

**2026 Gulf Coast Invitational
Rules & Regulations**



GULF COAST INVITATIONAL MAY DESIGNATE REQUIREMENTS FOR MAKING HOTEL RESERVATIONS. IF SO, ALL TEAMS WILL BE REQUIRED TO MAKE ALL HOTEL RESERVATIONS AS DESIGNATED. SEE THE GULF COAST INVITATIONAL WEBSITE FOR DETAILS.

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I. Laws of the Game

All matches must be played in accordance with the FIFA, US Soccer, and Tournament Rules and Regulations except as noted below for the Gulf Coast Invitational:

Law 1 - The Field of Play

Law 2 - The Ball

Law 3 - The Players

Substitutions—Substitutions may be made only upon proper notification of the referee through the assistant referee and with the referee's permission. The substitute may not enter the field of play until the player he/she is replacing has left the field and after being signaled onto the field by the referee. Substitutions will be allowed at any stoppage by either team, with the referee's permission.

ROSTER (Minimum/Maximum)

- **It is the responsibility of the club, coach, and team staff to monitor their roster. In no way will it be the responsibility of the tournament and/or any of its representatives to monitor a team's roster.** Clubs who enter multiple teams into the Gulf Coast Invitational must ensure players are not rostered on multiple teams.
- A team must not roster more than **five (5)** guest players, and those guest players will count toward a team's allowed roster maximum for their age group.
- All **U9-U10** teams must not roster more than **fourteen (14)** players (primary rostered plus guest players).
- All **U11-U12** teams must not roster more than **sixteen (16)** players (primary rostered plus guest players).
- All **U13-U19** teams must not roster more than **twenty-two (22)** players (primary rostered plus guest players). Prior to each game, the Coach/Manager must declare an 18-player game roster with the referees. Players not participating will be crossed out on the Official roster.

Law 4 - The Players' Equipment

Each player shall have a number on the player's jersey. The number shall be affixed to the back of the jersey and clearly visible. Duplicate numbers are not permitted. Numbers are not required for goalkeepers.

In the event of a uniform color conflict, the home team will wear light-colored jerseys and socks, and the away team will wear dark-colored jerseys and socks.

Goalkeepers must wear colors that distinguish them from the other players and game officials.

Player equipment shall be in accordance with the requirements of the affiliate, FYSA and FIFA rules. Additionally: (a) screw-in cleats are permitted; however, judgment as to their safety is at the discretion of the referee, (b) orthopedic casts can be worn at any sanctioned FYSA tournament with written approval from a doctor and written permission from a tournament official, final judgment as to its safety is at the discretion of the referee.

It is the policy of FYSA that no player be allowed to wear ANY jewelry while participating in any FYSA-sanctioned match. The only exception that may be allowed is a medical alert bracelet or necklace when taped to the body. The referee shall make the decision as to the safety of the player and the referee's decision is final.

Law 5 - The Referee

In the event the assigned referee fails to appear, the Site Referee Assignor will find an alternate referee. If the referee fails to appear and the site referee assignor is not able to find a replacement, the senior assigned assistant referee shall assume the duties of the referee and site referee assignor shall find an alternate assistant referee. The game will be played as scheduled and be deemed official.

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The referee shall complete the Game Report and any other reports as may be required following the game and deliver them to the Site Director.

The referee must be familiar with the rules of the competition and understand how to report results and any incidents that may occur during tournament play.

Law 6 - The Other Match Officials

Two (2) assistant referees will be used for all U11 and older age groups.

In the event the assigned assistant referee(s) fail to appear, the site referee assignor will find an alternate assistant referee(s). If the assistant referee(s) fails to appear and the site referee assignor is not able to find a replacement(s), the game will be conducted with club linesmen. Each team will provide a club linesman for the match, and the referee will determine if one or both club linesmen will be used. The game will be played as scheduled and be deemed official.

Law 7 - The Duration of the Match

The duration of the match for all rounds is noted below and is subject to change for certain group play. There will be no overtime periods in any round. In games requiring a winner, teams will proceed with Penalty kicks in accordance with IFAB's "Penalty Shootout."

