

Houston Tennis Association

Rules for Houston USTA and HTA League Play

(Revised November 2023)

The following set of “Rules for Houston USTA and HTA League Play” (the Rules) has been adopted by the Houston Tennis Association (HTA) for use by all participants in USTA and HTA League play.

League play is governed by, in hierarchical order, the ITF Rules of Tennis, the USTA Friend at Court, the USTA National League Regulations and Interpretations, the USTA Texas Section Operating Procedures, and these rules of the HTA. Players are responsible for educating themselves and following all rules and regulations.

“The Code”—a guide for unofficiated matches outlining tradition and etiquette—shall be followed at all times.

The definitions of terms used in this document are included as a Glossary.



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ADULT LEAGUE PLAY IN THE HOUSTON TENNIS ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1952, the Houston Tennis Association (HTA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and the umbrella Community Tennis Association (CTA) for the United States Tennis Association (USTA) covering the Greater Houston area. HTA has received numerous awards at the Section and National level. In addition to administering adult league play, the HTA operates USTA Junior Team Tennis (JTT), National Junior Tennis and Learning (NJTL) and a variety of annual tournaments. The HTA also provides scholarships to deserving high school seniors and community outreach functions through the Special Olympics and Wheelchair Tennis.

The HTA administers two brands of adult leagues in Greater Houston: USTA Leagues and HTA Leagues. The following chart shows the relationship of the HTA administration to the brands of adult leagues played in Greater Houston:

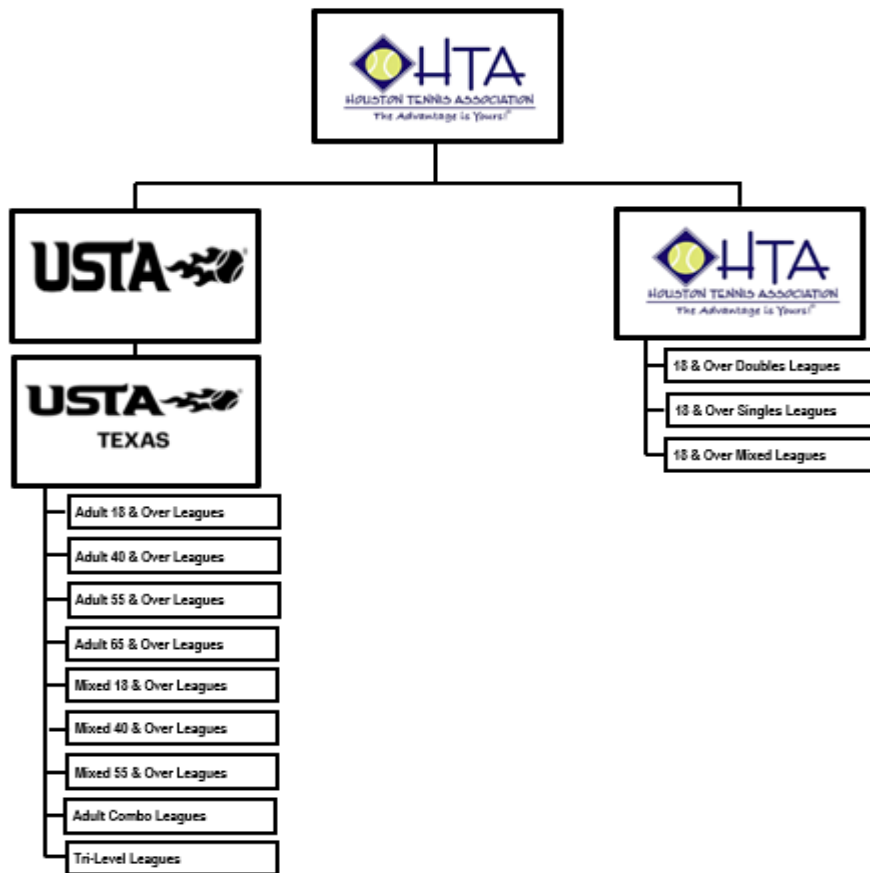


Figure 1: Leagues administered by the Houston Tennis Association

Each league, although similar in some respects, utilizes its own set of rules. USTA leagues are governed by, in hierarchical order, the ITF Rules of Tennis, USTA regulations and interpretations, USTA Texas Section regulations, and the rules of the HTA. HTA rules will never contradict USTA regulations, and USTA regulations will be repeated or referenced in this document only if merited due to specific relevance or frequent questions. **It is the responsibility of all adult league team captains and players to familiarize themselves with the National and Texas Section regulations governing USTA leagues.**

HTA adult leagues will follow USTA League Regulations, with exceptions as noted in this document, and will always follow [“The Code: The Player’s Guide for Unofficial Matches.”](#) HTA league play does not offer the opportunity for Sectional or National championships, and the rules for HTA leagues are set by the HTA.

NATIONAL TENNIS RATING PROGRAM (NTRP)

The National Tennis Rating Program (NTRP) is the official system for determining the levels of competition for USTA and HTA leagues. The USTA NTRP assigns ratings based on play in the local USTA leagues and at championship levels as well as USTA sanctioned tournaments during the current league year. The USTA and HTA both use this system to determine player skill-level eligibility for the various league types and age groups.

The USTA publishes year end ratings in early December of each year. These ratings take effect January 1 of the following year and will be used by all HTA and USTA leagues including Tri-Level. Though the HTA Spring and Fall leagues do not generate a dynamic NTRP, players must have a rating to participate in these leagues.

NTRP computer ratings are managed exclusively by the USTA. The HTA does not set or control NTRP ratings. All appeals can be made through the USTA.

1.00 ELIGIBILITY AND REGISTRATION

1.01 PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

(A) All players must meet the following requirements:

1. Have a USTA membership that is current through the end of the Local League season.
2. Must have reached the required minimum age prior to or during the calendar year in which he or she participates in the first local league.

(B) A player will be considered illegal, and disqualified from any match played, when:

1. The player is not registered in TennisLink for the current, appropriate team prior to playing a match.
2. The player does not play the line listed when lineups were exchanged.

1.02 NTRP REQUIREMENTS

Team NTRP levels and league formats differ by league and Age Group. The *Available League NTRP Levels and Formats* table shows the available options for USTA and HTA league play in Houston (note that a minimum number of registered teams is required in any given season, Age Group, and NTRP level in order to schedule play at that level).

