



2025-26 NORTH AMERICAN PAIRS CONDITIONS OF CONTEST



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2025 - 26 NORTH AMERICAN PAIRS CONDITIONS OF CONTEST

THESE CONDITIONS OF CONTEST MAY NOT BE CHANGED AT ANY LEVEL OF PLAY DURING THE COURSE OF THIS EVENT. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT CONSTITUTE CAUSE FOR EXCEPTION TO THESE CONDITIONS OF CONTEST.

INTRODUCTION

There are many changes to the North American Pairs this year, including changes to the organization of this document. **Please** read the relevant sections carefully as many things are different. Players need only read the first section (but may, of course, explore the rest of the document if interested). Districts (NAP Coordinators, Tournament Coordinators, District Presidents, etc.) should refer to the District section for important information about requirements for District Finals, District-level Conditions of Contest, and key dates. Clubs (Club Managers and Directors) should read the Clubs section for specific technical information needed to run qualifying games.

REGIONAL DIRECTOR AUTHORITY

All ACBL tournament regulations and Conditions of Contest, though not specifically included in these Conditions, apply to this event throughout. In the case of an unforeseen situation, the Regional Director (or their designee), in consultation with the ACBL NAP Coordinator, may make exceptions to these conditions. In emergency situations only, the Regional Director, on their own, may make decisions consistent with the spirit of these Conditions of Contest. In cases of dual residence, active military duty, school attendance or similar cases of extended temporary or permanent relocation, the ACBL NAP Coordinator has final authority of the residency and/or the qualification requirements (see Appendix). The Regional Director has final authority on any item not specified in the Conditions of Contest.

INFORMATION FOR PLAYERS

OVERVIEW

The North American Pairs is a grass-roots competition where each District selects representatives to compete at the Spring North American Bridge Championship (NABC). The event begins with qualifying games in Clubs during June, July and August. These games are followed by Unit- (optional) and District-level competitions to select players for the NABC. Financial subsidies are provided by ACBL to the top two pairs in each flight in each District to offset the cost of travel to the NABC.

The competition is divided into four separate flights, based on masterpoint (MP) levels, so players of all levels of experience have the opportunity to compete and represent their District in the National competition.

SCHEDULE

1. **Club Qualifying** June, July and August
2. **Unit Finals** Between Sept 1 and the District Final (note: most Districts do not have Unit-level competition.)
3. **District Finals** Between Sept 1 and the third Sunday in January (this year this is Jan 18, 2026)
4. **National Finals** 2026 Spring NABC in St. Louis, MO
 - a. **Championship Flight and Flight A** Wed/Thu February 25-26, 2026
 - b. **Flights B and C** Sat/Sun March 7-8, 2026

In all flights the NABC Final is a four-session event played over two days. Approximately 50% of the field will qualify for day two, with carryover per ACBL formula. In the Championship flight and Flight A, day two will be an all-play-all format when possible.

FLIGHT ELIGIBILITY

This is the first year that the NAP will feature four flights instead of three.

Eligibility for the various flights is as follows:

1. **Championship Flight** Open to any player
2. **Flight A** Players with fewer than 6000 MPs
3. **Flight B** Players with fewer than 3000 MPs
4. **Flight C** Players with fewer than 750 MPs who are not Life Masters

For purposes of NAP Flight Eligibility, ACBL uses the June masterpoint cycle, which runs on May 6, 2025. Points won after this cycle do not affect flight eligibility.

Players with significant playing experience in non-ACBL events may have this experience considered when determining their appropriate flight.

Partnerships consisting of players at different experience levels are only eligible to compete in those flights for which both players are eligible. For example, a 1000-MP player playing with a 3500-MP player is not eligible for Flight B even though the average of the partnership is less than 3000 MP.

Players may participate in any flight for which they (and their partner) are eligible. However, a player may play in only one flight at the NABC Final.

QUALIFICATION AND ADVANCEMENT

The qualification process begins at designated club qualifying games held during June, July and August. Players qualify for advancement by placing in the top half of their field or by scoring 50% or higher in the club qualifying game. Players may qualify in any club in any District, but only qualify for advancement in their home District. (See Appendix for more information about District membership.)

Players may play in as many club qualifying games, with as many different partners, as they wish. Players whose partner is not an ACBL member may still qualify; players whose partner is an online “robot” may not.

