

NPL Season 1 Rules

The *NATIONAL PICKLEBALL LEAGUE* is the premier professional pickleball league in Australia. Comprising of the best 108 players in the country across 18 teams in 3 states. Teams face off across 5 rounds of competition in their state conference. The top 8 teams across the country will then fight it out for the glory of becoming the National Pickleball League Champions.

Welcome to Australia's first professional teams league.

The Competition

The competition, a national team-based singles & doubles pickleball tournament, shall be called the "National Pickleball League".

Purpose and applicability

National Pickleball League Holdings Pty Ltd (NPL) circulates these Rules for the purpose of providing fair and reasonable rules for the orderly and uniform conduct of The National Pickleball League Season 1.

These rules must be read and applied in conjunction with the Global Pickleball Federation 2024 Official Rulebook (GPFOR) as well as any relevant National Pickleball League (NPL Policy) or Pickleball Australia Policy (PAA Policy).

When a rule of the GPFOR, PAA Policy or NPL Policy is inconsistent with a rule of the NPL Season 1 Rules, the latter shall prevail, and the former shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be invalid.

Any ambiguity or uncertainty in connection with these rules & policies shall be resolved at the sole discretion of the NPL, acting reasonably and in the interest of the competition. NPL reserves the rights to interpret these regulations, when necessary, in order to resolve particular or unusual circumstances. In addition, it may be necessary to determine the most appropriate procedures to be utilised in special or unusual circumstances.

These regulations take effect from March 15, 2024, and may be varied from time to time by NPL. Any new or revised policy, rule, procedure, or regulation will be published on the NPL website (www.nplpickleball.com.au) and/or notified to (a) tournament organisers and officials by email, and (b) Players as part of the tournament information provided.

All persons participating in any way in NPL Season 1 (including players, officials, staff, coaches, representatives, agents, medical staff, relatives and associates of a player, a player's entourage and spectators) must refrain from making comments, including to representatives of the media or through social media, that attack, disparage or criticise players, organisers, officials or staff of the NPL. Any failure or refusal to do so may be treated as a disciplinary matter, the NPL reserves the right to terminate any and all relationships with the player.

Rule Interpretations and Disputes

The chain of command for decisions and escalation is:

1. Referee
2. Head Referee
3. Tournament Director
4. League Director (acting as authority for the NPL)

At each venue the referees are responsible for managing the application of these rules.

The tournament director and league director will provide clarification as to the application of these rules and reserve the right to overrule these decisions for benefit of the competition.

Where instances arise that lead to dispute, or a question that is not adequately covered players may escalate using the defined chain of command.

The League Director will act to uphold the intent of the rules and make judgement that best preserves the integrity of the sport, and the competition.

Decisions made by the League Director will be binding.

Prize Money

Distribution based on final finishing place.

\$100,000 Pool

1. \$50,000
2. \$20,000
3. \$10,000
4. \$5,000
5. \$4,500
6. \$4,000
7. \$3,500
8. \$3,000

League Composition

18 Teams

- 6 in NSW
- 6 in QLD
- 6 in VIC

108 Players

- 36 Captains
- 36 Vice Captains

Team Composition

Each Team

- 6 Players
 - 3 Male
 - 3 Female

Format

A 5 round season will culminate in the finals weekend. All 5 rounds will be played within a team's home state. The rounds will be scheduled to be played over 3 months. The finals will be held over 2 days as the state champions fight it out for the ultimate glory.

Rounds

- 5 Rounds
- Played within state your team represents.

- 1 day commitment for 6 hours (Saturday)
- 2 matches played each round
- Play all teams in your bracket twice

Scoring

- All Sets are win by 2
- Sets 1-4 (all excluding Dill Breaker) are Traditional Scoring
- Set 5 (DillBreaker) is Rally Scoring

Ladder

- Win = 2 points
 - This is either 4-0, 3-1 or 3-2 (DillBreaker)
- Bonus point for 4-0 sweep
- Ladder based on
 - NPL Points
 - Sets For/Sets Against
 - Points For/Points Against

Finals

- Top 2 teams from each pool qualify.
- Third place teams qualify for the playoffs.
- 8 teams play in finals
- One weekend
- Friday Night
 - Finals playoffs
- Saturday
 - Qualifying
 - Elimination
 - Semi Finals
- Sunday
 - Preliminary
 - Grand final

Playoffs

The 3 third placed teams from each state play off in a round robin format.

