

## USA Club Rugby Match Commissioner Guidelines

### Section 1. Responsibilities

1. Represent the competition organizer (and/or USA Rugby) at appointed tournaments, which are sanctioned by USA Rugby and the event organizer.
2. Assist the event organizer (typically the tournament director or a USA Rugby Event Manager) with the team check-in process and Coaches and Captain's meeting.
3. Ensure USA Rugby Eligibility Regulations and Disciplinary Regulations are observed and adhered to throughout the Tournament.
  - a. Eligibility and Disciplinary Regulations can be found at [www.usarugby.org](http://www.usarugby.org).  
conflict of interest
4. Consider and take action, as appropriate, if any circumstance arise which call for decisions to be made on behalf of the competition organizer or USA Rugby. **The Match Commissioner has the final determination in all questions of competition, eligibility and disciplinary issues that arise at the tournament.**
  - a. In the case that the issue requires further discussion, the Match Commissioner will convene with a three-person panel including the Match Commissioner, the tournament director (or USA Rugby Event Manager), and head match official (or USA Rugby Event Referee Manager). Together a decision will be made that will stand for the duration of the tournament. All appeals must happen once the tournament has ended. Information pertaining to the issue must be collected by the Match Commissioner and presented to the respective USA Rugby committee no later than 24 hours post tournament. Full committee information can be found at [www.usarugby.org](http://www.usarugby.org).
5. Primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the players, officials, and spectators – including playing conditions that may cause a danger to players or spectators (even if any action means abandoning the matches). While the final determination will be the responsibility of the Match Commissioner and Referee, consultation with the event organizer/tournament director (or USA Rugby Event Manager) is recommended.
  - a. Please see the USA Rugby Severe Weather Policy available at [www.usarugby.org](http://www.usarugby.org).
  - b. Make sure host has secured proper medical personnel such as trainers, ambulance, and doctors for all matches.
  - c. Make sure host has an emergency action plan for weather and injuries.
6. For a championship game (1<sup>st</sup> place matches only) choose a panel of 3 people to select the MVP (include national team coaches if any are on-site).
7. Work with the event organizer (or Host Committee Event Manager) and the competition organizer (or USA Rugby) to arrange the award's ceremony and present the awards.
8. Ensure that all paperwork has been completed and returned to the competition organizer (or USA Rugby), including final scores, check-in paperwork, and competition-specific reports.

## Section 2. Before the event

1. **Familiarize yourself with [playerwelfare.worldrugby.org](http://playerwelfare.worldrugby.org).** As Match Commissioner, you are responsible for the welfare of all participants on the match weekend. You have a responsibility to work with the event organizer to make sure that players are put first in all situations.
2. **Read this guide and communicate with the event organizer.** If you know you're the Match Commissioner, then the communication has already begun. Ideally, you should read this guide and make sure that the event organizer is working hard to put on a properly-administered event for participants, officials, and fans. It is helpful to clarify roles and responsibilities for the weekend, and you'll also want to ask about any venue-related items you should be aware of in advance of your arrival.
3. **Ensure there is appropriate pre-event communication of information, policies, and procedures.** Your time spent as Match Commissioner will be more enjoyable if the event is well-organized. In advance of the event, work with the event organizer to make sure all involved parties can readily access information surrounding the event. This will also be helpful in making certain that teams show up to the event with all proper pre-event paperwork.

The event should have a *tournament information packet* ready well in advance of the event, with all information also online. This packet should include field directions, on-site contacts, check-in directions/times, links to required check-in paperwork, hotels information, training/warm-up information, a schedule of matches, facility information, merchandise information, and general policies/procedures for the event. Ideally, the packet will also either include USA Rugby policies for the event or links to the policies.

*It is heavily recommended that organizers require an online contact/information form.* This helps you and the event organizer certify that teams have properly received information, as well as provide you the ability to contact them when/if issues arise.