- (A) Returning HTA or USTA league tennis players will use the NTRP rating as shown for them in the USTA Computer Rating System.
- (B) Players with no current computer rating must self-rate. Players with expired ratings will not be allowed to self-rate at a lower level than their last valid NTRP rating.
- (C) A player may play up to one NTRP level above the player's current NTRP level. Example: 3.0 can play 3.5 but 3.0 cannot play 4.0.

Available League NTRP Levels and Formats				
League	Division	Age Group	NTRP Levels	League Format
USTA	Adult	18 & Over	2.5, 5.0+, Open	1 - Singles 2 - Doubles
		18 & Over	3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5	2 - Singles 3 - Doubles
		40 & Over	3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5	1 - Singles 3 - Doubles*
		55 & Over 65 & Over	6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 9.0	3 - Doubles
	Mixed	18 & Over	2.5, 6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 9.0, 10.0	3 - Doubles
		40 & Over 55 & Over	6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 9.0	3 - Doubles
	Special	Adult Team Combo	5.5, 6.5, 7.5, 8.5	3 - Doubles
		Adult Tri-Level	3.0/3.5/4.0 3.5/4.0/4.5	3 - Doubles
HTA	Adult	Adult Doubles: 3 Lines	3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5, Open	3 - Doubles
		Adult Doubles: 4 Lines	3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5, Open	4 - Doubles
		Adult Singles	3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5	4 - Singles
	Mixed	Adult Mixed Doubles	6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 9.0, 10.0	4 - Doubles

Figure 2: League NTRP levels and formats

*USTA teams that advance to Sectionals/Nationals will use the 1-Singles 4-Doubles format

(D) When straight NTRP levels are used for a league (e.g., 3.0, 3.5, 4.0), a player cannot have an NTRP rating higher than the NTRP level in which the player is competing. There are three exceptions:

1. 40 & Over 4.5 level may have up to three (3) players from the next higher NTRP level on a team roster.
2. 18 & Over 5.0+ level may have up to two (2) players from the next higher NTRP level on a team roster.
3. Leagues designated as Open level have no NTRP restrictions.

(E) In plus (+) NTRP levels utilizing three individual lines within a team match, no more than one plus (+) level player shall be allowed to play in a team match and shall be required to play in the number 1 position, either singles or doubles.

(F) In plus (+) NTRP levels utilizing four or more individual lines within a team match, two plus (+) level players may play in a team match and shall be required to play in the number 1 position, either singles or doubles.

(G) When combined NTRP levels are used for a league (e.g., 6.0, 7.0, 8.0), the combined NTRP rating levels of the doubles team cannot exceed the combined NTRP level in which the players are competing.

(H) When combined NTRP levels are used for a league, the following minimum player NTRP ratings apply: the minimum rating for a 6.0 team is 2.5; for a 7.0 team it is 3.0; for an 8.0 team it is 3.5; for a 9.0 team it is 4.0; and for a 10.0 team it is 4.5.

(I) The NTRP difference between members of an individual doubles team may not exceed 1.0.

1.03 REGISTRATION AND TEAM ROSTERS

- (A) Player registration will be online through the TennisLink registration page.
- (B) Teams will register at the NTRP level (flight) as appropriate for its players to meet eligibility requirements of the specific league and Age Group.
- (C) A player may play on multiple teams in a league and Age Group, so long as the teams are at different NTRP levels. A player may also play on multiple teams in a league and Age Group so long as the designated, regular day of play is different.
- (D) A player may register for a team any time up to four weeks after the start of the league season.
- (E) A player may be moved from one team to another if the player has not played any matches for that league season.
- (F) The HTA does not offer refunds of registration fees. If the level entered has too few teams/players to allow that level to be scheduled in the upcoming league season, refunds will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- (G) The minimum number of players required to field a team is shown in the table below. HTA has a 20-player maximum per team. Player registration deadline is approximately four weeks after the league start date or as noted in the HTA yearly league calendar.

Required Team Composition				
League	Division	Age Group	Minimum Number of Players	Gender
USTA	Adult	18 & Over 2.5, 5.0+, Open	5	Same Gender
		18 & Over 3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5 40 & Over	8 9	Same Gender
		55 & Over 65 & Over	6	Same Gender
	Mixed	18 & Over 40 & Over 55 & Over	3 Men 3 Women	Men and Women
	Special	Adult Team Combo	6	Same Gender
		Adult Tri-Level	6; 2 Players at Each of 3 Levels	Same Gender
	HTA	Adult	Adult Doubles: 3 Lines	6
Adult Doubles: 4 Lines			8	Same Gender
Adult Singles			4	Same Gender
Mixed		Adult Mixed Doubles	4 Men 4 Women	Men and Women

Figure 3: Minimum required composition of teams

2.00 SEASON STANDARDS

2.01 SCHEDULING

Items in this Section govern a team's published schedule for a season of play.

- (A) USTA and HTA leagues play throughout the year as scheduled and posted on the HTA calendar.
- (B) League play will be in a format of one or more round robin cycles with the possibility of playoffs after regular-season round robin play.
- (C) A league season's round robin play will be considered completed as determined by the League Coordinator.
- (D) Once a team declares its home-court venue for a given league season, that location cannot be changed without prior approval of the League Coordinator.
- (E) With respect to scheduling, it is the responsibility of the home team captain and/or co-captain to ensure that all facility rules are followed, and all necessary and proper arrangements are made, including, but not limited to, court reservations.
- (F) Weekday evening team matches are intended to be played between 7:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. Items (1) through (3) below can be altered only on individual, by-case instances and only by prior written mutual agreement between team captains. A team's published schedule shall not vary from the following:
 - 1. Individual lines in a team match shall not begin earlier than 7:00 p.m.
 - 2. In team matches with split start times, at least two individual lines must be scheduled to start at 7:00 p.m. and no individual line shall be scheduled after 8:30 p.m.
 - 3. In a team match where all lines are scheduled to be played at the same time, the matches shall begin no later than 8:00 p.m.
- (G) Weekday morning team matches will be played approximately 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., unless facility rules dictate otherwise. Individual lines in a team match shall not begin earlier than 9:00 a.m. unless both team captains agree in writing to the change. Individual lines in a team match shall not be scheduled after 12:00 p.m. unless both team captains agree in writing.
- (H) Weekend team matches will be played approximately 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., unless facility rules dictate otherwise. Individual lines in a team match shall not begin earlier than 4:00 p.m. unless both team captains agree in writing to the change. Individual lines in a team match shall not be scheduled after 7:30 p.m. unless both team captains agree in writing.
- (I) Should a team match's standard start time for a season as shown in TennisLink need to be changed, it is the home team captain's responsibility to notify the League Coordinator before the first regular match of the season is played.

