



FOUNDATIONAL LEAGUE HANDBOOK

2026-2027 Season

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Updated on July 1, 2026

MID-ATLANTIC PREMIER LEAGUE

Foundational League Rules & Regulations

U8-U12 Boys & Girls

2026-2027 Seasonal Year

1. LEAGUE PURPOSE, MISSION & PHILOSOPHY

1.1 Purpose

The Mid-Atlantic Premier Foundational League is a U8-U12 boys and girls league created to provide clubs, coaches, players, and families with a development-first, geographically sensible alternative to traditional youth league models.

The Foundational League provides structured, age-appropriate competition while maintaining a strong emphasis on long-term player development, club autonomy, reasonable travel, and positive game-day environments.

The league also serves as the introductory stage of the broader Mid-Atlantic Premier League player and club pathway.

1.2 Foundational League Objectives

The MAPL Foundational League is designed to:

- Reduce unnecessary travel;
- Create meaningful local competition and regional rivalries;
- Support long-term player development;
- Provide appropriate levels of competition;
- Allow clubs to maintain control of their developmental models;
- Introduce young players to competitive league standards in an age-appropriate environment;
- Align participating clubs with the player-centered mission and standards of US Club Soccer; and
- Create a clear pathway into MAPL, National 1 (N1), PDP, ID2, and other higher-level opportunities.

1.3 Core Principles

The Foundational League operates around five primary principles.

Geography First

Teams are organized into regional competition structures designed to reduce unnecessary travel and create meaningful local competition.

Geography will be an important factor in league placement; however, competitive appropriateness will also be considered when forming divisions.

Competitive Development

MAPL believes competitive games are an important part of player development.

The league utilizes age-appropriate formats, multiple competitive levels, and promotion and relegation to create environments where teams are consistently challenged at an appropriate level.

Club Alignment

Participating clubs remain responsible for their own:

- Coaching methodology;
- Player development philosophy;
- Team formation;
- Player movement;
- Coaching assignments; and
- Internal developmental pathway.

MAPL's role is to provide an organized competitive environment rather than dictate how individual clubs develop their players.

Clear Pathway

The Foundational League serves as the first stage of the MAPL competitive pathway:

Foundational League → MAPL → National 1 → PDP / ID2

Players and teams should have opportunities to progress into increasingly challenging environments when developmentally appropriate.

Player-Centered Competition

Every league decision should consider the experience and development of the player. Competition matters, but the purpose of competition at U8–U12 is to help players become better soccer players while learning how to compete, solve problems, work within a team, and enjoy the game. Winning is part of competition; however, winning should not come at the expense of long-term player development or an appropriate youth soccer environment.

2. LEAGUE STRUCTURE

2.1 Age Groups

The MAPL Foundational League offers competition for:

- U8 Boys & Girls
- U9 Boys & Girls
- U10 Boys & Girls
- U11 Boys & Girls
- U12 Boys & Girls

2.2 Competition Formats

The standard game formats are:

Age	Format
U8	7v7
U9	7v7
U10	7v7
U11	9v9
U12	9v9

MAPL may modify formats when necessary to accommodate a particular developmental initiative or regional competition structure.

2.3 Competitive Divisions

Whenever participation numbers permit, MAPL Foundational League competition will be organized into two competitive levels:

Black Division

Generally intended for teams requiring the league's stronger competitive environment.

Gold Division

Generally intended for teams requiring a developing or emerging competitive environment.

The purpose of these divisions is not to permanently classify a team or club. Teams are expected to move between levels as development and performance dictate.

2.4 Promotion & Relegation

MAPL will utilize promotion and relegation following the Fall and Spring seasons when appropriate.

Promotion and relegation decisions may consider:

- League results;
- Overall competitiveness of matches;
- Goal differential and competitive trends;
- Team development;
- Roster changes;
- Club recommendations;
- Geographic considerations; and
- Overall division structure.
- League Management retains final authority regarding team movement.
- Promotion and relegation are intended to maintain competitive balance rather than simply reward or punish teams based upon standings.

2.5 Geographic Competition

The MAPL Foundational League is built around regionalized competition.

Future competition regions may include:

- MAPL Foundational League NJ – Metro
- MAPL Foundational League – Capital Club League
- MAPL Foundational – Central / South Jersey & Pennsylvania

MAPL may create, consolidate, divide, or modify geographic regions based upon league participation.