- Top 2 progress to finals
- Each team plays each other once

Finals format

Seeding determined by:

- Top 3 are reserved for top position in each state
- Positions 4-6 are reserved for second position in each state
- Positions 7-8 reserved for outcome of playoffs

Qualifying finals

- QF 1 - 1 v 4
- QF 2 - 2 v 3

Elimination finals

- EF 1 - 5 v 8
- EF 2 - 6 v 7

Semi Finals

- SF 1 - Loser of QF1 v Winner of EF1
- SF 2 – Loser of QF2 v Winner of EF2

Preliminary Finals

- Winner of QF1 v Winner of SF2
- Winner of QF2 v Winner of SF1

Grand Final

- Winner of SF1 v Winner of SF2

Match Format

NPLLeague is NPL's trademarked teams format. This showcases the best players in Australia across all of pickleball's formats - Singles, Doubles & Mixed.

Each match consists of a minimum of 4 sets & 1 DillBreaker as required

- 1st Set = Female Singles
 - Best of 3 games
 - 3 separate singles games played by 3 individual players
 - Teams will nominate Player #1, Player #2 and Player #3
 - Game 3 only played as required
 - First to 11, traditional scoring, win by 2
 - Best of 3 game winner wins the set
 - Change ends at 6 each game
- 2nd Set = Mixed Doubles
 - First to 22, win by 2, traditional scoring
 - 2 pairs per team
 - Pair 1 - first to 11
 - Pair 2 - continue to 22
 - Pair 2 will sub in once either team reaches 11
 - Change ends at 6 and 17 when the first team reaches this score.
- 3rd Set = Male Singles
 - Same format as Female singles
- 4th Set = Gender Doubles
 - Same format as Mixed Doubles
 - However, it is gendered, i.e.:
 - Pair 1 womens doubles
 - Pair 2 mens doubles
- DillBreaker (as required)
 - First to 21 (as Team), Rally Scoring, Win by 2
 - Pairs swap after 5 points

- Womens Doubles #1
- Mens Doubles #1
- Womens Doubles #2
- Mens Doubles #2
- Womens Singles #1
- Mens Singles #1
- Womens Singles #2
- Mens Singles #2
- Womens Singles #3
- Mens Singles #3
- Mixed #1
- Mixed #2
- Mixed #3
- Repeat
- There is no 'Freeze'
- Change ends at 6, 11, 17 etc. when the first team reaches this score.
- The order of each set and match is set. i.e. it will not change between matches, rounds or for finals.

Rally Scoring

- Players do not switch sides after winning points.
- Player A for each team serves and receives on the right side when the score is even,
- Player B serves and receives on the left side when the score is odd.
- Changing sides
 - A team may choose to switch player sides during a time-out or end change.
 - They must inform the referee.
 - Referees confirm with each team they are happy with playing sides, i.e ready to start after all time outs, end changes etc.
 - What happens with an incorrect player/position error if not detected before the serve occurs:
 - If a player or referee stops a live rally to notate the error, the rally will be replayed.
 - If the rally concludes naturally and then the error is mentioned, the rally will stand. All players played the rally in good faith and played to win. The referee will ensure proper player alignment for the next serve.

Player Swaps - Gendered Doubles & Mixed Doubles

- When the first team reaches 11 points, the players (female partners or mixed pair 1) exit the court. The replacement players (male partners or mixed pair 2) take up the replacement position and the game continues.
- There is no toss at the swap, the game resumes on serve and score as per whomever had the serve the previous point.
- The game is treated as 1 singular game to 22 points, not 2 individual games to 11 points.

Time Allocation & Warm up

- Matches are to start at the stated start time.
- 1 minute warm up will be permitted at the start of each set.

- 1 minute warm up for the second and third singles matches
- No warm up following the 'swap'
 - i.e Mixed pair 2 & Mens Gendered Doubles. The games are to continue immediately.
- There will be a 4 minute break between sets.
- There will be a 1 minute break between games.
- There is only a referee briefing at the start of the match, this is to occur prior to the allocated start time. i.e 9:55am for a 10am game, or 2:25pm for a 2:30pm game.