2.02 ADMINISTRATION

- (A) Each team shall appoint a team captain to handle administrative affairs and represent the team in USTA and HTA matters. Each team may also appoint a co-captain who may serve as acting captain in fulfilling team responsibilities.
- (B) A captain may only captain one team at a time in a league at a given NTRP league level or Age Group.
- (C) A team may have a non-playing captain who may fall outside the NTRP eligibility requirements for that team. A non-playing captain will not appear on the team's roster of players. In order to register as a non-playing captain, you must contact the League Coordinator directly.
- (D) If any Adult Division Age Group consists of only two teams in a level of play, each team must maintain its roster with at least 40 percent of its players at the designated NTRP level of play. The Adult Division 55 & Over and 65 & Over Age Groups that use combined NTRP rating levels will not be required to comply with this rule.

3.00 CONDUCTING A MATCH

3.01 GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- (A) The home team captain decides what time and on which courts each individual line will play in accordance with the rules of the league and rules of the facility.
- (B) The home team captain or co-captain must contact the visiting team captain and/or co-captain at least **96 hours** prior to the scheduled match to provide individual line times, directions, facility rules that might affect play, and any other pertinent information. If the visiting team captain and/or co-captain has not received this information 72 hours prior to the scheduled match, it is their responsibility to contact the home team captain and/or co-captain to obtain the information. Repeated infraction of this notification rule by a home team captain and/or co-captain may result in penalties or suspension from league play.
- (C) If teams do not communicate with each other, the League Coordinator is to be contacted 48 hours prior to the scheduled match and will determine the match start and individual line times in accordance with league and facility rules.
- (D) If the home team fails to explain facility rules in writing to the visiting team, resulting in the visiting team player(s) violating a facility rule and thereby resulting in a visiting team default, such default shall be charged against the home team and awarded in favor of the visiting team.
- (E) For each team match on the date scheduled, the home team captain must assure a minimum of two hard (indoor or outdoor) courts, or the number deemed necessary for a specific league format in order to complete all individual lines by the end times described in items 2.01(E) through 2.01(H). Clay courts are permissible provided the visiting team agrees in writing in advance.
- (F) A captain or acting captain must be present throughout the entire time that team matches are played. Should a captain need to leave the match before the end of the entire team match, the captain shall appoint a teammate to be acting captain. The captain shall notify the opposing team captain of the acting captain.

- (G) Lineups must be exchanged simultaneously prior to the start of the first line at the designated match time. All players should be on their assigned courts ready to play at the match start time. Matches must be played according to the exchanged lineup.
- (H) Fifteen-minute default rule:
1. Players must be present and ready to begin the first point of each line no later than 15 minutes after the designated start time. Any player(s) arriving more than 15 minutes late to a match will automatically be defaulted unless a court is not yet available. Should one or more players from both teams in a given line be defaulted by the 15-minute rule, the match shall be recorded in TennisLink as a double-default (i.e., 0-6, 0-6 for both teams).
 2. If a line results in a default due to the 15-minute rule, the line may be played for fun (i.e., no recorded score) only if it can be done so without any possibility of affecting the start of subsequent lines or the completion of the team match. To assure this, any such for-fun match will be a timed match.
 - (a) If it is an early line, it must end precisely at the time the court is scheduled for the following line; no completion of an in-progress game is allowed.
 - (b) If it is a late line, it must end no later than the completion of the final point of the last scheduled line.
- (I) Once lineups have been exchanged, players cannot be moved from one line to another. No player may be replaced or substituted except under the following conditions:
1. A player becomes ill or injured prior to the first point being played on that line and an eligible replacement (one not already listed in the lineup) can be made within the default time.
 2. A player fails to show up and an eligible replacement (one not already listed on the lineup) can be made within the default time.
 3. A team has only one player each for two lines of doubles, those players may then combine and play at whichever line is the highest of the two on the originally exchanged lineup.
 4. A player or doubles team is defaulted under the 15-minute rule at a higher line and there is a player or players available on that team's exchanged lineup at the lowest scheduled line that can move up and complete the higher-level match.
- (J) It is the responsibility of the team captains or acting captains to ensure their players are playing the correct lines on the courts assigned by the home team.
- (K) Team captains may request photo identification of players.
- (L) Team matches:
1. All team matches will be scored best two out of three sets, with the third set, if required, being a 10-point Coman match tiebreak.

2. Leagues playing regularly scheduled matches on weekday evenings and weekends will use “no-ad” scoring. Leagues playing regularly scheduled matches on weekday mornings will use standard “ad” scoring.
 3. The Coman tiebreak procedure will be followed for both the set tiebreak and match tiebreak.
 4. On-court warm-ups will be strictly limited to no more than 10 minutes except as defined in item 3.01(H)1 and in no case shall the warm-up continue more than 15 minutes past the designated start time of the individual line.
 5. The “spin” for serving/receiving or choice of side shall be done prior to the start of warm-up.
 6. All warm-ups, including serves, must be taken before the match begins.
- (M) The home team is responsible for providing one can of new championship-quality USTA-approved yellow tennis balls per individual line to be played. The use of any USTA “transition” ball is prohibited.
- (N) The home team is responsible for all players’ facility fees, including, but not limited to, parking and court fees.
- (O) All matches are unofficiated and no linesmen or umpires will be provided or allowed.
- (P) Children or pets must be supervised at all times by someone not participating on-court in a match.
- (Q) All players are responsible for providing their own water and other personal supplies during play.
- (R) Cell phones must be silenced. Any cell phone interruptions may be subject to the USTA Point Penalty system.

