



# **ELIGIBILITY AND QUALIFICATION MANUAL**

**VERSION 1**

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## Preliminary information

### Mission

The Mission of the USA Team Handball (USATH) will be to develop, promote, educate and grow the sport of Team Handball at all levels in the United States and to enable United States athletes to achieve sustained competitive excellence by winning medals in international and Olympic competition.

### Foreword

The USA Team Handball (USATH) Eligibility and Qualification Manual regulates all eligibility and qualification requirements for USATH Championships in the USA. The amendments made to this Manual are aimed at facilitating sanctioning and promoting competition, in order to help boost the development of team handball at a National level. The competitions that are overseen under the authority of the USATH and this Manual are not considered as selection events for the USA National Team. As such, these competitions are not awarded a protected status that would give athletes the rights to supersede the qualification rules contained herein.

### Abbreviations

- **USATH** – USA Team Handball
- **CEO** – Chief Executive Officer
- **LOC** - Local Organizing Committee
- **EM** - Event Manager (representing sponsoring team or club or LOC)
- **EDC** - Event Disciplinary Committee
- **NRC** – National Referee Committee

### Definitions

- **Event Manager (EM)**

LOC representative who has the ultimate decision-making authority for a specific sanctioned or qualifying event and is responsible for compliance with USATH rules and regulations.

- **Local Organizing Committee (LOC)**



An organization of individuals (teams, clubs, community-based entities) that work together to host, promote and/or stage USATH sanctioned or qualifying events.

- **Head of Competition (HoC)**

The appointed individual that oversees the sanctioning, exemptions and qualification/eligibility requirements for USATH sanctioned and qualifying events.

- **Maximum Roster Size**

The highest number of players that a team can bring to and use in USATH sanctioned championships events.

- **Minimum Roster Size**

The lowest number of players that a team must enter in USATH sanctioned championship events without losing its Performance Bond.

- **Club Roster**

The list of players who actively participate in club practices or games.

- **Regular season**

The USA Team Handball regular season begins on September 1st and ends no later than 30 days prior to the start of the USATH Open Championships.

- **“In writing”**

A letter mailed or electronically transmitted (email); however, the sender must confirm any email that has been received by the intended recipient.

- **Qualifying Match**

Any match sanctioned and approved by USATH that is part of a larger Elite Division qualifying tournament or regional qualifying league, played in accordance with the USATH Competition Rule Book. Qualifying matches must be played during the regular season.



- **ELITE Quorum (EQ)**

Eight (8) members consisting of ELITE team participants based on prior season results at the USATH Open Championships. The EQ has the following responsibilities:

Each team shall have no more than one (1) representative. The representative will act as the main spokesperson for the team;

The EQ renews every year on June 1st and votes rule book rule renewal by July 31st;

If changes to the rule book are made, the Head of Competition is responsible to inform about and execute the said rule changes during the upcoming season;

Any amendment(s) to the rules as it pertains to the ELITE division is/are to be made by a majority of the EQ. In case of a tie, the Head of Competition makes the final call.

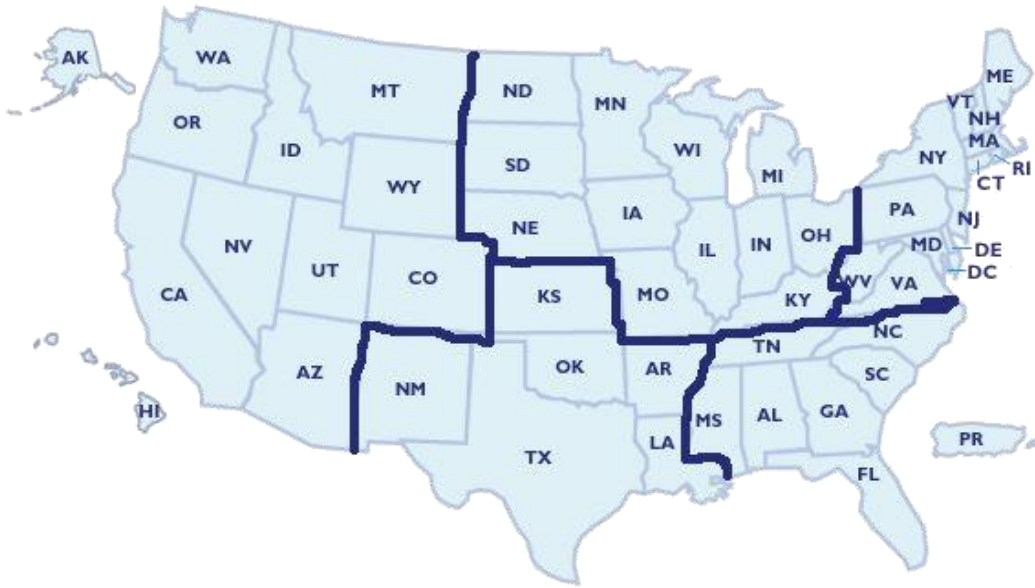
Any representative of the EQ, or the Head of Competition, can request an extraordinary session at any time. Extraordinary sessions are meant to discuss concerns or interpretation of the rules arising during the on-going regular season.