4. **Create a checklist of materials received.** If the event organizer is assisting with check-in, make sure you work with them first. With that said, your ability to check-in teams will be assisted by a checklist of the materials you have received from each team. Prior to check-in, you may receive contact information, team participation agreements, and rosters for the match/weekend. You should not accept participation waivers or event media release agreements in advance of the event.
5. **Advance roster work.** Work with teams' home unions and/or competition organizers to clarify any possible issues related to rosters in advance. Commonly, competition organizers must certify that players are registered to the participating team, submitted their registration by the proper deadline, and are eligible to compete (match minimums, 50% thresholds, etc.). Common issues prior to the National Championship Series (NCS) include players who have a.) not played enough games to be able to make the minimum match requirement prior to the USA Rugby NCS and/or b.) played too many games at a higher level to be allowed to compete at a lower level. If you have any advance questions regarding eligibility, you should contact the chair of the USA Rugby Eligibility Committee or the USA Rugby national office eligibility liaison.

### Section 3. Venue check

1. **Arrival.** Upon arrival at the event, you should check out the venue for any issues in advance of meeting with teams. *If you see an issue, immediately contact the event organizer to work through possible solutions.*
2. **Overall venue issues.** During your pre-event venue check, keep an eye open for any issue that you may believe could affect participants, officials, or fans at the event site. This includes proper parking area(s), safe walking paths, shade/tents/indoor areas for participant and official rest, proper warm-up area(s), water coolers for rehydration, a secure playing enclosure(s), proper bench areas, an area for late check-ins, an administrative area, proper scoreboard(s), and any issue related to field conditions.

*If you see an issue, immediately contact the event organizer to work through possible solutions.*

3. **Field Conditions.** As a match commissioner, one of your primary duties is to ensure the playing enclosure and (and its surface) is safe for players, coaches, and spectators. When in doubt, consult [World Rugby Law 1](#).

Common issues include width and length of the playing area, a proper safety perimeter, use of technical zones, safety of the goalposts, items in the playing area, and/or improperly marked fields.

1. **Field Dimensions and Markings.** The event organizer should have ensured that all playing enclosures meet the minimum and maximum requirements of World Rugby, but it is recommended that you test the size of each field upon arrival to the event. The easiest way to do this is to use a rolling measure stick, or properly measure your pace by walking the 5m and 15m lines until you are confident in your stepping. A quick way to test the maximums/minimums of the field is to measure the distance between the 10m line and the 22m line (which should be no more than 18m and no less than 15m), and the distance between the 15m lines (which should be no more than 40m and no less than 38 meters). Notably, World Rugby allows dispensation in advance of events to minimums no lower than 10% of the noted maximums. In other words, if the event organizer had no alternatives and the field sizes were considered in advance, minimums could go as low as 90m from goalpost-to-goalpost and 63m from touchline-to-touchline. *If you find issue with the dimension of the fields, you must speak with the event organizer immediately and make sure that teams are aware of any/all issues.*

The field should be properly marked in accordance to World Rugby Law 1. If the field is not properly marked, the Match Commissioner may ask the event organizer to mark the field properly (if possible).

The match commissioner has final say on adjusting field sizes and markings (if necessary) and/or deeming a field unplayable.

2. **Safety Perimeter.** Related to field size is the size and property set-up of the safety perimeter around the playing area. The safety perimeter should be 5m from the touch lines and dead-ball lines, and include no hard surfaces (e.g. concrete, wood, etc.) or otherwise dangerous objects. The safety perimeter should be maintained by presence of a monitored rope system, fencing, or other structural assurances. The only people allowed inside the playing enclosure (playing area and safety perimeter) during normal play

should be players, officials, registered coaches (no more than 2, and only in the technical zone), and medics personnel (also no more than 2, though medics/trainers may roam). Photographers/media may additionally be allowed by the event organizer but must wear obvious identification and generally stay out of the path of players. It is recommended that photographers shoot opposite the side of player benches, or stay between the 22 and the back of the deadball safety perimeter if on the side of players.

3. **Technical Zones.** Prior to the event, you should familiarize yourself with the USA Rugby Technical Zone Guidelines and ensure the event organizer provided a copy to each participating team. Ideally, technical zones should be clearly marked in the safety perimeter. If they are not, USA Rugby recommends each field monitor assist teams with staying between the 10m and 22m line (on the side of their bench), while also staying at least 2m back to stay out of the way of assistant referees running the touch line.

Technical zones should only include up to 2 registered coaches and up to 2 medical personnel. *Water carriers should not be in the technical zone during USA Rugby-sanctioned matches, and coaches should not be water carriers unless no other personnel exist.* Generally, USA Rugby recommends no more than 4 water carriers be allowed to enter the playing area at any one time. All water carriers should be clearly identified and in kit contrasting that of the participants on the field. Additionally, water carriers may only enter the field when the referee allows. If match officials, or the head match official, try to disallow water at times it can be reasonably consumed (after scores, for example) – particularly if under heat advisory – the Match Commissioner may direct the head match official to ensure player welfare by the allowance of water on the field.

