



2021 NWSL CHALLENGE CUP RULES AND REGULATIONS

All policies and procedures found in the NWSL Competition Manual and NWSL Operations Manual are in effect, except where not applicable or superseded by the 2021 NWSL Challenge Cup Rules. In addition, all medical protocols and guidelines created for the 2021 NWSL season are in effect. The League Office will rule in situations not covered by this document or the aforementioned documents.

I. Group Play and Final

- 1) The 2021 NWSL Challenge Cup will be played in group play comprised of four (4) matches per team, followed by the final.
- 2) All ten teams will be organized into two (2) divisions, an East and West. Each division will include five (5) teams (shown below) in a single table per division, to be ranked by points. In the event two (2) or more teams are even on points, tiebreakers, as described in Section II, will be employed to determine standings.

Divisions

<u>East</u>	<u>West</u>
Louisville	Chicago Red Stars
NC Courage	Houston Dash
Orlando Pride	Kansas City
Sky Blue FC	OL Reign
Washington Spirit	Portland Thorns

- 3) The matches in the group play will be played following the NWSL produced Challenge Cup schedule. Each team will play four (4) matches, according to a League scoring system (three (3) points for a win, one (1) for a draw, zero (0) for a defeat).
- 4) The top team from each division will advance to contest the final.
- 5) In the event a scheduled game is postponed for any reason, the teams, in conjunction with the NWSL, will make their best efforts to find an alternate date to play the match. In the event, it proves impossible to reschedule the match, no points will be awarded for match that was unable to be played. However, if the match was postponed and then cancelled due to gross negligence by a participating team, then the game will be forfeited, and the opponent will receive the points.
 - A. If a match is cancelled, scoring in that division will transition to average points per match.
 - B. A team must play at least two (2) matches to be eligible to advance to the final.

II. Equal Points and Qualification for Final



Effective Date: February 26, 2021

- 1) If two (2) or more teams are equal on points after the completion of the Group play, the following criteria, in the order below, shall be applied to determine the preliminary round ranking:

- A) Superior goal difference in all group play matches;
- B) Greatest number of goals scored in all group play matches;
- C) Lowest team conduct score relating to the number of yellow and red cards obtained:

yellow card:	1 point
indirect red card (as a result of two (2) yellow cards):	3 points
direct red card:	4 points
yellow card and direct red card:	5 points

Only one of the above point totals shall be applied to a player in a single match.

- D) Drawing of lots by NWSL.

- 2) The top two (2) teams, as determined by the process outlined in this Section II, will advance to the final.

III. Yellow and Red Cards

- 1) If a player receives two cautions during two (2) different matches, she will automatically be suspended from her team's subsequent match, unless the second yellow card is accumulated in the final match of group play.
- 2) If a player is sent off as a result of a direct or indirect red card, she will automatically be suspended from her team's subsequent match in the tournament including the Final. Further sanctions may be imposed in the case of a direct red card.
- 3) Any direct red card suspension that cannot be served during the 2021 NWSL Challenge Cup will be carried over to the team's next NWSL Regular Season match. Indirect red card suspensions will not carry over to the team's next NWSL Regular Season match.

IV. Extra Time and Kicks from the Penalty Mark

- 1) There will be no extra time in any match played in the 2021 NWSL Challenge Cup.
- 2) In the final, if the match is tied at the end of normal playing time, kicks from the penalty mark shall be taken to determine the winner, in accordance with the procedure specified in the Laws of the Game.
- 3) There will be a five (5) minute break between the end of normal playing time and the start of penalty kicks. The players shall remain on the pitch during this interval.