## **Article I. USATH Regional Structure, Qualifiers, and Leagues**

### **Section 1.01 Regions**

There are five (5) regions for USATH Handball competition and classification purposes.

Requests to qualify for Open Club Championships from outside of a home region will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The regions are outlined below:



WEST	MIDWEST	SOUTHWEST	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST
Alaska	Illinois	Arkansas	Connecticut	Alabam
Arizona	Indiana	Kansas	Delaware	Florida
California	Iowa	Louisiana	Maine	Georgia
Colorado	Kentucky	New Mexico	Maryland	Mississippi
Hawaii	Michigan	Oklahoma	Massachusetts	North Carolina
Idaho	Minnesota	Texas	New Hampshire	South Carolina
Montana	Missouri		New Jersey	Tennessee
Nevada	Nebraska		New York	
Oregon	North Dakota		Pennsylvania	
Utah	Ohio		Rhode Island	
Washington	South Dakota		Vermont	
Wyoming	Wisconsin		Virginia	
			West Virginia	
			Washington, D.C.	

**Section 1.02 USATH Regional Qualification Process**

Each region will strive to have a Regional Qualification Process, to determine its entrants into the USATH Open Club ELITE Championships. Only USATH sanctioned single contests, multi-game tournaments, and regional leagues are recognized as “qualifying” towards USATH National





Championships. USATH is ultimately responsible for the determination of the qualification format, which is described in Article III.

In case the winner of a sanctioned Regional League or Regional Qualification Tournament is also the reigning Club Champion, an additional bid shall be awarded to the next highest ranked team from that region. In the event that the qualified teams decline the bid, their spots shall be granted to the highest-ranking regional finishers interested in accepting it. If none of the remaining eligible teams accept the bid, such bid should be turned over and become a Wild Card bid.

If a regional committee or league does not meet its committed schedule, USATH reserves the right to reassign the ELITE bids that had been assigned to the region.

### **Section 1.03 Regional Leagues and Local Competitions**

Each region will strive to have a sanctioned regional league(s) with a designated Commissioner and own website or maintain a dedicated page on USATH website about playing schedule, participating teams, league news and results.

Regional leagues will abide by the regulations set forth by the USATH and comply with the USATH Competition Rule Book.

## **Article II. USATH Sanctioned Events Involving Domestic Teams**

Please refer to the USATH Competition Rule Book for the event sanctioning requirements and additional information. The Competition Rule Book is available on [usateamhandball.org](http://usateamhandball.org)

**Note: for all league tournaments, the league commissioner shall be responsible for managing the sanctioning process for each event and reporting the league's results to USATH.**



## Section 2.01 Participation in Sanctioned Events

### *(i) Membership requirements*

- A. All participants (players, coaches, referees etc.) in a sanctioned are subject to the membership requirements outlined in Section IV.05 of the USATH Competition Rule Book.

### *(ii) Players*

- A. A player may sign up at any time during the playing season; however, they will not be cleared to play at sanctioned events until their registration has been certified by the USATH.
- B. For sanctioned events that are not a part of the qualification process for the Elite division(s) at USATH Open Championships, players will be allowed to register and change teams throughout the season without restrictions, including during a tournament if approved and allowed by the LOC.
- C. Once a player has taken part in a sanctioned qualification event(tournament or league) for the Elite division(s) at USATH Open Championships with a team, they may not participate in sanctioned qualification events for the Elite division(s) at USATH Open Championships with other teams, except in the following situations:
  - a. One-time waiver (up to two per team, per tournament) to help a team meet minimum roster requirements. This only applies to teams that have fewer than ten (10) players on their roster. In that case, the qualifying event will not be counted towards that player's eligibility for participation in the ELITE division. Note that one-time waivers **must be announced in writing** at the time that the roster is submitted for review by the HoC. The HoC will be responsible for maintaining a record of all those waivers, should the CEO need to review them prior to the Open Club Championships. Players may not play for more than two (2) teams over the course of a season.
  - b. Permanent transfer, submitted in writing to the HoC and approved by the club of origin. This process, including approval from the CEO, must be completed **prior** to



