

2026 NRSL Rules
World Cup Challenge



**ROBOT SOCCER
LEAGUE**

Official 2026 Rules

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A Note to Teams and Coaches

The Soccer World Cup is a quadrennial event that is being held in North American in 2026. Teams from all over the world compete in a months-long tournament. Billions of people will follow the games, and results, with excitement, and heartbreak, as teams work their way through the bracket.



Illustration of the first international match between England and Scotland, 1872

In 2026, the Spark Performance League will premiere our answer to the World Cup tournament. The National Robot Soccer League is inspired by the stunning success of the National Forklift Racing League's teams, communities, drivers, and cheer squads. Like the NFRL, the NRSL is central to Lifespark's commitment to enhancing the strength, purpose and belonging of the older people. Like the NFRL, the NRSL will require generous portions of teamwork, strategy, spirit,

and practice from communities and competitors. Before the season's end, competitors will enhance their hand-eye coordination, sharpen mental acuity, and reduce the burden of social isolation.

Founded in 2026, the National Robot Soccer League (NRSL) is dedicated to promoting healthy team-based competition based on the skillful use of radio controlled "soccer bots." Our inaugural season will feature 42 teams organized into 6 divisions competing for a share of the NRSL's generous Purse and a place in the end of the season Championship Week.

Like regular soccer games, NRSL matches consist of head-to-head matches between identically equipped teams. Some highlights:

- Each match is divided into three rounds of 10 minutes each.
- During each round, four Soccer Bots (driven by team members using remote controllers) will attempt to drive balls through the goals.
- The team earns one point each time a Soccer Bot drives one ball past into the goal.

The Gear

During the NFRL years, our league used off-the shelf equipment that served our purposes but also exposed significant shortcomings.

- There was real variance in the quality, availability and cost of the forklifts offered by suppliers. At one time our league had purchased all of the RC forklifts on sale in the USA!
- We drove the forklifts HARD, with much more mileage than the designers ever imagined. This led to breakdowns.
- The forklifts were difficult to repair and there were no spare parts available.

During the planning for the NRSL we decided to pivot away from overseas suppliers and focus on “made in America” gear. Even better, we decided to make the gear we need right in the Twin Cities. This shift allows us to:

- Design the gear “from the ground up” for hard use in a tough league.
- Have a spare part inventory on hand that allows us to repair gear damaged during practice and competition.
- Reduce the overall cost of the gear we use in the competition.

Each NRSL Gear Package includes the following items:

- (4) Soccer Bots– designed and built specifically for the NRSL
 - Powered by 4 easy to change AA LI-Ion batteries
 - Reduced number of parts improves reliability.
 - Each Gear package includes a charger designed specifically for use with AA Li-Ion batteries.
- (4) Controllers– designed to be used by people with a wide range of gripping and holding styles and abilities. They are charged using a conventional (USB-C) phone charger.
- (1) AA Charging Unit– Each team will get a charger for the AA Li-Ion batteries that drive the Bot
- (1) Pitch– Soccer fans refer to the playing field as the “Pitch.” Our Pitch consists of 12 foam rubber tiles arranged into a 6 foot by 8 foot playing surface.
- (2) Goals– Each Team will receive two goals for use during competitions.

Each Team is expected to provide the following for their own use during competitions:

- (36) Golf Balls– these will serve as NRSL Soccer Balls.
- (4) Egg Cartons– these will be used to track scoring
 - Two of the Cartons must be painted BLUE
 - Two of the Cartons must be painted RED
- (2) Green Flags– these are used by Scorekeepers to signal that a goal has been scored.
- It is suggested, but not required, that teams equip Retrievers with Grabber/Reachers

The Roles

Captain and Coaches

Each team has Coaches and Captains (Team Captains and Cheer Squad Captains) who are responsible for:

- Recruiting– this is a never-ending process and teams are strongly encouraged to continue building their roster as the season progresses.
 - Organizing– The work of planning practices and warm-ups is crucial to success
 - Teaching– This is a test of skill and strategy and spirit so people will need to learn new skills, new approaches and new cheers in order to perform well.
 - Submitting results in a timely fashion show respect for the team and the league and is greatly appreciated.
-

Cheer Squad Members

NSRL Matches are intense. Most teams build on that intensity with an enthusiastic Cheer Squad that lets the Players know that their community is behind them.

