



National League Capping of grades and challenge system Guidelines

Updated September 2019

Primary Principles

1. To limit the number of teams in any given grade to stop grades getting too large
2. To improve the competitiveness within grades (less disparity between top and bottom teams)
3. To reduce the skill gap between grades to subsequently improve the ability for teams to progress up and retreat down the grades

Secondary Principles

1. To have competitive teams from all regions in all grades

Number of teams per grade

Open - 12

Women - 8

Initial rankings

- Direct results from the previous season
- All team rankings are retained by the club the team was associated through

Who can challenge

- New teams shall enter the grade they wish to play in, this will be reviewed by the Competition Council and team entries may be accepted, moved to a different grade or rejected at the Competition Council's discretion.
- The top 2 teams from the grade below may challenge for a place in the grade above

Challenge Exemptions

- Any NZ or overseas national team wishing to play National League will, with Board approval be given a spot in the appropriate grade over and above to the number of capped teams.

Challenge spots

- The bottom 2 spots in a grade will be open to be challenged (ie places 11 and 12 for open grade, 7 & 8 for women's).
- All teams returning from the previous year who are ranked above the bottom 2 spots should automatically qualify for the grade (E.g. 1-10 in open, 1-6 in women's). It is expected that if a team is significantly weakened between seasons that the club will to the best of their judgement enter each team into the grade they are most suited to.
- If a team who had automatically qualified pulls out then all the teams ranked lower than them move up one ranking. In this scenario the number of challenge spots increases by 1. (E.g. for women's grade, places 7 & 8 are challenge spots but team 4 pulls out, now places 6, 7 and 8 are all challenge spots).
- If the number of challengers is less than the number of defenders then the number of defenders will be reduced (starting with the highest ranked) until the numbers are equal.

Challenge system

- Once entries have been received and reviewed all challenging teams will be notified
- All teams involved in the challenge process must supply team lists prior to any challenges taking place. Team lists once supplied will be subject to the same rules as all National League team lists as per the Format and Guidelines documents.
- A challenge “draw” will be put together.
- Once the challenge “draw” is known teams are encouraged to contact one another and organise their own challenge matches as soon as possible.
 - Both teams must agree on the time, location, format of the challenge and referees.
 - The format could be a one off match or a best of 3 series or something different, this is up to the 2 teams to agree on, however, there must be a clear winner at the end.
 - The competitions director must be informed of and approve the challenge prior to the challenge (including all information noted above).
 - The competitions director must also be informed of the outcome (confirmed by both parties).
- If teams are unable to agree to a format, or organise their own challenge to be completed prior to the challenge tournament, all remaining challenges will take place at the challenge tournament
 - Any remaining challenge teams from all grades are required to attend Atahua 2020
 - Challenge matches held at the challenge tournament will be determined by the winner of a 1 off head to head game.
- The bottom 2 ranked teams from the previous season will effectively become the “defenders” of the challenge spots and will only be expected to play 1 match to defend their spot
- In a scenario where there are the same number of challengers as defenders then it will be direct head to head matches to see who qualifies for the grade. In this case the top ranked defender will get to choose their opponent from the challengers, then the next ranked defender will choose their challenger and so on.
 - E.g. 2 defenders and 2 challengers, the highest ranked defender chooses who they wish to play in the challenge match, the lower ranked defender gets to play whichever challenger is left. The winner of each match qualify for the grade, the losers drop to the grade below.
- In a scenario where there are more challengers than defenders then the challengers will need to complete a playoff process and the best challengers will win the right to play the defenders for spots in the grade.
 - E.g. if there are 4 challengers and 2 defenders then the 4 challengers will need to do a round of knockout until there are only 2 challengers and then those 2 challengers will play the defenders to see who qualifies for the grade. The highest ranked defender will get to choose which of the challengers they play and the other defender will get whoever is left. All losers will drop down into the grade below.
- Challenge matches are to be refereed in accordance with the National League Format and Guidelines documents (ie. at least one Regionally qualified referee for all A grade matches, at least one District qualified referee for all B, C and D grade matches).
- Any player who takes part in a challenge team must play at least one other National League round for the team they challenged with in the same season.

Spirit of the Rules Intent

The capping and challenge system must be undertaken within the spirit of the rules intent. The spirit of the rules intent being that the best 8 or 12 teams qualify for A grade then the next best 8 or 12 teams for B grade and so on.

E.g. we don't want clubs to move their "stronger" players into a challenging team in the hope of keeping an extra team in a particular grade leaving their "weaker" players in a higher ranked team which has automatic qualification.

Any perceived attempts to violate the spirit of the rules intent will be dealt with at the discretion of the Competition Council.