playing any sanctioned game with a new team. The HoC will be responsible for maintaining a record of all permanent transfers, should the CEO need to review them prior to the Open Club Championships. Note that any sanctioned games played with a former team will not count towards eligibility with a new team. All permanent transfers must fall within one the following categories:

- i. Off-season transfers – players may transfer without justification during the off-season period, from June 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup> of every year. Those transfers must still meet the rules listed previously but do not require justification.
- ii. In-season transfers – players may transfer one-time during the season, provided they present justification with their request. Acceptable forms of justification include – but are not limited to – relocation or strategic change on the player’s current team. The HoC will review the request and make a recommendation to the CEO, who will have the ultimate decision on whether or not to allow the transfer.

## **Section 2.02 Violation(s)**

Any and all violations of Article II shall be recorded by the CEO and are subject to disciplinary sanctions by USATH. Pending disciplinary sanctions shall be communicated in writing, via emails, to the respective parties as soon as recognized but no later than within 60 days after the event. Should an individual or club/team/LOC wish to appeal those sanctions, they will have 10 business days to do so to the CEO. The USATH Judicial Committee will review the case and either support, alter, or overrule the sanction rendered. The USATH Judicial Committee’s decision is final and cases that are denied for appeal cannot be reopened.

## **Article III. USATH Open Championships**

### **Section 3.01 Open Club ELITE divisions**



***(i) Format***

Provided there are enough interested and eligible teams, an ELITE division may be held for both MEN's and WOMEN's teams. The Head of Competition will announce, **no later than March 31<sup>st</sup>** of the on-going regular season, whether or not ELITE divisions will be held.

The ELITE divisions will be limited to eight (8) teams until such a time as the number of ELITE-worthy teams exceeds that capacity. The ELITE QUORUM or Head of Competition reserves the right to recommend a new and more appropriate format of play between June 1 and July 31 of a given year, or, and only in the event there are less than eight (8) teams interested in competing in the ELITE division, by the time the regular season concludes.

The Head of Competition will preside over the draw of all teams into their respective pools of play and follow seeding procedures as described in Section 3.10.

***(ii) Minimum eligibility requirements***

**A. Teams**

- A. All teams wishing to participate in ELITE divisions must meet the following minimum participation standard:
  - a. Women: three (3) qualifying matches, including qualifying matches at regional qualifying leagues.
  - b. Men: nine (9) qualifying matches, including qualifying matches at regional qualifying leagues.

Regional League Commissioners will be asked to provide participation information for all teams affiliated with their respective regional qualifying league.

- B. If a club wishes to enter two or more teams into a regional qualifying league, it can do so under following conditions:



- a. The club must declare its intentions in writing and provide a separate roster of at least 10 registered players for each team.
- b. Each entered team must meet the minimum participation standard to be eligible for ELITE divisions.
- c. If more than one team from the same club enters a qualifying tournament, players may only play for one team during the course of that tournament.
- d. If more than one team qualifies for the ELITE division, those teams may not swap players used during qualification. However, teams may add eligible players who have not played in the qualifier.
- e. If only one team qualifies for the ELITE division, that team may call up any player from its club that:
  - i. complies with the player minimum participation rule for the qualified team
  - ii. has not qualified for the ELITE division with another team.

## **B. Players**

- A. To be eligible for participation in the ELITE division, each player must meet the following requirements:
  - a. Female players: Prior to the start of Open Club Championships, and complying with all other parts of this rulebook, must be listed as a player, and therefore physically present, at two (2) qualifying matches for the respective team qualified for the ELITE division.
  - b. Male players: Prior to the start of Open Club Championships, and complying with all other parts of this rulebook, must be listed as a player, and therefore physically present, at three (3) qualifying matches for the respective team qualified for the ELITE division.



- B. Each team will be allowed one (1) automatic exception from the player minimum participation rule.