- A person can be both a Player and a member of the Cheer Squad. It has been observed that the top performers in the League invest time and effort in developing their Cheer Squads to their full potential.
-

Players

The people who drive the Soccer Bots during competition are called Players. As was the case during the NFRL years, the roster of Players can include people living in a Lifespark Community AND people living outside the community (includes staff members, family members and friends). As we will see, during actual competitions the number of younger players can be equal to, but not exceed, the number of senior drivers.

It is strongly recommended that those seeking to join the corps of NRSL Players take the time needed to learn how to pilot their Soccer Bot. In general, Players will move through three levels of mastery with the Soccer Bots:

- Basic - Players can maneuver the Soccer Bot in all directions and avoid obstacles.
 - Intermediate - Players can blend forward and reverse motions into complex sequences that allow the Bot to strike the Balls on the Pitch.
 - Advanced - Players can reliably strike balls, aiming them in specific directions.
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Timekeepers

A team's Timekeeper coordinates with the opponent's Timekeeper to start and end the competition round. Timekeepers provide countdowns prior to the start and before the end of each round.

Scorekeepers

Each Team's Scorekeepers track the goals scored at their end of the Pitch. Scorekeepers record and document scores from each round. When all three Rounds are completed Scorekeepers oversee the entry of results on the Opticon at the end of the match.

Retrievers

Each Team can have up to four Retrievers who pick up balls that roll off the pitch and return them to the Pitch. Retrievers "keep the balls in play" and help protect the safety of Players and Fans by ensuring that out of bounds balls do not become a tripping hazard.

Kit Managers

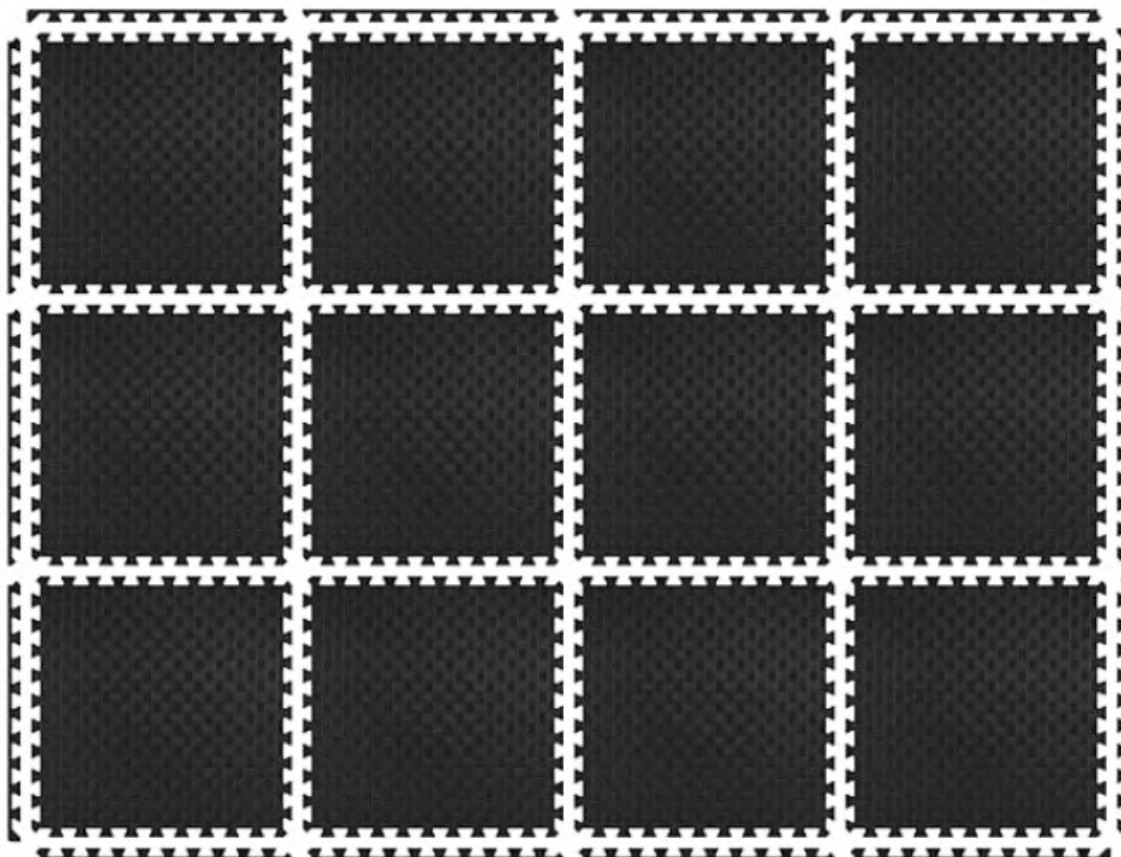
High performing NRSL teams take care to develop a group of Kit Managers who look after the Bots and Controllers. This equipment must be properly maintained and repaired if it is to remain in good order.