The objective is to create a local soccer ecosystem where teams can compete regularly against appropriate opponents without excessive travel.

2.6 Division Size

MAPL will generally target a maximum of approximately 22 teams per age group within a geographic competition region, subject to competitive and scheduling considerations.

Divisions may be subdivided further where necessary.

3. APPLICATION, REGISTRATION & TEAM ACCEPTANCE

3.1 Eligibility

Teams participating in the MAPL Foundational League must be properly registered and insured through an approved governing body and meet all applicable US Club Soccer and U.S. Soccer requirements.

MAPL reserves the right to verify the registration and eligibility status of any team, player, coach, or club official.

3.2 Application Process

GotSport shall serve as the official registration and competition-management platform for the MAPL Foundational League unless League Management announces otherwise.

Teams must provide accurate information regarding:

- Club;
- Team;
- Age group;
- Gender;
- Coach;
- Team manager;
- Competitive level;
- Previous league placement;
- Recent results; and
- Other information requested by MAPL.

Providing inaccurate or misleading competitive information may affect placement and may result in league sanctions.

3.3 Acceptance

Submission of an application does not guarantee acceptance.

MAPL may consider:

- Competitive level;
- Geography;
- League capacity;
- Club history;
- Previous performance;
- Roster composition;
- Appropriate developmental placement; and
- The overall structure of the competition.

3.4 League Fees

For the 2026–2027 season:

Age Groups	Format	League Fee
U8–U10	7v7	\$475 Full Year
U11–U12	9v9	\$750 Full Year

League fees do not include referee expenses unless otherwise communicated by MAPL.

3.5 Agreement to Participate

By accepting a place in the MAPL Foundational League, each club and team agrees to:

- Complete its league schedule;
- Follow MAPL Rules & Regulations;
- Maintain appropriate communication with opponents;
- Meet league scheduling requirements;
- Follow applicable player and coach registration requirements;
- Maintain appropriate sideline behavior; and
- Accept decisions issued by MAPL League Management.

4. COMPETITION PHILOSOPHY BY AGE

MAPL recognizes that the competitive experience should evolve throughout the Foundational League pathway.

4.1 U8-U10

U8-U10 competition should place the greatest emphasis on:

- Technical development;
- Decision-making;
- Creativity;
- Confidence with the ball;
- Appropriate playing time;
- Learning positional concepts without premature specialization;
- Positive competitive experiences; and
- Developing a love for the game.

Teams may earn:

- 3 points for a win;
- 1 point for a draw; and
- 0 points for a loss.

4.2 U11-U12

U11-U12 competition begins introducing greater competitive accountability while maintaining the developmental principles of the Foundational League.

Public standings may be maintained for U11 and U12.

Teams may earn:

- 3 points for a win;
- 1 point for a draw; and
- 0 points for a loss.

Results will also be used to help inform promotion, relegation, and future divisional placement.

5. FOUNDATIONAL FEST

5.1 Foundational FEST Purpose

The Foundational Fest provides an age-appropriate postseason experience and an opportunity for all teams to conclude the seasonal year in a competitive championship environment.

Participation in the Foundational Cup does not change the league's underlying development-first philosophy.

6. SCHEDULING

6.1 League Schedule

MAPL will publish the seasonal schedule through GotSport.

The number of scheduled matches may vary depending on the number of teams within each division and geographic region.

MAPL will make every reasonable effort to create balanced schedules and minimize unnecessary travel.

6.2 Default Match Day

Sunday shall be the standard MAPL Foundational League match day unless otherwise approved or scheduled. Teams may mutually agree to play on another day when permitted by MAPL.

6.3 Scheduling Responsibilities

The home team is responsible for:

- Securing an appropriate field;
- Confirming the match time;
- Entering the correct field and kickoff information into GotSport;
- Arranging referee coverage when required; and
- Communicating game details to the visiting team.

Both teams share responsibility for communicating promptly and ensuring the match is properly scheduled.

6.4 GotSport Game Communications

All official scheduling conversations, game-change discussions, and opponent communications should take place through the applicable GotSport Game Communications feature.

MAPL may rely upon the communication history contained within GotSport when resolving scheduling disputes.