***(iii) Additional Eligibility provisions***

- A. Qualifying matches include matches played in regional qualifying leagues, as well as any match at a qualifying tournament. Only qualifying matches run during the regular season (as defined by Head of Competition) allow to fulfill team and player eligibility requirements.
- B. All team and player eligibility requirements must and can only be fulfilled at domestic (US only) qualifying tournaments or regional qualifying leagues.
- C. All team and player eligibility requirements must be cleared no later than 30 days prior to the start of the USATH Open Championships. The Head of Competition will determine the latest date, in the regular season, to hold a qualifying match and inform teams accordingly.

***(iv) Qualification***

ELITE divisions may feature from six (6) to eight (8) teams. Foreign teams are not eligible to compete in the ELITE divisions.

**A. Defending champion**

An automatic bid will be awarded to reigning ELITE Open Club Champions, under condition that they still meet the team eligibility requirements.

**B. Regional Qualifying League(s)**

- A. Only regions with an official qualifying process are eligible to receive bids for ELITE divisions. Regional qualifying leagues must be announced **by August 31st**. The qualification process must be presented by the league commissioner together with the intent to host and approval shall be granted in writing by the Head of Competition assuming all provisions are met.



- B. Based on the number of approved regional qualifying leagues, the Head of Competition will announce the number of bids awarded to each regional qualifying league **by October 31<sup>st</sup>** of the on-going season, based on the following guidelines:
- a. One (1) bid for regional qualifying leagues with five (5) or fewer active teams.
  - b. Two (2) bids for regional qualifying leagues with six (6) or more active teams.
- C. If a team has already been awarded an automatic bid, the regional bid passes to the next highest rank team in the region.
- D. If the total number of regional bids exceeds the number of available entries into the ELITE division, the Head of Competition reserves the right to reduce the number of bids for a given region and will provide an explanation to the concerned region's commissioner, as well as to the ELITE QUORUM.

### **C. Wild Card bid(s)**

The remaining bids will be assigned to the highest ranked teams using a point ranking system. Points are earned by participating in USATH "Wild Card" Qualifying Tournaments that have been approved to award points (regional qualifying leagues excluded) based on table 1.

**All USATH "Wild Card" qualifying tournaments must be announced by August 31<sup>st</sup>.** The announcement must include the following information: organizing club and approximate date (month). Tournament organizers are encouraged to provide as much information as possible, such as tournament location, exact dates, tournament format, etc. to facilitate participation. If, for a justified reason, expressed in writing to the Head of Competition and the ELITE Quorum, a club isn't able to meet this deadline, a 30-day extension shall be granted.

Each registered club may organize one, and only one USATH "Wild Card" qualifying tournament per season. In the event that a club plans on hosting more than one tournament, they must notify



the Head of Competition of which event will be considered as qualifying when submitting their intent to host. The full schedule will be announced to all teams **by September 30th**.

**Table 1 - Wild Card Points System**

		NUMBER OF TEAMS IN TOURNAMENT						
RANK		4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
1		4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2		2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4		1	1	2	3	4	5	6
5			1	1	2	3	4	5
6				1	1	2	3	4
7					1	1	2	3
8						1	1	2
9							1	1
10+								1

A four (4) point bonus will be awarded to the defending OPEN division champions, in recognition of a successful season. The team that plays most qualifying matches during the season will be rewarded a two (2) point bonus.





If two or more teams end up with the same number of points, ties will be broken using the following rules:

1. Head-to-head results during Wild Card qualifiers.
2. The best record (Win – Draw – Loss) against other teams that have qualified for the ELITE division. Records will be assessed using a points system (Win = 2 points – Draw = 1 point – Loss = 0 points).
3. A playoff game to be played on the first day of the Open Club Championships.

Additionally, USATH “Wild Card” qualifying tournaments must follow these rules:

- Minimum of four (4) participating teams. Tournaments with fewer than four (4) teams will not be considered as qualifying tournaments.
- Given that the ELITE division is intended to determine the best US-based team, qualifying tournaments should comprise of at least two-thirds (2/3) US-based teams. If a qualifying tournament does not meet that rule, no Wild Card points will be attributed.
- USATH “Wild Card” qualifying tournaments may include up to two (2) teams from the same club. If a qualifying tournament includes more than two teams from the same club, Wild Card points will be allocated on a smaller sized tournament.
- All USATH “Wild Card” qualifying tournaments must be sanctioned and only qualifying tournaments run during the regular season (as defined by the Head of Competition) allow to collect Wild Card points.
- All USATH “Wild Card” qualifying tournaments must be registered and hosted through the designated USATH registration platform. This includes roster management, to allow for review by the Head of Competition and the USATH Membership Director no later than 7 days prior to the start of the event. The host will be responsible for ensuring that all registered teams and athletes meet the eligibility requirements, but they must receive a sign-off, in writing, from the Head of Competition and/or the USATH Membership Director prior to the start of the event in order to receive points for the event.