3.02 COACHING AND SPORTSMANSHIP

- (A) No coaching is permitted at league matches.
- (B) The server shall announce the game score before the first point of a game and the point score before each subsequent point of the game. If there is disagreement over the score, it shall be resolved by one of the following methods, listed in order of preference:
1. Count all points and games agreed upon by the players and replay only disputed points or games
 2. Play from a score mutually agreeable to all players
 3. Spin a racquet or toss a coin
- (C) Spectators may not aid players in making a line call or in determining the correct score. A spectator is any person not playing the match; this includes team captains, teammates, and players on adjacent courts.
- (D) Spectators may quietly watch a match in progress. They shall not stand or sit on the court, which includes benches or seating areas designated for use by players. Spectators are never allowed on an active court unless rendering aid to a physically injured player.

- (E) It is the responsibility of the captains to control the behavior of their teams and teams' spectators. Loud, boisterous, or unsportsmanlike behavior is unacceptable. If a problem arises, players should ask the spectator to refrain from the offensive behavior. If the behavior persists, the team captains should be summoned to handle the situation. If necessary, a grievance should be filed.
- (F) Disputes should be settled between players as soon as they arise. All points played in good faith will stand. Players are to resolve any dispute themselves. If they cannot, they shall do the following:
1. The player will inform the opponent of the problem and intention to leave the court to obtain the assistance of the team captain. Racquets should be left on the court if a player must leave the court.
 2. The captain shall contact the opponent's captain and they will try to resolve the dispute. If the captains are involved in playing a match the players may have to cease their play until the captains are available to assist them or follow rule 3.02(F)3a below.
 3. If the captains and players cannot agree on a resolution to the conflict, the offended player(s) may either:
 - a. Continue to play the match, but do so under protest. The score and who was serving at the time of the protest must be indicated on the scorecard with the annotation, "played under protest." At the conclusion of the match, the offended player(s) may or may not file a grievance. If no grievance is filed, the results of the match stand as played.
 - b. Stop play, ensuring both captains and the opponents know why. Indicate on the scorecard that the match was stopped in protest, and note the score and who was serving at the time the match was stopped. The offended player or the player's captain should file a grievance. If no grievance is filed within the required timeframe, the match will be scored as a retirement by the offended player. All points played will be recorded in TennisLink. For information about grievances and the grievance process see rule 5.02.
- (G) In an effort to promote fair play and good sportsmanship, the USTA adheres to a Suspension Point System for those who violate the rules or policies governing league competition. To view the USTA Suspension Point System, please [click here](#)."

3.03 POSTPONED, SUSPENDED, AND DELAYED MATCHES

- (A) Postponed team matches prior to any line starting.
1. Do not postpone for rain until the day of the match and not earlier than one (1) hour prior to the scheduled start time or at a time mutually agreed upon between the two captains. The match can be rescheduled if any of the actual temperature is 40 degrees or below or wind chill factor is 32 degrees or below.
 2. The home team captain is responsible for determining court conditions and court playability and for communicating that information to the visiting team captain. Both team captains shall attempt to reach a mutual agreement regarding match postponement. If mutual agreement cannot be achieved the home team captain will make the final decision.

3. If a postponement has not been called, all team members scheduled should arrive at the facility ready to **play**.
4. In the event of postponement prior to commencement, a team will not be held to any defaults announced prior to postponement.
5. A new lineup may be given for a rescheduled team match.

(B) Suspended matches after any line has begun:

1. Incomplete matches must be continued by the same players and resumed at the exact place—set, game and point—they stood when play was suspended.
2. Defaults from the originally exchanged lineup will stand.
3. Substitutions of eligible players may be made in individual lines if play was not begun on those lines.
4. If the team captains cannot agree on a date to complete the suspended line(s) within required timeframes—the team captains must contact the League Coordinator, who will select a make-up date. If one team is unable to agree to the make-up date set by the League Coordinator, that team will take the loss and the match will be recorded with a status of “Retired” in TennisLink; all games previously played in good faith will stand. If neither team is able to agree to the make-up date set by the League Coordinator, the match will be recorded as a default for each team. Also, see the *Frequently Asked Questions* item about make-up matches.

(C) Delayed matches:

If both team captains do not agree to suspend play, both teams (all players to play that team match) must be available at the site for 30 minutes beyond the scheduled match start time. After that period, if the courts remain unplayable, the match is automatically suspended.

(D) Rescheduling:

1. Team captains will have 48 hours to initiate negotiations to reschedule a postponed or suspended match.
2. Team captains have five (5) days to notify the League Coordinator of the rescheduled date. Once a make-up match has been rescheduled, teams are committed to play on that date. If a match has not been rescheduled within five (5) days, the League Coordinator will have discretion to select a make-up date.
3. Postponed or suspended matches must be played, and scores recorded within 14 days of the postponement/suspension or by the deadline set by the League Coordinator.
4. If mutually agreed by both team captains, postponed/suspended matches may be completed at a different facility.

3.04 TEAM MATCH SCORING

(A) Team results and standings:

1. Team match results and standings for all USTA leagues will be determined, whether in round robin or single elimination competition, first by number of team matches won. In the event of a tie, the tie shall be broken by the first of the following procedures.
 - a. Winner of the most individual lines.
 - b. Winner of the most head-to-head team matches.
 - c. Loser of the fewest number of sets.
 - d. Loser of the fewest number of games.
 - e. If all calculations are equal after using the preceding scoring methods, the team with the highest game percentage will be declared the winner.
2. Team match results and standings for HTA leagues will be determined by the total, cumulative points earned in match play. Each line carries a weighted value established by the League Coordinator, and it is the running total of those values that determines standings. If at the end of a season two teams have an equal number of accrued points, the standings shall be determined first by the winner of the most head-to-head team matches; second by the loser of the fewest number of sets; and third, if necessary, by the loser of the fewest number of games.

Weighted Line Values for HTA Leagues:

- Line 1 – 10 points
- Line 2 – 6 points
- Line 3 – 4 points
- Line 4 – 2 points

3. TennisLink will maintain the accurate team standings. Teams that have not completed all regular season matches before a playoff deadline will not be included in the playoff schedule. All regular season matches must be played, completed, and scores entered into TennisLink in order to calculate standings.