Pro Tip

Quality Teams, along with their coaches and captain are always looking for new ways to engage and inspire new people. Your team may develop new roles that help put you in the winner's circle.

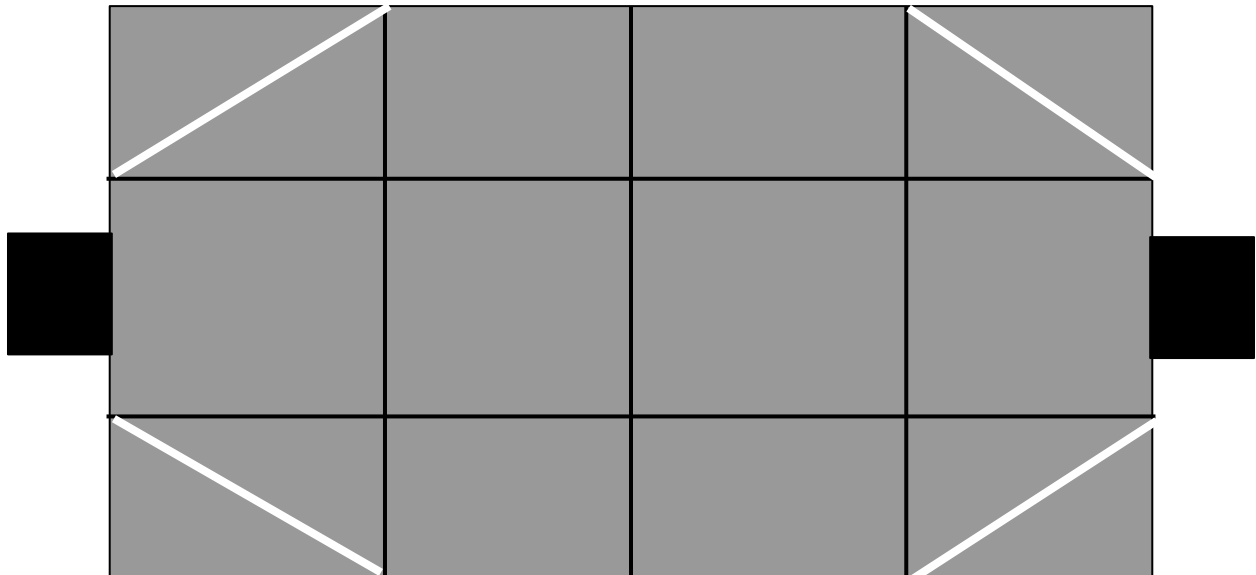
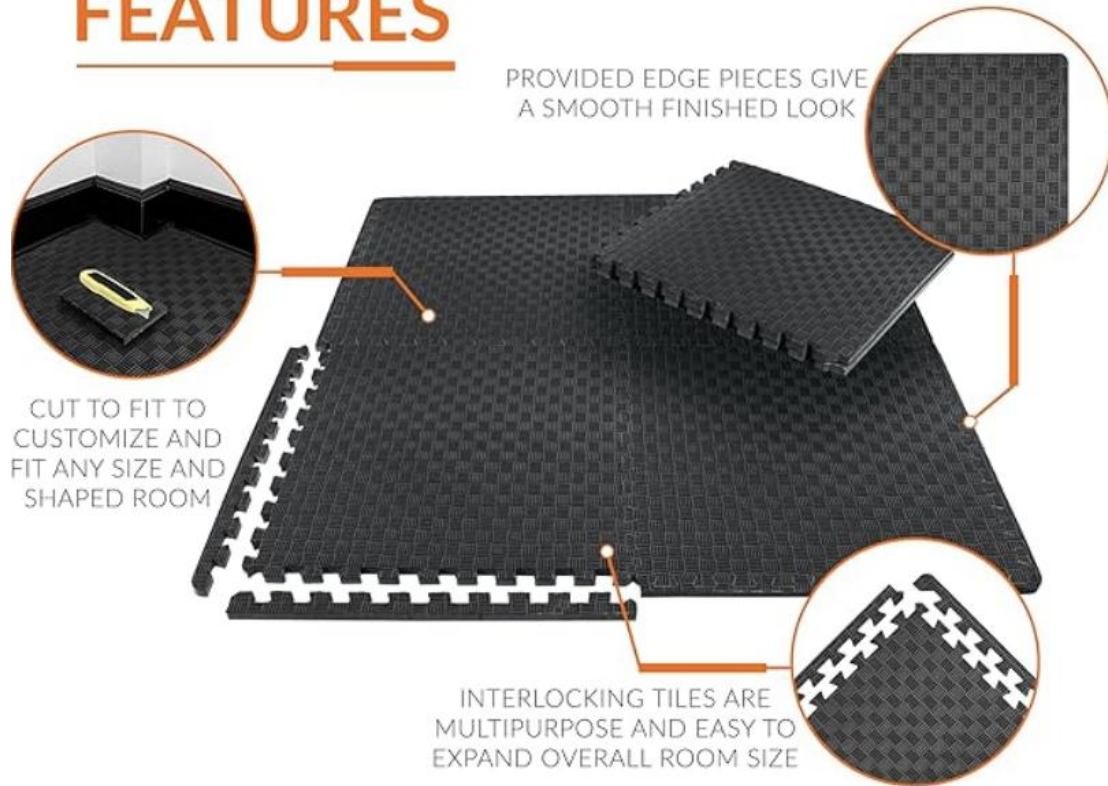
The Pitch

