



Rules to Consider

Every league must have rules. This task can be simplified by using the “USBC Adult or Youth League Rules” found on BOWL.com. In adult leagues, the league board of directors or members must vote on each rule. Pay particular attention to rules covering the following items:

Absentee scores (Rule 112) - An absentee score is used when a player on the roster is absent from league and a substitute is not obtained. The absentee score shall be the absent member’s current average minus 10 pins, unless otherwise provided by league rule.

Entering averages (Rule 108c) – A complete and adequate average rule is essential for any handicap or classified league. Averages from the previous season are recommended to be used for a bowler’s first night of competition because they are easily verified, and they represent the bowler’s true ability. Bowlers who do not have a qualifying average will then establish their average the first session they bowl unless league rules state otherwise.

In youth leagues, a bowler using a two-hand delivery will establish an average with two hands. When the bowler changes to a one-hand delivery, they must establish a new average using that hand. (Rule 108b, Item 5)

Handicaps (Rule 100d-2) - Handicapping is a means of placing bowlers and teams with varying degrees of skill on as equitable a basis as possible for their competition against each other.

A handicap league must decide if individual or team handicapping will be used. We recommend the individual handicap method for leagues offering individual handicap prizes.

A handicap league must also decide what percentage and base will be used. Without a rule, a handicap league must use 100%. USBC recommends higher handicap percentages such as 100% be used for more equalized matches. The scratch base handicap is figured from should be greater than the highest team or individual entering average. For example, if the highest entering individual average is 218, handicap should be 100% of 220.

Another option is to adopt a rule that provides a negative handicap for all bowlers with an average above the base figure. For example, 100% handicap of 200, average is 220, bowler receives -20 handicap. Be advised that some secretarial systems do not support this option.

League fees (Rule 105) - While prize/award funds are important, avoid pricing yourself out of members. Large prize/award funds require larger payments by individual members and can discourage new members and increase league dropouts.

League fee arrearages (Rule 119a) - Insist all bowlers pay full fees every session. Team captains are responsible for collecting fees but are not liable for teammates’ payments. To encourage prompt payment, leagues can adopt a rule that a team forfeits any games when a bowler is present and bowling and not current in paying fees. If adopted, the league arrearage rule must be enforced consistently throughout the season.





Legal lineups (Rule 111a) – The minimum legal lineup must be present prior to the completion of the first frame unless the league adopts another frame. The league cannot require the legal lineup to be present at the start of the game. Leagues may adopt a rule allowing one eligible bowler as the legal lineup. Leagues decide whether substitutes count toward a legal lineup. Rule 109a, Item 2 states substitutes do count, unless league rules specify otherwise.

Playoffs (Rule 118) - A playoff is a scheduled competition conducted by leagues. The playoff may be conducted in one session to determine a champion when the league bowls a split season, or across multiple sessions such as a bracketed playoff system.

Unless the league adopts another format, teams involved in a playoff must bowl the same number of games normally bowled during regular league play using the same handicapping and point system.

Acceptable formats for championship playoff a league may adopt into the rules include, but are not limited to:

- One or more frames
- A point for each game, but none for series
- Total pins of a three-game playoff series
- Best-of-three games (If a team wins the first two games, the third game need not be bowled.)
- Stepladder finals (Teams are seeded the lowest seed bowls the second lowest seed, the winner advances.)
- Single or double elimination (Set up like a bracket.)
- Round Robin (Each team bowls each team the highest point winner or pinfall determines the winner.)

Postponements (Rule 117a- 117f) – Postponements may be requested up to the league start time unless an emergency exists. A league’s board of directors, specific committee, or a youth league supervisor/official decides requests for postponements. Leagues must grant postponements for emergencies.

Minimize postponement problems by:

- Discussing postponements at the organizational meeting for special situations such as hunting seasons, holidays, or local/national events.
- Consider lowering the legal lineup requirement.
- Allowing teams to carry extra team members on the team roster or keeping a list of roving or designated substitutes, including contact information.
- Appointing a committee of one or more people to handle postponement requests and cancellations because of severe weather.

Prize/Award Fund (Rule 106b) – To be eligible for individual prizes, a member must have bowled at least two-thirds of the scheduled games, unless the league adopts another percentage or number of games.

Roll-offs (Rule 118) – A roll-off is a separate competition conducted to break ties.

Total pins for the season, segment or team average cannot break position standing ties at the conclusion of the season, or at the end of any segment of a split season schedule.

If the league rules are silent, teams tied for first place at the end of a segment or end of the season must bowl the same number of games normally bowled during regular league play using the same handicapping and





point system. If the points are tied after the roll-off is complete, the teams bowl an extra frame scored like a tenth frame to break this tie. A league may break other ties in the standings with a roll-off.

Some roll-off formats a league may adopt into the rules are:

- Bowl one game (or two games)
- Best two of three games
- One or more frames
- A point for each game, but none for series
- Total pins of a three-game playoff series

Substitutes (Rule 110c) – Every league needs extra players to minimize absentee and vacancy scores. Do this by keeping an ongoing list of substitutes. Substitutes are not rostered players.

Tardy players (Rule 111c) – A tardy player uses one-tenth of the absentee score for each frame missed, unless otherwise provided for by league rules.

Team rosters (Rule 109a) – Leagues specify how many players are allowed on each team's roster. Team captains submit names before the league starts play or by a time designated by the league. Only additional players and replacements are listed on the roster.

Vacancy scores (Rule 112) – Teams without full rosters receive a vacancy score.

In adult leagues, unless league rules state otherwise, the vacancy score is 120.

In youth leagues, unless league rules state otherwise, the vacancy score shall be the average of the lowest average bowler on the opposing team's roster. If two or more vacancy scores are required, the average of the next-to-the-lowest bowler on the opposing team's roster shall be used for the second vacancy score. Youth leagues also may set their own vacancy score.