(B) Recording team match results:

1. The home team captain shall enter match results in TennisLink within 24 hours of the completion of all lines. If the home team has not entered the scores within 24 hours, it becomes the responsibility of the visiting team captain to enter the match results in TennisLink within 48 hours of the completion of all lines. The team that does not enter the match results is responsible for ensuring the match results have been correctly entered in TennisLink. Match results must be confirmed in TennisLink within 48 hours after the completion of all lines.

(C) Disputing team match results:

1. Match results entered incorrectly may be disputed. When the results are entered, the objecting captain has 48 hours to dispute the results. TennisLink automatically confirms results 48 hours after the results are entered. Failure to dispute results within the time allowance will forfeit an individual's right to protest. Any dispute made beyond 48 hours will be handled in accordance with the rules of TennisLink. For additional information, see the *Frequently Asked Questions* item regarding confirming/disputing match scores.
2. Following initiation of a dispute in TennisLink, the team captain initiating the dispute shall:
 - a. Confirm the scoring discrepancy with the opposing captain.
 - b. Email the League Coordinator with the desired change and include the TennisLink match identification number and the correction needed.

3.05 FORFEITS, DEFAULTS, AND RETIREMENTS

(A) An individual default occurs when a player fails to appear on time, or is disqualified by eligibility or other reasons.

1. If a team defaults an individual line of play due to the 15-minute default rule, the team receiving the default must have players present and ready to play the line being defaulted.
2. If a team captain knows in advance that an individual line must be defaulted due to lack of player availability, he or she must notify the opposing captain no later than one (1) hour before the scheduled start time of the line. Habitual violators of this rule will be considered using gamesmanship and are subject to penalties or suspension from league play.
3. Unless a line is postponed after advance notification of a line default is given, the default stands. The team receiving the default is not required to have players present to play that individual line.
4. A team that withdraws from league play after team registration has closed, is subject to suspension for the next league season.

(B) For the purpose of determining standings, individual defaults will be scored as a 6-0, 6-0 win for the player or doubles team receiving the default and a 0-6, 0-6 loss for the player or doubles team that defaulted the match. In the event of a default by both players or doubles teams, both sides will be given a 0-6, 0-6 loss and neither receives credit for a win.

(C) A team must have a minimum number of eligible players available for play in each team match in accordance with the table below or the entire match must be defaulted. The maximum number of positions that may be defaulted without defaulting the entire match is also noted. When defaults are necessary, the order of the defaults, whenever possible, shall be determined by the team captain in accordance with the table below.

Allowable Line Defaults for All Leagues					
League	Division	Age Group	Min. Number of Players Available per Team Match	Max. Number of Positions that can be Defaulted	Position(s) and Order of Line Match Defaults
USTA	Adult	18 & Over 2.5, 5.0+, Open	3	1	#1 Singles <i>or</i> #2 Doubles
		18 & Over 3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5	4	2	Singles: #2 Singles before #1 Singles
		40 & Over	5	1	Doubles: #3 Doubles before #2 Doubles, and #2 Doubles before #1 Doubles
	Adult	55 & Over 65 & Over	4 players who are eligible to combine and compete	1	#3 Doubles
	Mixed	18 & Over 40 & Over 55 & Over			
HTA	Adult	Adult Singles	2	2	Any line may be defaulted
		Adult Doubles: 4 Lines	4	2	Any line may be defaulted
	Mixed	Adult	4 players who are eligible to combine and compete	2	Any line may be defaulted

Figure 4: Allowable Line Defaults before team default

(D) If a team defaults an entire team match for any reason during round robin play, that team is ineligible to continue play at that championship (USTA leagues only). All matches of the defaulting team already played shall be null and void when determining standings but will be used for ratings and advancement purposes. If all teams with a mathematical chance to advance have played the defaulting team in good faith, those matches shall stand as played when determining standings. See [USTA League Regulations](#) item 2.03(L), and [USTA Texas Section Operating Procedures](#) item 7.

(E) Retirement

1. A retirement occurs when a line has started and a player/doubles team is unable to continue due to injury, loss of condition, emergency, or refusal to play.
2. In case of a retirement, for the purpose of determining standings, the non-retiring player/doubles team shall be credited with such number of additional games as would have been won if the match was completed as if the non-retiring player/doubles team had won every subsequent game. For NTRP computer data entry in TennisLink, mark as retired and submit actual scores of matches at the point of retirement.

4.00 CHAMPIONSHIPS

4.01 POST-SEASON PLAY

- (A) Post-season and/or championship play may be offered to NTRP levels (flights) and Age Groups that contain more than one sub flight.
- (B) Post-season and/or championship play will follow the procedures described in section 2.03 of the *USTA League Regulations*.

4.02 ELIGIBILITY

- (A) To be eligible to participate in post-season or championship competition, all computer rated players must have two match results entered into TennisLink during the Local League season; one result may be a win by default. Self-rated or Appeal rated players must play three (3) matches, no defaults shall count.
- (B) Post-season and/or championship play may include wildcard teams. To determine which wildcard teams will advance to post-season or championship competition, the records of the teams ending the regular season in second place in each sub flight will be compared. Wildcard entries will be given to the second-place team(s) with the highest percentage of individual lines won in USTA league play, and most points won in HTA league play.

4.03 MULTIPLE LEAGUES PROGRESSING TO THE SAME CHAMPIONSHIP

The USTA Texas Section allows multiple leagues to play within cities in the Section provided the team captains and players abide by the local rules for the leagues in which they participate. The purpose of allowing multiple league play is to encourage more USTA adult participation.

For purposes of these rules, "League" represents a distinct calendar of play with start and end dates (a season); which plays on a specific day and/or time; which has specific NTRP eligibility requirements; and which is of a specific Age Group. All conditions must be met to constitute a separate league. For example, a ladies' NTRP 4.0 USTA 18 & Over league playing on Monday mornings is distinct from the same level and Age Group playing on Friday mornings. A player may participate on each of these teams, but may not be a member of two teams that both play on Monday mornings at the same level and Age Group.

