MONTANA

INTERSCHOLASTIC CYCLING LEAGUE

2026 Handbook

RULES & GUIDELINES

EFFECTIVE DATE

The following league standards and guidance materials are derived from terms that previously appeared in the National NICA Rulebook. These materials are made available to NICA leagues who must establish league rules and guidance materials covering the subjects included herein. The Required Standards must be included at a minimum in the guidance leagues provide to their participants. Leagues may modify the discretionary standards to accommodate the size, makeup, and other needs of their student population.

This edition of the NICA Handbook is made ***effective April 1st, 2026*** *(the "effective date"), for the fall season for NICA leagues. All prior rules and regulations are superseded as of the effective date.*

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Questions or comments? Please contact NICA at **handbook@nationalmtb.org**

NICA NATIONAL INTERSCHOLASTIC CYCLING ASSOCIATION

Founded in 2009, the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) provides interscholastic mountain biking programs for student-athletes across the United States. As the national governing body, NICA provides support, resources, and guidance to regional leagues, which operate at the local level.

We are dedicated to fostering a lifelong passion for cycling and building a strong, inclusive community. Welcome to NICA!

OUR MISSION

We build strong minds, bodies, character and communities through cycling

OUR VISION

Every youth is empowered to be part of a thriving and engaged cycling community

OUR VALUES

Fun, inclusivity, equity, respect & community

How to use this handbook

This handbook, which includes the student-athlete code of conduct, the adult code of conduct, and rules set forth by NICA is the foundation for our culture and provides clear guidance for all decision makers and participants. Refined since 2009, the handbook embodies best practices for upholding NICA's core values. Adherence to these standards is crucial for maintaining NICA's risk mitigation model, contributing to its low injury rates, and ensuring its insurability and financial stability. It reflects our commitment to our values, fostering a positive and inclusive NICA culture.

By upholding our standards, we create an environment where all participants can thrive.

NICA Codes of Conduct

Student-Athlete Code of Conduct

As a representative of the community, student-athletes and parents/guardians agree to follow this code of conduct during all NICA activities and while interacting with NICA community members. You also agree to maintain the code of conduct while connecting with other NICA community members through social media and electronic communications. The code of conduct is the starting point, teams are encouraged to create great teammate pledges (social contracts) with their teams to support building strong minds, bodies, character and communities. ***Parents and guardians, please review the following expectations with your NICA student-athletes***

BE SAFE

- Be prepared with safety gear: always wear a helmet when your leg is over the bike
- Only ride a safe and functional mountain bike (use the ABCDE bike check to confirm this before each ride (Air, Brakes, Chain, Derailleur, Everything Else)
- Ride within your ability
- Plan ahead, ride with a friend, and let your family or guardians know where you are going and when you plan to return
- Stay on the trail or in designated activity areas and be aware of hazardous animals and plants
- Obey traffic laws

BE RESPONSIBLE

- Be prepared with the water, food, tools, spare parts, and clothing that you need to complete the ride
- Support your teammates, help them have a safe and successful ride
- Come to practice with a clean and well-maintained bike
- Be accountable for your actions and choices
- Never consume prohibited substances (alcohol, illegal drugs, or performance enhancing substances)
- Ride only on designated legal trails and routes
- Know and follow additional rules that may be associated with your team, school or league

BE RESPECTFUL

- Respect coaches, teammates, competitors, trail users and other community members
  - Be kind and treat everyone with dignity
  - Avoid language and actions that may be perceived as bullying, harassment, or discrimination
  - Be inclusive and welcoming to new athletes, coaches, competitors, and other trail users
  - Sexual harassment by NICA community members is not tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to: offensive or unwelcome sexual flirtations, advances or propositions, verbal abuse of a sexual nature, graphic or degrading comments about an individual and/or their appearance, the display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures, and any offensive or abusive physical contact
  - Seek consent before touching, hugging and otherwise embracing teammates and coaches

- Always treat other trail users with courtesy
  - Slow down when approaching other trail users
  - Provide right of way to pedestrians and equestrians. Stop and ask for passing instructions from equestrians
  - Announce your passing intention, specify the passing side, and seek confirmation from the other trail user
  - Move aside to allow others to pass you safely

- Respect the environment and trails
  - Only ride on open trails
  - Ride when conditions will ensure no damage to the trail
  - Perform trail maintenance only with full permission and permits from the land owner/manager
  - Do not litter and pick up trash before leaving practice areas, venues and campgrounds

Adult Code of Conduct

All staff, coaches, and volunteers within the NICA community are role models and leaders. It is our job to help student-athletes and other adults behave in a safe, responsible and respectful manner during all NICA activities and events, whenever interacting with NICA community members, and while conducting any electronic communication or social media connected to NICA. Please carefully review the following expectations:

As an adult associated with NICA, a youth development organization, I agree to:

- Follow NICA policies, rules, guidelines and training at all times.
- Prioritize participants' safety at all times. Your primary role is to ensure the physical, social and emotional safety and then the success of participants within each activity or event.
- Follow athlete abuse prevention policies, rules, guidelines and training, particularly:
  - Avoid engaging in behavior that could be interpreted as "grooming." NICA's Athlete Abuse Prevention Training is required for coaches and available to all NICA long-term volunteers. Examples of behaviors to avoid include making sexual comments in the presence of a student-athlete or setting-up 1:1 time with a student-athlete.
  - All planned 1:1 interaction between a student-athlete and coach must be observable and interruptible. That is, they must take place where another adult can see what is happening and intervene if the interaction looks inappropriate. For example, unless they are immediate family members coaches should not be 1:1 with student-athletes in a vehicle or for a bike ride.
  - If unplanned situations that result in 1:1 contact with a student-athlete occur, be sure to report to three other coaches, including team leadership. Include how that circumstance occurred and how long you were 1:1.
  - Remember the 1:1 policy applies to phone, social media, online or other virtual communications. Use your team or league platforms to communicate with student-athletes and keep electronic communications transparent, accessible, and professional.
  - Practice athlete abuse prevention strategies throughout the year, not just during the season.
- Treat others with respect.
  - Sexual harassment by NICA community members is not tolerated. These forms of harassment include, but are not limited to: offensive or unwelcome sexual flirtations, advances or propositions, repeated verbal abuse of a sexual nature, or graphic or degrading comments about an individual and/or their appearance. The display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures and any offensive or abusive physical contact will also not be tolerated.
  - Discrimination by NICA community members is not tolerated. NICA prohibits discrimination and harassment of any type with regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, disability status, genetics, protected veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local laws.
- Address all concerns brought to your attention. If you see or hear something that in any way compromises the safety of our community, or is not aligned with NICA expectations, it is your job to intervene (within your ability) and inform your team leadership, league leadership or Human Resource Director at NICA.
- When coaches are acting in their roles as coaches, and have decision-making and or supervision responsibilities for student-athletes, they may not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This holds for league and event staff and volunteers when they are acting in their roles with decision-making and or supervision responsibilities for student-athletes.
- Operate within your NICA training and experience, and provide NICA-approved activities.
- Use your best judgment. If you have concerns that a task, project or activity you are working on is dangerous, or is not going to meet the agreed-upon objectives, tell the person in charge.
- Be supportive. If a fellow NICA community member is struggling, support them. If you are unable, tell the person in charge that assistance is needed.
- Be transparent. If you have a concern, share it with the person in charge. If the person in charge is the person with whom you have a concern, share it with your league director.
- Support each individual in their leadership role.
- Work as a team. Present a cohesive environment to the student-athletes, their families and the broader NICA community.
- Communicate intentionally. Be open to giving and receiving feedback.
- Be clear and consistent with student-athletes and guardians in defining when and where a NICA activity starts and ends.
- When leading or promoting an activity not associated with NICA, be sure to clearly communicate the activity is not a NICA activity.