Age Group	Game Length	Halftime	Overtime	Size
U9-U10	Two 25' Halves	5 Minutes	Penalty Shootout	Size 4
U11-U12	Two 30' Halves	5 Minutes	Penalty Shootout	Size 4
U13-U19	Two 35' Halves	5 Minutes	Penalty Shootout	Size 5

PLAYER HYDRATION/WATER BREAKS

In any FYSA-sanctioned match, a break will be given at the midpoint of each half of regulation time. This break will be given at a normal stoppage of play, and it is mandatory for any FYSA-sanctioned match during which the air temperature is or is expected to reach eighty-five (85) degrees. This break will be a maximum of one (1) or two (2) minutes of time. The tournament has the ability to add additional water breaks if necessary.

Law 8 through 10 – No Change

Law 11 - Offside

For U9-U10 games, offside will be called using the build-out line (midfield line will be used if no build-out line is painted)

Law 12 through 17 – No Change

Format Specific Rules

7v7 Rules

- A. No heading
- B. No Punting
- C. No dropkicks
- D. Build-out lines (midfield line will be used if no build-out line is painted)
 - a. Offside will be called using the build-out line.
 - b. When the keeper has the ball, the opposing team must retreat behind the build-out line.
 - c. The opposing team may cross the build-out line once the ball is in play.*
 - *When the keeper releases the ball from his/her hand the ball is in play;
 - *On goal kicks, the ball is in play once the ball is kicked;
 - *Please note that if the keeper releases the ball prior to the opposing team retreating completely behind the build-out line, the opposing team may attack the ball.
- E. One (1) referee per game (assistant referee(s) will be used when available)

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9v9 Rules

A. No heading

HEADING RULES

Deliberate heading is NOT allowed in age groups U12 and younger.

If a U12 or younger player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense.

If the deliberate header of a U12 or younger player occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal line parallel to the goal line at the nearest point to where the infraction occurred.

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II. ELIGIBILITY OF PLAYERS/COACH/TEAM & ROSTER

PLAYERS

Age determination:

Age Group	Birthyear
U8	2018
U9	2017
U10	2016
U11	2015
U12	2014
U13	2013

Age Group	Birthyear
U14	2012
U15	2011
U16	2010
U17	2009
U18	2008
U19	2007

Only players in good standing with current, valid, and verified US Soccer affiliate (i.e., USYS (state association), US Club Soccer, USSSA, etc.) or international affiliate player passes (current photo) will be allowed to play, provided they have met and completed all registration procedures per Tournament Rules and Regulations.

Players and rosters are subject to the following requirements:

- Teams may only enter the Gulf Coast Invitational in the age group of their oldest player, based on their roster at the time of entry. After entry, teams may not release players in order to qualify for a younger age group.
- The tournament shall be open to all teams comprised of properly registered youth players as defined by the rules and regulations of either their US Soccer affiliate (i.e., USYS (state association), US Club Soccer, USSSA, etc.) or international affiliate sanctioning body.
- All players must be sanctioned through the same sanctioning body, i.e., US Club Soccer with US Club Soccer. It is not possible to play USYS (state association) with a US Club Soccer or vice versa.

COACH

Only coaches in good standing with current, valid, and verified US Soccer affiliate (i.e., USYS (state association), US Club Soccer, USSSA, etc.) or international affiliate coach passes (current photo and correct signature) will be allowed to coach providing they have met and completed all registration procedures for their sanctioning body.

A minimum of one (1) coach, preferably the head coach, must be rostered to every team entering the Gulf Coast Invitational.

TEAM/APPLICATION/ROSTER

The tournament Gulf Coast Invitational is limited to teams registered as U9 thru U19. The Gulf Coast Invitational application **MUST** be entered online in GotSport using either a US Soccer affiliate (i.e., USYS (state association), US Club Soccer, USSSA, etc.) or an international affiliate team account for a team to be accepted in the competition and can be entered by the club Registrar or a registered team staff member rostered to that team received access to the team account.

DEADLINES FOR APPLICATION:

- ALL divisions – no later than midnight of **January 9th, 2026**.
- Initial acceptance of team application does not necessarily confirm that a team meets initial eligibility requirements. Compliance with requirements will be reviewed during Online Check-in.
- No applications can be completed without the submission of payment within the GotSport application process. Therefore, a team must enter payment information in order to complete the GotSport application process; payments will not be charged until the team is accepted. Applications with faulty payment must be corrected within forty-eight (48) hours following the respective payment deadline. Failure to provide payment by this time may result in the denial of the team's application.