4. **Goalposts.** Upon arrival at the facility, you should ensure that the goalposts are properly set up in accordance to World Rugby Law 1, and that proper safety padding is on the posts to prevent player injury. Goalposts should be straight and of proper height. If the goalposts at the facility are not straight or not of proper height, you should speak with the event organizer and see if the posts can be corrected. If the posts cannot be corrected and you allow play to happen, ensure that teams are aware of post issues *before* taking the field of play. *Goalposts must always have proper padding when players are on the field.*
5. **Playing surface.** The playing surface should be of appropriate quality and free of all debris. The field should not include any hard surfaces such as pothole covers, construction materials, or dangerously-available sprinkler heads, nor should it include pools of standing water. If standing water exists on the field over the presence of grass, the event organizer should attempt to mitigate the water by pouring sand or other soft materials atop the water until it is no longer standing.

If weather affects the playing surface, it is the duty of the Match Commissioner to ensure that the playing area remains safe for participants to play on, or consider the abandonment and/or rescheduling of matches with the competition organizers.

## Section 4. Check in

1. **Check-in times.** Hopefully, the event organizer has communicated to teams a proper time to check-in prior to their match. If not, or if there is no standard meeting before the event, it is common to require that teams check-in no later than 60 minutes prior to the kickoff of their first match. Check-in typically takes ~15 minutes per team, so teams without a check-in time should request one absolutely no later than 75 minutes before their first match.
2. **Receipt of roster and waivers.** When teams first arrive to check-in, you should receive a roster of players and any standard forms not specifically related to individuals (e.g. you may receive a media release agreement with multiple players' signatures, but not individual waivers of participation). Players should line up in the order that their forms are submitted, and be listed in the same order on all forms. For multi-match weekends with extended rosters, players should usually be lined up alphabetically. For single-match weekends, it's not uncommon for players to line up in the roster order for their match.
3. **Roster scanning.** Before teams line up scroll through their roster and see if there are any obvious issues, or if there are any notations from the competition organizer who may have previously checked their paperwork. Be sure to address these issues *before* you have individual players check in.
4. **Individual check-in.** When players arrive for check-in, they should present proof of identification (government-issued ID) and proof of residency. Additionally, they should turn in their individual participation waiver (properly signed or initialed in all appropriate places) and point out their place on any other required forms (e.g. point to their signature on a media release agreement, if being used). At the end of the event, you will turn in all paperwork to the event organizer. Teams may request their participation waivers be returned but it's recommended that the event organizer hold onto their paperwork for up to 3 years after the event to make sure no liability issues arise. If a team advances beyond the event you're working, you may ask the event organizer to mail their paperwork to the next event organizer.
  - a. **Identification.** Players must present government-issued IDs to verify their identity at the time of check-in. If you do not believe the ID presented meets that standard, you have the authority as Match Commissioner to deny or approve acceptance of the player's/(s') identity. Players should have their ID returned after you've reviewed it. If a player does not have a government-issued photo ID, they should not participate.
  - b. **Proof of Residency/citizenship.** Club rugby matches under the authority of USA Rugby have specific regulations regarding the citizenship/residency of participants. *No club may field more than five non-residents on its match roster.* Residents include U.S. citizens or green card holders. Notably, players must actively hold a green card to count as a resident alien (as opposed to a non-resident); players only in the process of applying for a green card do *not* count as residents. U.S. citizens may verify their citizenship by producing a birth certificate, a passport, or enhanced drivers license (EDL). EDLs are available in Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Vermont, and Washington (state), and function as an alternative to a passport for international travel in states that commonly see residents travel to Canada.

Photo copies of birth certificates or U.S. passports are acceptable, but not of green cards or foreign passports.

*A common misconception is that a military ID is proof of citizenship. Notably, you do not have to be a citizen of the United States to be a member of the U.S. military.*

If a player does not have proof of residency/citizenship, it is your sole authority as Match Commissioner to decide their eligibility to compete as anything other than a non-resident. Typically, Match Commissioners will rule that players without ID count towards a team's 5-player non-resident limit. However, some Match Commissioners have elected to use other tactics to determine a player's citizenship/residency if they believe it necessary in situations without evidence. This is typically not recommended and only applied in extraordinary circumstances.