The following rules apply to participation in multiple USTA leagues that advance to the same championship progression, whether Local, Area, Sectional, or National:

- (A) When involved with more than one Community Tennis Association, players must abide by the fees, rules, and boundaries of each organization.
- (B) A player may be on as many teams as he or she is otherwise eligible, provided participation is not on two teams that: play during the same season on the same days/times, and at the same NTRP level and Age Group.
- (C) If there is more than one league, or flight within a league, at a given NTRP level and Age Group, the team to advance to the Texas Sectional Championships shall be determined by the *Houston Citywide Championships* for Houston league play and by the *Playoffs* for North Houston (NoHo) league play.

- (D) Within the Houston or North Houston (NoHo) leagues, teams and/or players participating on multiple leagues or at multiple NTRP levels can participate at only one NTRP level per Age Group in a local league championship. For example, assuming both teams qualify, a player participating in two USTA 40 & Over leagues in Houston at both the NTRP 3.5 and 4.0 levels must select only one team to represent in the Houston Citywide Championships. Likewise, a player participating in NTRP 4.0 play in USTA 18 & Over leagues on both Monday and Wednesday mornings must declare which team she will represent in the Houston Citywide Championships.
- (E) A player on a team that qualifies for the HTA Houston Citywide Championships and is also on a team that qualifies for the NoHo Playoffs must abide by the following:
1. A player that does not participate with either of their teams in the Houston Citywide Championships or the NoHo Playoffs may still join one of the winning teams in advancement to the Texas Sectional Championships provided all eligibility requirements are met.
 2. If a player participates in either the Houston Citywide Championships or the NoHo Playoffs and their team wins, they may **not** participate in any other local league playoff for that league type and Age Group. This rule applies if the teams are the same NTRP levels. **Winning a local league championship constitutes a team declaration for the Texas Sectional Championships.**
 3. If the team a player participates with in either the Houston Citywide Championships or the NoHo Playoffs does not win, but the player's second team wins the other local league championships, the player may rejoin that team to advance to the Texas Sectional Championships even though they did not participate in those local playoffs.
- (F) If an entire team is eligible for both the Houston Citywide Championships and the NoHo Playoffs, the team must make a declaration as to which championship the team will enter. Depending upon this decision, the championship opportunity will then be offered to the second-place team in that division. If that second-place team declines, the wild-card team with the best overall winning percentage in the local league at that Age Group and level of play will be invited to participate in the local league championships.
- (G) Players on a team that proceeds directly from local league play to the Texas Sectional Championships without requirement of a local league championship (e.g., insufficient number of teams to hold a playoff) may not participate in local league playoffs on any other of their qualifying teams for that division/NTRP level.
- (H) Any other situations regarding play in multiple leagues progressing to the same championship will be resolved by the League Coordinator for the appropriate Community Tennis Association. Standards for the filing of grievances apply.

5.00 VIOLATIONS, GRIEVANCES, AND PENALTIES

5.01 SCOPE

- (A) Any situation not covered in these league rules will be settled at the discretion of the team captains, League Coordinator, or the HTA Discipline and Grievance (HTA D&G) Committee, in that order.
- (B) A team or player violating HTA or USTA regulations, standards of conduct, fair play, or good sportsmanship is subject to disciplinary action as deemed necessary by the HTA.
- (C) The HTA D&G Committee will determine if any violations have occurred after reviewing a grievance. They have the power to dismiss or deny a grievance, or to direct the correction of any violations by reasonable means including, but not limited to, the suspension of an individual or team. This is applicable to any party to the

grievance so long as such party has been given the opportunity to review the grievance and present evidence.

- (D) The rulings of the HTA D&G Committee will stand unless any party materially affected by the decision files an appeal to the HTA Executive Director within seven (7) calendar days of the ruling's publication. Such an appeal will be heard by the Local Grievance Appeal Committee (LGAC).
- (E) The LGAC has the power to affirm, modify, remand for cause, or reject the decision of the HTA Discipline and Grievance Committee. The LGAC shall not impose a harsher penalty than that imposed by the HTA D&G Committee. For the purpose of clarification, should the HTA D&G Committee elect not to impose a penalty, the LGAC may not impose a penalty; however, the LGAC may, for cause, remand the matter to the HTA D&G Committee for reconsideration.
- (F) Decisions of the LGAC are final and binding except with regard to suspensions of individuals or teams from USTA play for a period of 12 months or more; suspensions of 12 or more months that affect USTA play may be appealed further to the USTA Texas Section.
- (G) Grievances concerning NTRP ratings, including complaints regarding self-rated players, must be filed with the USTA Texas Section, not the HTA.

5.02 FILING A GRIEVANCE

- (A) Any volunteer, player, or person associated with a player (including, but not limited to, a parent or coach) who observes a violation of HTA or USTA regulations, standards of conduct, fair play, or good sportsmanship may file a written grievance.
- (B) If a grievance against an individual or team arises out of participation in HTA or USTA league offerings, the grievance may only be filed by (a) the team captain of the team that has competed in the match where the alleged violation occurred; (b) a league coordinator; or (c) a member of a Championship Committee. The exception is for Administrative Grievances, Eligibility Grievances and NTRP Grievances, which may be filed as stated in [USTA League Regulations](#) 3.03A(2), 3.03B(3), 3.03C(3) and 3.03E(2).
- (C) Grievances arising out of league play must be filed in writing with the League Coordinator prior to commencement of the next team match involving said player or team, or within 48 hours after the end of local league play, whichever occurs first.
- (D) An individual or team may continue to play during a grievance investigation and hearing but must understand that, if the grievance is upheld, all matches played during that time may be reversed.
- (E) There will be a \$25 administrative fee to file a grievance.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

7-Point Set Tiebreak: The 7-Point Set Tiebreak is played when the players reach 6-all in a set. The first player or team to win seven points by a margin of at least two wins the set 7-6. It will follow the Coman format.

10-Point Match Tiebreak: The 10-Point Match Tiebreak is played in matches in lieu of the deciding final set. The first player or team to win 10 points by a margin of at least two wins the final set 1-0 and the match. The Match Tiebreak follows the Coman format, and will count as both one game and one set in TennisLink standings.

Age Group: Age groups within the Divisions of the USTA League Program.

Appeal: Request for reconsideration of a previous decision, determination, or finding.