At the time of entry, all teams must have a minimum of one (1) coach, preferably the head coach, listed on their application.

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ONLINE CHECK-IN

The Gulf Coast Invitational utilizes online credentials for all teams participating in this tournament. **ALL accepted teams must complete online check-in no later than Wednesday, January 28th, 2026.**

For online check-in, a team must provide an official roster and player/coach cards from either a US Soccer affiliate (i.e., USYS (state association), US Club Soccer, USSSA, etc.) or an international affiliate. Rosters must include ALL guest players and mark out any players not attending the tournament.

- To add guest player(s) to a roster, write guest player's information below the existing rostered players. The minimum required information for each player on the roster is name, date of birth (month and year ONLY), player ID number, uniform number, and gender.

ROSTER (Minimum/Maximum)

- **It is the responsibility of the club, coach, and team staff to monitor their roster. In no way will it be the responsibility of the tournament and/or any of its representatives to monitor a team's roster.** Clubs who enter multiple teams into the Gulf Coast Invitational must ensure players are not rostered on multiple teams.
- A team must not roster more than **five (5)** guest players, and those guest players will count toward a team's allowed roster maximum for their age group.
- All **U9-U10** teams must not roster more than **fourteen (12)** players (primary rostered plus guest players).
- All **U11-U12** teams must not roster more than **sixteen (16)** players (primary rostered plus guest players).
- All **U13-U19** teams must not roster more than **twenty-two (22)** players (primary rostered plus guest players). Prior to each game, the Coach/Manager must declare an 18-player game roster with the referees. Players not participating will be crossed out on the Official roster.

III. PRE-GAME PROCEDURE

Prior to each game, the coach/manager will check in at the field with the officials, present the approved roster for all players and coaches, and verify jersey numbers for each player on the roster who will participate in the game. The tournament is responsible for referee costs for all tournament matches.

At check-in time, the coach/manager must inform the officials and note on the roster any player who will not participate in the match due to suspension (i.e., for a previous red card).

EACH TEAM MUST HAVE IN HIS/HER POSSESSION A MEDICAL RELEASE FORM FOR EACH PLAYER.

NO PASS – NO PLAY – NO EXCEPTIONS

The referee will check the player's identity with the approved roster and will check the player's equipment. Only at this time may a player's identity be challenged. The referee will note the challenged player's name on the game report, and staff members of the team requesting the challenge must inform the Site Director of the challenge. The player will be allowed to play. No player's identity can be challenged or protested after the start of each game.

A player who arrives at the playing field after the start of the game may enter the game after showing his/her pass to and being checked by the referee/assistant referee.

No more than three (3) team staff members are allowed on the side with the team. All must have appropriate US soccer affiliate (i.e., USYS (state association), US Club Soccer, USSSA, etc.) or international affiliate passes and be listed on the Approved tournament roster. Site Directors have the discretion to add coaches to the roster by write-in if the coach has a proper coach pass from the club in which the team is registered.

CONTROL OF SIDELINES

- A. Players, managers, coaches, and fans are expected to conduct themselves within the letter and spirit of The Laws of the Game. The Site Directors shall have the authority and responsibility to remove any person(s) from the tournament for abuses of good conduct without warning; in addition to the rules of good manners, these rules will apply in this competition:

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- B. Players and team officials (i.e., coach, assistant coach, manager, or club's athletic trainer) will be located in the technical/bench area on one side of the field. No more than three (3) Team Officials will be permitted in the technical area. The spectator area is located on the opposite side of the field from the technical/bench area.
- C. It is expected that respect for the game will prevail if a limited number of spectators wish to **quietly** observe the match from the **far end** of the opposing spectator section (for example, a parent of the Goalkeeper). In the event of disruptive behavior by these spectators, a referee or competition official may require them to return to their designated area and restrict any further sideline movement of spectators.
- D. A restraining line may be drawn three (3) yards from the side touchline, and all sideline viewers must remain outside that line.
- E. Coaches will be accountable for the behavior of their fans and may be ejected for non-compliance.
- F. All coaches are required to remain in their technical area and should remain seated on their respective benches (if provided), except to give tactical instructions or to make substitutions.
- G. Artificial noisemakers are NOT permitted during any rounds of the tournament.

