

2026 Buckeye Cup
USA Hockey High School
Ohio State Championship Rules
August 20, 2025

1) NEW PROPOSED RULES

New proposed rules will be submitted between April 1 and September 30 via conference calls and have a vote completed no later than October 31.

2) MEMBERS AND SEQUENCE OF TOURNAMENT

- A) The Three (3) leagues participating in the Buckeye Cup are The Ohio Scholastic Hockey League (www.gchschl.net), the North Coast High School Hockey League (NCHSHL) (www.NCHSHL.com) and the Cincinnati High School Hockey League, (www.chshl.club).
- B) Each city in the league will host the tournament in rotation. In the event of a new league being added, the new league would be eligible to host after all current leagues have hosted an equal amount of Buckeye Cup Championship Tournaments. Should a city be unable to host at the date specified (see Date & Time), the next city in rotation would become eligible to host. The hosting city will file the appropriate forms to ensure the Buckeye Cup is a USA Hockey-sanctioned event.
- C) The Buckeye Cup should be completed not less than three (3) full weekends prior to the first day of the USA Hockey High School National Championships. The 2026 Buckeye Cup Tournament will be February 27 – March 1, 2026, in Columbus, Ohio.
- D) The Host League shall send a published schedule of the Tournament Game Dates and Times 30 days prior to the start of the Tournament to each League representative.

3) GAME BRACKET

There will be a 3-game preliminary round with each team playing the other 3 teams in its pool. The pools will consist of the following seeds from www.myhockeyrankings.com:

Pool A: 1, 4, 5, 8

Pool B: 2, 3, 6, 7

If there are 3 or more teams from one league in one pool and there are teams with adjacent seeding numbers and with less than 0.10 difference in MHR scores that can switch pools to reduce the number of teams from one league in one pool without increasing the number of teams in any pool from one league to more than 2, then the teams will be switched unless the Buckeye Cup Committee decides otherwise.

4) BUDGETING

- A.) The hosting league will provide each city representative an itemized budget to include the cost of the ice, trainer, security, trophy, referee, or any other miscellaneous items for the upcoming Buckeye Cup no later than four (4) weeks prior to the first day of Buckeye Cup. The due date is January 29, 2026.
- B.) Failure to provide a budget by the deadline will result in a fine of \$100 for every 5 days it is late.
- C.) A fine assessed to the hosting league for failure to provide the budget by the deadline will be paid by the hosting league to the upcoming Buckeye Cup's hosting league when the fees are due for the upcoming Buckeye Cup.
- D.) All active participating leagues must acknowledge this fine in writing.

5) DUE DATE FOR BUCKEYE CUP FEES

- A.) The Buckeye Cup fees for a league's participating teams is due to the Buckeye Cup's hosting league by the Thursday prior to the start of the Buckeye Cup (i.e., one (1) week before the start of the Buckeye Cup – (February 19, 2026).
- B.) Failure to send in any of the above noted Buckeye Cup payments will result in suspension from the Buckeye Cup, unless approved by the Tournament Director and the Buckeye Cup Committee.

6) REFUND POLICY

- A.) Once a team has accepted the invitation to attend the Buckeye Cup and paid the entry fee, there will be no refunds unless the tournament is cancelled.
- B.) A team found ineligible after the start of the Buckeye Cup will not be eligible for a refund for any reason.

7) GAME PLAY FORMAT

Pool Play round 1: Friday night.

Pool Play round 2: Saturday morning.

Pool Play round 3: Saturday late afternoon. The round 3 games shall be

Pool A 1 v 4 and 5 v 8, and Pool B 2 v 3 and 6 v 7.

The winner of each Pool and the next best team of each Pool advances to the Semi-Finals. Refer to Section 23 for Tie-Breaker Procedure. Refer to USA Hockey Tournament Guidebook, (<http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook>) for explanation of tie-breakers.

Semi-Finals: Sunday morning. The 4 semifinalists shall be

Pool A #1 vs Pool B #2 and Pool B #1 vs Pool A #2

Championship Game: Sunday afternoon. Higher Seeded Team in Tournament based on tournament play is the Home team.

The Buckeye Cup Tournament is an advancing tournament to the USA Hockey High School National Championship, and will follow the game play format used by USA Hockey, which can be found at:

<http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook>.

8) GATE CHARGE

No gate charge for admission to any Buckeye Cup Tournament games.

9) USE OF RINKS & HOTELS

A maximum of 3 rink facilities may be utilized with a driving distance no further than 20 minutes from the farthest hotel recommended. The hosting city will provide a list of suggested hotels.

10) OFFICIALS & SUPPLIES

The hosting city will include four (4) officials per game, scorekeeper, and timekeeper for all games. Each team will provide its own practice pucks and penalty box attendant. (all off-ice officials must be 18 years old or older) A confirmation email will provide proof of scheduling.

11) SECURITY & TRAINER

Each hosting city will provide security guards and certified medical personnel for each Buckeye Cup game. In the event that a facility is used which contains two (2) rinks, a single security guard and single certified medical personnel may be used while two games are being played at the same time. A confirmation email will provide proof of scheduling of security and trainer. Buckeye Cup will follow USA Hockey Injury/Concussion Return to Play Policy as noted in the USA Hockey Tournament Guidebook (<http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook>).

12) LOCKER ROOMS

Each team is responsible for any damage that may occur by any of their members to any locker room facility that is used by that team during the Buckeye Cup. Please make sure that a responsible adult is in the locker room at all times for player supervision. The Tournament Committee requests that team coaches, managers, and players cooperate in keeping the locker room clean, orderly and in good condition. Please see that all debris, tape, can, wrappers, etc. are placed in the proper receptacles before leaving the locker room. Car keys or Photo I.D. may be required to obtain locker room keys prior to each game and returned once locker rooms have been inspected to assure no damage has been done.

13) TROPHIES REQUIRED

A team trophy will be awarded to the winning team. In addition, individual awards are to be given to each player on the winning team. Cities may do more if they choose.

14) ROSTERS

A.) Teams eligible to participate in the Buckeye Cup shall send a copy of their stamped and approved USA Hockey rosters dated no later than 12/31 to the hosting city league director postmarked no later than four (4) weeks prior to the first day of Buckeye Cup.

B.) NUMBER OF PLAYERS

A maximum of twenty (20) players, including goalkeepers, shall be permitted to play in a game. The maximum number of players, excluding goalkeepers, shall not exceed eighteen (18).

It is highly recommended that all teams arrive at the State Championship with two (2) goalkeepers qualified under the rules. Refer to (<http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook>) for rules pertaining to an Emergency Back Up Goalie (EBUG).

NOTE: The high school teams may roster up to 30 players.

15) TEAM AND PLAYER QUALIFICATION AND ELIGIBILITY

The Buckeye Cup will have eight (8) participating eligible teams. The Host City will earn one automatic bid, and Seven (7) teams will receive at-large bids. All teams must post all scores from **ALL GAMES** played on www.myhockeyrankings.com.

Automatic Bids One (1) team from the Host City will qualify to participate in the Buckeye Cup. The automatic bid shall be the League Tournament Champion, League Regular Season Champion or the highest ranked ([myhockeyrankings.com](http://www.myhockeyrankings.com)) team from that League.

If a team is unable to attend the Buckeye Cup for any reason prior to the start of the Buckeye Cup, the next highest ranked team in My Hockey Rankings (MHR) will replace that team.

At-Large Bids Seven (7): The Seven (7) at-large teams will be selected from the www.myhockeyrankings.com website, using the Ohio-OH USA Hockey Listings posted on the 2nd Wednesday of February -(February 11, 2026). The top Seven (7) highest ranked teams subject to the next paragraph.

Should a tie exist between teams on [myhockeyrankings.com](http://www.myhockeyrankings.com), head-to-head game results will determine the seeding. If no head-to-head game was played between the teams, go to the highest strength of schedule to determine the seeding. If a tie still exists between the teams, go to a coin flip.

Team Eligibility. If a USA Hockey High School registered team desires to participate in the Buckeye Cup, it must meet the following requirements:

1. Have 50% or more of the team's registered players reside in Ohio;
2. Team must be registered in the State of Ohio, to be eligible to compete in the Buckeye Cup.
3. Teams seeking to participate in the High School National Championship/District Tournament should play a regular season schedule as a team, if available within that team's state, or compete against other high school registered teams during their regular season. (Refer to <http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook>)
4. Be ranked at www.myhockeyrankings.com and
5. Agree in writing to comply with these Buckeye Cup Rules.

Player Eligibility:

- A. Any players and/or teams that are members of an OHSAA program are ineligible.
Note: the OHSAA season extends to the date the state championship is determined.
- B. Eighth graders are ineligible.
- C. Double rostering of current season Junior players is NOT permitted.
- D. Double rostering of current season Tier I players is NOT permitted.
- E. Double rostering of Tier II players is permitted.
- F. Double rostering of Bantam freshman players is permitted.
- G. Internal double rostering between an organization's varsity and junior varsity teams is permitted.
(Only grades 9-12 are permitted.)
- H. A player **must participate in 50% of his/her Varsity or Junior Varsity team's league games** that season **and play in a minimum of Five (5) Varsity Team Games** to be eligible to participate in the Buckeye Cup. If a team is not in a League, Player must play in 50% of that Team's Regular Season Schedule.
 - 1.) If a player begins participation on a Varsity team late in the season, then 50% of those league games or Regular Season Schedule games would begin after his/her start date with the team. Players must be on the Varsity team roster stamped no later than 12/31.
 - 2.) If a player is unable to participate on a team due to medical reasons validated by a physician, then 50% of his/her Varsity league games would include only those games he/she was medically cleared for or those prior to the medical reason excusing the player from participation.
 - 3) Notwithstanding the above, **each player must have played in at least FIVE (5) games for the Varsity team participating in the Buckeye Cup.**
- I.) A challenge of player eligibility may be brought to the hosting city director **by any head coach or manager of a team entered in the Buckeye Cup.** The only proof accepted to prove a player is ineligible due to double rostering will be that player's name on another team's scoresheet or stat sheet.
- J.) Teams **MUST** be registered through USA Hockey as a High School team, not 16U or 18U. Only Teams whose roster includes 50% or more players living in the State of Ohio are eligible.,

16) PENALTIES FOR INELIGIBLE TEAMS/PLAYERS/COACHES

Teams not following Rule 14 (Rosters) and Rule 15 (Team and Player Qualification Eligibility) will forfeit eligibility to the Buckeye Cup.

In the event a player or team is found ineligible, during the Buckeye Cup, all games of that team will be a forfeit. If a team Forfeits any of its games, the team that forfeited will not advance and all games played against the forfeiting team shall be recorded as 1-0 victories for all opposing teams.

(Refer to USA Hockey Tournament Guidebook - <http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook> - (Credential Requirements of Teams for State/Affiliate and/or Districts and Nationals)

17) GAME JERSEY / UNIFORMS

All teams entered must be properly uniformed. All teams must arrive with two (2) sets of jerseys: a home (light) and a visitor (dark) jersey. No additional jersey will be allowed.

Unless otherwise approved by the on-site Tournament Director, the home team shall wear light jerseys and the visiting team shall wear dark jerseys in all games.

All players of a team shall be dressed uniformly per USA Hockey Rule 203(b). (the referees of that game will decide all challenges regarding matching jerseys or socks.)

18) GAME PLAYING TIME

Every game will consist of a five (5) minute warm-up, three (3) seventeen (17) minute periods, and one (1) ice cut between the second and third periods. The intermission that has no ice cut will be two (2) minutes in length. All games will be played in full with *no curfew games*. Games can start up to 20 minutes early.

The National Anthem and introduction will only be required in the championship game; cities may do more if they choose. Games will be scheduled with a minimum four (4) hour break from the end of one game to the start of the team's next game. No games may be scheduled to begin prior to 8:00 AM and no games may be scheduled to begin after 8:00 PM. Note: There must be a minimum of 12 hours between the finish of the previous game and the start of the game on the next day.

19) TIME OUTS

One (1) time out per team will be allowed in all games. Time outs will be one (1) minute in length.

20) MAX GOAL DIFFERENTIAL

The maximum goal differential to be used in any tiebreaker is eight (8).

21) TIE GAMES

All games tied at the end of regulation play shall follow the format shown in the most current USA Hockey Tournament Guidebook – Method of Determining Champion.

(Refer to <http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook>)

22) POINTS

During the preliminary rounds, each team will be awarded three (3) points for a win in regulation, two (2) points for a win in overtime or shootout, one (1) point for a loss in overtime or shootout and zero points for a loss in regulation.

23) TIE BREAKER AFTER THREE GAMES

If two or more teams have an equal number of points, their position in the standings shall be determined by the most current USA Hockey Tournament Guidebook – Process to Determine Quarterfinalists, Semifinalists and Finalists.

(Refer to <http://nationals.usahockey.com/guidebook>)

24) TOURNAMENT MANAGEMENT

The Tournament Management/Discipline Committee is made up of one representative from each of the participating leagues and the tournament director. The Tournament Management/Discipline Committee reserves the right to make decisions, interpret rules, and make adjustments to the tournament format as they deem necessary. The decision of the Tournament Management/Discipline Committee is final.

25) USA HOCKEY NATIONAL TOURNAMENT.

The champion of the Buckeye Cup will be the Ohio representative to the USA Hockey High School National Championship (Tournament). If the champion chooses not to participate in the Tournament, the Ohio slot will be offered to the remaining Buckeye Cup teams in the following order:

- a) the other finalist,
- b) the semi-finalist with the most points,
- c) the other semi-finalist, d) the remaining
- d) teams in the order of points. If USA Hockey offers additional slots in the Tournament, the order will be the same as above.

26) INTERPRETATION.

If any rule herein is ambiguous, the tournament management shall look to the following rules in the order/priority shown below:

- 1. USA Hockey Rules and Regulations
- 2. USA Hockey Annual Guide
- 3. USA Hockey National Tournament Guidebook
- 4. Mid-Am District Rules and Regulations
- 5. Buckeye Cup Rules

27) HEAD COACH/TEAM MEETING.

An opening meeting for all teams participating in the tournament shall be held prior to the start of play via Zoom at a time set by the Tournament Director. All participating teams are required to have a team representative. No one person may represent more than one team at this meeting. Failure to have a team representative present shall result in the suspension of the head coach, as listed on the team's official roster, from that team's first game of the Buckeye Cup.