Phone calls, text messages, and outside emails may be useful between club representatives but should not replace the official GotSport communication record when a scheduling dispute exists.

6.5 Schedule Lock

MAPL will announce a schedule-lock date each season.

Prior to the schedule lock, mutually agreed changes may be permitted according to procedures established by League Management.

Following the schedule lock, games may not be changed without MAPL approval.

6.6 Failure to Schedule

Both teams have an obligation to participate actively in the scheduling process.

If one team is unresponsive or fails to provide required scheduling information, the opposing team should notify League Management through the appropriate league communication process.

MAPL may establish a match date, time, or venue when teams fail to reach agreement or meet league scheduling requirements.

7. GAME CHANGES & RESCHEDULING

7.1 General Standard

Once the schedule is locked, the published match date, time, and location are considered official.

A team's participation in another tournament, league, friendly, showcase, training event, or other competition does not automatically create a right to reschedule a MAPL match.

7.2 Game Change Requests

After the schedule lock:

1. The requesting team must contact its opponent through GotSport Game Communications.
2. Both teams should attempt to identify an acceptable alternative date.
3. The appropriate GotSport Game Change Request must be submitted.
4. The opposing team must approve the proposed change.
5. MAPL must provide final approval.

A match is not officially changed until MAPL approves the request and the change appears on the official GotSport schedule.

7.3 Failure to Reach Agreement

If teams cannot mutually agree upon a requested change, the existing MAPL schedule remains in effect unless League Management determines otherwise.

MAPL reserves the right to establish the final date, time, location, and home/away designation of any league match when necessary.

7.4 Canceled Matches

When a match is canceled because of weather, field closure, or another approved circumstance, both teams must work promptly to establish a new date.

MAPL may establish a deadline for rescheduling postponed matches.

Failure to cooperate in rescheduling may result in League Management establishing the match date or imposing additional competition sanctions.

7.5 Home/Away Reversal

If the scheduled home team is unable to provide an appropriate field, MAPL encourages teams to consider reversing the fixture when the visiting team has a suitable venue available.

Any home/away reversal must be mutually agreed upon and reflected in GotSport.

8. WEATHER & FIELD CLOSURES

8.1 Home Club Responsibility

The home club is responsible for determining field availability and communicating closures as early as reasonably possible.

The home club must notify:

- The opposing team;
- The referee assignor or referee crew, when applicable; and
- MAPL when required.

8.2 Opponent Travel

Home clubs must make reasonable efforts to account for an opponent's travel distance when making weather-related decisions.

Teams should not knowingly require an opponent to travel when the home club is already aware that the field will not be playable.

8.3 Lightning & Thunder

Upon seeing lightning or hearing thunder, play must be suspended.

Teams may not return to the field until at least 30 minutes have passed following the most recent occurrence of lightning or thunder.

Each additional occurrence restarts the 30-minute waiting period.

The referee and/or facility authority shall determine whether play can safely resume.

8.4 Unplayable Fields

The referee retains authority to determine whether a field is safe for play after arriving at the venue.

No league match shall be played on a field determined to present an unreasonable safety risk.

9. TERMINATED & ABANDONED MATCHES

9.1 Referee Authority

Once a match begins, the referee has authority to suspend or terminate play because of:

- Weather;
- Lightning;
- Darkness;
- Unsafe field conditions;
- Serious injury;
- Spectator behavior;
- Coach or player misconduct; or
- Other circumstances affecting match safety.

9.2 Weather-Shortened Matches

If a match is terminated after completion of the first half, MAPL may recognize the score at the time of termination as the final result.

If a match is terminated before halftime, MAPL will determine whether the match should be replayed, resumed, or otherwise resolved.

9.3 Abandoned Matches

Matches abandoned because of player, coach, team-official, or spectator misconduct will be reviewed by MAPL.

League Management may issue:

- A forfeit;
- A fine;
- A suspension;
- A replay;
- A venue restriction;
- Additional disciplinary action; or
- Any combination thereof.

10. GAME-DAY COMPETITION STANDARDS

10.1 Match Length

Age Group	Format	Match Length
U8	7v7	2 x 25-minute halves
U9	7v7	2 x 25-minute halves
U10	7v7	2 x 25-minute halves
U11	9v9	2 x 30-minute halves
U12	9v9	2 x 30-minute halves

Halftime should generally not exceed five (5) minutes.