IV. POST-GAME PROCEDURE

At the completion of the match, the referee/assistant referee(s) will complete the game report, compile any other reports as may be required, and give the report(s) to the Site Director.

At the conclusion of the match:

- It is required that both teams clear the bench area and the field as soon as possible (ten (10) minutes maximum).
- It is also required that the bench area be cleaned and that all trash be disposed of in a proper manner.

The coach will be responsible for the behavior of their fans at all times.

All spectators will remain on the spectator sideline during the match and until such time as the coaches have released the players after the match and the referee(s) have vacated the field of play. Failure to remain off the field of play until time may result in an ejection of the coach and possible forfeit of the match.

Following the completion of group finals, all final teams will present themselves to a site identified by the Site Director, where awards will be presented.

V. DETERMINATION OF STANDINGS

Group Play

In group play, there will be no overtime. Standings in group play will be determined by:

Three (3) points for a win

One (1) point for a tie

Zero (0) points for a loss

If two (2) or more teams are **TIED** after group play, then the following tiebreaker rules will apply:

1. **Head-to-head competition** (if more than two (2) teams are tied, skip to #2); if no clear winner, then
2. **Most Wins**; if no clear winner, then
3. **Goal differential** (max of five (5) per game); if no clear winner, then
4. **Goals Against**; if no clear winner, then
5. **Goals Scored**; if no clear winner, then
6. **Most Shutouts**; if no clear winner, then
7. **Penalty kicks** in accordance with FIFA "Penalty Shootout".

If all three (3) teams remain tied after #6, then a coin toss will determine which team sits out for the first round of "Penalty Kicks". The winner of the first round of "Penalty Kicks" will then take on the team that sits out to determine a winner.

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PLAYOFFS (SEMI-FINALS AND FINALS)

In playoffs, if the game is not decided after regulation time, a penalty kick (or Penalty Shootout) will be taken in accordance with FIFA's "Penalty Shootout."

Note: Teams may be asked to move to a designated "Penalty Shootout" area to permit the next scheduled game to proceed.

VI. DISCIPLINE

It shall be the club's, team's, and coach's responsibility to determine the status of its players. It is the team's responsibility to notify the tournament director of any suspensions from a tournament, local league, etc., that are to be served at the time of the player's check-in (see pre-game check-in).

Any team playing a suspended player or coached by a suspended coach shall have their games forfeited with a score of 5-0 in favor of the opponent.

The Discipline Committee will consist of three (3) members of the tournament staff, and will review and rule on all reports of unacceptable conduct by players, coaches, managers, referees, spectators, etc.

Notwithstanding rulings of this committee:

1. A player or coach ejected will have at least one (1) game suspension. A player/coach may receive more than a one-game suspension based on the severity of the actions. The minimum suspensions for unacceptable conduct will be in accordance with FYSA Section 502 – Discipline and Sanctions.
2. Suspensions for red cards/ejections received in any Gulf Coast Invitational matches must be served in the next Gulf Coast Invitational match until the team is eliminated from the competition. After the team has been eliminated from the Gulf Coast Invitational, players and coaches will sit the remainder of their suspension in any subsequent FYSA sanctioned games scheduled for the team until suspension has been fulfilled.
3. Coaches and other team officials shall be subjected to all rules pertaining to misconduct contained herein, including cautions, ejections, and standard suspensions. Any other individual, who may be reasonably construed as being associated with a team such as relatives and spectators, shall also be subjected to the jurisdiction and authority of this tournament. Any coach or team official shall be held responsible for the actions of any individual(s) at any match, that in the opinion of the referee, is a supporter of that team.
 - a. A player that receives a red card may remain on the team bench for the remainder of the provided the player does not cause any additional problems. If further issues are created by the red carded player, additional penalties may be imposed against the player and/or coach. A player under the age of eighteen (18) may leave the site if they are accompanied by a parent or guardian only. A player eighteen (18) or older may leave the site unaccompanied. If the player chooses to leave the site, he/she must do so in a timely manner, or the match may be declared a forfeit.
 - b. Any coach ejected must leave the site immediately following ejection.
 - c. It shall be the coach's responsibility to notify the site director prior to any match of any players serving suspensions. A suspended player may be present at subsequent matches and if so, remain on the team's bench and shall not be in game uniform.
 - d. An ejected coach may be present at subsequent matches and, if so, remain on the spectator side and shall not coach the players. A coach may be barred from subsequent matches and from coaching other teams in the Gulf Coast Invitational if the suspension results from an Abusive Language or Violent Conduct ejection.

