NLD RFU Merit Leagues – Guidance, Rules and Regulations 2026 - 27

This document has been prepared to provide assistance, guidance and clarity to clubs playing within the Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire Rugby Football Union (NLD RFU) Merit Leagues and should be read in conjunction with the general Regulations of the RFU.

The NLD RFU Competitions Committee will oversee the organisation and management of the NLD RFU Merit Leagues. In the event of any confusion or conflict these must be communicated to the NLD Competitions Secretary using the competitions@nldrfu.co.uk email address.

Ultimately the aim of the NLD RFU Competitions Committee is to be as flexible as possible to ensure games get played using its mantra of '…in the interest of rugby!'

i. Objective

The objective of the NLD RFU Merit Leagues is to create local competitive playing opportunities of grassroots rugby which allow clubs to grow and develop their teams and individual players throughout the season.

The key focus is the player, their development and access to a positive playing experience.

ii. Club Eligibility

Participating clubs must be affiliated members of NLD RFU or of another Constituent Body of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) with approval from their Constituent Body of the RFU to participate in the NLD Merit Leagues.

Please note that all participating clubs must have a completed Club Risk Assessment and Emergency Medical Action Plan in line with RFU Regulation 9; this must be made available to visiting opposition Clubs / Team upon request,

All Clubs / Teams must have suitably trained and qualified Club First Aid personnel at each fixture.

Failure to meet the Player Welfare requirements of Regulation may result in a Club / Team being removed from all NLD Competitions and being reported to NLD Governance.

iii. Structure

The NLD RFU Merit Leagues will made up of various pools to accommodate the number of teams entered. They will be established permitting the best geographical fit, mindful of travel distances, and the perceived ability of the Team to perform within their allocated League.

Clubs may enter more than one Team if player availability supports this though they will be allocated to different Pools.

The NLD RFU Competitions Committee will perform a mid-season review by the end of December for the current season, with a view to making adjustments to the structure and / or format if required to ensure the NLD RFU Merit competitions remain appropriate for competing clubs and their players.

A further review will be also performed at the end of the season to inform the season. Player and Club feedback, fixture scores and game completion rates will be used as part of said review.

iv. Format

All matches will be played in accordance with the World Rugby Laws of the Game and the RFU's regulation 6 unless stated otherwise here. In line with RFU Regulation 6.53 & 6.54, 'Game On' principles may be applied in non-RFU Competitions (including Merit League fixtures and friendlies), all Teams should utilise the 'Game On' framework to ensure that their fixture is played.

Where Game On! principles are applied it is agreed that teams should play with balanced number – each team having the same number of players on the field – however a maximum variation of one player may be accepted.

Where necessary the removal of players to permit this may be required. Unequal numbers resulting from players being dismissed the field due to law infringements will not be balanced; Yellow or Red Card.

The 'loaning' of players across teams to achieve a balance is acceptable.

Subject to the above each team must consist of at least 10 players.

Both Teams must confirm the application of Game On! principles prior to the Kick-Off and the Referee included in those discussions; Regulation 6.53.iii.

Teams can agree to concede the scheduled fixture and play the game as a friendly, under Game On!, to ensure that play occurs in which case consideration may be given to the of awarding 0 - 28 score against the conceding team for the scheduled fixture. This is at the sole discretion of the Competition Secretary to whom this should be reported.

The 'Player Off' principle will not be applicable as this is incompatible with utilisation of the 'Game On' principles Regulation 6.63 & 6.64.

Teams will play everyone in their League home and away. All games must be played guided by the spirit of England Rugby's core values.

The following form the Rules and Regulations of the NLD Merit Leagues.

1.	**Player Eligibility**	a) All players must be Club registered in accordance with RFU Regulation 13 using the Game Management System (GMS) system to play within the NLD RFU's Merit competitions. b) All players must be allocated to the team / teams for which they will be selected to play for in GMS. c) Dual registered players, applicable to those players who play at Level 9 and below only, are permitted to play for multiple Clubs / Teams during the period of the season; please note that they may only be registered for 2 clubs at any given time. If they play above Level 9 during the season the dual registration faculty is revoked. d) In conjunction with Rules 1.e & 1.f below the NLD Competitions recognise that there will be 'Fringe Players' within clubs / teams. In terms of the NLD a 'Fringe Player' is defined as a player who is intermittently or irregularly selected to a club's team who play in a higher league for 50% of the higher-level team's scheduled fixtures or consistently for a period of 3 scheduled weekends - in the latter instance players will be ineligible for selection to the Merit League squad