Once qualified at the club level, players may play in future stages with any qualified partner. In other words, new partnerships may be formed at the Unit or District level. Qualification to the NABC final (at the District-final level) is by partnership; players will play at the NABC with the same partner they competed with at the District final. For all stages beyond the club level, all participants must be ACBL members whose dues are current.

The top three pairs in each District Final in the Championship Flight and Flight A qualify for the NABC Final; the top four pairs qualify in Flights B and C. Additionally, the defending champion in the Championship Flight will be invited to participate in the NABC Final, provided they meet all eligibility requirements. (Note that since this is the first year of the Championship Flight, this clause applies to the winners of Flight A from 2024.)

In a stratified game at any level, players who achieve qualification in any flight also qualify in any lower flights for which they are eligible. In other words, a Flight C-eligible player who qualifies in Flight A is also qualified for Flights B and C at the next level. In a flighted game, qualification is only earned in that specific flight.

CONVENTIONS

The Open Convention Chart applies in stratified games at any level. In flighted games, the Basic+ Chart applies in Flights B and C, the Open Chart applies in Flight A, and the Open+ Chart applies in the Championship flight.

INFORMATION FOR DISTRICTS

Each District must appoint a District NAP Coordinator. This person serves as the point of contact for communication to and from ACBL, clubs, players, and Unit and District leadership. They are responsible for preparing the District's Conditions of Contest and scheduling Unit (if any) and District finals.

DISTRICT CONDITIONS OF CONTEST ARE DUE TO ACBL BY JUNE 1, 2025

Because so much has changed this year, there is a grace period; Conditions will be accepted until July 1. Conditions submitted after this date will have the following defaults imposed: club qualifying **will** be required, Unit Finals **will not** be permitted, and District Finals **will** be a two-session, play-through event in all four flights.

Conditions must be submitted by email to tournaments@acbl.org. District Conditions must address:

- Whether club-level qualifying is required (almost all Districts require club qualifying)
- Whether Unit-level qualifying is required or permitted (almost no Districts require Unit-level play)
- The format (number of sessions, number of boards per session, etc.) for Unit (if any) and District Finals
- The date and site of Unit (if any) and District Finals. If these are not yet known at the time the Conditions are submitted, they may be provided later. The due date is June 1, or 3 months prior to the date of the Finals, whichever is later.

All Conditions of Contest, requests for Finals sanctions, and any questions should be submitted by email to tournaments@acbl.org. Sanction requests DO NOT use the submission/approval process in TourneyTRAX that is used by most other tournaments; simply email your requested dates and sites to tournaments@acbl.org.

FEES

The table fee for club qualifying games is \$5.15 (USD), which is billed directly to clubs via ACBL Live for Clubs. Districts may impose an additional fee, supporting the District Grass Roots Fund, payable directly from clubs to the District. Table fees at the Unit and District level are \$7.15 (USD). District Finals held at the site of a Regional or Sectional tournament pay the same table fee as the tournament.

EVENT FORMATS

- District Finals must follow one of the following formats:
- Two-session playthrough
- Three sessions, where approximately 50% of the field after the second session qualifies for a one-session final (carryover per ACBL formula)
- Four sessions, where approximately 50% of the field after the second session qualifies for a two-session final (carryover per ACBL formula)
- Four-session playthrough

Unit Finals, if held, may follow one of the above formats. They may also be single-session or a two-session event with a 50% cut after the first session.

Any format which includes a cut may schedule a consolation event for pairs who do not qualify.

All sessions at both the Unit and District level must be at least 24 boards and no more than 30 boards.

District Finals may be held in-person or online. An ACBL Tournament Director will be assigned for all District Finals. District Finals may be split among multiple sites; the District's Conditions of Contest must specify the basis on which the District's qualifying "slots" will be apportioned.

Unit Finals may not be held online. If requested, an ACBL Tournament Director will be assigned. Otherwise, any club director who is certified as a Tournament Assistant or as qualified to run a Local Sectional may run the game.

Substitutes and Replacements

At any stage of the competition, the Regional Director (or their designee), the District NAP Coordinator or the tournament committee may approve a substitute in an emergency. A substitute must meet the flight eligibility requirements, may not appreciably strengthen the partnership and is subject to the following limitations:

- At the club or Unit stage, if a substitute plays more than 50 percent of the boards, they become the contestant of record if otherwise qualified.
- At any stage beyond the Unit stage, a substitute is not permitted for more than 50 percent of the boards played in a qualifying session or sessions; for more than 50 percent of the boards played in a final session or sessions; or more than one session in any case.