10.2 Ball Size

All U8–U12 MAPL Foundational League matches shall use a Size 4 soccer ball.

10.3 Substitutions

Unlimited substitutions are permitted.

Substitutions should be conducted in accordance with the Laws of the Game and at the referee's direction.

MAPL strongly encourages coaches to provide meaningful playing opportunities to all rostered players.

10.4 Free-Kick Distance

For 7v7 and 9v9 matches, opponents should remain at least eight (8) yards from the ball until it is in play where applicable.

10.5 Small-Sided Standards

U8–U10 competition will follow applicable age-appropriate small-sided game standards, including build-out line requirements where applicable.

U11–U12 competition will utilize the 9v9 format and appropriate field and goal dimensions.

Applicable U.S. Soccer, US Club Soccer, and sanctioning-body modifications shall govern when not specifically addressed within these rules.

11. FIELDS & EQUIPMENT

11.1 Field Standards

Home clubs are responsible for providing fields that are safe and appropriately marked for the applicable age group.

Fields should include:

- Clearly visible boundary lines;
- Appropriate penalty areas;
- Corner markings or flags where required;
- Properly secured goals; and
- Safe technical and spectator areas.

11.2 Goal Safety

Goals must:

- Be properly secured;
- Contain nets;
- Be of reasonably equivalent size at both ends; and
- Meet applicable safety requirements.

An improperly secured goal must not be used.

11.3 Recommended Field Dimensions

7v7

Approximately 55–65 yards long by 35–45 yards wide.

9v9

Approximately 70–80 yards long by 45–55 yards wide.

Reasonable variations may be permitted based upon facility constraints provided the field remains appropriate and safe.

11.4 Player Equipment

Shin guards are mandatory.

Players may not wear jewelry or equipment deemed dangerous by the referee.

The referee has final authority regarding the safety of:

- Casts;
- Braces;
- Protective equipment;
- Jewelry;
- Clothing; and
- Other player equipment.

12. UNIFORMS

Teams should have access to contrasting uniform colors.

When the referee determines that the teams' uniforms are too similar, the home team shall be responsible for changing colors, unless the teams mutually resolve the conflict another way.

Players should have unique jersey numbers whenever possible, and jersey numbers should correspond with the official game-day roster.

Goalkeepers must wear colors that distinguish them from the other players and match officials.

13. ROSTERS & PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

13.1 Eligible Players

All players must be properly registered and eligible under the rules of the team's sanctioning organization and MAPL.

Players must meet applicable age and registration requirements.

13.2 Game-Day Documentation

Teams must have access to the appropriate:

- GotSport Game Card;
- Official roster; and
- Player and coach credentials or passes required by the applicable sanctioning body.

Digital credentials may be accepted where permitted.

13.3 Player Movement

MAPL supports appropriate player movement within a club when used for legitimate developmental purposes. Players may participate with another eligible team within their properly registered club when permitted by applicable registration rules.

Player movement should support:

Player development;

- Appropriate playing opportunities;
- Roster needs;
- Developmental challenge; and
- Club pathway opportunities.

Player movement must not be used primarily to manipulate league results or artificially strengthen a team for individual matches.

MAPL reserves the right to review patterns of player movement and restrict such movement when it determines the system is being abused.

13.4 Ineligible Players

Use of an ineligible player may result in:

- Match forfeiture;
- Coach suspension;
- Team sanctions;
- Club sanctions; and/or
- Removal from MAPL competition.

The club is responsible for verifying the eligibility of every player used in league competition.

14. GAME-DAY ROSTER LIMITS

Unless otherwise established by MAPL:

Format	Maximum Game-Day Roster	Minimum Players to Start
7v7	14	5
9v9	16	6

Only properly eligible and checked-in players may participate.

A player arriving after kickoff must be properly checked by the referee before entering the match.

15. COACHES & TEAM OFFICIALS

All coaches and team officials participating in MAPL competition must satisfy applicable registration, background screening, SafeSport, and credentialing requirements.

Only properly credentialed team officials may occupy the technical area.

MAPL recommends limiting the technical area to essential team personnel.

Coaches are responsible for:

- Their players;
- Their team officials;
- Their team sideline; and
- The behavior of their team's spectators.