		for the next Merit League scheduled fixture. This is only applicable in relation to the team's immediately higher-level club team; i.e. 2nd and 3rd teams or 1st and 2nd team but excludes 1st and 3rd transfers; 1st and 3rd transfers are not permitted except where players are recovering / returning from injury and is only permissible for the first scheduled Merit League fixture after returning to play. Any uncertainty on player eligibility is to be referred to the NLD Competitions Committee before the player is included in any Merit League scheduled fixture. e) In conjunction with Rule 1.f Club Players who have played in a higher-level Team, cancelled higher level fixtures will not be considered as 'the previous week', will be considered ineligible for inclusion in a NLD Merit League squad the following week unless permitted by Rule 1.d. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the reversal of game points and result should a substantiated complaint be received by the NLD Competitions Committee. f) Notwithstanding and additional to Rules 1.d & 1.e a player who has previously played at a higher level may take part only when mutually agreed by both teams regarding their appropriate and safe inclusion. This must be communicated to the Fixtures and Competitions Secretary prior to the fixture occurring This is to help maintain the right playing experience. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the reversal of game points and result should a substantiated complaint be received by the NLD Competitions Committee. g) Regulation 15.6 Playing Adult Rugby must be adhered to all times.
2.	**Squad Sizes & Front Row Replacements**	a) There are no limits on match day squad sizes; the limitations Regulation 6.56 are not applicable. b) When there is a shortage of players it is advised games commence applying the relevant aspects of the 'Game On' framework. c) If a team has a large squad, the use of the half game rule is required (a 'Game On' principle), as is lending players to the opposition and other teams to give players time on the pitch. d) It is not compulsory to have a front row replacement and, if necessary due to lack of experienced front row players, part or all of a match may be played with un-contested scrums with no detrimental effect to the result; i.e. the 'Player Off' principle is not applied – reference Regulation 6.63.
3.	**Player Borrowing**	a) Player borrowing is permitted where it means the fixture is played. b) In the first instance the priority should be borrowing from your opposition on the day. c) Should players be borrowed from teams outside of your fixture, these players must be agreed in advance of the fixture by the opposition, be Club registered for their home Club and comply with the requirements of 1.d and 1. e.
4.	**Substitutes**	a) Unlimited Rolling substitutions are permitted within the definitions of Regulation 6.61.

		b) Teams are encouraged to ensure all players get appropriate pitch time. i.e. using the half a game principle.
5.	**Match Dates & Kick Off Times**	a) Matches will be scheduled to be played on Saturdays. b) **Teams may mutually agree to move a fixture to a different day/date.** The home team must ensure they confer and agree changes with the NLD RFU Competitions Secretary and Fixture Secretary (to ensure GMS is updated accordingly) and that the NLD RFU Referee Society are informed once a change of venue, date and / or time has been agreed and accepted. c) Kick off times can be mutually agreed. Where teams cannot agree matches shall kick off at 3 pm except for those matches played in November, December, January, and February, which shall kick off at 2:00 pm or 2:15 pm; cf Regulation 6.41 & 6.42. d) Matches played other than on Saturday or Sunday will kick off at 7:00 pm; reference Regulation 6.43.
6.	**Un-played, postponed and / or Abandoned Matches**	a) Where possible teams should utilise the 'Game On' framework to ensure that fixture take place. Both teams **must** agree which of the 'Game On' principles will apply to the match and notify the referee at least 30 minutes prior to kick off. b) In the event of a host venue pitch being unplayable due to weather, it is recommended that the fixture is: a. switched to the away team venue – consulting with the NLD RFU Referee Society b. moved to an alternative venue – consulting with the NLD RFU Referee Society c. postponed and new date agreed in agreement with the NLD RFU Competitions Fixture Secretary c) If a game is abandoned, after 40 minutes of play, the result will stand. d) Where there is a genuine need to cancel or a postpone a fixture, the club requesting a postponement are asked to communicate it to their opposition, the NLD RFU Referee Society and the NLD RFU Competitions Secretary at the earliest opportunity and in any case within 24 hours. e) Where a match is abandoned for reasons other than those permitted above – i.e. weather or fitness of the pitch – the Referee will submit a formal report to the CB Disciplinary Secretary.
7.	**Score Reporting and Match Day Form**	a) The first named team on a fixture – the home team - is responsible for entering match details and the result onto the Game Management System (GMS) using the electronic match card (EMC) facility; reference Regulation 6.79 b) Each team / club must have a nominated person with the correct GMS access. (The individual, who must be notified to the NLD RFU Competitions Committee prior to the Club's first fixture, will need to have the 'Match Card Administrator' GMS role). c) Inputting team line ups on the EMC is required for all NLD RFU Merit fixtures.