APPLICABILITY OF RULES

The codes of conduct and all rules in this handbook should be observed at all times when participating in all manner of NICA activities or any occasion where NICA is represented.

The interpretation and application of the policies set forth in this handbook will be made at the league's discretion by representatives of the league. This discretion may not be abused or applied unfairly, however the facts of individual cases may differ and NICA and its leagues acknowledge that the specific facts of individual cases are likely to require the use of discretion.

Appeals must first be exhausted within the league through the appeal process provided, if any, and only then will the National Rules Committee consider the appeal of a league's final application of the rules.

Consequences issued are cumulative and in effect for the entire season for violations of a Code of Conduct or a rule, unless otherwise specified in official communication. Repeated infractions will result in the next level of consequences. Rule violations are subject to NICA consequences and law enforcement.

All student-athletes who participate in any of the events associated with NICA and the league including, without limitation, races, training rides, clinics, camps, and practice skill sessions, do so at their own risk. Whether or not you are registered with the league, no liability shall be attached to NICA, the league or any of its officials, coaches, parents, and participants with respect to any loss or injury sustained or caused by anyone participating in these events.

By participating in a race or camp conducted by NICA or the league, a student-athlete, or a parent or legal guardian who permits a minor to participate, acknowledges understanding and acceptance of the regulations covering the event.

CODE OF CONDUCT OR RULE VIOLATION CONSEQUENCE LEVELS

As a youth development organization, NICA's primary aim is to educate community members while upholding behavioral and safety standards.

If a situation arises that is beyond the capabilities of a head coach or team director to manage, they should reach out to league staff for assistance.

NICA relies on coaches, team directors, parents and other adults as primary educators of student-athletes to model and uphold the standards of safety, etiquette, and trail use. League Directors will apply consequences to a student-athlete, individual or team based on violations. Consequences will be given to student-athletes, individuals and/or teams for violations by student-athletes, coaches, family members, spectators or any other participants.

Standard consequences: Unless otherwise specified, rule violations will result in consequences at one of the four following levels: **yellow**, **orange**, **red**, or **purple**. League staff or designated race officials will enforce consequences.

CONSEQUENCE LEVELS

YELLOW

Warning
For behavior directly contradicting NICA vision, mission, values, policies, standards, rules, codes of conduct, and training that define the NICA culture. Multiple infractions at this level may result in more severe consequences. Warnings are in effect for the duration of the season.

An orange level consequence will be assessed if a behavior is repeated or determined to be intentional or egregious.

ORANGE

5-minute race penalty
Infractions that occur during a NICA sanctioned race-related event by a racing student athlete.

D1 100/D2 50 Point Team Race Penalty
Infractions that occur during a NICA sanctioned race event by a non-athlete.

One-day Suspension
For behaviors that pose a significant risk to the safety of the individual or another participant and/or more severe behaviors that contradict the NICA vision, mission, values, policies, standards, rules, codes of conduct, and training that define the NICA culture.

A red level consequence will be assessed if a behavior is repeated or determined to be intentional or egregious.

RED

Suspension
For behaviors that pose a significant risk to the safety of the individual or another participant and/or more severe behaviors that contradict the NICA vision, mission, values, policies, standards, rules, codes of conduct, and training that define the NICA culture.

Team suspension
Teams in violation of these rules may not host team practices or participate in league events.

Race disqualification
Infractions that occur during a NICA sanctioned race event. Penalties will be enforced by race officials or other league staff.

An expulsion from the league will be assessed if a behavior is repeated or determined to be intentional or egregious.

PURPLE

Expulsion
The NICA expulsion process is for serious offences and supports NICA league leadership in maintaining the NICA vision, mission, values, policies, standards, rules, codes of conduct, and training that define NICA culture.

Chapter 1: Community Conduct

RULE 1.1 — Positive sporting behavior and attitude

YELLOW

1.1.A — Everyone is expected to display an excellent sporting attitude and should treat all others with respect. Fair play and respectful, kind, supportive behavior is expected of everyone. Profanity in any situation is not acceptable.

1.1.B — Everyone must show respect for and deference to the person and the decisions of the league officials as it relates to sporting behavior. League officials have total discretion for the implementation of the rules and consequences.

1.1.C — Adults are role models and must demonstrate a fair and calm response in the face of protests, complaints, conflicts, or emergencies. Adults are expected to be focused on helping student-athletes develop positive character traits, learn life lessons, and grow into healthy young adults.

RULE 1.2 — Leave No Trace

YELLOW

1.2.A — Everyone is required to practice low-impact cycling, recognizing that there are different types of soils and trail construction. Wet and muddy trails are more vulnerable to damage. When the trail bed is soft, consider other riding options. Ride it, don't slide or skid. Ride through mud puddles, not around them widening the trail. Stay on existing trails and do not create new ones. Don't cut switchbacks or otherwise modify the existing trail.

1.2.B — No littering or leaving trash behind. Be sure to pack out at least as much as you pack in.

ORANGE

1.2.C. - Everyone must follow all practice and event venues' rules, not alter or modify any part of the venue in any way without specific permission from the landowner and remain in designated areas for venue use.

RULE 1.3 — Prohibited substances: B-list

YELLOW

Student athletes cannot use or be supplied with performance-enhancing supplements, including but not limited to caffeine, guarana root and taurine.

In addition to the A-List substances, NICA advises against performance-enhancing supplements, citing potential dangers even when taken as directed. These risks include unhealthy side effects, harmful interactions with medications, inaccurate labeling, and minimal benefits for young athletes. Instead, student-athletes are encouraged to focus on nutritious, minimally processed foods, to stay hydrated, to get adequate sleep, and prioritize training and conditioning. If supplements are necessary, they should only be taken under the guidance of a doctor or dietitian to address specific nutritional deficiencies.

RULE 1.4 — Drone policy

ORANGE

In an effort to maintain the safety of athletes and spectators, Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), also known as drones, may only be flown at races with the written permission of the league director. Unmanned aircraft are excluded from NICA's liability policy. Operators must carry their own liability policies.

RULE 1.5 — Prohibited substances: A-list

RED

Student-athletes are prohibited from using performance enhancing or otherwise illegal substances as detailed below:

1. **USADA Rules:** Student-athletes are subject to all U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) rules pertaining to anti-doping. The use of performance enhancing substances, as listed by USADA, will result in the immediate disqualification from one (1) full season or the equivalent number of races spanning two (2) seasons. A list of banned substances is available at the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency website — click on the Substances link at www.usada.org to find the current Prohibited List. Although it is already included in the banned substances identified by the USADA, for the sake of clarity, NICA emphasizes here that any product containing THC regardless of the means of consumption, is strictly prohibited.

2. **Nicotine and Tobacco:** The use of nicotine or tobacco in any form is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, snuff, vaping devices, e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches, nicotine gum (unless medically prescribed), and any other nicotine delivery systems.

   Only those students who provide evidence that they have enrolled in a stop-smoking (or chewing) class may continue to use tobacco or nicotine during participation. Such student-athletes must provide proof to their coach of participation and when they have completed the class, and refrain from use in the future to avoid consequences for violating this rule.

3. **Alcohol and Drug Use:** Alcohol and drug use by any means are prohibited. At the league's discretion, NICA recommends the following structure of consequences to violation of this rule.

   a. First violation: The student-athlete will lose eligibility for one (1) race. The student-athlete must continue to attend and participate in regular practice with his/her team in order to remain eligible for future participation and must attend a minimum of six (6) educational group sessions regarding alcohol and drug abuse.

   b. Second violation: The student-athlete will lose eligibility for an additional three (3) races. The student-athlete must continue to attend and participate in regular practice with his/her team in order to remain eligible for future participation and must attend an additional minimum of six (6) educational group sessions regarding alcohol and drug abuse.

   c. Third and subsequent violation: The student-athlete will lose eligibility for participation for an additional six (6) races for each subsequent violation. If the student becomes a participant in an alcohol and/or drug treatment program on their own volition, the student-athlete may be eligible for participation after a minimum of six (6) weeks.

RULE 1.6 — Legal mountain biking trails only & application of rules outside of race events

RED

As representatives of NICA, the league, and our sport, student-athletes and coaches must ride only on authorized trails. This rule applies at all times. It is the responsibility of student-athletes and coaches to know which trails are legal for bikes. Building unauthorized trails or adding unauthorized features, such as berms or jumps, is also unacceptable and carries the same consequences. Red level consequences will be enforced upon the issue of a citation.

RULE 1.7 — Abusive behavior not tolerated

RED

No one may inappropriately or unwelcomingly touch another person, or cause physical harm to, or engage in any behavior that may be considered abuse, assault, or battery to any person connected with or attending any NICA or league event. An assault is an unlawful attempt, coupled with the present ability, to commit a violent injury on the person of another. Battery is defined as an unlawful application of force directly or indirectly upon another person or their personal belongings, causing bodily injury or offensive contact. Unsafe riding practices including swerving, suddenly stopping, willfully crashing into another rider, grabbing another person, hitting, or pushing another person may be abusive behavior, or possibly assault and battery.

RULE 1.8 — Social media policy

RED

As a youth sport and youth development organization, NICA expects communication, online and otherwise, to be done in a manner aligned with our core values of fun, inclusivity, equity, respect and community. The content and intent of all electronic communications and social media must adhere to NICA's codes of conduct and policies, especially those limiting 1:1 interactions between coaches and student-athletes.

We recognize the benefits of social media in connecting and communicating with others within the greater mountain biking community. Social media are forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).

a. The use of any social media network and postings, displays or communications on any social media network must comply with all state and federal laws as well as the requirements contained within this handbook.
b. All electronic communication between coaches and student-athletes must be Transparent, Accessible and Professional.
    i. All electronic communication between coaches and student-athletes should be transparent. Communication must not only be clear and direct, but also free of hidden meanings, innuendos and expectations.
    ii. All electronic communication between coaches and student-athletes is considered a matter of record and part of the team, league or NICA's records. Always include another coach or parent in the communication so that there is no question regarding accessibility.
    iii. All electronic communications between a coach and student-athlete must be conducted professionally as a representative of the team, league and NICA. This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards of integrity.
c. Disparaging, threatening, harmful or offensive behavior on social media is not tolerated by coaches, student-athletes, parents or any other person associated with the league.
d. Cyberbullying means using the internet, a cell phone or another device to send or post text, video or an image with the intent or knowledge, or with reckless disregard, that the text, video or image will hurt, embarrass or threaten an individual, regardless of whether the individual directed, consented to or acquiesced in the conduct or voluntarily accessed the electronic communication. Cyberbullying is expressly prohibited and is subject to disciplinary action by the league.
e. While use of social media in the NICA community is permitted, no student-athlete or coach shall be required to open or maintain a social media account or otherwise use social media to participate in the NICA community, on their team, or in any specific NICA activity or event.

RULE 1.9 — Sexual harassment policy

PURPLE

1.9.A — NICA and the leagues strictly prohibit sexual harassment in any form, including verbal, physical, and visual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual advances, or visual, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. This definition includes many forms of offensive behavior and includes harassment of a person of the same sex or based on gender. Sexual harassment includes: unwanted sexual advances or visual conduct such as leering, making sexual gestures, displaying of sexually suggestive objects or pictures; verbal conduct such as making or using derogatory comments, epithets, slurs and jokes, verbal sexual advances or propositions; and physical conduct such as touching or blocking movements.

1.9.B — If any student-athlete believes they have been sexually harassed by league staff, coach, NICA employee, or another student-athlete should promptly report the facts of the alleged incident(s) and the name of the individual involved to any adult or league representative or other party with whom they feel comfortable. The initiation of an allegation of sexual harassment by a student-athlete will not adversely affect matters pertaining to their status in any league program or activity.

1.9.C — If any student, coach, parent, volunteer, or employee feels they have been sexually harassed at a NICA or league event, they should report the incident immediately to their league director or NICA director. If any student, coach, parent, volunteer, or employee feels they have been a victim of abuse, assault, or battery at a league event, they should report the incident immediately to their league director or NICA director. All reports will be handled in a confidential manner.

RULE 1.10 — Crime-related revocation of attendance privilege

PURPLE

Individuals with a pending charge or adjudication equivalent to conviction, for charges of sexual crimes against children or human trafficking charges may not participate in any NICA team or league activities.

RULE 1.11 — Weapons

PURPLE

Firearms or other weapons are expressly prohibited at all NICA events or activities, except by duly authorized law enforcement officers.

Chapter 2: Eligibility and Participation

RULE 2.1 — Student-athlete eligibility

ORANGE

2.1.A — League registration must be open to all students who attend public or private school, or who are homeschooled for high school (grades 9–12) and middle school (grades 5-8), within the league's region.

2.1.B — Proof of school attendance may be requested for a student-athlete at any time. This proof may be in the form of a school ID, a report card, or some other form of proof.

2.1.C — Student age and grade

To be eligible to compete in either a spring or fall school-year season, a student-athlete must:

1. Be enrolled in grades 5-12, or the homeschool equivalent, and not be younger than 9 or older than 19 years of age at any time during the entire school year.
2. Not have a high school diploma, general education diploma (GED), or otherwise be graduated from high school.
3. Students older than 19 years of age who are still enrolled in high school in a school-based transition program and receive special education services must consult with league directors regarding eligibility.

Student-athletes who have skipped or been held back:

1. a single grade are placed into categories according to their current grade; or
2. more than one grade must consult with the league director regarding placement into the appropriate categories.

2.1.D — Placement of homeschooled students

Homeschooled student-athletes will be placed in categories corresponding to the grade level they would otherwise be enrolled in for their assigned public school based on their ages. The league director must consider such age-based placement in the event homeschooled student-athletes seek alternative placement under the Category Placement Standards adopted by the league.

2.1.E — College class enrollment

Student-athletes enrolled or otherwise taking classes in a college remain eligible to compete so long as they are enrolled or taking classes at the college as middle or high school students and not as college students.

RULE 2.2 — Student-athlete registration requirements

ORANGE

2.2.A — Student-athletes must register with the league. Registration is conducted online through the NICA Pit Zone. Student-athletes must sign and submit the following registration forms and complete the following requirements:

1. Pay applicable registration fees or apply granted financial assistance
2. Signed Agreement to Participate/Release of Liability
3. Signed Medical Form
4. Signed Media Form
5. Signed Code of Conduct Form

2.2.B — The Code of Conduct form must be agreed to and signed by the student-athlete regardless of their age, along with their guardian if the student is a minor. All other forms must be signed by a legal guardian unless the student-athlete is at least eighteen (18) years old or older. The forms will contain language indicating that parents or legal guardians who permit a minor to participate in league races or camps, acknowledge, understand and accept the rules and regulations covering the event and agree to the terms of the league's release form which shall be binding even when no proper entry form for a student has been signed and submitted.

RULE 2.3 — Coach requirements

ORANGE

2.3.A — All coaches must register with the league in order to participate and be covered by league insurance. This registration for coaches at all levels carries a membership fee. Coaches are not fully insured until they are licensed (Level 1 license at minimum). Registration is conducted online through the NICA Pit Zone.

2.3.B — All adults participating in team rides must be at least 18 years of age, have a NICA coach license and undergo an annual background check. Adults who switch leagues will need to repeat the background check before participation in the new league.

2.3.C — All participating teams are required to have a fully licensed coach present at all events. Coaches have a duty of care to their student-athletes at every event. This duty of care begins at the time designated by the team for the students to arrive and it ends at

the conclusion of the event. The head coach, or someone acting as interim head coach, must remain at the venue until the last student-athlete from their team has departed, except in the case that any remaining student is in the care of a parent or legal guardian.

2.3.D. — Alumni who have graduated high school but will not turn 18 before the first league event may apply to be a Coach-in-Training (CIT). All requests to become a Coach-in-training must start with the team's head coach.

2.3.E — Teams must have a Head Coach that holds at least a Level 1 license in the first year, Level 2 in the second year and Level 3 in the third year of the team.

2.3.F — During NICA trail rides, teams must maintain a student athlete to coach ratio of 8:2 or 6:1. The ride leader must be a Level 2 or 3 NICA licensed coach.

RULE 2.4 — Team training limits and preseason

ORANGE

2.4.A — League teams and clubs are limited to the number of weeks during which they can participate in, and conduct the allowable activities described below. Insurance coverage is not provided for any activities outside of these time limits and these limits create a supportive environment and reduce exposure to physical risk and burnout.

2.4.B — Any NICA coach working with student-athletes during their off-season that is not sanctioned/insured under another organization may risk the eligibility of the coach, rider, and team to compete in NICA races.

2.4.C — Each year is divided into a pre-season, a regular season, and an off-season.

2.4.C.1 — **Preseason**

1. Start date — Limited pre-season activities may commence April 1
2. Allowable activities — The team, club, and coaches must be registered with NICA to participate in, and conduct activities. Only the following pre-season activities are permitted and must be pre-approved by the league Director:
    a. Bike checks, equipment inspections, and bike fit;
    b. Mechanical workshops;
    c. All-inclusive fun rides; and
    d. Skills clinics
    e. Trail maintenance
3. Activities Limit — The maximum number of preseason activities is six (6)

    GRiT activities do not count toward the maximum number of pre-season activities.

2.4.C.2 — **Regular season**

1. Start date — Regular training, to include up to 4 practices per week, may commence July 1
2. Racing limits — Teams and clubs may participate in races only during the regular season. NICA insurance coverage covers only NICA-sanctioned events and practices. Participation in events outside of NICA is not covered by NICA insurance.
3. Allowable activities — The team, club, and coaches must be registered with NICA to participate in, and conduct activities including meetings, team practice, rides, team skills clinics, basic trail maintenance/upkeep and NICA-sanctioned league events. NICA teams may not participate as a NICA team in non-NICA activities at any

time. If coaches and student-athletes participate as a team at non-NICA events, it must be done under a separately organized, insured, and named team.

4. End of season — No on the bike activities may take place following the final league race/event of the season including regional events whichever comes last.

2.4.C.3 — **Offseason**

The off-season is defined as the time outside of the official preseason and regular season periods. Organized NICA team rides and races are strictly prohibited during the off-season and are not covered by NICA insurance.

NICA respects off-season non-league related activities. However, all off-season coaching and activities must be done under a separately organized, insured, and named team. Participation in this team and off-season activities cannot be a requirement to participate in NICA. Teams found to be racing and operating as NICA teams during the off-season will be ineligible to participate in the league the following season.

RULE 2.5 — Team registration and insurance

ORANGE

2.5.A — All teams must register annually with the league at least two (2) weeks before the opening race. Teams must not conduct any practices without registering and obtaining insurance through the league.

2.5.B — NICA Insurance coverage applies only to NICA sanctioned events and team practices during the preseason and regular season. Participation in any events outside of NICA is not covered under NICA Insurance.

RULE 2.6 — Student placement and team composition

ORANGE

TEAM TYPES

2.6 A — **School Teams:** Composed of full-time students from the same public or private high school or middle school. Only one team may represent a school.

- High school only teams
- High school teams may roster student athletes from all feeder middle schools.
    - Middle schoolers must be rostered to the team based on the high school they plan to eventually attend, which may be part of a school or composite team, or rostered as a middle school only team. Once they are in high school, they must roster to the team for the high school they attend, even if it is different from their middle school team.
- Middle school only teams

School teams are not required to be officially or otherwise formally affiliated as a sports team with the school in which its members are enrolled. A school team must include the name of the school in their team name.

- School teams are defined by the school's enrollment area and may be one of the following, in no particular order
    - School aligned team - Separate entity outside of the school's purview
    - School club team - Recognized club as defined by the school
    - School sport team - Part of the athletic department
    - Homeschool Team - A group of homeschool students from a defined geographic area

Teams are responsible for obtaining permission from schools related to the team's use of school names, colors, mascots, logos, and other identifying school-related imagery or graphics.

Homeschool students join teams according to the location of the school they would be assigned to if not homeschooled.

Student-athletes must join and compete with their school's team if one exists. They cannot compete for another team or as independent riders.

Teams can combine resources and training activities but separate school teams must be scored separately and wear separate jerseys.

2.6 B — **Composite Teams**: Composed of full-time students from multiple schools or homeschool athletes from the area. Composite teams may not overlap in geographical area nor can two composites draw student-athletes from the same schools.

A composite team must be approved by the league director prior to team registration for the season. Composite teams are constrained based on the number of potential student athletes, geographic size, and travel times. Composite teams must include "composite" and its geographic identifier in the team name.

The composite team formation must include the following:

- Proposed geographical area for its student-athletes bounded by school district lines
- List of public school and private schools in the geographic area
- The names of the team director and head coach

2.6 C — **Independent study or virtual students**

Independent study or virtual students must contact the league director with the details of their individual circumstances to determine their team placement.

2.6 D — **Independent student athletes**

Independent student athletes are a rare exception that must be approved by the league director. For safety and inclusion, an independent student athlete must have a registered and fully licensed level 2 or level 3 coach.

COMPOSITE TEAM EXPANSION

2.6 E — A single composite team may be composed of subdivided teams. Each subdivided team shall be scored independently. The league director will annually review each composite team's composition and must approve the expansion of teams that previously comprised a single composite team.

Composite team subdivision rules:

- The league director must approve the subdivided teams proposed by a single composite team
- If twelve (12) or more student-athletes are from the same school then they must be subdivided into a separate team the following year and scored as representatives of that school.
- If a composite team has thirty (30) or more student-athletes, high school and middle school, then the team will work on subdividing the team in the subsequent season prior to the opening of team registration. .

Composite teams may not be subdivided based on the experience and ability of the student-athletes. Doing so violates the policies that permit composite teams and creates an unfair advantage by avoiding the geographical limitations that apply to other teams.

SAME-SEX SCHOOL TEAM ASSOCIATIONS

2.6 F — A same-sex school team ("all boys" or "all girls") may petition to be scored with an opposite-sex school team or a group of riders from that school. This association is for scoring only and does not create a composite team. The combined team competes in the division as it would be as a single school team. Approval from the league director is required before the season starts, and the association remains in place for the entire season.

TEAM RECRUITING AND MID-SEASON TRANSFERS

2.6 G — Team efforts to recruit riders from other teams is not allowed. A student-athlete who transfers teams must meet all requirements to compete as a member of the new team.

- Individual points will transfer with the student-athlete.
- The prior team shall retain all points earned by the student-athlete before the transfer for determining team standings.
- The new team will accumulate points scored by the student-athlete after the transfer for determining team standings.

RULE 2.7 — Inter-league participation

ORANGE

League Directors are not required to allow inter-league participation or out-of-region student participation, however if they elect to do so, the standards for such participation must be consistently and fairly applied to all athletes seeking such participation.

1. Student-athletes must re-register in the NICA Pit Zone and be practice ready in the new league before they participate in team practices. This includes paying all applicable fees again.
2. Student-athletes may not compete in two different leagues in one calendar year. Some leagues do allow guest student-athletes to participate in one race. Guest student-athletes are not included in league scoring.