Change of Ends

- Singles
 - Change when first player reaches 6 points
- Doubles
 - Change when first team reaches 6 points
 - Change when first team reaches 17
 - Change when first team reaches 23
 - Change when first team reaches 29 etc.
- Dillbreaker
 - Change when first team reaches 6 points
 - Change when first team reaches 11
 - Change when first team reaches 17
 - Change when first team reaches 23
 - Change when first team reaches 29 etc.

Schedule

- ROUND 1: SAT MAR 2nd 2024
- ROUND 2: SAT MAR 16th 2024
- ROUND 3: SAT APR 6th 2024
- ROUND 4: SAT APR 27th 2024
- ROUND 5: SAT MAY 11th 2024
- FINALS: FRI MAY 31ST/SAT JUNE 1st/SUN JUNE 2nd 2024

Indicative Weekly Schedule

- Morning Events
 - 7am - Venue Opens for Practice
 - 10am - Match #1 Begins
 - 12pm - Lunch (lunch break minimum of 30 minutes)
 - 1pm - Match #2 Begins
 - 3pm - Matches conclude
 - 4pm - Courts open to public
- Twilight Events
 - 1pm - Venue Opens for Practice
 - 3pm - Match #1 Begins
 - 5pm - Dinner (Dinner break of minimum 30 minutes)
 - 6pm - Match #2 Begins
 - 8pm - Matches conclude
 - 9pm - Courts open to public

DUPR

All matches will be entered into DUPR.

- Games to 22
 - Womens doubles and mixed pair 1 will have the score entered as the team reaches 11.
 - Mens doubles and mixed pair 2 will have the score entered (having removed the score from the first game).
- Dill breaker
 - Score will not be entered into DUPR

Player Order

- Each captain will nominate their playing order for each of the rounds matches by 2pm the Tuesday before the round.
- This order can change for each match and each round.
 - i.e. a captain can nominate a different order for match 1 and match 2 in a given round.
- Following the 2pm deadline, captains can adjust their order twice per round. The opposition captain will have the ability to adjust based on these changes. This adjustment will not count as one of the 2 changes for that captain.
- Adjustments to playing orders are designed to enable a shift of introducing player 3 into doubles or mixed in the event of fatigue or strategy.
- Injury adjustments will not count towards the 2 changes, but injuries will preclude the player from participating in remaining matches for the round.

Player order changes on game day

- To submit a game day player order change, this must be done so in writing using the player order change form.
- Submission must be made to the Tournament Director in person from the captain.
- The tournament director will alert the impacted team of the change who will have 3 minutes to decide of any changes in response.
- The purpose of the changes is not to gain a strategical advantage, such as switching your #1 singles player to play against the #2 singles player. Whilst this is permitted, opposing teams can simply respond.
- The purpose of a change is if you would like to have a different player involved earlier in the singles, or included in the mixed or gendered doubles.

DillBreaker line ups

- DillBreaker line ups will be nominated at the time of the DillBreaker, these line ups are blind (i.e. submitted without knowledge of the other team).
- Line-ups cannot be changed once submitted.
- Teams will have 3 minutes following the completion of the gendered doubles to submit their DillBreaker line up.
- The DillBreaker line-up has no impact on future DillBreaker or the line-up for the remaining games.

Injuries

- Injuries are inevitable. In the event of injury, resulting in the inability to continue participating. Teams will be able to draft a player for the remainder of the round.
- The league will make best efforts to ensure to there are a minimum of 2 Male and 2 Female players available at each venue.
- The team is able to use this player as if they were an original member of the team. i.e. they are not restricted in which sets they play or the order of which they are included.
- In the event of multiple injuries, the team suffering the first injury as per decision by the Tournament Director in conjunction with the referees will select the player first.

- If no reserve player is available, following 15 minutes after notification to the Tournament Director, the League Director will give a reasonable amount of time for a game day reserve to be located and utilised. However, if a game day reserve is not available, the team whom is missing the player will forfeit the impacted sets.
- The league will make best efforts to have game day reserves available, however this is not guaranteed, thus in the event that a reserve is not available the team that is missing a player will forfeit the impacted sets/games after all reasonable efforts to replace a player are made.

Lunch/Dinner Break

- The minimum break will be 30 minutes. In the event that a match exceeds the allocated 2 hours and beyond the 30 minute grace period – match 2 will be delayed to allow the full 30 minute break. All match 2's will be delayed.