		d) The result, as reported by the officiating Referee, must be entered within 48 hours of the kick off time of the fixture as recorded in GMS; this is to include final scores and the number of tries scored. **e)** Walk Overs are not permitted. Should there be a need for this option to be considered a written report must be sent to the Competitions Secretary who will enter in GMS. **f)** If a Club enters a Walk Over, other than as agreed above, they will be removed by the Competitions Secretary.
8.	**Referee Appointments**	a) The home team is responsible for confirming whether the NLD RFU Referee Society have appointed a Society Referee for their fixture; reference Regulation 6.34. b) If the NLD RFU Referee Society have been unable to appoint a Society Referee then a suitably qualified Club Referee must be used. c) The Home team must notify the Referee, in advance, of any changes to team kit – i.e. who is changing when colours clash – to ensure that the Referee doesn't clash with either team. d) Teams must notify the appointed Referee at least 30 minutes prior to kick-off of any 'Game On' principles being applied to the fixture.
9.	**Fulfilment of Fixtures**	a) Teams are encouraged to fulfil all their fixtures using the Game On! Framework as required for completion however prior to mid-season review no use of 'Double Headers' will be made. b) Where Game On! principles are used to ensure completion of a fixture a League Table bonus point will be awarded to both Teams. For the points to be awarded a note to this effect – 'Game On! Squad' - must be made in the 'Save Team Name' field of the Team tab for each Team and emailed to the Competitions Secretary. If this is not noted or verified no Bonus Points will be awarded. c) Completion of fixtures will be routinely monitored by the NLD RFU Competitions Committee and a team's continued engagement within the NLD Merit Leagues will be reviewed as necessary. d) All League fixtures should be played before end of April '26.
10.	**Points System**	a) Fixture points will be awarded to teams as follows: • 4 points for a win • 2 points for a draw • 0 points for a loss b) Bonus points will be awarded to teams for: • The scoring of 4 or more tries • A loss within 7 points • As noted in Regulation 9.b a Bonus Point will be awarded, to both Teams, if a fixture is fulfilled using Game On! Principles. c) There will be no sanction for cancelled games until post the mid-season review however it is the responsibility of the club cancelling the game to notify the NLD Competition Secretary, Fixture Secretary and Referee Society a minimum

		of 24 hours before kickoff. Failure to do so will be taken into consideration for continued engagement and support. **d)** A maximum 50 score points differential is advised in any NLD RFU Merit League fixture. If this occurs, teams are encouraged to mix teams up playing the remaining game time as a friendly under the 'Game On' principles; the score will be recorded as the score when the 50 points differential was reached.
11.	**Table Positions**	a) Should more than one team have the equal points the following criteria will be used to determine table rankings at the end of the season: I. League Points II. Score Points difference III. Score Points for b) If Rule 10.d has been applied during the season by either of the teams on equal points table rankings will be determined as below: I. League Points II. Away wins III. Home wins
12.	**Communications**	a) Each team should have a minimum of 2 representatives on the NLD Fixtures Pool WhatsApp group; these must be notified to the NLD RFU Competitions Secretary a minimum of 2 weeks before their respective league starts play.
13.	**Disputes**	a) Any Club wishing to raise a post-match matter – i.e. dispute - shall do so in writing within 24 hours of the match being played; such communications should be sent to the NLD RFU Competitions Secretary. b) The compliant must be submitted on Club headed notepaper, signed by the lead complainant and counter-signed by the Chair or Secretary of the Club. c) The NLD RFU Competitions Committee will be the sole arbitrator of all disputes and the decision of this committee will be final.
14.	**Other**	a) The NLD RFU Competitions Committee reserve the right to make amendments to the NLD RFU Merit Tables and / or Guidance Documents. b) All communications must be addressed to the NLD Competitions Secretary – competitions@nldrfu.co.uk whilst general communications regarding NLD RFU Merit League Fixtures should be addressed to the Fixtures Secretary – fixtures@nldrfu.co.uk.