NRSL competitions are held on League Certified Pitches (Soccer fields are called Pitches). The Pitch consists of 12 foam rubber floor tiles. Each tile measures 24"x24".



As you can see, these are interlocking tiles with trim pieces positioned around the perimeter.

PREMIUM FOAM PUZZLE TILE FLOORING FEATURES



A NRSL Pitch:

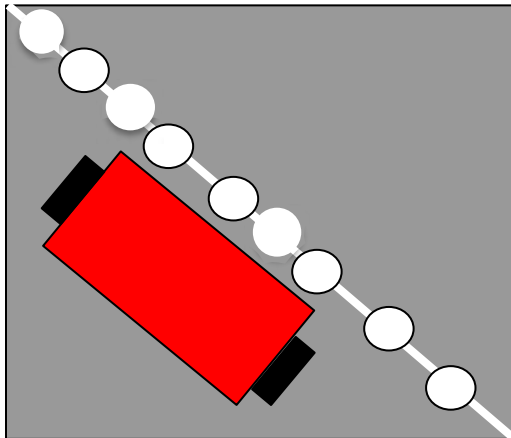
2026 NRSL Rules

- Measures 6 feet by 8 feet.
- Needs to be placed on a flat surface.
- Has a corrugated surface.
- There are two goals, one at each end of the pitch.
- Has four “Corner Stripes

The Balls

Here is the funny thing about Robot Soccer– we use golf balls for the competition. Yes, that is correct– golf balls– not a golf ball. In fact, there are 36 balls on the pitch at the start of each round.