Student-athletes and teams located in a state that has a NICA league and or other youth cycling program may only participate in another NICA league's events and races upon agreement between the leagues' directors. Such agreements must be reviewed and approved annually by the directors. In reaching such an agreement, the league directors must consider (a) which league's race series is closest to the students and teams seeking to participate in the other league, (b) policies of inclusivity for all student-athletes and (c) policies of league development such that all student-athletes and teams can reasonably participate in events and races within the leagues in which they are located. Such an inter-league agreement must include, at a minimum, that the student-athletes and teams:

1. Declare that they are committed to participating and scoring exclusively in the other league's race series;
2. Be scored and registered in the league in which they have declared their participation; and
3. Participate in only one season, either spring or fall, per academic year and are subject to the team training limits and race season limitations.

At the league director's discretion, student-athletes and teams located outside of the league's region and in a state where there is no NICA league may be allowed to participate in league events and races.

RULE 2.8 — Non-discrimination in participation standards

ORANGE

2.8.A — NICA is committed to fostering an inclusive environment where all student-athletes can participate and thrive. We believe athletic participation supports physical, intellectual, social, and character development for all students. Discrimination of any kind, including discrimination based on race, religion, sex, gender identity, or perceived gender, is strictly prohibited.

2.8.B — Student-athletes may participate in NICA activities and competitions in alignment with their gender identity. If a student-athlete chooses to participate in a category different than their sex assigned at birth, they will be scored separately within that category. Scoring is at the discretion of the League Director, who must be notified of the student-athlete's category selection before the season begins.

Chapter 3: Bike Safety

RULE 3.1 — Footwear

YELLOW

Student-athletes must wear footwear that is fully enclosed and fastened with either straps, buckles, or laces.

RULE 3.2 — Controlled riding

YELLOW

Everyone must practice safe riding techniques and be in control of their bicycles at all times. Riding out of control or with excessive speed is not tolerated. Having a reckless attitude or taking dangerous risks is not tolerated. A dangerous risk is defined as willingly attempting anything that is beyond one's ability to control the bike or puts someone else in danger.

RULE 3.3 — Pass with class

YELLOW

3.3.A — Passing in a manner that compromises the safety of other riders is not tolerated.

3.3.B — Riders must not pass during portions of narrow technical or downhill singletrack which are deemed unsafe for passing.

When passing a rider, the passing rider must...

- ...say "passing on your right" or "passing on your left" to indicate which side of the rider the passer will be passing on
- ...do so only when safe and without contact
- ...seek acknowledgement by the rider being passed

The rider being passed must...

- ...acknowledge the pass
- ...move over as soon as it is safe to do so
- ...not intentionally block the trail when another student-athlete is attempting to pass

3.3.C — Intentional blocking or contact is prohibited. In the event two racers are vying for position, the leading racer does not have to yield to the challenging racer. However, a racer may not interfere or impede another racer's progress.

3.3 D. People walking while pushing their bike must stay on the least-rideable portion of the trail.

RULE 3.4 — Riding in low light

YELLOW

When riding in low-light conditions, including dawn, dusk and after sunset, all riders and coaches must use a functioning, hands-free light.

RULE 3.5 — Helmets

ORANGE

3.5.A — Everyone must wear approved helmets when sitting on or riding a bike. Helmets must also be worn when walking or running on the course with a bike due to a mechanical problem.

3.5.B — Helmets must be the correct size with little to no side-to-side or front-to-back movement.

3.5.C — Helmet straps must be adjusted to the extent that two fingers can be pushed under the strap.

3.5.D — Helmets must not have any cracks or dents from previous falls or mishandling.

3.5E — Approved Helmets must meet one of the following standards:

1. U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standard for bicycle helmets.

2. Snell Memorial Foundation Standard "B" or "N" series.
3. American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standard F-1447.
4. European Committee for Standardization (CE EN1078) standard for bicycle helmets.

**Helmet rules are not applicable to riders warming up on bikes that are securely mounted to stationary trainers.*

RULE 3.6 — Bike requirements

ORANGE

Everyone must compete with the following bike requirements:

3.6.A — Mountain bikes must have 26- to 29-inch wheels* with tires, not narrower than 1.75 inches.

3.6.B — Tires must have knobbies; slick tires are not permitted.

3.6.C — Bikes must have multiple gears; no single speed bikes.

3.6.D — Bikes must have fully operational front and rear brakes.

3.6.E — Handlebar end plugs and stem caps are required.

3.6.F — Bar ends (forward pointing handle grip extensions) may not be used.

3.6.G — No road, cyclocross, or mountain bikes equipped with drop bars.

3.6.H — E-bikes can be used by coaches, only if allowed by the trail system. Student-athletes must have league director permission to race on an e-bike and only if allowed by the trail system.

**If a student-athlete is unable to ride a mountain bike with 26- to 29-inch wheels due to their height or other limitations, competing on a 24 inch wheel mountain bike is permitted.*

RULE 3.7 — Riding while distracted

ORANGE

Riding with any headphones or other portable musical devices is prohibited. Headphones are permitted while riding a stationary trainer.

RULE 3.8 — Concussion and return-to-play

ORANGE

NICA requires adherence to, at a minimum, the return-to-play policies and procedures for student-athletes who have suffered concussions advocated by the US Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Applicable state laws and its applicable state interscholastic federation or association return-to-play management protocols and procedures for a student-athlete who has sustained a concussion or head injury will be followed.

NICA's concussion protocols

1. Immediate removal from activity: An athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury in a league activity, or who is suffering the effects of a concussion sustained outside of league activity, shall be immediately removed from the activity for the remainder of the day.
2. Medical evaluation required: After being removed from the activity, the athlete shall not be permitted to return to the activity until he or she is evaluated by a licensed healthcare provider.
3. Clearance required: The athlete shall not be permitted to return to the activity until he or she receives written clearance to return to the activity from a licensed healthcare provider.

Seven-day minimum graduated observation period: If the licensed health care provider determines that the athlete sustained a concussion or a head injury, the athlete shall also complete a minimum graduated return-to-play protocol under the supervision of a licensed health care provider.

Chapter 4: Event Rules

RULE 4.1 — Walking the bike

YELLOW

Everyone must walk their bikes in designated areas.

RULE 4.2 — Team apparel

YELLOW

4.2.A — Teams must have an official and distinct team jersey, t-shirt, or top.

4.2.B — Student athletes must race in their team jersey.

4.2.C — Independent student-athletes must choose a distinct individual jersey and race wearing the same jersey design throughout a season.

RULE 4.3 — Assigned plates

YELLOW

4.3.A — Student-athletes must securely affix their assigned plate to their bikes for the entirety of all league events.

4.3.B — If the plate comes off of the bike while racing and it is possible to safely do so, student-athletes must move their bike off the trail, walk the trail to retrieve the plate, and keep it on their person for the remainder of their race. If the student-athlete cannot safely retrieve the plate, the lost plate must be reported to the next race official.

RULE 4.4 — Listen to pre-race announcements

YELLOW

Student-athletes must be present and attentive during pre-race announcements. Student-athletes that are being disruptive and/or talking over the announcements may be relegated to the back of the group.

RULE 4.5 — Staging race starts

YELLOW

4.5.A — Student-athletes must adhere to the following rules when lining up at the start line for the start of a race:

1. Student athletes must not loiter in the staging area until staging for their race begins.
2. Student athletes must enter the staging area at the designated entrance.

3. Student-athletes may not change or trade the starting position they were given.

ORANGE

4.5.B — Adults are expected to support the staging rules.

RULE 4.6 — Start line etiquette

YELLOW

Student-athletes must have at least one foot on the ground when staged for a start and until the race begins.

RULE 4.7 — Repair bikes off the trail

YELLOW

In the case of a broken bicycle or other mishap, clear the trail and do not block other riders.