Benchmark Rated Player: A player by whom other players' NTRP computer ratings are calculated. This includes any player who participates in an 18 & Over or 40 & Over Adult Division match at the local playoffs, participates in championship play, or who is dynamically disqualified. Additionally, on teams in the 18 & Over and 40 & Over Adult Division that qualify for a championship event and/or are on the schedule at a championship but the team does not participate and the team is not replaced by another team, all rostered players who played one or more matches become Benchmark players.

Benchmark Rating: A computer rating determined by the USTA NTRP Computer Rating System for a player using a combination of their dynamic rating and their rating derived at a local league playoff or at championships.

Championship Level: Any League competition held after local league competition or playoffs.

Championship Year: The timeframe beginning with the first local league including Early Start League and ending with the conclusion of the National Championship.

“The Code”: A summary of the procedures that custom dictates players follow:

Coman Tiebreak Procedure: The Coman Tiebreak Procedure requires the tiebreak to be played with the players changing ends after the first point, every fourth point thereafter, and at the end of the tiebreak. Scoring is the same as a traditional tiebreak. For additional information, see the USTA's *Friend at Court*—Part 3: USTA Regulation [I.E.\(1\)c](#).

Community Tennis Association (CTA): Any incorporated, geographically defined, not-for-profit, volunteer-based organization that supports or provides programs which promote and develop the growth of tennis.

Computer Rating: An NTRP rating assigned to Adult players to the 1/100th of a point at year-end that reflects level of ability. (Also see *Current NTRP Rating*.)

Current NTRP Rating: A rating generated by the USTA NTRP computer rating system based on two or more matches. (Also see *Computer Rating*.)

Default: When a player or team fails to appear or is removed by an administrator or tournament official for misconduct or violation of regulations.

Disqualification: Action taken to remove from a team a player deemed ineligible to participate.

District: Geographic boundaries fixed by a Sectional Association within their Section that represents a subdivision of the Sectional Association. This term may be interchanged with the terms Area, State, Region, and Territory.

Division: National League Programs (Adult and Mixed) offered and administered by the USTA and any other USTA League sanctioned program offered in a Section, District or Area, identified as part of TennisLink and entered as part of the USTA NTRP Computer Rating System.

Domicile: A legal concept involving residency. It is that place where a person has a true, fixed permanent home or that person's home for the indefinite future. A person can only have one domicile at a time.

Dynamic Rating: A rating associated with a player that has the potential to change with every match played by the player.

Early Start League (ESL): A local league season that commences prior to January 1 of the league year. An ESL will use Early Start (midyear) Ratings to determine NTRP level.

Early Start Rating (ESR): A player's dynamic rating on a specific date to govern eligibility for registration on an Early Start League team.

Eligibility: Requirements to play.

Fifteen-Minute Default Rule: Any player—or entire team—that arrives 15 minutes or more past the regularly scheduled or agreed upon start time will be defaulted. If players from either team get defaulted under this rule, the match will be recorded as a double-default. Team captains do not have the authority to play any match for score after 15 minutes past the agreed upon start time.

Flight: A group of teams competing at a specified NTRP level within a local league or Championship competition where every team in that group plays every other team to declare a winner.

Grievance: Written formal complaint regarding an alleged violation of a regulation, procedure, standards of conduct, fair play, or good sportsmanship.

Houston Tennis Association (HTA): The HTA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and the umbrella Community Tennis Association (CTA) for Greater Houston, Texas, that administers HTA league tennis, USTA league tennis, WTT league tennis, junior and adult USTA sanctioned tournaments, Junior Team Tennis, and National Junior Tennis and Learning programs.

HTA League: USTA membership is required. A program for men and women in which teams comprised of players with the same NTRP rating (with some exceptions) are established. Players must reach 18 years of age during the calendar year of the competition to be eligible unless otherwise specified by Age Group play.

Inaccurate self-rating: A self-rating that occurred as a result of no willful intent on behalf of the player whether by the player or one acting on behalf of the player (e.g., captain or coach).

Inappropriate self-rating: A self-rating that occurred as a result of willful intent to misrepresent a player's level of play, whether by the player or one who condones or acts on behalf of the player (e.g., captain or coach).

Individual Line: Any singles or doubles line played as part of a team match.

League: League play is available throughout the year in varying formats. For purposes of these rules, when not used in a generic sense "League" represents a distinct calendar of play with start and end dates (a season); which plays on a specific day and/or time; which has specific NTRP eligibility requirements; and which is of a specific Age Group.

For example, for USTA advancing play the HTA operates a ladies' Monday day league, a ladies' Friday day league, and NoHo operates a ladies' Wednesday day league. These are considered to be three distinct leagues. Therefore, the same player might participate on three different teams, all of which are at the 4.0 NTRP level in the 18 & Over Age Group. If, however, more than one of those teams wins through to progress to Texas Section championship play, the player would need to declare which team she will represent.

Likewise, a man might choose to play on both an NTRP 3.5 and a 4.0 18 & Over league in Houston on Thursday evenings. Even though the two teams play on the same day and time and in the same Age Group, they are distinct leagues because the NTRP levels are different.

League Committee: A committee assigned to oversee the functioning of, and make decisions regarding, the direction of the organization's League tennis program. Both the HTA and USTA Texas have league committees.

League Coordinator: Person appointed or hired to implement and administer the League.

League Progression: Local USTA league team winners have the opportunity to advance through area, sectional, and national championship competition.

Level of Play: NTRP skill levels offered in the league program.

Lineup: A lineup is a list of players from a roster taking part in a particular team match. Players for each individual line will be listed in a lineup.

Local League: A team competition in a specified geographical area that applies specific local league regulations and consists of NTRP level(s) with a minimum of two or more teams per NTRP level. A local league may choose to divide any or all NTRP levels into flights and sub flights. Where flights or sub flights are used, a playoff structure may be established to determine a champion.

Match Tiebreak: Used in place of a third set, a match tiebreak is the first to 10 by a margin of two. The Coman format is used.

Mixed: A team comprised of a man and woman who combine to play.

New Player: An individual who is playing in the Championship Year of his/her first year of competition in the HTA or USTA League Program.

No-Ad Scoring: A scoring system that is the same as the traditional system except that when the score reaches 40-40, only one additional point is played to determine the winner of that game. In Mixed Doubles, a male server serves this point to the male receiver, and the female player serves this point to the female receiver. In all other events, the receiver chooses the side from which the server must serve.