If a player is a non-resident, the player must have been registered and residing in the United States no later than 11:59 pm Mountain Time on the required registration deadline (April 1 for all competitions except 7s and the WPL). It is not unreasonable to go through a non-resident's passport and verify entry into the United States in accordance to this timeline.

5. **Coaches and Captains Meeting.** If your event has a coaches and captains meeting, it is critical that you touch base with the event organizer to be prepared for any/all information that will be covered. Notably, you should introduce yourself to the teams and review your role and responsibilities for the weekend, *as well as verify that teams know the role(s) and responsibilities of others*. Match Commissioners should typically not involve themselves in duties related to operation of the event, participation in the event, or officiating at the event. If no coaches and captains meeting is held, it's important that you check that all teams have received proper communication of information, policies, and procedures.

If granted the opportunity to communicate in advance of matchday, it is wise to inform teams where you'll be located throughout the weekend and what you'll be wearing. Many Match Commissioners do not like to be confined to one area throughout the weekend, so they typically state where they'll be at certain times, e.g. in the administrative tent 30 minutes before all kickoffs, etc.

## Section 5. Matchday protocols

1. **Dress appropriately.** As the final authority for several important issues that could arise during events, it's important you look the part. You should wear a comfortable, professional top (typically, a polo or dress shirt) and pants that are appropriate to the weather. If it's warm, you may wear single-color shorts. Many Match Commissioners choose to wear something distinctive for easy identification, whether that be an official event/union/competition polo, a specific hat (if sunny/hot and appropriate to the event), etc.
2. **Arrive early.** As Match Commissioner, you'll typically want to arrive no later than 90 minutes before the first match. This allows you the opportunity to do a final walkthrough of the venue, address concerns with the event organizer, and interact with teams regarding questions, challenges, or check-ins.
3. **Do a walkthrough of the venue.** Ideally, you've checked the major items the day/evening before. If not, this is your opportunity to do so. If you didn't walk through the venue the day prior, it's heavily recommended that you show up to the event at least 120 minutes before the first match. This gives the event organizer time to address your issues before teams begin play. If you *did* walk through the venue the day prior, this is your opportunity to ensure the event organizer has addressed (or is addressing) your concerns.

Notably, you'll want to double-check with the event organizer that they will be ready for the matches to be played. This includes having water readily available for officials and players\*, as well as other things such as balls being properly inflated/ready and the coin toss area being clearly identified.

4. **Verify the attendance of medical personnel.** Medical personnel must be present at all times for sanctioned events. USA Rugby National Championship Series (NCS) events require an on-site ambulance at all times, which must arrive at the venue at least one hour prior to the first kickoff and stay until the last match is complete. Ambulances are recommended for all non-NCS events as well.

Trainers should also be on-site at least one hour prior to the first kickoff and stay until the last match is complete. A trainer should be present at each playing field during all active matches, and one or more trainers should also be available in a central and clearly-identified medical personnel area.

5. **Work with the event organizer and the head match official.** The event organizer and the head match official are likely to be key communicators of issues that arise throughout the weekend. Additionally, they may be the body you compile if you wish to address an issue with outside parties for counsel. It is generally recommended that you have a healthy relationship with both of these parties throughout the event to provide a quality event experience for all involved.
6. **Confirm proper match rosters.** Teams should enter their rosters into the USA Rugby Competition Management System (CMS), located at [usarugbystats.com](http://usarugbystats.com), in advance of their match. The roster for their match should then be printed and handed to the match officials and opposition. If this protocol is not followed, as Match Commissioner you will want to check the competition URL provided to you by the competition organizer to ensure that teams have at least entered their roster in the CMS. Any/all changes from a printed form should be noted by the Match Commissioner and checked in the CMS after the match data is entered to ensure accuracy.

7. **Matchday ID check (USA Rugby Trial).** Beginning in 2015, USA Rugby began trialing matchday ID checks of players in their jerseys prior to kickoff. If you elect to do this, you must communicate it to the teams well in advance of the match. In order to do this effectively, you should ask the teams to form a line within 10 minutes of kickoff – while already in kit that they can't remove – and have a photo ID ready. The players then typically hand their IDs to a coach or manager for the duration of the match and receive their IDs back post-match. This trial procedure is to ensure that no team improperly misrepresents who it is putting on the playing field for any given match.



