



As the Conference League season approaches, IHNZ would like to remind clubs of the following Rules and changes to rules. Ignoring or misunderstanding these rules may result in forfeit of Central League games and ineligibility for Junior Festival of Hockey/National Club Championships.

## **1. Conference League and Nationals/Junior Festival of Hockey:**

**Rule 3.3** *For age grade eligibility players must be at or under the designated age on January 1, 2023.*

The intent of this rule is that players play in their eligible age grade. The misuse or misunderstanding of this rule in previous years and this year, because of the somewhat loose wording, has allowed for the possibility of players to play up should clubs chose this route. If clubs intend to misunderstand the intent of Rule 3.3, please be fully aware of Rule 3.6 (below) regarding the Junior Festival of Hockey/Nationals Club Championships re: playing up. As a result of the manipulation of this rule, Rule 3.3 will be tightened, and this loophole closed, in the 2024 Events Notice. From 2024 onwards, IHNZ will initiate a robust process for evaluating whether a child is capable of, or should be playing in, the succeeding age grade, including the risks of harm to said child and the Organisation as a whole.

There is research both for and against playing children up in an older age grade. Sometimes they might be physically stronger and more skilled, but may lack the social maturity to be able to cope in an older age group. Or they may be technically and tactically ahead of their peer group, but only average or physically out-muscled within the next age group, getting less game time than in their own. Or they may be perfectly able to cope on all levels, which will be determined by unbiased and structured player evaluation. However, many children are moved up without proper evaluation to whether doing so is in the best interests of the overall development of that child. Often, these children are considered 'talented' at a young age because they are early developers; by the time that they are in their early-mid teens, many of these players are no longer distinguishable from the rest, with only a very small proportion continuing at an elite level.

In a niche sport such as inline hockey, there are also other factors that need to be considered, because the sport just does not have the large pool of talented players that mainstream codes do to backfill. These factors include removing the role models that the younger players in that grade aspire to be, and the ability to learn on the rink during actual game play from these older players. Importantly, the competitiveness of that grade for

teams that chose to apply Rule 3.3 as it was intended is removed or lowered, thereby destroying the intent of an *age-based competition*, of which the IHNZ Conference League and Junior Festival of Hockey/National Club Championships is structured around. Clubs and Conferences should instead be looking at other avenues to challenge and extend more talented players, taking advantage of IHNZ Events such as Youth Development Camps, Pre-season opportunities where bio-grouping can be encouraged, non-IHNZ run events, NZ team Training camps where applicable, and Rule 3.7 which does allow for players to be called up (to a maximum of 4 games) during the Conference League season. Where necessary (e.g., that age grade not on offer at the players club), the dispensation process may be used.

Talented players get so many more opportunities than their less skilled counterparts; by playing these players up also, you are creating a wider divide within your player base, and doing nothing to help develop ALL the players in that grade – this is something that has been identified as a key reason why NZ players are not as competitive on the international stage as their counterparts. Clubs need to focus on all their players and work on improving the skill level overall, not directing attention to one or two ‘talented’ players in each grade only.

*Rule 3.6 During the Conference League, players may be called upon **by the next grade up** in their club to play in Conference League games. This may be done throughout the conference league as required, [contingent on Rule 3.7] however, **will not be permitted at the Junior Festival or the National Club Championships.***

Any player playing more than 1 grade higher than their actual grade during the Conference League will be deemed an illegal player and any game that they participate in during the League will be forfeit. Based on Rule 3.6, they will also not be given dispensation to play in that grade at Nationals or the Junior Festival of Hockey.

Note also, if a club fields 2 or more teams in a particular age-grade, it is presumed by IHNZ that most of these players ARE eligible for that grade (using rule 3.7 to top us as needed during Conference League games). Thus, dispensation to play a player up at the Junior Festival of Hockey/National Club Championships will ONLY be granted if it does not disadvantage eligible players for that actual age-grade.

**Rule 4.5 *Players must play for a club within the Conference in which they reside. Players not covered by Rule 4.7 will be deemed illegal players during the Conference League competition.***

Any player whose place of residence is an address listed outside of the Conference they have registered for, and who is not grandfathered by Rule 4.7, will be deemed an illegal player as soon as they take the rink during Conference League games. Thus, any Conference League game that these players play in will be forfeit. These players will also not be eligible for the Junior Festival of Hockey, or National Club Champs.

All scoresheets for the 2023 season are to be completed properly and forwarded to IHNZ after each game weekend, where the eligibility of players will be checked.

## 2. Inter Conference

Please be aware of **Rule 3.7** *Players must play in the age grade that matches their age as of January 1, 2023.*

There will be no dispensation given for players to play in an older age grade.

## 3. Player Transfers

Players transferring from one club to another MUST complete a Player Transfer Form before Conference League competition starts (**Rule 4.8**). This form can be found on the IHNZ website under Documents  IHNZ Policy (<https://www.inlinehockeynz.org.nz/documents/ihnz-policy/>). Please note, under the policy, 'Any player who wishes to transfer to another IHNZ Club **at any time** must complete a player transfer form prior to their IHNZ membership transferring to the new club and they may not play for their new clubs until the outcome of the player transfer application has been advised.'

It is important the clubs understand that the Conference League and Nationals are IHNZ sanctioned events that are governed by a set of rules to maintain consistency and fairness across all Conferences, clubs, and teams, and to maintain the integrity of said competitions. Any teams entered into either competition do so in agreement and understanding of these rules. IHNZ will be seeking to uphold and preserve the equality of the competition in the 2023 season.