Reserve/Alternative List

In the event a player is unavailable, either through legitimate personal schedules or as a result of injury. Then the team will select a player from the reserves list.

Those players not drafted to an NPL S1 team originally are automatically eligible as a reserve/alternate player.

Additional players are eligible to sign up to this list until February 28th. From this date the only available reserves will be those nominated on this list.

The final reserve list has been distributed to all captains.

There are no costs for the players being on a reserve list, but if selected to play they will incur a \$50 registration fee. This will include playing uniform and access to prize money.

Reserve process:

- On the Friday (8 days) prior to each round - Reserve Players will be alerted to the potential opportunity to play and are to re-confirm availability by Sunday 7pm.
- On Monday morning prior to each round - a lottery will be held to determine the "Reserve Order" for each team in each state (if multiple teams require reserves)
- Teams will then select a Reserve from the Reserve List by Monday evening
- Reserve will then be included in the Team Line-up for that week
- Reserves DO NOT then form part of that team, but are returned to the reserve pool for subsequent rounds.
- NOTE: Reserves will be included in prize money distributions based on the relevant teams money contract.

If a player is unavailable for illegitimate reasons, i.e. in the attempt to manipulate an outcome, such as gaining access to a player from the reserve list for a particular round, then the player/team will be in breach of their playing contract.

Minimum Player Game Time

Players are not guaranteed a minimum number of games in the season or week. This is at sole discretion of the captain. This does mean in theory that a team with a strong 4 players, may not require the 3rd male or female players for all matches.

The team must however have player 3 available for each match, they may be needed for singles and would be needed for the DillBreaker if this occurs.

Player withdrawals & absence

General

- Player withdrawals are an inevitable outcome of any competition. Players are governed by individual playing contracts which permit absence as arranged prior for legitimate commitments.
- Complete withdrawals are also unfortunately to be expected, whilst any withdrawal for legitimate reasons will be accepted on a case-by-case basis. Withdrawal for reasons such as playing in alternative events or competitions will be considered in breach of the playing contract, without prior approval.

Team impact

- Any player withdrawal (personal or injury) that renders a player unavailable for the remainder of the competition will allow the team to select a permanent replacement.
- This player will need to be selected from the original draft list as at 31 January 2024.
- Any withdrawal for non-injury related reasons will forfeit all prize money owed & entry fees paid.

Game day absences

- In the event a player from another team fails to show, the team will be able to use the game day reserve, or any other player on the final reserve list.
- If no reserve player is available, following the later of 15 minutes past the allocated start time or a reasonable amount of time by the NPL, the team whom is missing the player will forfeit the impacted sets.

Reserve availability

- The league will make best efforts to have game day reserves available, however this is not guaranteed, thus in the event that a reserve is not available the team that is missing a player will forfeit the impacted sets/games after all reasonable efforts to replace a player are made.

Finals

- Substitutes (absence & injury replacements) can only be used for one of Mixed Pair #1 and Singles #2.
- Substitutes cannot be used in Gendered Doubles, or Mixed pair #2.
 - Example:
 - Substitute would be named in Mixed Pair #1 & Singles #3
 - OR
 - Substitute would be named as Singles #2 only (i.e no doubles)
- Substitutes may be used in the Dillbreaker in:
 - 1 of the Gendered Doubles
 - 1 of the Singles
 - 1 of the Mixed Doubles

- The exception to these restrictions would apply in the unlikely scenario that 2 injuries occur to the one team. In the event this happens, the remaining team member is used first, with replacement players filling the remaining gaps.

Officials

- All matches will have an allocated Referee
- All matches will have an allocated Tournament Director
- The competition also has a League Director
 - This is David Anjou, NPL COO

Time outs

General

- A player/team is entitled to one time-out for each of the singles games and 2 time outs for the doubles and mixed doubles and DillBreaker.
 - In practice this means teams may:
 - Take ONE in the female/mixed pair 1 and ONE in the male/mixed pair 2.
 - Take TWO in the female/mixed pair 1 and ZERO in the male/mixed pair 2.
 - Take ZERO in the female/mixed pair 1 and TWO in the male/mixed pair 2.
- Each time-out period may last up to 1 minute.
- Play may be resumed early if all players are ready.
- If a team has any remaining time-outs, only participating (active players) and the captain may call a timeout.
 - In the event that the captain is on court they may nominate a non-playing player to take on this role. They must alert the referee prior to the game commencing.
- The referee will announce when there are 15 seconds remaining. At the end of the time-out period, the referee shall call “time in” and then call the score when all players are (or should be) ready to play.