V. Substitutions



Effective Date: February 26, 2021

- 1) Teams are permitted five (5) substitutions during each match to be used in accordance with IFAB Laws of the Game temporary addendum to Law 3 (shown on pg. 6).
- 2) The NWSL will test a new International Football Association Board rule that will allow two “concussion substitutes” per team, per game following the IFAB Protocol B guidelines (shown on pg. 8).
 - A) A “concussion substitution” may be used regardless of the number of substitutes already used. When a “concussion substitute” is used, the opposing team then has the option to use an “additional” substitute for any reason. A “concussion substitution” may be made:
 - Immediately after a concussion occurs or is suspected;
 - After an on-field assessment, and/or after an off-field assessment; or
 - At any other time when a concussion occurs or is suspected (including when a player has previously been assessed and has returned to the field of play).
- 3) In the final if the match is level at the end of normal playing, teams may not make substitutions after the end of normal playing time, except in the case of a goalkeeper who is unable to continue before or during the kicks, in accordance with the procedure specified in the Laws of the Game.

VI. Game Day Roster

1. Teams must have a minimum of eighteen (18) on its matchday roster. Teams will be permitted to have a maximum of twenty (20) players on their matchday roster. The NWSL will consider exceptions to this requirement in cases where a player is injured or otherwise becomes unavailable within forty-eight (48) hours of a schedule match.
2. Only players listed on the match day roster may dress for each match.

VII. Technical Area

1. Only the nine (9) named substitutes may sit on the bench. A maximum of seven (7) nonplaying personnel are allowed on each team bench. These persons can either be Coaches or medical staff. The Home Team is required to have a Team physician on its bench at every Game and, therefore will be allowed seventeen (17) total individuals on its bench. If the Visiting Team does not bring its physician, the maximum number of bench personnel will be sixteen (16) total individuals. Team owners, general managers, and other executives are not permitted to sit on the bench unless they are an active roster Player or recognized team Coach.

VIII. Trophy and Player Medals

- 1) Medals will be presented to each of the top two (2) teams in the final competition. All players on the teams’ final roster are eligible to receive a medal, as are all members of the technical staff (maximum 35 medals per team).
- 2) The winner of the final will receive the 2021 NWSL Challenge Cup Trophy. The trophy will be presented by the NWSL Commissioner to the team captain and team owner of the winner of the final.
- 3) At the conclusion of the 2021 NWSL Challenge Cup, the NWSL will also select a Most Valuable Player of the tournament.



To all national football associations,
and confederations

Circular no. 21

- 1. Temporary amendment to Law 3
- extension**

- 2. Additional permanent
“concussion substitutes”
- trial**

Zurich, 18 December 2020
SEC/2020-C359/bru

Dear Sir or Madam,

At The IFAB Annual Business Meeting held remotely on 16 December, The IFAB Board of Directors (BoD) made decisions in relation to the **temporary amendment to Law 3 – The Players and trials of additional permanent “concussion substitutes” in the event of actual or suspected concussion.**

Confederations and national associations are kindly asked to take note of these decisions (as outlined below) and to pass the information on to the relevant competition organisers.

1. Law 3 – The Players: extension of temporary amendment

As outlined in circular no 19 (8 May 2020) and 20 (15 July 2020), the main reason for the introduction and extension of the temporary amendment (giving top competitions the option of allowing teams to use up to five substitutes) was the impact of COVID-19 on football. The IFAB's ongoing review, which has included stakeholder feedback and an analysis of the impact of the global pandemic on competition calendars, has shown that the reasons for the temporary amendment remain valid and, as a result, the BoD has **extended this temporary amendment to domestic and international club competitions scheduled to be completed by 31 December 2021 and national-team competitions scheduled to be completed by 31 July 2022.**

2. Law 3 – The Players: trials of additional permanent “concussion substitutes”

Following extensive consultation related to finding ways to improve the in-game management of possible neurological head injuries in football matches, the BoD has taken careful note of the recommendations from meetings of both The IFAB Football and Technical Advisory Panels and the Concussion Expert Group (which consists of medical concussion experts, team doctors, players/coaches, and refereeing and legal/Laws of the Game experts).

Based on these recommendations, the BoD strongly agrees that, where there is any suspicion about a player having been concussed, the player should be protected by being “permanently” removed from the match and to facilitate this, the player's team should not suffer a numerical disadvantage as a result of prioritising the player's welfare.