- All guidelines and necessary documents can be found in the Event Sanctioning Guide.

### **Section 3.02 Open Club OPEN divisions**

#### ***(i) Format***

USATH will determine the format of play based on the number of teams and preside over the draw of all teams into their respective pools of play.

#### ***(ii) Minimum eligibility requirements***

Teams and players are required to comply with the requirements set forth in the USATH Competition Rule Book Section IV.05.

### **Section 3.03 Open College Championships**

#### ***(i) Format***

USATH will determine the format of play based on the number of teams and preside over the draw of all teams into their respective pools of play.

#### ***(ii) Minimum eligibility requirements***

Teams and players are required to comply with the requirements set forth in in the USATH Competition Rule Book Section IV.05. USATH may announce any further requirements during the season, but no later than in the official tournament invitation.

#### ***(iii) Eligible players***

USATH may announce any further requirements during the season, but no later than in the official tournament invitation.



### **Section 3.04 Open Youth Championships**

#### ***(i) Format***

USATH will determine the format of play based on the number of teams and preside over the draw of all teams into their respective pools of play.

#### ***(ii) Minimum eligibility requirements***

Teams and players are required to comply with the requirements set forth in Section 5.05. The minimum age is 15, meaning that players eligible to participate have to turn 15, on the day of their first match at the latest.

The maximum ages are as follows: 19 for men's youth and 18 for women's youth. Accordingly, players who have exceeded the maximum age for their respective category in the year of the Championship are not eligible to participate in the competition.

#### ***(iii) Eligible players***

All athletes currently residing in the U.S. for at least 6 months before the start of the tournament are eligible to play for a team (documentation should be provided to verify residency, e.g. school records, etc). Additional players may be added to a team's roster in order to meet minimum roster requirements if the request is made, in writing, to USATH no later than 30 days prior to the Open Championships. USATH will review the request and make a recommendation to the CEO, who will have the ultimate decision on whether or not to allow the player to participate.

### **Section 3.05 Open Junior Championships**

#### ***(i) Format***

USATH will determine the format of play based on the number of teams and preside over the draw of all teams into their respective pools of play.



### ***(ii) Minimum eligibility requirements***

Teams and players are required to comply with the requirements set forth in Section 5.05. The minimum age is 16, meaning that players eligible to participate have to turn 16, on the day of their first match at the latest.

The maximum ages are as follows: 21 for men's juniors and 20 for women's juniors. Accordingly, players who have exceeded the maximum age for their respective category in the year of the Championship are not eligible to participate in the competition.

### ***(iii) Eligible players***

All athletes currently residing in the U.S. for at least 6 months before the start of the tournament are eligible to play for a team (documentation should be provided to verify residency, e.g. school records, etc). Additional players may be added to a team's roster in order to meet minimum roster requirements if the request is made, in writing, to USATH no later than 30 days prior to the Open Championships. USATH will review the request and make a recommendation to the CEO, who will have the ultimate decision on whether or not to allow the player to participate.

## **Section 3.06 Open High School Championships**

### ***(i) Format***

USATH will determine the format of play based on the number of teams and preside over the draw of all teams into their respective pools of play.

### ***(ii) Minimum eligibility requirements***

Teams and players are required to comply with the requirements set forth in in the USATH Competition Rule Book Section IV.05. USATH may announce any further requirements during the season, but no later than in the official tournament invitation.

### ***(iii) Eligible players***

USATH may announce any further requirements during the season, but no later than in the official tournament invitation.



### **Section 3.07 Roster size requirements**

#### ***(i) Minimum roster size***

All teams participating in the ELITE division must present a roster with a minimum of 12 players and one (1) team official.

All teams participating in any other Open Club Championship division must present a roster with a minimum of 10 players and one (1) team official.

For any other sanctioned event, the LOC will determine and regulate minimum roster sizes

#### ***(ii) Maximum roster size***

The maximum roster size for any USATH Open Club Championship is set at 16 players. For any other sanctioned event, the LOC will determine and regulate maximum roster sizes, including any substitution rules for additional or reserve players.