16. REFEREES

16.1 Referee Assignment

MAPL matches shall utilize qualified referees assigned through approved referee assignors whenever available.

16.2 Referee Systems

The standard referee system shall generally be:

- U8-U10: One referee
- U11-U12: three referees

Clubs may utilize additional referees when available and appropriate.

16.3 Referee Payment

Unless MAPL establishes a centralized payment process, referee fees will be handled according to procedures communicated by League Management and/or the applicable referee assignor.

16.4 Referee No-Show

If the assigned referee does not appear, both teams may mutually agree upon a qualified individual to officiate the match.

Once both teams agree to the replacement referee and the match begins, the match will ordinarily be treated as an official league match.

If the teams cannot agree upon an alternative, the matter shall be reported to MAPL for review and potential rescheduling.

16.5 Respect for Referees

MAPL recognizes that referee development is an important component of youth soccer.

Coaches, players, and spectators are expected to treat referees with respect regardless of age or experience. Persistent criticism, intimidation, abusive language, threats, or confrontation of referees will not be tolerated.

17. SCORES & STANDINGS

17.1 U8-U10

Scores may be collected for the purposes of:

- Competitive placement;
- Division evaluation;
- Promotion and relegation decisions;
- Identifying competitively mismatched teams; and
- Future scheduling.

Win – 3 points

Tie – 1 point

Loss – 0 points

17.2 U11-U12

Public standings may be maintained for U11 and U12.

When standings are utilized:

- Win – 3 points
- Tie – 1 point
- Loss – 0 points

17.3 Competitive Balance

Regardless of whether standings are publicly displayed, MAPL may use match results to evaluate competitive balance and future team placement.

The league's objective is to reduce repeated one-sided matches and provide appropriate competitive environments.

17.4 Score Reporting

Scores should be entered or reported through the league's designated GotSport process following the completion of each applicable match.

Clubs are responsible for identifying and correcting inaccurate results promptly.

18. TIEBREAKERS

When standings or postseason qualification require a tiebreaker, MAPL may use the following sequence:

1. Head-to-head result when two teams are tied;
2. Goal differential;
3. Goals scored;
4. Goals allowed;
5. Additional league-determined competitive criteria; and
6. Random draw when necessary.

MAPL may establish separate tiebreaking procedures for Foundational Cup qualification.

19. FORFEITS

19.1 Forfeit Score

A match declared a forfeit shall ordinarily be recorded as a 1–0 result.

19.2 Failure to Fulfill a Match

MAPL expects teams to complete their entire league schedule.

A team that fails to fulfill a scheduled league match without an approved reason may be subject to:

- Forfeit;
- Fine;
- Loss of home games;
- Competition sanction;
- Removal from the division;
- Suspension from future MAPL competition; or
- Other action deemed appropriate by League Management.

Repeated forfeits will be reviewed at the club level.

20. SIDELINE & SPECTATOR CONDUCT

MAPL expects every match to provide a positive environment for young players and referees.

Coaches are responsible for the behavior of their team's spectators.

The following behavior is prohibited:

- Abusive or threatening language;
- Persistent criticism of referees;
- Entering the field without permission;
- Confronting opposing players, coaches, referees, or spectators;
- Discriminatory or offensive language;
- Encouraging dangerous or retaliatory play;
- Threatening behavior;
- Harassment of officials; and
- Behavior that interferes with the referee's ability to manage the match.

MAPL reserves the right to sanction individuals, teams, or clubs for spectator behavior.

Local and State Association requirements regarding sideline positioning shall take precedence where applicable, including requirements specific to matches played in Pennsylvania.

21. DISCIPLINE

21.1 Player Send-Offs

A player receiving a red card is automatically suspended for at least the team's next MAPL league match.

MAPL may impose additional sanctions based upon the nature of the offense.

21.2 Coach & Team-Official Dismissals

A coach or team official dismissed from a match is automatically suspended for at least the team's next MAPL league match.

During the suspension, the individual may not coach or communicate instructions to the team from another location at the facility.

21.3 Serious Misconduct

Violent conduct, fighting, threats, discriminatory language, referee abuse, or other serious misconduct may result in enhanced sanctions.

Sanctions may include:

- Additional match suspensions;
- Time-based suspension;
- