

NORTH WEST MEN'S LEAGUE COMPETITION RULES 2026

1. APPLICABLE OPERATIONAL RULES

- 1.1 The "North West Men's League" (NWML) is part of the RFL Tier 4 Competition Structure within the National Community Rugby League (NCRL). Governance of this competition sits with the RFL through its Operational Rules for Tiers Three and Four, while day-to-day management is delegated to the NWML Management Group. All teams must comply with the RFL Operational Rules applicable to Tiers Three and Four.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 Membership of the NWML is open to all clubs playing rugby league within the North West Region who are capable of meeting the Annual Entry Criteria as specified by the NWML Management Group.
- 2.2 Applications from new clubs must be submitted in writing to the Competition Officer by the date specified by the Competition Officer each season. Membership shall be granted to a club for one season only, and all clubs must reapply for membership each year.
- 2.3 The annual subscription shall be £80 per team, and fees must be paid by 28th February. Any team that has not paid its annual subscription by this date will not be allocated fixtures until such fees are paid. Entry Division and Merit Division teams will be subject to a reduced £40 fee.
- 2.4 In addition to the annual subscription, certain teams may be required to pay a bond at the start of the season. This bond will be held by the RFL until the end of the season and will be returned subject to clubs fulfilling specified criteria relating to fixture completion, discipline and conduct.
- 2.5 The criteria will be agreed by the NWML Management Group and communicated by the Competition Officer at the start of each season. Failure to meet the specified criteria will result in the full bond amount being forfeited. The bond tariff for all divisions will be a minimum of £200.
- 2.6 All decisions regarding club entry, re-entry, or removal are made by the NWML Management Group in accordance with the Terms of Reference.
- 2.7 Clubs must ensure the following volunteers are registered on GameDay and appropriately qualified:
- Coaches
 - Club Welfare Officer
 - First Aiders
 - Game Day Manager

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- Club Secretary
- Club Chair

2.8 **Club Meetings Attendance**

All member clubs are required to attend designated Club Meetings, including the Annual Clubs Meeting. Failure to attend without prior approval from the Competition Officer may result in a fine of up to £50, or other sanctions as determined by the NWML Management Group.

3 **START AND END DATE OF THE COMPETITION**

- 3.1 The NWML Management Group shall determine the commencement date of its competition and the date upon which it shall cease.
- 3.2 Fixtures will be issued in January each year. Clubs can submit fixture requests for consideration as part of the application process by the application deadline specified by the Competition Officer, indicating any dates they are unavailable to host games and requesting away fixtures where necessary.

4. **STRUCTURE OF THE COMPETITION**

- 4.1 The RFL, in conjunction with the NWML Management Group, will determine the structure of the competition, including its format and size, any play-off structure and matters relating to promotion and relegation.
- 4.2 Promotion and relegation shall normally be based on two up and two down between all divisions. However, as per rule 4.1, the RFL, in conjunction with the NWML Management Group, will determine the makeup of each division.
- 4.3 **Promotion to Tier 3**
- Teams finishing in promotion places within Tier 4 shall be eligible for elevation into the Tier 3 National Conference Leagues.
 - A minimum of one team from the NWML Premier Division shall be promoted to the National Conferences at the conclusion of each season. This may be extended to two but would be determined by the overall promotion and relegation movements between the National Conferences and National Division One.
 - The final number of teams promoted, and their placement within the National Conferences, shall be confirmed by the NL Management Group, in consultation with the relevant Tier 4 Management Group, in order to maintain the prescribed number of teams in each division.
 - Promotion is subject to compliance with the Minimum Standards Criteria (Appendix A of Tier 3 rules) and approval by the NL & NCL Management Group in consultation with the NWML Management Group.
 - Promotion is non-negotiable and cannot be declined, deferred, or traded.
- 4.4 **Relegation from Tier 3**
- Teams relegated from the National Conference Leagues (Tier 3) shall enter the appropriate Tier 4 division in the following season.

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- Placement will be determined by the NWML Management Group to ensure competitive balance and divisional integrity.

- 4.5 If two or more clubs finish level on points at the end of a season the application of competition rule 4.11.2 will decide which team finishes above the other.
- 4.6 If a team withdraws from the League having played at least one fixture, then the points from the teams remaining fixtures shall be awarded to their opponents in line with competition rule 4.11.3, until they have completed one fixture against all teams within their division. If a team completes more than one fixture against another team within their division, the same method will apply until they have completed the same number of fixtures against all teams within their division.
- 4.7 If a club is expelled or suspended, its record will be expunged, irrespective of how many games that club has played.
- 4.8 The play-off format for the Premier Division through to Division 2 will be as follows: 1st v 4th and 2nd v 3rd with the highest placed team having home advantage in the semi-final. There will be no play-offs in any other division.
- 4.9 Only players who have played 3 or more League fixtures for their respective team are eligible to participate in the play-off stages of the competition. The NWML Management group have the discretion to allow players' eligibility who have not met the 3-match criteria upon reasons presented by clubs.
- 4.10 Teams that have forfeited 2 or more games over the course of the season shall not be eligible to participate in the playoff stages of the competition. In this event, the next qualifying team will be entered into the play-off stages.

4.11 League Tables

- 4.11.1 The League competition tables shall be compiled by the RFL, the positions in which shall be determined by the number of points gained, with points being awarded as follows: two points for each Match won; and one point for each Match drawn.

- 4.11.2 The League placings will be determined and calculated as follows:

- The club with the highest number of points shall be at the top of the league table and the club with the lowest shall be at the bottom.
- Where clubs have an equal number of points then relative positions shall be determined by the head-to-head record in League matches only. Where their head-to-head record is even then the aggregate score of all head-to-head league fixtures will decide the team on top (head-to-head placings will not be displayed on the league table but will be communicated by the Competition Officer if necessary).

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- Where clubs have an equal number of points, head-to-head results, and aggregate score, their relative positions shall be determined by points difference so that the club having the greater points difference is placed above the club with the lesser points difference.
- If the positions are still equal, positions will be determined by the toss of a coin which shall be conducted at such time and place as the RFL shall direct and those clubs concerned shall be entitled to witness the toss.

4.11.3 The notional scores in forfeited games shall be 24-0 and a points deduction of 2 points. The League and clubs will work together to ensure, where possible, games are played, and all alternative options should be discussed before a rearrangement/postponement/forfeit is considered.

4.12 Cup Fixtures

4.12.1 In accordance with Operational Rule B3:2:2, Cup ties will take precedence over League Matches.

4.12.2 Only players who have played 1 or more Cup fixtures for their respective team in the current season are eligible to participate in the final of any NWML Cup competition. The NWML Management group have the discretion to allow players' eligibility who have not met the 1 match criteria upon reasons presented by clubs.

4.12.3 Where a Cup competition includes a Group Phase, group tables shall be compiled and placings determined in accordance with Rule 4.11 (League Tables).

4.12.4 The notional score for any forfeited Cup fixture shall be 24–0, if this occurs during the Group Phase the offending club shall also incur a deduction of 2 points, in line with Rule 4.11.3.

5. FIXTURES

5.1 All fixtures should be played as per the published fixture list. Clubs entering teams into a structured division are expected to demonstrate a clear commitment to fulfilling all scheduled fixtures, and every effort should be made to play matches on the original date.

Where exceptional circumstances arise, a request to rearrange a fixture may be considered. Any club wishing to seek a rearrangement must consult their opponents in the first instance to discuss the proposed change. Mutual agreement between clubs is required before any application is submitted.

Before agreeing to any change, both clubs must ensure that a suitable and mutually acceptable alternative date is available for the fixture to be played. Requests to rearrange fixtures without a realistic alternative date will not be supported.

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Once agreement is reached, a fixture amendment form must be completed and submitted to the Competition Officer for approval. The Competition Officer retains the right to approve or reject any request in order to protect the integrity and smooth running of the competition.

As per Rule 5.13.1, teams must accept a postponement request where at least one month's notice is provided and a suitable alternative weekend date is available.

- 5.2 Where backlog dates are programmed into the fixture list, these shall not be considered free weekends. Clubs must be prepared to play fixtures on these dates if allocated.
- 5.3 No friendly fixtures shall be arranged on a League fixture date without prior approval of the Competition Officer. Approved friendly fixtures must be confirmed with the Competition Officer before being played.
- 5.4 Clubs must accept fixtures given at seven days' notice by the Competition Officer.
- 5.5 Any club failing to play a fixture on a scheduled date will be made to play the reverse fixture, if it has not already been played or forfeited, on their opponents' ground.
- 5.6 Clubs failing to fulfil any competitive fixture (Cup or League) will be sanctioned as per the following scale.
- 1st offence - £50 fine
 - 2nd offence - £100 fine
 - 3rd offence - Withdrawn from their respective division and placed in the Merit Division (subject to NWML Management Group discretion, who will also determine if there will be any additional sanctions).
- 5.7 Relegation for Fixture Failures is subject to the NWML Management Group's discretion, any club failing to fulfil:
- one fixture in the Premier Division,
 - more than one fixture in Divisions One and Two, or
 - more than two fixtures in any other division, may be relegated irrespective of League placing. If the club was due for promotion, it would remain in the same division the following season. The next highest placed club will be promoted.
- 5.8 Any club failing to fulfil a fixture must pay reasonable expenses to the non-offending club, as determined by the NWML Management Group. This may include the referee's full fee and expenses. The non-offending team should contact the Competition Officer to notify them of their intention to claim.
- 5.9 In addition to the sanctions imposed as outlined in rule 5.6, any club failing to fulfil the corresponding away league fixture after their opposition has travelled to them may be asked to compensate their opposition up to a maximum of £100. This is to offset the cost of travel

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incurred from the first fixture and the loss of match-day revenue from the second fixture. The non-offending team should contact the Competition Officer to notify them of their intention to claim.

- 5.10 Any club which fails to notify their opponents of its inability to raise a team 60 minutes before the scheduled kick-off, shall also be liable to pay any expenses, up to a maximum of £50, which their opponents may incur, including kit washing, or medical costs such as strapping. The non-offending team should contact the Competition Officer to notify them of their intention to claim.
- 5.11 In the case of a home club failing to fulfil a fixture, a visiting club that has travelled may claim up to a maximum of £100 towards transport costs. The non-offending team should contact the Competition Officer to notify them of their intention to claim.
- 5.12 Any club with more than one team at home, in any competition, must provide an alternative pitch in case of a clash of fixtures. If an alternative pitch cannot be found, and no other mutual agreement can be reached, the game should be moved to the ground of the opposition team, provided this is available.
- 5.13 **Postponements**
 - 5.13.1 Teams must accept a request for postponement providing a minimum of one months' notice is given by their opposition, and there is a suitable alternative weekend date available. Suitable alternative weekend dates are considered to be any assigned backlog date. Postponement requests made with less than one months' notice will not be considered because of injuries, or any other matter not considered exceptional, unless mutually agreed.
 - 5.13.2 When a game is unable to go ahead as scheduled, **BOTH** teams should notify the Competition Officer via email to confirm if the game is being postponed until a later date or conceded and the points claimed by the opposing side. As per rule 4.11.3 all alternative options should be discussed before a rearrangement/postponement/forfeit is considered.
 - 5.13.3 In the case of both a no-fault or mutually agreed postponement, if clubs cannot agree on a new date within 7 days of the original postponement, then the Competition Officer will issue a new date for the fixture. This will be on the next available Saturday, or if there are no Saturday dates available, the fixture will be set for a midweek evening. If the new fixture is not played as instructed by the Competition Officer, sanctions will apply as outlined in section 5.6.
- 5.14 **Grounds Unfit to Play**
 - 5.14.1 If the home club suspects that its ground may be unfit for play due to adverse weather or other causes, it must immediately contact a Match Official from the RFL-approved list to conduct a ground inspection.

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If the Match Official deems the ground unfit for play and determines that it is unlikely to become playable before the scheduled kick-off, this decision must be communicated immediately to:

- The visiting club
- The appointed Match Official
- The Competition Officer

Failure to follow this procedure may result in the home club being found guilty of Misconduct. In addition to any sanctions, the home club will be responsible for reimbursing reasonable travel expenses incurred by any Match Official or club that was not notified in accordance with this rule.

5.14.2 This clause aligns with Operational Rule B2:4. Clubs must also refer to the [RFL's Grass Pitch Inspection Form](#) and guidance on hard ground protocols. A common-sense approach should be applied, prioritising player welfare and fixture fulfilment. Where appropriate, clubs are encouraged to consider alternative venues (e.g., local schools or parks).

6. **PLAYER REGISTRATIONS**

6.1 All players shall annually register with the club using the RFL GameDay system. The League will circulate a link to the registration portal to the clubs to commence the registration process. During this process, a Player must become an Our League Active member.

6.2 New Players can be signed 'on the day' using the GameDay system. Clubs must make every effort to confirm that players are free to register in this manner. Clubs are responsible for ensuring that a player is eligible to play for them before allowing the player to play. A Competition Officer can be contacted on match day to check a player's eligibility.

6.3 The RFL may introduce, from time to time, new registration processes.

6.4 **Professional Players**

6.4.1 The NWML Management Group shall allow professional players to play within the Competition in accordance with the Operational Rules and any regulations that are in place relating to the dual registration of players. This season's dual-registration regulations can be viewed [HERE](#).

6.4.2 Players whose contractual arrangements with a Professional club during the current season have been terminated by mutual consent shall not, after the 31st of August annually, be allowed to register in the NWML.

6.5 **Transfers**

6.5.1 Clubs may register or transfer players from other clubs, using GameDay. It is the responsibility of the new club to initiate the transfer. The club the player is moving from will

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need to approve any outgoing transfer requests on GameDay. Clubs will have 7 days to notify the Competition Officer of any objections to a transfer being approved. After this point, if no objections are raised the Competition Officer will approve the transfer on the club's behalf. The player has final sign off of the transfer. The process must be completed in full, including player sign off, before a player plays. The club shall follow any other policies issued by the RFL in relation to the registration of players.

- 6.5.2 All players must fulfil any financial obligations to their current club before any transfer to another club, including professional clubs, will be permitted. This would exclude a players OLA membership fee for those clubs that have opted to pay for their players. This also applies to a player wishing to sign for a different club in future seasons.
- 6.5.3 The deadline date for transferring players shall be the 31st of August each year, subject to the NWML Management Group's discretion.

7. MATCH DAY OPERATIONS

- 7.1 All games shall, unless there is a mutual agreement between the competing clubs to the contrary, be organised and staged on Saturday afternoons with a scheduled kick-off time of 2.30pm. The League, at the start of the season, may also designate selected fixtures to be played on Friday evenings. Fixtures may alternatively be played midweek, on Sundays, or at different kick-off times on Saturdays, provided both clubs agree. Any changes to the date or time of a fixture must be agreed by both clubs, and the Competition Officer must be notified in good time before the scheduled fixture.

- 7.2 To maintain the continuity of the playing programme the Competition Officer shall be empowered, if necessary, to bring forward to an earlier date a fixture scheduled for later in the season.

7.3 Contacting Opponents and Kit Obligations

- 7.3.1 In accordance with the Operational Rules it is the responsibility of the home club, during the week preceding a game, to contact both its opponents and the relevant Match Officials regarding team colours and ground directions by no later than 8pm on the Thursday before the following Saturday's fixture. Away clubs should acknowledge any correspondence received and confirm their intention to travel, no later than 24 hours before the scheduled kick off time.
- 7.3.2 In the event of a colour clash involving two competing clubs it is the responsibility of the visiting team to provide and wear a suitable alternative strip, to thereby enable the home team to maximise any shirt/sponsorship opportunity.

7.4 Game Day Manager

- 7.4.1 Each Club must appoint a "Game Day Manager" whose duties on match days include, and may extend to, acting as a touchline steward in support of the Match Officials while play is in progress. Match Officials must receive the same level of hospitality as the visiting club.

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7.4.2 To prevent abuse or other unacceptable behaviour, Match Officials appointed by the RFL must be escorted to and from the dressing rooms, and onto and off the field of play, by a club official designated for that purpose.

7.5 Technical Areas and Dug Outs

7.5.1 The listed Head Coach shall ensure that registered officials ONLY, together with players and substitutes, occupy the dugouts.

7.5.2 Each team shall ensure the following:

- **Maximum Officials:** Only 10 people (including substitutes) allowed in the technical area during play.
- **Dugout Conduct:** Everyone must remain seated, except substitutes warming up or authorised personnel wearing designated bibs (e.g., Medical - Red, Coach - Yellow, Substitutes - Orange).
- **Technical Area:** Must be clearly marked (10m max length, 1m from touchline).
- **Dugout Priority:** If there's one dugout, it must be given to the visiting team.
- **Team Sheet:** All dugout personnel must be listed on the Official Team Sheet.
- **Dismissed Personnel:** Dismissed individuals must leave the dugout/field area and not return.
- **Penalties:** Non-compliance results in fines and/or suspensions for individuals and clubs.