#### ***(iii) Reserve players***

- A. In order to encourage the development of the sport, teams will be allowed to bring up to two (2) additional players to USATH Open Club Championships.
- B. In the event a team elects to use its reserve players, a minimum number of 12 players for the ELITE division and 10 players for all other divisions must be clearly identified as “permanent players” and cannot be removed from the roster.
- C. In the event a “permanent player” is injured during the course of a championship and is ruled out for the remainder of the event, he may be replaced by a reserve player.
- D. The responsible team official (identified as official A) must ensure, prior to every game, that all active players are listed on the match report. Inactive players may not sit on the bench.

### **Section 3.08 Sportsmanship and Performance Bonds**

Each team competing in a USATH Championship (Club, College, or High School) is required to submit two (2) separate and refundable bonds (check made payable to USA Team Handball). More information will be provided in the official tournament invitation.



### Section 3.09 Rules for Foreign Teams Interested in Competing in the USATH Championships

Any foreign club team, and not an All-Star team, is welcome and encouraged to participate in the USATH Open Club Championships under following guidelines:

- A. Each team must verify its local roster by sending appropriate documentation proving local residence.
- B. Each team must pay standard participation fees set by the USATH and post required bonds
- C. Each team must bring, at its own expense (travel and hotel accommodations), at least one (1) certified referee to work during the event. The NRC reserves the right to accept/reject traveling guest referee(s) based on review of their refereeing certification credentials. If accepted to officiate during Nationals, the USATH will pay such referees for their court duties and per diem according to the established domestic scale.
- D. Each team must accept all medical, health and accident responsibility as well as satisfying their own visa requirements.
- E. Each team interested in College Nationals must proof its players' eligibility per USATH College Eligibility Criteria.

### Section 3.10 Seeding

Note that this section is applicable across all USATH Open Championships.

#### *(i) National ranking*

In order to seed teams for the Open Championships, we will use a National Ranking system, based on the results of the previous Open Championships, at the start of every season.

- Each team will score points based on their **overall** placement in the Open Championships, in 2-point increments, with the highest number of points being allocated to the ELITE National Champion.
- All teams that did not participate in the Open Championships start the season with 0 points.
- Throughout the season, the National Ranking will be updated based on points that teams secure through sanctioned events, using Table 1. Note that only sanctioned events are counted in the ranking.
- Teams that participate in regional leagues will score points from that league worth double those listed in Table 1 (e.g. the winner of a 4-team league will score 8 points).

The final season ranking will be announced no later than 30 days prior to the Open Championships and used as the basis for seeding teams. Any ties will be broken by:

1. Head-to-head results in sanctioned events.
2. A random draw.



### ***(ii) Seeding an even number of teams***

In the event that a division has an even number of teams, those teams will be split into as many pots as there will be groups in the group stage of the championship, in order of strength. For example, if the 8 top-ranked teams have qualified for the same division, the buckets would be:

1. Team #1 and Team #2
2. Team #3 and Team #4
3. Team #5 and Team #6
4. Team #7 and Team #8

One team from each pot shall then be drawn at random into each group.

### ***(iii) Seeding an odd number of teams***

In the event that a division has an odd number of teams, one team shall be given the choice of which group to play in. That team will be:

1. The defending champion in that division.
2. The highest ranked team on the National Ranking.

All other teams will be split and drawn in the same manner as for an even number of teams.

## **Article IV. Amendments, Conflicts and Interpretations**

### **Section 4.01 Amendments**

Changes to this Manual may only be made by the USATH CEO with the approval of the USATH President.

Any Changes or Addendums will be published in a timely manner at [www.usateamhandball.org](http://www.usateamhandball.org). All registered clubs will be notified of such changes via email.

### **Section 4.02 Conflicts or Interpretation Issues**

Any conflicts or interpretation issues resulting from this Manual will be resolved and published by the USATH CEO. If needed, the CEO will publish such interpretations as addendums to this Rule Book.



### **Section 4.03 Effective Date and Transition, Proposed Rule Changes**

This revision of the Manual is scheduled to go into effect on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 and will be published at [www.usateamhandball.org](http://www.usateamhandball.org).

The USATH CEO will submit a timetable for gradual and full compliance by all persons and groups involved with USA Team Handball, if required.