NoHo: NoHo (**N**orth **H**ouston) is a Community Tennis Association (CTA) serving areas north of Houston, including but not limited to Spring, Tomball, The Woodlands, Kingwood, Atascocita, Conroe, and Montgomery. HTA is the umbrella CTA for Greater Houston, and it is common for players to participate in both NoHo and HTA leagues.

NTRP: National Tennis Rating Program. The system rates players by ability levels ranging from 1.5 to 7.0.

NTRP Level: Generic term advising the minimum NTRP level in increments of .5 at which a player may participate.

NTRP Disqualification Criteria: Having reached disqualification level three times, as designated in the USTA NTRP Computer Rating System Procedures, during the local league competition and/or any level of championship competition below the national championships in the adult division. (Also see *USTA League Regulations 2.04.*)

NTRP Computer Methodology Procedures: The document establishing procedures governing the USTA NTRP Computer Rating System.

Numeric Scoring: Numeric scoring consists of substituting “zero,” “one,” “two,” and “three” for “Love,” “15,” “30,” and “40.” Deuce may be announced by “Deuce” or by “3-all”. When language is a barrier, hand signals are often used with a clenched fist indicating “Deuce.”

Player: The individual USTA Member who registers on a team.

Plus (+) NTRP Level: An NTRP level which allows a team roster to include a specified number of players from the next higher NTRP level.

Plus (+) Player: A player who is allowed to register on a specific NTRP Plus (+) level roster with a rating that is at the next higher NTRP level.

Postponed Match: Either a team or individual line that could not begin as originally scheduled. Due to weather conditions or other considerations, a match may be postponed by mutual agreement between the team captains provided no point has yet been counted in the match.

Remand: To send a grievance back to either the original Grievance Committee or a new Grievance Committee, as the Grievance Appeal Committee deems appropriate, for reconsideration.

Residency: A place where a person is actually living, as distinguished from the person’s domicile, or a place where one temporarily lives. Domicile and residence may coincide. A person can have more than one residency while he or she can have only one domicile.

Rest Period: A maximum of 10 minutes with coaching permitted between the second and third set when playing best of three tiebreak sets; does not apply if a tiebreak is played in lieu of a third set.

Retirement: Occurs when an individual line has started and a player is unable to continue due to injury, loss of condition, emergency, or refusal to play. Retirements are entered in TennisLink with the final game count for NTRP calculation purposes (e.g., 2-6, 1-3) and the system will automatically credit the individual receiving the retirement with sufficient games as to make them the winner of the match (i.e., 2-6, 6-3, 1-0) for determining standings.

Returning Player: An individual who has played in a previous Championship Year and is now going to play in the current Championship Year.

Roster: A roster is a list of the entire team.

Round Robin: Each team plays every other team in its flight or sub flight. League play may consist of more than one round-robin cycle.

Self-Rating: A rating for a new player entering the program determined in accordance with the National Tennis Rating Program (NTRP) guidelines during the on-line player registration process. The player uses the NTRP guidelines to select the level of play that the player believes best describes the player's ability.

Set Break: The two (2) minute period between the completion of the last game of a set and the beginning of a succeeding set. Breaks taken at other times should be limited to true emergencies.

Set Tiebreak: The Set Tiebreak is the 7-Point Tiebreak Game that is played to decide a set when the set score reaches 6-all. The winner is the first to reach seven points or more by a margin of two. The Coman format is used.

Single Elimination Format: In this tournament format, once you lose you are out and do not get to play any additional matches.

Spectator: Any person not playing a specific match. Spectators may not aid or influence players in making line calls or in determining the score. Spectators include team captains, teammates, and players on adjacent courts. Spectators are never allowed on the court unless rendering aid to a physically injured player. See *USTA Friend at Court* comments 23.2, 26.6, and "The Code" item 16.

Start of a Match: First service attempt on an individual court.

Sub flight: Flights with a large number of teams may be divided into sub flights as needed.

Suspended Match: A match, either individual or team, that is stopped after the first point has been played. The team captains will mutually agree to reschedule a suspended match. The match will resume with the same players, the same service order, and at the same score.

Suspension Point System: Updated in 2023, the USTA League Suspension Point System is designed to preserve the health and safety of players participating in League. Three documents explain the system, [USTA League Suspension Point System 2023](#), [USTA League Suspension Point System 2023 Calculation Tables](#), and [USTA League Suspension Point System 2023 FAQ](#).

Team Captain: Appointed to represent the team and perform administrative duties.

Team Match: (Local team match) A number of individual singles and doubles or any combination as determined by the local league.

TennisLink: TennisLink is a user-friendly Web-based system designed as a means to provide secure communication and flow of information between the USTA and its members via the Internet.

TennisLink allows users to:

- ³⁵/₁₇ Register teams and players.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Enter and confirm match scores.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Access team rosters, schedules, and standings.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Apply for and renew USTA memberships.

United States Tennis Association (USTA): The United States Tennis Association is a not-for-profit organization that is the national governing body for the sport of tennis.

USTA League: A program for men and women in which teams comprised of players with the same NTRP rating are established. USTA membership is required. Players must reach the minimum age as specified by the Age Group during the calendar year of the competition. Teams may advance from local to area, sectional, and national competition.

USTA Section: One of 17 defined areas that comprise the USTA.

Valid Computer Rating: An NTRP computer rating that has not expired and is based on accurate player history.

Waiver of Claims: As a condition of participation, each player gives up the right to any demand for injuries sustained in traveling to or from or participating in the HTA or USTA League Programs.

Warm-up: In order to ensure that matches begin and end in a timely manner, on-court warm-ups are limited to no more than 10 minutes and in no case shall the warm-up continue more than 15 minutes past the designated start time of the individual line. For example, a player taking the court 10 minutes after the announced match time will have only a five-minute warm-up. Warm-up serves must also be taken at this time, not before each player's service game; taking serves "as you go" adds time to the length of a match. It is expected that players will physically prepare themselves to play (e.g., raising body temperature, dynamic stretching) off-court, prior to the scheduled start of a match. (Also see "The Code" items 3 and 4.)

Willful Intent: An act is done willfully and knowingly when the individual intends to do it and knows the nature of the act will achieve the intended result.

Year-End Rating: A published NTRP rating generated at the end of the league year.