Medical

A player needing medical attention during a match should request a medical time-out from the referee. Once the medical time-out has been requested, the following guidelines shall be used:

- The referee shall immediately summon on-site medical personnel, or the Tournament Director if no medical personnel are present, to assess the situation and render appropriate first aid.
- When medical personnel or the Tournament Director arrive, the referee shall start the 15-minute timer.
- The time-out must be continuous and shall not exceed 15 minutes.
- If the player uses fewer than 15 minutes, the remaining time is lost and no additional medical time will be available to the player during the match.
- If the player cannot resume play after the 15-minute medical time-out period, the match will be declared a retirement. The player may use their available regular timeouts after the medical timeout has expired to allow more time before the match must be retired.
- If medical personnel, or the Tournament Director, determine that no valid medical condition exists, the player or team will be charged a standard time-out, if available, and issued a technical warning.
- A player may be granted only one player requested medical time-out per match.
- Presence of blood. If blood is present on a player or on the court, play may not resume until the bleeding has been controlled and blood on clothing and the court has been removed.
- Issues relating solely to blood clean up or control will be considered a referee timeout.

Coaching

- Coaching is permitted from those within the team. i.e the 6 players.
- Coaching may only occur when the ball is ‘dead’, i.e. not mid point.

- Nonplaying players (including the Captain) are not permitted on the court, for conversations with the teams, these must occur on the bench/off the court.

Weather Policy

- The league may shift the start times to accommodate any adverse weather impacted events. This may involve moving the start times later or earlier.
- Players are advised that matches could start as early as 7:30 am and will be completed no later than 10pm on any given day.
- In the event of adverse weather impacting play, games will be paused until it is safe to resume.
- The Tournament Director will make best efforts to provide clear communication to players as to expected length of delays and if a decision is reached to finish play on a particular day.
- In the event that matches are incomplete, they will be rescheduled per the following order:
 - Inclusion as an extended set of matches in the subsequent round.
 - Inclusion on the Sunday of the following round (if required)
 - Scheduling of an alternative (indoor) venue if required.
 - This will not be done prior to Round 4 or 5.

Extreme Heat Policy

- NPL follows Pickleball Australia's Heat Policy.
 - Rescheduling of games please refer to Weather Policy.

Abuse

- No abuse will be tolerated, for specific details umpires are guided by the Global Pickleball Federation.
- However, for the avoidance of doubt the tournament director reserves the right to forfeit the player and team as required.

Prize Money Allocation

Drafted Players

Prizemoney is to be split between teams as per the team's individual prizemoney contracts. All players are guaranteed a minimum of paid entry fees or 10% of the total prize, whichever is higher. Details are covered in Player Contracts.

Reserves Prize Allocation

Reserve players will be allocated a maximum of 10% of the prize pool achieved by a particular team.

An example formula for calculating prize money is:

- Percentage of total games played multiplied by portion of contract allocated to 'participation'.
 - note this is a minimum of 10% and maximum of 40%.
- Alternative contracts include % of sets won etc. These are covered in specific NPL Team Contracts.

For example:

- Team A plays in 10 home and away matches + 2 finals.
- Team A wins \$10,000
- All matches do not require a tiebreaker.
- All singles ties are resolved with just the first 2 players.
- Each match consists of 12 player contributions (i.e they participated in a set):

- 4 for mixed
- 2 womens
- 2 mens
- 4 gendered
- Players have thus played in 144 sets.
- If a reserve player played in 3 of these, they would be entitled to:
 - $3/144 * 40\% = 0.83\%$
 - \$83
- If a player played in 8 contributions (across 2 weeks)
 - 2.22%
 - \$220

If a team's money contract stipulates 10% + participation, the following would be an example for the number 1 player v number 6.

- Number 1 player plays 3 sets each match. They would play in 36/144 games = 10% + guaranteed 10% = 20% of prize pool.
- Number 6 player plays in 1 set each match they would play in 12/144 games = 3.33% +10% = 13.33% of prize pool.