At the start of each match, the Retrievers place nine balls on each of the Corner Stripes. The balls can be positioned any place the Retrievers choose– as long as they are on the Corner Stripe.



If a ball falls off the pitch (goes out of bounds) it is picked up by a Retriever and placed on the closest Corner Stripe.

EVERY TEAM will be responsible for collecting 36 golf balls from friends and family members for use during their matches. Every community knows people who loves the game of golf and have many balls that are perfect for the NRSL.

The Bots



At the start of each round of each NRSL match, one Soccer Bot is placed behind each of the four Corner Stripes. Remotes will be turned off and will be turned on when the 5 second count down ends. Each Bot has:

- Two motors– It's All-Wheel Drive!
- Four AA Li-Ion Batteries– They deliver more power than alkaline batteries
- One Custom Printed Circuit Board and our own software to run on it.
- One Roller Bearing– makes maneuvering easier on the Pitch
- One Wireless Controller– uses the Players gestures to control the bot– no joysticks

Fun Facts about the NRSL Soccer Bots and Controllers

- They are made of a biodegradable material that can easily be recycled
- They DO NOT LIKE SUNLIGHT– these are indoor Bots!
- The material they are made from a bioplastic that is produced from corn starch.
- They require less energy to produce traditional plastics.
- Spare parts are available for all Bots and Controllers

How the Game is Played

Timeline

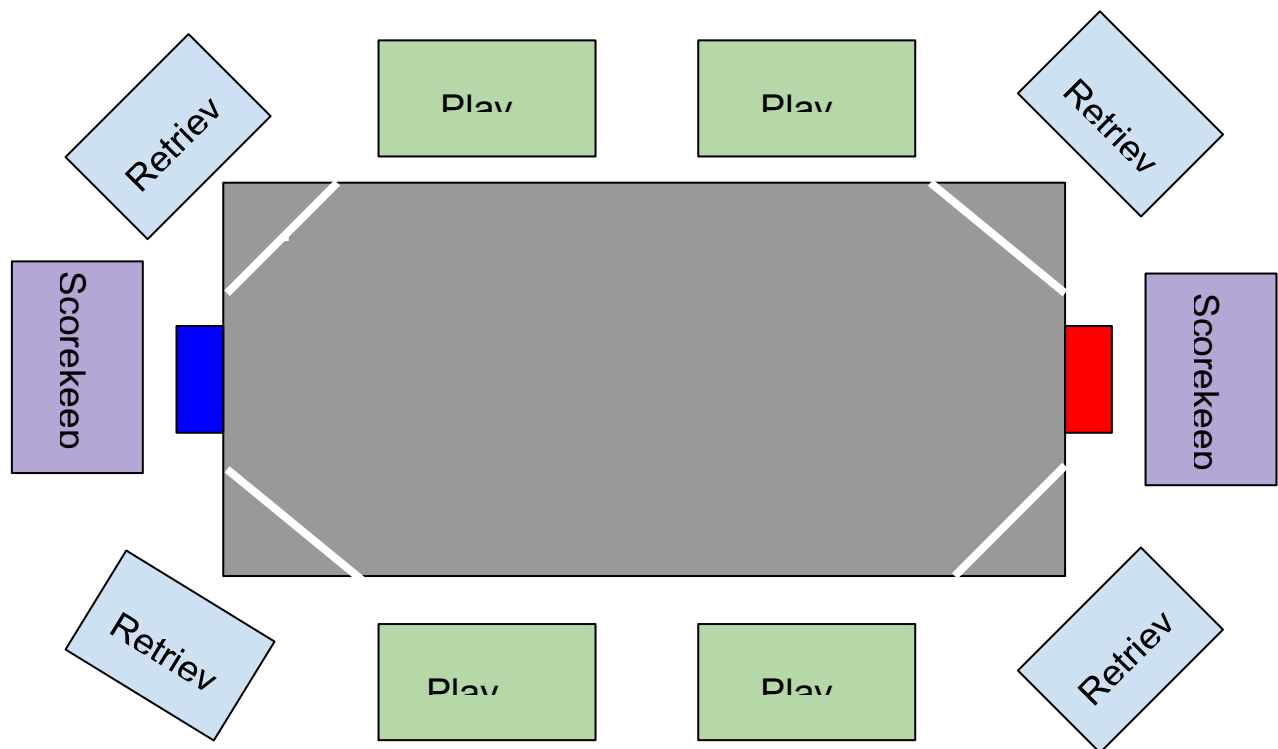
- 1:00-1:05 PM
 - Opticons connect and introductions are made.
- 1:05-1:10 PM
 - Retrievers place nine balls on each Corner Stripe and place Robots in the corner of the Pitch behind the Corner Stripe Bots behind the Corner Stripe. Remotes will be turned off until five second count down is completed.
- 1:10-1:20 PM
 - The Timekeepers coordinate the start of the first round. The round lasts 10 minutes.
- 1:20-1:25 PM
 - Kit Managers check batteries. The Scorekeepers record the score at each goal and take pictures to document those scores. Reset the Pitch with the nine balls on the corner stripe and Robots behind the Corner Stripe with the Remote turned off until the five second countdown is completed.
- 1:25-1:35 PM
 - The Timekeepers coordinate the start of the second round. The round lasts 10 minutes.
- 1:35-1:40 PM
 - Kit Managers check batteries. The Scorekeepers record the score at each goal and take pictures to document those scores. Reset the Pitch with the nine balls on the corner stripe and Robots behind the Corner Stripe with the Remote turned off until the five second countdown is completed.
- 1:40-1:50 PM
 - The Timekeepers coordinate the start of the third round. The round lasts 10 minutes.
- 1:50-1:55 PM
 - Congratulations and Farewells– the scores from each round are entered into the scoring form

