2026-2027 NIHL
Championship Tournament Format

The road to the 2026–2027 NIHL Tournament is underway! Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with the tournament format below and the number of teams that will qualify in each of our nine divisions so that teams, clubs, and fans know what to expect. As the end of the season approaches, remember that standings on the NIHL website are not final until the regular season ends and all applicable tiebreakers outlined in the NIHL Rules have been applied. Good luck to all teams as you work toward a spot in the championship games in February!

Play-In Games: Divisions requiring a play-in game will play those games February 3-5. The higher-seeded team will be the home team.

Playdown (Semi-Final) Games: Most levels will play a two-game series during the weekend of February 4–7, with teams earning 2 points for a win and 1 point for a tie. The team with the most points after two games will advance to the championship game.

If both teams finish with 2 points, a mini-game (1 period) will be played immediately after the second game, using the standard period length for that level. The mini-game is not sudden death, and penalties from the second game will not carry over. If the mini-game ends in a tie, sudden-death overtime periods will be played until a winner is determined.

Championship Games: Championship games will be played on February 27th and 28th.

10U Premier Division: *The top five teams will advance.* The #4 and #5 seeds will play a single play-in game February 3-5. The winner will face the #1 seed, and the #2 seed will face the #3 seed in the semi-final series. Each semi-final matchup will follow the two-game series format, with both games played the weekend of February 4-7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

10U Elite Division: *The top four teams will advance.* The #1 seed will face the #4 seed, and the #2 seed will face the #3 seed in the semi-final series. Each semi-final matchup will follow the two-game series format, with both games played during the weekend of February 4–7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

12U Premier Division: *The top five teams will advance.* The #4 and #5 seeds will play a single play-in game February 3-5. The winner will face the #1 seed, and the #2 seed will face the #3 seed in the semi-final series. Each semi-final matchup will follow the two-game series format, with both games played the weekend of February 4-7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

12U Elite Division: *The top five teams will advance.* The #4 and #5 seeds will play a single play-in game February 3-5. The winner will face the #1 seed, and the #2 seed will face the #3 seed in the semi-final series. Each semi-final matchup will follow the two-game series format, with both games played the weekend of February 4-7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

14U Premier Division: *The top five teams will advance.* The #4 and #5 seeds will play a single play-in game February 3-5. The winner will face the #1 seed, and the #2 seed will face the #3 seed in the semi-final series. Each semi-final matchup will follow the two-game series format, with both games played the weekend of February 4-7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

14U Elite Division: *Seven teams will advance: five from Tier 1 and two from Tier 2.* The Tier 1 teams will be seeded #1–#5, and the Tier 2 teams will be seeded #6–#7. The #1 seed will receive a bye. The #2 seed will face the #7 seed, the #3 seed will face the #6 seed, and the #4 seed will face the #5 seed in single play-in games February 3-5. The three play-in winners will advance to the semi-final series. The #1 seed will face the lowest-seeded remaining team, and the other two teams will face each other. Each semi-final matchup will consist of the two-game series format , played the weekend of February 4-7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

16U Premier Division: *The top four teams will advance.* The #1 seed will face the #4 seed, and the #2 seed will face the #3 seed in the semi-final series. Each semi-final matchup will follow the two-game series format, with both games played during the weekend of February 4–7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

19U Premier Division: *The top four teams will advance.* The #1 seed will face the #4 seed, and the #2 seed will face the #3 seed in the semi-final series. Each semi-final matchup will follow the two-game series format, with both games played during the weekend of February 4–7. The winner of each series will advance to the championship game.

16U/19U Elite: *Nine teams will advance: five from Tier 1 and four from Tier 2.* The Tier 1 teams will be seeded #1–#5, and the Tier 2 teams will be seeded #6–#9. The #8 and #9 seeds will play a single play-in game February 3-5. The losing team will be eliminated, and the winner will enter the eight-team bracket.

Bracket A will consist of seeds #1, #4, #5, and the play-in winner. Bracket B will consist of seeds #2, #3, #6, and #7. These teams will play a double-elimination format during the weekend of February 4–7. All bracket games must produce a winner. Games tied at the end of regulation will follow the standard NIHL sudden-death overtime procedure.

In the first game in Bracket A, the #1 seed will face the play-in winner, the #4 seed will face the #5 seed.
In Bracket B, the #2 seed will face the #7 seed, and the #3 seed will face the #6 seed.

In the second game in Bracket A, the two first-game winners will play each other, and the two first-game losing teams will play each other. A team's second loss eliminates them from the tournament. The same will occur in Bracket B.

In the third game in Bracket A, the winner of the matchup between the losing teams will face the loser of the matchup between the winning teams. Both teams will enter with one loss. The winner will advance to the bracket final, and the loser will be eliminated. The same will occur in Bracket B.

In each bracket final, the remaining team with one loss will face the undefeated team. If the undefeated team wins, it will advance to the championship game. If the undefeated team loses, a mini-game (1 period) will be played immediately afterward to determine the bracket winner. The mini-game will use the standard period length for that level and will not be sudden death. Penalties from the preceding game will not carry over. If the mini-game ends in a tie, sudden-death overtime periods will be played until a winner is determined. The winner of each bracket will advance to the championship game.