RULE 4.8 — Finish line etiquette

YELLOW

Student-athletes must have both wheels on the ground and at least one hand on the bars as they ride through the finish line area when racing.

RULE 4.9 — Podium Etiquette

YELLOW

4.9.A — Student-athletes receiving medals must wear a team jersey or other branded team clothing item (e.g. shirt, jacket or sweatshirt) during the podium ceremony.

4.9B — Riders may not bring their bikes or other equipment with them to podiums when accepting awards at the podium ceremony.

RULE 4.10 — Pre-ride during designated times only

ORANGE

4.10.A — Everyone must abide by the league race pre-ride instructions.

4.10.B — Pre-rides must be confined to the times designated by the league. Coaches and student-athletes must begin and end their pre-ride within the time allowed that day.

4.10.C — Pre-rides that are conducted prior to race weekend must comply with the rules and regulations regarding trail use at the venue.

4.10.D — Student-athletes must pre-ride with a level 2 or level 3 coach.

RULE 4.11 — Racers and coaches only on the course

ORANGE

Only registered student-athletes and their licensed team coaches may ride the race course during designated times during the event weekend. No coach is permitted to ride or otherwise be on the course during a race.

RULE 4.12 — Spectator etiquette

YELLOW

4.12.A – Spectators, including student-athletes not currently racing, must follow the event guidelines.

ORANGE

4.12.B – For purposes of safety and fairness to the participants, the following rules must be observed by all persons in attendance,

1. No walking, running, or riding on the course.
2. No running or riding alongside the course or alongside a student athlete while they are racing.
3. No providing food, water, or support outside of the feed zones.
4. Spectators must not interfere with racers in any way.

RULE 4.13 — Modification of the course prohibited

ORANGE

Intentionally adding obstacles or removing obstacles deemed by officials to be part of the race course is prohibited.

RULE 4.14 — Riding the course backwards prohibited

ORANGE

Everyone must ride in the designated direction of the course. If anyone must backtrack, they must walk with their bikes.

RULE 4.15 — Bring your bike

ORANGE

Student-athletes must not progress on the race course unaccompanied by a bike. In the case of an inoperable bike, student-athletes may progress along the course with their bike. They must not obstruct the progress of other racers.

RULE 4.16 — Switching bikes and wheels

ORANGE

4.16.A — Student-athletes must complete the entire race on the same bicycle upon which the race was begun.

4.16.B — Student-athletes must complete the entire race on the same set of wheels upon which the race was begun.

4.16.C – In the event of damage to a bike that makes it unsafe to ride, bike swaps can only happen in the areas indicated by event officials.

RULE 4.17 — Deviation from course

ORANGE

4.17.A — Racers must not deviate from the edge of the trails (as defined either by ribbons or an obvious change in surface or foliage characteristics) by more than three (3) feet.

4.17.B — When the trail is clearly on one side of a pole, tree, or other obstacle, the racer must pass that feature on the trail side of the feature.

RULE 4.18 — Leaving the course

ORANGE

4.18.A — A racer may not leave the prescribed course unless ordered or permitted to do so by public authorities or a race official. In the case of mechanical problems, racers shall walk along the course to the finish line or use an approved shortcut to return to the finish line and report their DNF status to the timing official. In the case of medical emergencies, racers shall remain still and wait for a course marshal or medical help.

4.18.B — A rider that goes off-course, whether intentionally, inadvertently, or to switch or repair a bike, is not permitted to gain advantage from leaving the course and must make best efforts to re-enter the course at the same location they went off-course.

RULE 4.19 — Penalty for outside assistance

ORANGE

4.19.A —

1. High school categories: High school student-athletes must repair their own flat tires and mechanical problems and carry their own tools, tubes, etc. If outside assistance, parts, or tools, are provided, a 5-minute penalty will be assessed. The student-athlete must report such an occurrence of outside assistance before the end of the protest period that precedes the award ceremony. The student-athlete must report to a Scoring Official, Course Marshal, or other Race Official.

2. Middle school categories: In the event of a mechanical issue during a race, a middle school student athlete may ask a course marshal, rover, or race official for assistance, parts, or tools. No penalty will be issued for outside assistance.

4.19.B — No penalty will be assessed for any prescription medical item or device (e.g., inhalers, EpiPens, etc.) given to a rider along the course or in the feed zone for safety or medical reasons.

RULE 4.20 — Feed zone

ORANGE

A designated feed zone must be present and easily accessible at races. The feed zone shall have a well-marked start and end.

The following rules must be followed in the Feed Zone:

1. Feeders may only hand riders food and drinks in the feed zone.
2. Feeding one student-athlete must not cause other riders to slow down or veer off course or otherwise interfere with other riders.
3. Riders bypassing the feed zone must ride on the opposite side of the course from the feed zone

4. All hand-offs must be conducted hand-to-hand only — from the hand of the feeder to the hand of the rider. No other physical contact between riders and feeders is allowed. It is not permitted for a feeder to place water bottles onto the bike or hydration packs onto riders nor may items be put into the riders' mouth or the pockets on the rider's jersey.
5. After feeding a rider, the feeder must move clear of the feed zone to allow plenty of room for other feeders.
6. Water bottles and all items must be discarded safely and within the identified area.
7. Running in the feed zone is not permitted.
8. Throwing water on riders is not permitted.
9. Clothing may only be discarded, not given, in the feed zone.
10. Feeders must wear a shirt, jacket, hat, vest, jersey, or adhesive name tag that identifies the team of the riders they are feeding.
11. If conditions such as high temperatures exist, a neutral feed zone may be provided near the halfway point of the course. The neutral feed zone will be for all student-athletes and handouts will be provided by designated race staff and/or volunteers only.
12. Each team is allowed a limited number of feeders based on the number of racers competing in the current wave:

# of Racers	# of Feeders
5 or Less	2
6 - 10	3
11-20	4
21-more	5

RULE 4.21 — Cutting the course

RED

Except in the case of injury, racers are not allowed to intentionally cut the course, ride off course, or engage in any other behavior that would indicate an intention of unfair play.

RULE 4.22 — Racing the wrong category

RED

Coaches and student-athletes are responsible for knowing, understanding, and following the category placement rules and the placement criteria. Student-athletes who race in the wrong category shall be disqualified from that race.

Chapter 5: Event Production Guidelines

NICA's race production, safety, and scoring standards are intended as guidance to facilitate and promote fair, safe, and challenging competition.

SECTION 5.1 — NICA courses

NICA events follow best practices to optimize the safety and enjoyment of all participants. NICA activities are limited to off-road mountain bike activities that are intentionally inclusive to all ability levels and do not expose any participants to situations of elevated risk. Courses may consist of natural surface trails, paved bike paths, and dirt or gravel roads that are closed to vehicular traffic.

NICA courses are designed to limit maximum speed and do not include large drops, large jumps, and other features and to reduce elevated risk.

SECTION 5.2 — NICA course length

The number of laps raced in each category is determined according to riders' ability to complete the race within a specific time.

Event times will be:

- Not to exceed 45 minutes for Middle School categories;
- Not to exceed 75 minutes for High School categories
- Not to exceed 90 minutes for Varsity categories

SECTION 5.3 — Designated pit zone

NICA events will include designated pit zone areas where teams can set up their equipment. Leagues reserve the right to manage and restrict the flow of auto, bike, trailer, and other traffic in the pit zone area. Teams may only put up tents, tables, bike stands, mechanical stations, etc. within their designated pit zones or other areas provided by the league.

To minimize congestion, the league reserves all rights to manage the flow of automobile traffic in and out of the pit zone. Parents, coaches, and student-athletes are encouraged to limit driving into the pit zone by pooling and cooperating with other parents, coaches, and student-athletes to transfer equipment. Accommodations may be made for large and heavy items, though teams are encouraged to use the pit zone drop-off area for such items.