7.6 Team Sizes & Substitutes

7.6.1 A maximum of 17 players may be named for each side taking part in a fixture, including league and cup fixtures, play-off games and finals. The maximum number of players can be increased to 20, subject to the agreement of the opposition. This must be agreed upon before kick-off. If agreement is not sought or permitted with opponents, then a maximum of 17 players may be named.

7.6.2 Clubs are encouraged (not required) to match team sizes with their opposition to increase the likelihood of games taking place. For example, if a team only travels with 12 players, the opposing team also starts with 12 players on the pitch. Team sizes should be discussed and agreed between opposing teams in advance of the game.

7.7 Medical Requirements

7.7.1 Each home club is required to ensure that a first aider attends each game. The first aider should make themselves known to the Match Official before the start of any Match and shall remain for a minimum of 15 minutes after the end of the Game and shall speak directly with a designated Official from both clubs, if necessary, to ensure that the correct reporting paperwork is completed. If there is no first aider, then the Match Official will not permit a game to take place.

7.7.2 First aiders should be listed on the team sheet and are required to register on the GameDay system as a volunteer.

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- 7.7.3 In the event a player sustains an injury to the head or displays signs or symptoms of concussion, the Match Official will stop the game and ask for the first aider to attend to them. If the first aider suspects a concussion, the player **MUST** be removed from the field of play and remain off the field. If the player refuses to follow the first aider's advice, then the Match Officials can hold up play until the player follows the instructions of the first aider. Advice for managing a concussion can be found [HERE](#). The RFL is supportive of and follows the SRA concussion guidance – please read through the guidance in full [Concussion Guidelines](#) and ensure they are applied to matches and training at all times.

7.8 Reporting Injuries and Concussion

- 7.8.1 In the event of a serious injury or suspected concussion at a Match, the incident must be reported in accordance with the reporting procedures issued by the RFL at the start of each season. This includes submitting all required information through the designated system identified in the RFL guidance. Any head injury must be reported as directed, as this information is required for insurance purposes.

7.9 Post Match Arrangements

- 7.9.1 The home club shall be responsible for supplying all the competing players, club officials and appointed Match Officials with a suitable post-match meal (up to a maximum of 25 people per team). The visiting club is obligated to accept such hospitality.
- 7.9.2 In the case of away clubs failing to fulfil a fixture the home club, providing they have not been notified at least 48 hours in advance, may also claim up to a maximum of £100 towards refreshment costs. Any club which will not be requiring refreshments should notify its opponents in advance of the game; otherwise, the club will be liable to pay £100 compensation to the home club. The non-offending team should contact the Competition Officer to notify them of their intention to claim.

7.10 Team Sheet and Reporting Results

- 7.10.1 Teams will be required to enter their team sheet online, on GameDay, no later than 30 minutes before the scheduled KO time, this should include shirt numbers and positions. Failure to do so will result in an £10 administration fine. Any changes after that point must be reported to the Match Official on the day.
- 7.10.2 The home club, in consultation with the Match Official and designated officer from the opposition, must agree the result immediately on completion of the game and enter the result onto GameDay within 60 minutes. Failure to comply will result in a £10 administration fine.
- 7.10.3 Each club is responsible for ensuring their points scoring information is updated within the player stats area on the GameDay system within 48 hours following the completion of the game. Failure to do so will result in a £10 administration fine.

7.11 Abandonment of Games

- 7.11.1 If a game is abandoned with more than three-quarters of the playing time elapsed, the result shall stand unless otherwise determined by the NWML Management Group. If less than

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three-quarters of the playing time has elapsed, the NWML Management Group, at its sole discretion, may order a game to be replayed.

8 DISCIPLINE, SUSPENSIONS AND FINES

- 8.1 All disciplinary matters, suspensions, fines and appeals shall be dealt with in accordance with Section D of the RFL Operational Rules and the F9 On-Field Sentencing Guidelines.

9 APPEALS

- 9.1 Appeals against disciplinary sanctions shall be conducted under Section D of the RFL Operational Rules, with reference to the F9 On-Field Sentencing Guidelines where applicable.