VII. FORFEITS

A team will be allowed a fifteen (15) minute grace period from the scheduled game time before awarding the match to the opponent. A match shall be started as soon as the minimum number of players is present per the minimums below:

- All **U9-U10** teams must have a minimum of **five (5)** players for a match to start.

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- All **U11-U12** teams must have a minimum of **seven (7)** players for a match to start.
- All **U13-U19** teams must have a minimum of **nine (9)** players for a match to start.

A forfeited match shall be recorded as a 5-0 score in favor of the opponent. Tournament Director can extend the 15-minute time allocation due to unforeseen circumstances.

VIII. PROTEST/DISPUTES

PROTESTS

There will be NO PROTESTS. No protest against referee judgment or discretion calls will be accepted.

DISPUTES

All disputes will be resolved immediately by the Site Director. These decisions will be FINAL.

IX. UNFINISHED GAMES

Unfinished games due to any cause shall be replayed, provided neither team is at fault, and the first half of the match has not been completed. If play is stopped after the completion of the first half and play cannot be resumed, and provided neither team is at fault, the game is considered complete. Any match that is not played or terminated where both teams are at fault will be marked as a "No Contest." A match labeled a "No Contest" may be rescheduled at the tournament director's discretion. Should play be stopped at any time in the second half due to one of the teams being adjudged at fault, it shall be at the discretion of the tournament director as to whether the game is to be replayed, complete with the score at the time of stoppage, or declared a forfeit in favor of the team not adjudged at fault. The decisions of the tournament director are final.

X. EXTERNAL CONDITIONS, COVID, WEATHER, ETC.

In the event unusual conditions necessitate rescheduling, curtailment, or cancellation of games, the tournament staff shall have absolute authority to make changes to best serve the interest of the tournament, which includes but is not limited to:

- Games being shortened; or,
- Games being rescheduled; or,
- Games be declared a 0-0 tie; or
- Go to "Penalty Shootout"; or,
- Games being canceled.

Regardless of weather conditions, players and coaches must be on the field at the scheduled game time, ready to play.

PLAYER HYDRATION/WATER BREAKS

In any FYSA-sanctioned match, a break will be given at the midpoint of each half of regulation time. This break will be given at a normal stoppage of play, and it is mandatory for any FYSA-sanctioned match during which the air temperature is or is expected to reach eighty-five (85) degrees. This break will be a maximum of one (1) or two (2) minutes of time. The tournament has the ability to add additional water breaks if necessary.

XI. GENERAL

The tournament director, tournament staff, and/or tournament sponsors will not be responsible for any expenses incurred by any team due to the cancellation in part or in whole of this tournament or for any travel incidental to the competition.

The tournament director's interpretation of the foregoing rules and regulations will be final.

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TOURNAMENT AND MATCH SCHEDULE

This tournament is designed as follows:

- All age groups - All teams are guaranteed a minimum of three (3) scheduled games.
- The maximum number of games is four (4).
- Teams can play up to two (2) games per day.

HEADING RULES

Deliberate heading is NOT allowed in age groups U12 and younger.

If a U12 or younger player deliberately heads the ball in a game, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense.

If the deliberate header of a U12 or younger player occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal line parallel to the goal line at the nearest point to where the infraction occurred.