Important Notes:

- Players endeavor to drive balls into the goal using only their Soccer Bots.

- Players can score only one goal at a time. If they drive more than one ball into the goal at a time (so-called snowplowing) they earn only one point no matter how many balls enter the goal.
- When a ball passes through the goal it is placed in the Scorekeeper's Egg Cartons for the remainder of the period.
- If more than one ball passes through the goal from one shot, then only one of those balls will be placed in the Scorekeeper's Egg Carton. Others will be placed back on the Corner Stripe.
- Retrievers keep the game moving, and keep people safe, by repositioning out of bounds balls to the nearest Corner Stripe during the match.
- If the Robot leaves the Pitch they are placed in the nearest corner to restart.

This is a sample alignment for Pitch, Players, Scorekeepers, and Retrievers. Some teams may choose to alter this arrangement in order to better accommodate their strategy.



The Scoring

During the NFRL years, the scoring was often– COMPLICATED. In part this was necessary because the skill displayed by the teams grew so fast that complex rules were needed to make the challenge difficult enough to be interesting.

The NRSL is different. The scoring is SIMPLE– put a ball in goal with a Bot and get a point. The team that scores the most points wins– just like regular soccer!

An NRSL match scoresheet for the **Lions** would look like this:

Round	Blue Goal	Red Goal	Total
One	14	9	23
Two	11	17	28
Three	8	19	27
Total	33	45	78

An NRSL match scoresheet for the **Bison** would look like this:

Round	Blue Goal	Red Goal	Total
One	13	9	22
Two	12	17	29
Three	8	19	27
Total	33	45	78

We can see that the score is tied at the end of the match Lions 78 Bison 78.
How do we break the tie?

We award a tie breaking point to the team with the higher score in Round Three.
But, because both teams scored 27 points in Round Three each, no tie-breaking point can be awarded.

So, we look at which team had a higher score in Round Two. In this case, the Bison scored 29 and the Lions scored 28 so the Bison would be awarded the tie-breaking point.

If the score in Round Two was tied, we would look at the scores for Round One.

If Round One was also tied, then we would look at the total number of points scored to date for each team and use that to break the tie.

Rules Summary

Setup

- Each period begins with 36 balls on the Pitch.
- There are nine balls on each Corner Stripe.
- A Bot is placed in each corner behind the Corner Stripe with the remote turned off until the five second countdown is complete.