Law 3 – The Players: number of substitutions

Current wording:

2. Number of substitutions

Official competitions

The number of substitutes, up to a maximum of five, which may be used in any match played in an official competition will be determined by FIFA, the confederation or the national football association except for men's and women's competitions involving the 1st teams of clubs in the top division or senior 'A' international teams, where the maximum is three substitutes.

Temporary amendment:

Competition organisers have the option of applying either or both of the following:

- *During the match, each team:*
 - *may use a maximum of five substitutes*
 - *has a maximum of three substitution opportunities**
 - *may additionally make substitutions at half-time*
- *Where extra time is played, each team:*
 - *may use an additional substitute (whether or not the team has used its maximum number of substitutes)*
 - *has one additional substitution opportunity* (whether or not the team has used its maximum number of substitution opportunities)*
 - *may additionally make substitutions:*
 - *in the period before the start of extra time*
 - *at half-time in extra time*

If a team has not used its maximum number of substitutes or substitution opportunities, the unused substitutions and opportunities may be used in extra time.

**Where both teams make a substitution at the same time, this will count as a used substitution opportunity for each team.*

Consequently, the BoD has approved two trials with “concussion substitutes” because such an approach:

- prevents a player sustaining another concussion in the match – multiple concussions during the same game could eventually be fatal (“second-impact syndrome”);
- sends a strong message – “if in doubt, sit them out” – that maximises player welfare;
- allows the player to be replaced, so there is no numerical/tactical disadvantage when prioritising player welfare;
- reduces pressure on medical personnel to make a quick decision;
- is simple to operate and applicable at all levels of the game, including lower down the football pyramid, where there are usually no doctors or medically qualified staff; and
- is consistent with recommendations given by expert panels (e.g. the Concussion in Sport Group).

Use of a “concussion substitute” would operate in conjunction with other protocols, including delaying the restart of play for up to three minutes for an on-field assessment by the team's medical personnel (if present/available). In addition, while this is beyond the scope of the Laws of the Game, the implementation of return-to-training and return-to-play protocols for after the match is encouraged.

Participation in trials

Both trials will be open to all interested competitions at any level; confederations and national FAs (on behalf of the competitions under their auspices) must apply to The IFAB and FIFA for permission to take part in either trial, which will only be given to competitions using the official protocols and agreeing to submit requested feedback.

Trial protocols

An outline of the two protocols is given below. Those wishing to take part in the trials can request further information, including the detailed protocols and feedback requirements. For the purpose of the trials with additional permanent “concussion substitutes”, the following protocols must be used in their entirety. No variations are allowed except as outlined in these protocols.

Protocol B

Principles

- Each team is permitted to use a maximum of two “concussion substitutes” in a match.
- A “concussion substitution” may be made regardless of the number of substitutes already used.
- In competitions in which the number of named substitutes is the same as the maximum number of substitutes that can be used, the “concussion substitute” can be a player who has previously been substituted.
- When a “concussion substitute” is used, the opposing team then has the option of using an “additional” substitute for any reason.

Procedure

- The substitution procedure operates in accordance with Law 3 – The Players (*except as outlined otherwise below*).
- A “concussion substitution” may be made:
 - immediately after a concussion occurs or is suspected;
 - after an initial three-minute on-field assessment, and/or after an off-field assessment; or
 - at any other time when a concussion occurs or is suspected (including when a player has previously been assessed and has returned to the field of play).
- If a team decides to make a “concussion substitution”, the referee/fourth official is informed, ideally by using a substitution card/form of a different colour.
- The injured player is not permitted to take any further part in the match (including kicks from the penalty mark) and should, where possible, be accompanied to the changing room and/or a medical facility.
- The opposing team is informed by the referee/fourth official that it now has the option of using an “additional” substitute.
- This option may be used concurrently with the “concussion substitution” made by the opposing team or at any time thereafter (*except as outlined otherwise by the Laws of the Game*).

Substitution opportunities

- Making a “concussion substitution” is separate from any limit on the number of “normal” substitution opportunities.
- However, if a team makes a “normal” substitution at the same time as a “concussion substitution”, this will count as one of its “normal” substitution opportunities.