CONCUSSIONS

Pursuant to Florida Statutes (FS 943.0438) Florida in 2012 enacted a very stringent Head injury and Concussion Law. If the referee (or assistant referee) believes that, in his/her opinion, a player has suffered a head injury or possible concussion, the match must be stopped IMMEDIATELY. The injured player, if able to leave the field on their own must be escorted to their coach and the coach must be told that the player cannot return for the duration of the match. If a trainer is brought onto the field because the player is incapacitated, the referee must still notify the coach that the player cannot return to the game. It is the responsibility of the coach and the player's parent(s) or legal guardians to seek medical attention. The player may not resume participation until he/she has been cleared by a medical doctor. The Referee HAS NO FURTHER responsibility beyond removing the player from the match in which the player was injured. The referee crew must ensure, that UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES or due to the appeal from any coaching staff that the player is allowed to return to the game.

TOURNAMENT REFUND/CANCELLATION POLICY

After a team is accepted, then no refunds will be issued. If the event is canceled due to weather, the tournament staff will evaluate expenses and make a decision if any refund will be given.

FYSA REFUND POLICY

Any tournament that fails to return an entry fee and application within fifteen (15) days after notification that the team is not accepted or within ten (10) days of withdrawal request of the application by a team prior to the acceptance of that application by the tournament, will be subject to an assessment fine not to exceed ten (10) times the original entry fee.

- A. Within five (5) days after notification that the team is not accepted by their application.
- B. Within five (5) days upon cancellation of the tournament.
- C. Within ten (10) days of withdrawal request of the application by a team prior to acceptance of that application by the tournament.

Any team that will not be permitted to play in the contracted age group shall have the option to withdraw and receive a full refund of all entry fees. All tournaments shall notify any participant not less than fifteen (15) days prior to the beginning of the tournament if any age group advertised will not be offered.

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XII. DIVISION STRUCTURE

Game Schedule subject to change based on selection of optional Friday night games.

Four (4) teams – Each team will play the other three teams in the group. #1 will play #2 in the Final.

Five (5) teams – On Saturday, each team will play two group games (opponents determined at random). On Sunday, #4 will play #5 in the Consolation. #2 will play #3 in the Semi-Finals. The winner of the Semi-Final will play #1 in the Final.

Five (5) teams [2 Finals] - On Saturday, each team will play two group games (opponents determined at random). On Sunday, #2 will play #3 in Semi-Final A and #4 will play #5 in Semi-Final B. The winner of Semi-Final A (#2 v #3) will play #1 in the Gold Final (Final A). The loser of Semi-Final A (#2 v #3) will play the winner of Semi-Final B (#4 v #5) in the Silver Final (Final B).

Six (6) teams – One group of six. Each team will play three group games (opponents determined at random). #1 will play #2 in the Final.

Six (6) teams [2 Finals] – One group of six. Each team will play three group games (opponents determined at random). #1 will play #2 in the Gold Final and #3 will play #4 in the Silver Final.

Seven (7) teams – Bracket A will have three teams. Bracket B will have four teams. On Saturday, each team will play two group games. On Sunday, Bracket A#3 will play Bracket B#4 in the Play-In Game. The winner of the Play-In Game will play Bracket B#3 in the 5th place game. There will be no awards given to teams in the 5th place game. Bracket A#1 will play Bracket B#2 and Bracket A#2 will play Bracket B#1 in the Semi-Finals. The winner of the Semi-Finals will play in the Final.

*7 team brackets are subject to change

Seven (7) teams [2 Finals] – One group of seven. Each team will play two group games (opponents determined at random). On Sunday, #1 will play #4 and #2 will play #3 in the Gold Semi-final, winners will play in the Gold Final. #6 will play #7 in the Silver Semi-final, the winner will play #5 in the Silver Final.

Eight (8) teams – Two groups of four. Each team will play the other three teams in their group. Bracket A#1 will play Bracket B#1 in the Final.

Eight (8) teams [2 Finals] – Two groups of four. Each team will play the other three teams in their group. Bracket A#1 will play Bracket B#1 in the Gold Final. Bracket A#2 will play Bracket B#2 in the Silver Final.

Ten (10) teams [2 Finals] – Two groups of five. Each team will play two group games (opponents determined at random). On Sunday, A1 will play B2 and B1 will play A2 in the Gold Semi-Final, winners will play for the Gold Final. A3 will play B4 and B3 will play A4 in the Silver Semi-Final, winners will play for the Silver Final. A5 will play B5 in a consolation.