 3 and 4 for the following season may be subject to review later in the season should venue constraints require it.

- 13.3 In the event that existing teams decide not to renew their entries or teams finishing in a promotion spot in the previous season opt to decline promotion, teams in the relevant division that would otherwise have been relegated at the end of the season will not be relegated (starting with the relegated team finishing in the highest position, and so on down the relegated teams). In the event that the number of teams not renewing their entries exceeds the number of relegated teams, extra teams will be promoted from the lower division after applying the provisions in the first section of this rule, and so on down the divisions as necessary. If any teams relegated from the two Division 3 pools are not to be relegated, then the two eleventh placed teams will be ranked by rating performance, followed by the two twelfth placed teams.
- 13.4 If an extra team is needed to be promoted to Division 2, the teams which are in third place in each of the Division 3 pools are to be ranked by rating performance. If extra teams are still needed, this process will apply to the teams which are in fourth place in each of the Division 3 pools, and so on.
- 13.5 In Divisions 1, 2 and the two Division 3 pools no more than one team from any squad will be permitted to play in the same division. Where this situation is caused by a team finishing in a promotion place, the next eligible team will be promoted instead. Where this situation is caused by a team being relegated into a lower division, the necessary number of teams from that squad will be relegated from that division and the highest placed team that would otherwise have been relegated will escape relegation. The top placed eligible teams will be offered promotion as required to ensure that the complement of twelve teams in Divisions 1, 2 and each pool of Division 3 is maintained.

14 Chief Arbiter and management

- 14.1 The Chief Arbiter, Deputy Chief Arbiter and the Sector Arbiter at the relevant venue shall be empowered to administer the rules of the League.
- 14.2 The Management Board may apply penalties as it sees fit for any flagrant or premeditated breaches of the spirit as well as the letter of the rules.
- 14.3 All fines and fees due by a team must be paid within 28 days of the weekend in which they are incurred, or not later than the registration deadline for the following weekend if that is earlier. This period may be extended on a case by case basis at the discretion of the Chief Arbiter and/or the Management Board (e.g. where an appeal has been made, or the sum currently owed by a team is negligible). Teams failing to pay any fines or additional payments by the due date will (a) be excluded from the pairings for that following weekend; (b) be deemed to have defaulted on that weekend; and (c) incur the resulting match default fines. Failure to pay any fines or fees due will also result in the exclusion of teams from future weekends until they are paid.

- 14.4 The Chairman of the 4NCL shall arrange meetings for captains and managers, as and when required, at which matters of current interest and future policy shall be discussed.
- 14.5 The Management Board shall announce the arrangements for the following season including the entry fees, the official closing dates for the receipt of entries and registration lists and the name and contact details of the Chief Arbiter.
- 14.6 In all cases the decisions of the Management Board shall be final.

15 Appeals

- 15.1
 - a. In matters relating to play, an initial decision made by an Arbiter may be appealed to the Sector Arbiter during, or within one hour of the conclusion of, the round in question.
 - b. Appeals against the Sector Arbiter's decision in 15.1a may be made by the team captain in writing to the Chief Arbiter (or a Deputy Chief Arbiter if the Sector Arbiter was the Chief Arbiter) within three days of the weekend in question, provided the decision is subject to appeal under the 4NCL rules.
- 15.2 For administrative matters (e.g. a default fine), a team captain may appeal to the Management Board in writing within three days of the decision in question being communicated to team captains.
- 15.3 After the decision in 15.1 or 15.2 is made, the team captain may appeal further to an Appeals Committee (AC), providing that: a) the further appeal is received in writing by the Chief Arbiter; b) the appeal is accompanied with a £50 deposit; and c) both the appeal and the deposit are received within seven days of the original appeal decision.
- 15.4 The AC will consist of one arbiter (independent of the original decision and first appeal), and two independent players chosen from a panel by the Management Board. In the event that there are not enough panel members available to form a committee at a given point, the Management Board will appoint new permanent or temporary members to the panel to hear the appeal.
- 15.5 The decision of the AC will be final. If the appeal is upheld the £50 deposit will be refunded. If the appeal is rejected the AC may decide to reimburse the deposit at its discretion.
- 15.6 Any appeal deadlines may be extended by the Chief Arbiter on a case by case basis.

16 Miscellaneous provisions

- 16.1 Food and drink may not be consumed within the hotel buildings or the hotel car park unless it has been purchased from or supplied by the hotel, or is being consumed in the guest's bedroom. This applies both to players and any accompanying persons.
- 16.2 If a player wishes to eat during their game, they should do so away from any board or outside the playing area.
- 16.3 The 4NCL accepts no responsibility for loss or damage to personal property. Players are requested to take sensible precautions to avoid losing personal items or leaving them behind at the conclusion of each weekend. If necessary contact should be made with the hotel in the first instance.
- 16.4 4NCL Ltd do not accept responsibility for the content of other websites to which the site links.
- 16.5 In addition to the information referred to in rule 3.6 the website will include names, telephone numbers, and email addresses of 4NCL Officials and Arbiters, and team captains and managers.