Beyond the District Final stage, a replacement is permitted only if one member of a pair that qualified to play in the National Final stage is either:

- Deceased - The surviving qualifier may select a new partner, who must be fully eligible to play in the National Final stage, or,
- Medically diagnosed as being unable to travel to or play in the National Final stage and the medical condition that renders the member unable to travel to or play in the National Final stage was unknown to the member at the time of the District Final.

The otherwise-qualified member may request permission to obtain a substitute. Either member will have an opportunity to provide medical documentation of the condition. The NABC leadership team will decide the request fairly and promptly and are the sole judge of whether a substitute will be allowed. Their decision will be final. If the request is approved, the remaining qualifier may select a new partner, who will be fully eligible to play in the National Final stage. The new partner must meet all of the eligibility requirements of this event. The replacement may not appreciably strengthen or weaken the partnership.

Flights

At the District Final, each flight plays separately. Each flight requires at least five pairs (2.5 tables) to be considered “viable”. In flights B and C, if between one and four pairs register to play, all such pairs will be considered qualified to play at the NABC upon payment of the District’s entry fee. If fewer than five pairs register in either (or both) of the Championship Flight or Flight A, those two flights may be combined. This combined flight is not stratified for masterpoint purposes; awards are as per the Championship Flight. The combined field is ranked, with the top three pairs qualifying for the NABC in the Championship Flight. The top three Flight A-eligible pairs qualify for the NABC in Flight A; any such pair which also qualifies in the Championship Flight must declare in which flight they choose to advance.

Districts which have historically attracted low attendance in Flight A may wish to schedule the Championship Flight and Flight A concurrently to allow for a combined field.

Only in the event of multiple flights not being viable should the District Final run as a fully-stratified event. Pairs earning NABC qualification in multiple flights must declare in which flight they choose to advance.

INFORMATION FOR CLUBS

Club qualifying is in June, July, and August. Each club may run up to two NAP qualifying games per month for each of their scheduled weekly sessions. Both face-to-face and virtual (VACB) clubs may run NAP qualifying games. Players in club qualifying games need not be ACBL members, but only players who are current ACBL members may advance to the next stage of the competition.

Most club qualifying games will be fully-stratified games. Clubs **MUST** use strat limits of Unlimited/3000/NLM 750 for a stratified game. Strats are based on the player with the most masterpoints, NOT the pair average. Stratified games use the Open Convention Chart.

Clubs may also offer fully-flighted games, with each flight playing separately. Clubs need not offer all four flights in every session; for example, sessions which are normally a limited game may choose to offer only Flight C. Flighted games are NOT stratified within the flights, with one exception: a Flight C game playing separately may be stratified using whatever limits the club deems appropriate, provided that the top strat is NLM 750. Lower strats in such a game award black points only and do not impact qualification for further stages.

Flighted games use the Convention Chart appropriate for their flight: Open+ in the Championship flight, Open in Flight A, and Basic+ in Flights B and C. Club qualifying games award 50% Red, 50% Black masterpoints. See the District section (above) for information on table fees.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Masterpoints

Clubs

In-person club qualifying games issue awards per the chart at <https://web2.acbl.org/documentlibrary/play/NAP/2024/NAP24.pdf>. In a flighted game, Flight A awards 80% of the above values; Flight B awards 70% and Flight C 50%. An Invitational Club awards 80% of the appropriate award. Masterpoints are 50% Red, 50% Black. VACB qualifying game awards are 150% of club rating, 50% Red, 50% Black.

Unit Finals

Unit Finals award masterpoints at Sectional rating. One-session events award Red masterpoints. Multi-session events award fractional Gold for overall awards: 20% Gold in the Championship Flight, 15% Gold in Flight A, 10% Gold in Flight B, and 5% Gold in Flight C. The balance of the overall awards, and all section awards, are Red.

District Finals

District Finals award a fixed amount, per the following table showing awards for first overall:

Flight	2 Sessions	3 Sessions	4 Sessions	Color – Overall and Section Top	Rating - Session Awards
Open	32	40	48	100% Gold	100% Regional
A	27	33	40	100% Gold	85% Regional
B	24	30	35	100% Gold	70% Regional
C	16	20	24	50% Gold/50% Red	62.5% Regional

Session awards in all flights are 100% Red. If the District final is played at two sites, scored and ranked separately, the applicable first place award will be divided in proportion to each site's share of the total tables.