Matches

- Each match is divided into three rounds of 10 minutes each.
- During each round, four Soccer Bots (driven by team members using remote controllers) will attempt to drive balls through the goals.
- The team earns one point each time a Soccer Bot drives one ball past into the goal.

Out of Bounds

- If a Bot goes out of bounds during play the Bot is picked up and moved to the closest Corner and is then able to resume play.
- If a Ball goes out of bounds during play the Ball is picked up and placed on the nearest Corner Stripe where it can return to play.

Scoring

- Players endeavor to drive balls into the goal using only their Soccer Bots.
- Players can score only one goal at a time. If they drive more than one ball into the goal at a time (so-called snowplowing) they earn only one point no matter how many balls enter the goal.
- There is no specific goal that the balls have to go through for a score.
- When a ball passes through the goal it is placed in the Scorekeeper's Egg Cartons for the remainder of the period.
- If more than one ball passes through the goal from one shot then only one of those balls will be placed in the Scorekeeper's Egg Carton.

Players

- If a Player is substituted DURING a round that Player can return as a Player during another round with a maximum of 2 rounds per player.
- Players can compete in a maximum of two rounds during a match.
- At no time may there be more YOUNGER Players than OLDER Players.

Strategy Notes

Remember:

- Ease is the Enemy of Ability
- We Play to Win
- We are Better Together

The NRSL is a test of both skill, strategy and spirit.

- Skill
 - Top Teams help people practice

The Competitions

The 2026 NRSL Season will feature two distinct but related competitions:

- The competition for a place in the 2026 NRSL Playoffs
- The competition for a share of the 2026 NRSL Purse

The race for a place in the Playoffs plays out during the regular season's round-robin series of Divisional matches. Matches in each Division will determine the Division Champion and the Division Runner-Up. Those two teams in each Division will advance to the 2026 NRSL Playoffs.

- Lighting Conference
 - Flash
 - Division Winner—earns \$100
 - Division Runner-Up—earns \$100
 - Strike
 - Division Winner—earns \$100
 - Division Runner-Up—earns \$100
 - Heat
 - Division Winner—earns \$100
 - Division Runner-Up—earns \$100
- Thunder Conference
 - Rumble
 - Division Winner—earns \$100
 - Division Runner-Up—earns \$100
 - Roar
 - Division Winner—earns \$100
 - Division Runner-Up—earns \$100
 - Boom
 - Division Winner—earns \$100
 - Division Runner-Up—earns \$100

The 2026 NRSL Playoffs will feature 12 teams.

- The teams with the top two scores in each Conference will:
 - Advance to the 2026 NRSL World Cup
 - Be designated as a **2026 NRSL World Cup Finalist**.
 - Earn an additional \$50 for being a Finalist
- The team with the top score in each Conference will
 - Be the Champion of their Conference.
 - Earn an additional \$150 for being a Conference Champion.

The 2026 NRSL World Cup Finals features 4 teams.

- Lightning

2026 NRSL Rules

- Top Score in Playoffs
 - Runner Up in the Playoffs
- Thunder
 - Top Score in Playoffs
 - Runner Up in the Playoffs

The 2026 NRSL World Cup winner:

- Is the team with the highest score in the Finals.
- Earns an additional \$300 for being NRSL World Champion.

The Purse

At the beginning of the NRSL Season each team will pay a \$1,000 entry fee. This entry fee is used to fund the 2025 NRSL Purse. The top 20 teams in each Conference will earn a share of this 2026 NRSL Purse. The team that scores the greatest number of points in each Conference will be ranked first. The team that scores the fewest number of points in each Conference will be ranked last. The amount earned will be determined by each team's order of finish in their Conference.

Conference Rank	Earnings
1	\$2,000
2	\$1,900
3	\$1,800
4	\$1,700
5	\$1,600
6	\$1,500
7	\$1,300
8	\$1,200
9	\$1,100
10	\$1,000
11	\$800
12	\$700
13	\$650
14	\$550
15	\$450
16	\$350
17	\$175
18	\$75
19	\$30
20	\$20
21	\$0