- Pets must be kept on a leash at all times.
- Recreational vehicles (RVs) are not permitted in the pit zone.
- Gas-powered generators (built-In or external) are not permitted in the pit zone.
- Coaches and student-athletes must park their bikes out of the way to avoid obstructing cars, pedestrians, and other riders.

SECTION 5.4 — Start line and first race call-ups

Start line call-ups for top placed riders takes place at all races. The following number of riders will be called up for each race start:

Mass start races will be staged with 100% call-ups for all categories.

- The call-up order for race #1 will be determined by the series results from the previous season followed by newly upgraded riders from the most advanced category in order of ranking from the previous season.
- The call-up order for race #2 will be the finish order from race #1. Student athletes who did not participate in race #1 will be assigned random numbers and organized behind.
- The call-up order for race #3 will be the points total for races #1 and #2. Student athletes who did not participate in race #1 or #2 will be assigned random numbers and organized behind.
- For all other races in the series, the series points total with one dropped race will be used to establish the call-up order.

In staging, student athletes will be asked to choose their position within the row in the order in which they are called up. They may not choose a position in a later row. If a student athlete misses their staging time, they will be staged at the back of the category

SECTION 5.5 — Concussion recovery call-up accommodation

To reduce pressure on student-athletes to return to full participation and encourage lengthened healing time following a concussion, a student-athlete who has sustained a concussion may take off multiple races and when they return, maintain the same call-up position held prior to their concussion. This will impact the rider in the same call-up position and following riders by moving them back one call-up position. To be granted this accommodation, a coach or guardian of a student-athlete must submit a request in writing with an attached doctor's note no sooner than 3 days prior to the race to league officials.

SECTION 5.6 — Air quality sensitivity call-up accommodation

To reduce pressure to race for student-athletes who are sensitive to air pollution, any student-athlete may take off any race held with an index over 100 fine particle or ground level ozone air pollution (as defined by Airquality.gov for the time and location racing)

and maintain the same call-up position held previously. This will impact the rider in the same call-up position and following riders by moving them back one call-up position. To be granted this accommodation, a coach or guardian of a student-athlete must submit a request in writing with attached AQI measurement including time and location from airnow.gov no sooner than 3 days prior to the race to the race director and head referee.

SECTION 5.7 — Student-athletes may be pulled

Lapped riders and racers outside the last lap cutoff time limit may be pulled from the race at the finish line. At a race official's discretion, a racer may be pulled from a race at any location on the course due to circumstances that make it unsafe for the racer to proceed. Racers that are pulled out of the race must not continue and will be placed according to their position at the time they are pulled.

SECTION 5.8 — Time limits may be imposed

Student athletes may be asked to withdraw at the finish line after time limits have been reached. League officials reserve the right to determine these time limits at any time. Time limits may be imposed for reasons that include, among others: safety, heat, cold, rain, muddy conditions, clearing the course, and relieving course marshals. Course closures may be announced at any time without advance notice.

League officials may also, when appropriate, opt to pull a rider who appears to be overheated, hypothermic, overly exhausted, or in any way injured, overstressed, or at risk of injury.

SECTION 5.9 — Race course blocked by vehicle or emergency

In the event a race course is blocked by a vehicle or an emergency situation, all racers will stop in a single file row without changing position. Racers will remain in those positions until instructed to recommence racing.

SECTION 5.10 — Race finishes

All lap and finish positions are determined by electronic timing chips (transponders).

If the electronic timing system fails to record a time or lap position for any rider, a backup system may be used at the finish line to aid the scorekeepers in determining laps completed or the finishing order of a close race. Leagues may use a manual paper backup OR league-owned video cameras. Should the paper logs or video footage from league-designated cameras be unavailable or inconclusive for any reason, the scoring of the laps or finish will be based solely on the scorekeepers' decision.

In the case of a visual tie or where a clear determination cannot be made, the riders concerned will be ranked in the order of the best lap time made during the race or awarded a tie.

SECTION 5.11 — League structure and categories

Each NICA league determines the appropriate league structure to facilitate and promote fair, safe, and challenging competition based on the league's number of teams, student-athletes, and geographical circumstances.

Leagues have pre-defined criteria for how students are placed into categories.

The league will determine the criteria for placing student-athletes into categories. These criteria are based on grade level, gender, and/or ability.

- A student athlete's prior performance factors into category placement.
- Student-athletes who did not compete in the prior year and have no results are placed into the designated category
- Student-athletes who would like to petition into a different category must discuss this with their head coach, who may then submit a petition for the student-athlete.

- Head coaches must have another Level 3 coach submit a petition on behalf of their own child.
- Petitions for exceptions to the category placement criteria may be limited to certain categories.

The league director should determine the category placement criteria at the beginning of each season. The category placement criteria may vary from season to season based on the league's size and categories.

- Category placement criteria will be published in the league handbook each season.
- All previous race results and overall season standings must be publicly available.
- Category placement tables must be published prior to the race season.
- Individual NICA race results and a student's end-of-season overall standings dictate placement in ability-based categories from season to season.
- To determine category placement in ability-based categories, a finishing percentile is calculated for each student-athlete for each NICA race from the previous season.
- Finishing percentiles are determined by dividing the student-athlete's finishing place by the total number of riders, including DNFs.

Placement criteria will begin with the following guidelines:

HIGH SCHOOL	
Varsity	9th- 12th grade Boys and Girls who: 1. Placed in the top 25% in any three JV1 races in the prior year, or; 2. Placed in the top 30% of the JV1 overall season standings in the previous season, 3. Raced varsity the previous season 4. Successfully petition into the category.
JV1	9th-12th grade Boys and Girls who: 1. Placed in the top 25% in any two JV2 races in the prior year, or; 2. Placed in the top 30% of the JV2 overall season standings, 3. Raced in JV1 the prior year but did not qualify to upgrade to Varsity 8th-12th grade Boys and Girls who: 1. Successfully petition into the category. 9th grade Boys and Girls who: 1. Previously raced Competitive 7/8 and had 2 finishes in the top 25%
JV2	9th-12th grade Boys and Girls who: 1. Placed in the top 25% in any three JV3 races 2. Raced JV2 the prior year but did not qualify to upgrade to JV1 or Varsity 3. Choose to opt into JV2 from JV3 9th grade Boys and Girls who: 1. Placed in the top 25% in any two 8th grade races in the prior year 2. Previously raced Competitive 7/8 and did not qualify for JV1
JV3	All 9th through 12th grade Boys and Girls except for those who qualified for other categories. This is a novice category.
MIDDLE SCHOOL	
7 & 8 Advanced	7th and 8th graders that successfully petition
8th Grade	8th Grade only
7th Grade	7th Grade only
6th Grade	6th grade only
5th Grade	5th grade only

FIELDS (CATEGORY SPLITS)

- When it is not practical to split into divisions or conferences, a single category may be split into fields without splitting teams into conferences or divisions.
- Examples of split fields:
    - JV2 has 100 riders in the category so it's split into two fields; two separate start times. They score together as one category. Best practice is then to split JV2 into multiple categories in the next season.

SECTION 5.12 — Petitioning for a placement criteria exception

In general, exceptions to the placement criteria are discouraged and should be granted only under extraordinary circumstances.

Student-athletes must compete in appropriate competitive peer groups to prevent strategic gamesmanship in category placement.