NABC Final

First overall in each flight is per the following table:

Flight	Award for 1st Overall	Pigmentation
Championship	100	100% Platinum
A	80	100% Gold
B	70	100% Gold
C	45	50% Gold/50% Red

Session awards are Platinum in the Championship flight, Red in all other flights. If the NABC Final is played online for any reason, overall awards which would otherwise be Platinum will be Gold, and session awards in all flights will be Red.

Appendix II – District Membership

The North American Pairs were created initially with the expectation that players would play in and represent the District in which they lived. A member's principal residence as of June 1 of the year prior to the National Final shall establish the District in which said member is eligible to participate beyond the club qualifying stage. Changes in residence after that date shall not change the District in which the player is eligible to participate.

The expectation is that exceptions to this rule will be rare, especially in the Championship flight. Exceptions must fall into the categories listed below in the "Guidelines for Exceptions". A player seeking an exception must obtain permission in writing from the ACBL Regional Director representing the District in which the member has a principal residence and from the ACBL Regional Director representing the District in which the member wishes to play. Both Directors must approve the request for the exception to be granted. Further, any exceptions in the Championship flight of the event must also be approved by a BOD Credentials Committee. The expectation is that Regional Directors will approve and forward requests to the Credentials Committee only in very special cases. There is no appeal from the Credentials Committee decision.

The Credentials Committee (CC) is also responsible for clarifying which District a player is allowed to play in when said player's eligibility is in question. When a challenge to one's eligibility from a Unit final stage or later stage has been made, the CC may request documentary evidence from the member whose eligibility is in question. If a member is unable to verify to the CC's satisfaction that he or she is playing in the District of the member's principal residence, the CC shall automatically disqualify the member and his or her partner. Knowingly attempting to compete in a District in which a player is not eligible constitutes a Violation as defined by the Code of Disciplinary Regulations.

Guidelines for Exceptions:

As noted above, the expectation is that exceptions will be rare. The following are some situations where an exception may be considered:

- “Snowbird”. A member with seasonal residences who spends more than half of the NAP (June 1 – August 31) qualifying period in a District other than the District of their principal physical residence may play beyond the club qualifying stage in the District of seasonal residence. If they choose to do so, they may play in the District-level final of only one District. They must play in that District's finals to be eligible to play in the National Final. All necessary approvals must be obtained before play begins at the District level.
- A player with multiple domiciles may apply to the ACBL NAP Coordinator for a one-time choice of District in which they wish to play. This application must be made before the start of the event's qualifying period. This player may be asked to document their time in each of their residences. The player must spend at least three months each year in a District in order to have it considered as a domicile possibility. Once a player chooses a District in which to play, they must play only in that District until they no longer have a domicile in that District.
- A participant who is a full-time student, a member of the armed forces or an employee requiring temporary relocation may play in the District in which they temporarily reside.

- In rare cases, a player who is a member of a Unit in a District in which they do not reside may seek permission to play in the District in which they have a Unit membership. Such an exception will be considered only if all the conditions below are met:
 - Lives sufficiently close to the District border;
 - Has been a member of the Unit in which they wish to play for at least 5 years continuously prior to the start of the competition in the year for which the exception is being requested;
 - Must not have played in the GNT or NAP in another District for that period of time; and
 - Must have been actively involved as a volunteer in the Unit or District in which they wish to play for at least two years. Possibilities include but are not limited to: Unit or District Board Member, Chair of NABC or major NABC Committee, District or Unit Recorder, Tournament Chair, or Club Manager.

Any player seeking an exception for this reason must document the reasons why an exception should be considered and send it to both Regional Directors involved, as described above. This application must be made before the start of the event's qualifying period. The Regional Director of the District in which the player seeks to play must confirm the fact that the player has been an active volunteer in the District (or Unit) where the player does not live. If the player seeks to play in the Championship Flight, the Regional Director must then forward such a request to the Credentials Committee. Should an exception be granted for this reason, the player is eligible to play only in that District and may not change Unit affiliation unless the player's principal physical residence changes.

The Credentials Committee may consider exceptions under unusual circumstances for otherwise eligible players who change their District through a change in their physical domicile after June 1. Requests shall be made at least 30 days before the District Level final.