## Section 6. Common (Additional) Issues

1. **Severe Weather (Lightning and Thunderstorms).** The USA Rugby Severe Weather and Lightning Policy can assist in planning for the assessment of severe weather. It is recommended that you familiarize yourself with this document prior to the event and distribute a copy of the policy to all participating teams.

If you must make a decision related to stopping a match for unplayable conditions, USA Rugby has communicated the following previously:

1. The match should be replayed the next day, either starting from the minute stopped (if played at least 40 minutes) or started over (if not played at least 40 minutes)
  2. If (1.) is not possible, any match played 60 minutes will stand as played
  3. If (1.)/(2.) are not possible, any match played at least 40 minutes will be resumed at a future date from the score/time played
  4. If (1.)/(2.)/(3.) are not possible, any match not played at least 40 minutes will be played at a future date, with the score/time reset
  6. If (1.)/(2.)/(3.)/(4.) are not possible, the result stands as played
2. **Severe Weather (Heat).** World Rugby Law 5.7(i) allows for stoppage during play due to heat and/or humidity. Specifically, the law reads, “When weather conditions are exceptionally hot and/or humid, the referee, at his discretion, will be permitted to allow one water break in each half. This water break should be no longer than one minute. Time lost should be added on at the end of each half. The water break should normally be taken after a score or when the ball is out of play near the half way line.”

The World Rugby Heat Guideline notes that, utilizing the Heat Stress Index, a guide to acceptable temperature/heat levels is:

- a. temperature  $\leq$  30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit)
- b. humidity  $\leq$  60%

Notably, World Rugby also states that, “There is no evidence to suggest training or playing at higher temperature and humidity levels will result in a heat illness.

Generally, as match commissioner, you must use your best judgment to assess the effect of heat on players’ ability to perform. At all times, you should ensure that players are receiving plenty of hydration and have a cool, shaded (or, preferably, indoor) area to rest. If the temperature and humidity is above the noted thresholds, consider your options for alternative match times, arrangements, and/or dates.

Reference: [World Rugby Heat Guideline](#)

3. **Kit Conflict.** For USA Rugby events, most kit conflicts are usually managed in advance of the event by identification of kit information in tournament contact/information form. If no advance information is provided, or the conflict couldn’t be sorted pre-event, the common policy is:
  - a. If the event is seeded, the higher seed is required to change kit.
  - b. If the event is not seeded (e.g. it has rotational match-ups), the team that traveled the least-far is required to change kit.

Practical management of this issue can be sorted by additional factors. If one team doesn’t have a change kit available, it’s reasonable to ask the other team to change and admonish the union/organizer for the team without second kit after the event has concluded. If neither team has

change kit available, ask the referee about his/her ability to manage the conflict. If the event is being broadcast, look at the kits from a distance (30m) to see if you can distinguish sides. If no practical solution is available, the team required to change kit should work with other teams at the event site to borrow appropriate kit.

If the event is being held at a venue related to a team (e.g. a home team hosting in a stadium) with specific contractual requirements, a Match Commissioner may reasonably request that the visiting team be the one to change kit and not the home (least-far-traveled) side. This is at the discretion of the Match Commissioner, however.

4. **Coin Toss.** Teams sometimes miss coin tosses and bring the issue to the Match Commissioner. As such, it's important that you're aware of coin toss policy/location by speaking with the head match official in advance of the event (or first match) so as to mitigate any conflict that arises. Typically, match officials will award a team as the 'winner' of the coin toss if its opponent doesn't show up for the toss. If no coin toss policy is provided, coin tosses also commonly occur at half-time of the match before teams are set to play, or at a designated time (usually 30 minutes) if a match is the first match of the day.
5. **Conflict of Interest.** Match Commissioners should never make decisions that affect a club they are directly affiliated with, or a club uniquely party to their region/union/competition (in contrast to its opposition). To mitigate the appearance of impropriety, it is recommended that the Match Commissioner work with the competition organizer to deputize an outside party in advance of the event to assure no conflicts of interest arise. If a deputy cannot be located, the competition organizer and the Match Commissioner should seek consultation from USA Rugby.