- Petitions for an upgrade in categories will only be granted upon a showing that:
    - The student-athlete's performance and experience level clearly exceed the level of other riders competing in the rider's designated category. The riding abilities and maturity of the student-athlete seeking the upgraded category greatly exceeds the competitive nature of the category; and
    - The upgrade will place the student into a more appropriate competitive peer group.
- Student-athletes may petition to a lower category for extenuating circumstances. Doing so may have scoring implications.
- Petitions are subject to revocation at any time at the League Director's sole discretion, in which event the student shall be placed in the appropriate category according to the placement criteria.
- Petitions require a coach's comments and signature.
- The League Director or the League's Rules Committee shall consider all petitions and render a decision promptly.
- Petitions must be submitted with sufficient time for consideration. Allow a minimum of five business days from the date of submission for a decision on the petition.
- Pending the outcome of the petition, the petitioning student must compete in the category determined.

Individual scoring

SECTION 5.13 — Points system

All racers earn points. Those who start but do not finish a lap receive 100 points. Racers who complete at least one lap are ranked by laps completed (descending) and then by finishing time (ascending).

Points do not transfer if a student changes categories. Points from the lower category are forfeited, but team points earned before the change remain. Riders downgraded to a lower category cannot score individual or team points unless their petition cites extenuating circumstances.

SECTION 5.14 — Overall individual series scoring

Overall Series scoring for individuals is based on the best 4 of 5 in a five-race series or the best 3 of 4 in a four-race series. In other words, the lowest score is dropped.

A missed race would be the lowest score dropped. In the case of a race cancellation in a five-race series, the lowest score is still dropped (best 3 of 4). If there are fewer than four races in the series, no score will be dropped.

SECTION 5.15 — Point bonus for completing all races

All student-athletes who complete each and every race in a season shall be awarded an additional 25 season bonus points.

If a race is canceled, it will not count as a season race and season bonus points shall still be awarded if all other season races are completed. In the event a student athlete does not complete a race due to a mechanical, crash, illness, or other similar circumstances out of his or her control, that is considered an incomplete and no season bonus points will be awarded.

Season bonus points are awarded to individuals following the calculation of overall series points after the final race. Season Bonus Points are not added to points scored in the final race nor are they added into the team score.

SECTION 5.16 —Championships determinations

Overall Series Champion

- The overall series champion in each field will be decided based on the total of series points accumulated (best 4 of 5 results and inclusive of bonus points for completing all races).
- In the event of a tie for the championship, the winner will be determined based on the number of wins.
- Should a tie remain, second, third, etc. finishes will be tallied until the tie is broken.
- If a tie remains, the best finish in the last race will determine the champion.

Team scoring

SECTION 5.17 — Scoring matrix

The team's score is the highest score possible out the following boy-girl combinations:

BBBG
BBGG
BGGG

SECTION 5.18 — Overall team scoring

A team's overall placement is based on team point totals for an entire point series — the lowest score is not dropped.

SECTION 5.19 — Awards at each race

- Individual medals are awarded at least five places deep at each race.
- Team trophies are awarded at least three places deep in each division at each race.

SECTION 5.20 — Awards for overall series

Individual overall series medals are awarded to finishers in the top 10% of the total number of scoring riders for the series (rounded up) plus at least two places deep. Team overall series trophies are awarded to at least three places deep in each division.

SECTION 5.21 — Race results and protest process

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Preliminary race results and penalty assessments are posted at the race venue, as soon as possible after each event. The posting time shall be stated on the results and penalties sheets.

SUBMITTING PROTESTS

Protest forms are to be presented to the head referee or designated race official to raise rule violations and scoring issues.

- Protests to the preliminary results and opposition to penalties must be submitted by the head coach, unless the head coach is the parent in which case a different Level 3 coach from the team must submit the protest, using the forms provided to the head referee or designated race official within 15 minutes of the league determined start time
- At the League Director's discretion, an extended protest period may be permitted after the results are posted, during which student-athletes may protest the results or oppose the assessment of penalties. Such an extended protest period must be announced along with the official results on race day, or must be announced simultaneously with the posting of the official results on the League's website. The online posting date of the results and the protest submission deadline shall be indicated in the announcement.

RULINGS ON PROTESTS

- After the timely protests and opposition to penalties are considered, ruled upon, and approved by the league director or the head referee, the results on race day shall be official and posted. Unless otherwise stated in a decision or ruling, such decisions and rulings made on race day regarding protests and penalties are final.
- If asked by a league official, student-athletes and coaches who are involved on either side of the dispute may submit statements within the applicable protest period. Submitting such statements after the protest period is permissible only if done at the request of league officials.
- At the discretion of the league director or head referee, the decision and ruling on a protest or opposition to a penalty may be deferred until after race day. If such a deferred decision affects the podium results for an event, medals may be awarded at a later date following resolution of the dispute
- Protests made on race day but deferred for later decision and protests submitted during an extended protest period shall be heard by the league director, head referee, or members of the league rules committee, or any one or combination thereof.

JUDGMENT CALLS

- League officials must decide and rule upon protests despite often having little direct, firsthand information regarding the underlying incident. This is inherent to mountain biking since most of the racing takes place on the race course out of the sight of race officials. Nevertheless, every effort is made to reach the fairest and most informed decisions possible for every submitted protest.
- Student-athletes and their families and coaches are expected to understand the challenges inherent to resolving disputes, and the difficult decisions league officials must make.
- Once a decision has been made on a ruling, the results are final.

SECTION 5.22 — Individual point scale

PLACE	JV2, JV3 & MIDDLE SCHOOL	JV1	VARSITY
1	500	540	575
2	490	530	565
3	481	521	556
4	472	512	547
5	464	504	539
6	456	496	531
7	448	488	523
8	441	481	516
9	434	474	509
10	427	467	502
11	420	460	495
12	414	454	489
13	408	448	483
14	402	442	477
15	396	436	471
16	390	430	465
17	385	425	460
18	380	420	455
19	375	415	450
20	370	410	445

PLACE	JV2, JV3 & MIDDLE SCHOOL	JV1	VARSITY
21	365	405	440
22	360	400	435
23	356	396	431
24	352	392	427
25	348	388	423
26	344	384	419
27	340	380	415
28	336	376	411
29	332	372	407
30	329	369	404
31	326	366	401
32	323	363	398
33	320	360	395
34	317	357	392
35	314	354	389
36	311	351	386
37	308	348	383
38	306	346	381
39	304	344	379
40	302	342	377

PLACE	JV2, JV3 & MIDDLE SCHOOL	JV1	VARSITY
41	300	340	375
42	298	338	373
43	296	336	371
44	294	334	369
45	292	332	367
46	290	330	365
47	289	329	364
48	288	328	363
49	287	327	362
50	286	326	361
51	285	325	360
52	284	324	359
53	283	323	358
54	282	322	357
55	281	321	356
56	280	320	355

Chapter 6: Guidance for Sharing Grievances

SECTION 6.1 — Guidance for sharing grievances

6.1A — NICA recognizes that student-athletes, parents, coaches and volunteers have the right to raise grievances about any matter related to their participation with the organization. The grievance procedure is in place to ensure that all community members are treated in a fair and equitable manner.

6.2.B — If a community member has a complaint against a member of staff, another volunteer, or the organization in general they should first discuss the issue with their head coach or team director.

6.3.C — If the complaint is against the head coach, team director or other leadership position, the matter should be taken to and discussed with the league director. If the matter cannot be resolved at this level, the complaint should be made in writing and submitted to NICA National Human Resources.

6.4.D — At this point, the aggrieved party will be notified of the issue/concern/complaint and NICA National will make every attempt to have the issue resolved within fourteen days. This and all complaints will be treated in a confidential manner.

SECTION 6.2 — No retaliation policy

No individual who reports a suspected violation of any NICA policy, rule, standard, code of conduct, regulation pursuant to law, or is in violation of a clear mandate or public policy concerning the health, safety, welfare, or protection of the environment to a superior, whether or not the allegation turns out to be true, shall be subject to any form of retaliation, including, but not necessarily limited to, harassment, suspension, expulsion, demotion, or firing.

Let's ride!