Appendix III – ONLINE District Finals

General Conditions

1. This event will be hosted by Bridge Base Online (BBO), which is currently the only approved host. BBO will charge a fee of 25% of gross entry sales to host the event.
2. Regarding any of these conditions, the decision of the Director in Charge (DIC) will be final. The DIC is empowered to remedy any omissions in these CoC.
3. Unless specifically noted below, the Laws of Duplicate Bridge, the ACBL Convention Charts, the ACBL Alert Procedures, the CoC for the 2025-26 NAP, General CoC for Pairs events, Appendix O for Online Play and ACBL Zero Tolerance Policy shall govern this event.
4. The DIC must be an ACBL Director, with the rank of Tournament Director or higher, and shall have the authority to assign their own staff.
5. The Tournament Organizer will provide a format for the event which includes contingencies for any number of pairs in each flight.
6. If feasible, contestants in each flight will play the same deals as others within their flight.

7. Each Contestant shall have access to these CoC and the event's format (#5 above). Failure to have reviewed these conditions, or lack of proficiency with computers or the software used by the online host does not excuse any irregularity, or violation of these conditions.
 - a. Each pair must pre-register no later than one week prior to the announced date of the contest. Late entrants may be accepted for the convenience of the movement and only at the discretion of the DIC. At the time of pre-registration, pairs are required to submit the following information for each pair member: Name, ACBL Number, BBO ID, Flight in which they intend to compete, and any special needs not addressed by these CoC.
8. In the event a Contestant who, due to disability, is unable to use a computer, and in all cases where a Contestant does not have the requisite computer skills, said Contestant may appoint an Operator to relay calls, plays and explanations thereof. The Operator must be named in preregistration and is subject to the approval of the DIC.
9. Should a technical difficulty delay play for one or more tables, play in all unaffected tables shall continue and 15 minutes will be allotted to resolve the issue before play is suspended. If play is suspended for longer than 15 minutes, the decision of the DIC about the continuation of the event shall be final.

Security

Proctored sites are no longer required but may be used at District option. Players may participate from any location, provided that partners are not playing from within the same room.

Contestants are not permitted to be in possession of any electronic communication devices while they are competing. While it is impossible to monitor this directly, any evidence of communication external to BBO, electronic or otherwise, will constitute a violation. VIOLATION OF THIS CONDITION WILL RESULT IN A MANDATORY PENALTY OF ONE FULL BOARD, AND A SECOND VIOLATION WILL RESULT IN THE PAIR'S DISQUALIFICATION.

Contestants may only run the following applications during the play period:

1. Bridge Base Online app or an internet browser for the purpose of accessing BBO
2. A document reader with approved written defenses from ACBL's defense database where permitted by ACBL Convention Charts.
3. Contestants must not relay any extraneous information through chat visible to partner.
4. Suspicious calls or plays must be reported to the Director. All calls and plays are subject to review by the ACBL Recorder or his designee; this includes computer-based cheating detection software tools.

The Play

1. Contestants are required to post a complete convention card, in ACBL format, including any supplemental notes.
2. Pairs playing methods requiring a written defense must pre-alert their opponents and post a written description of their method(s) along with their convention card. Contestants opposing a pair playing such methods are permitted to access the ACBL's defense database and keep said defenses open in their internet browser.
3. The Director must be summoned electronically for any irregularity which occurs during play. Once the Director has been summoned, all play and bidding shall cease until the Director authorizes its continuation.
4. Contestants are required to alert and explain their own calls (not their partner's). When one makes an Alertable call, the bidder must give a full explanation of the agreement to their opponents (and only their opponents). Stating the common or popular name of the convention is not sufficient.
5. Any Contestant may request, but only at their turn to call or play, information concerning an opponents' methods. Such inquiries may be asked of either or both opponents but must be asked in a private chat. Replies to these inquiries must be given in a private chat.
6. Violations of conditions, thereby making available to one's partner extraneous information by a remark, a question, a reply to a question, an unexpected alert, failure to alert, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement or mannerism (Security 4 & The Play 5 & 6), shall be rectified under the Laws of Duplicate Bridge, and are subject to procedural penalties. Contestants must report any such violations to the DIC.
7. Any deviation in tempo does convey extraneous information and is subject to rectification under the Laws of Duplicate Bridge. Any Contestant experiencing technical difficulties which may be construed as conveying extraneous information must immediately inform the Director.
8. Claims, concessions, agreement thereto and contention or cancellation thereof will be rectified under the Laws of Duplicate Bridge.
9. Unintended calls or plays will be rectified under the Laws of Duplicate Bridge. If a Contestant makes an unintended call or play they should summon the Director immediately. As in live play, undos are permitted only upon instruction of the Director.
10. See Appendix O for additional information about online play.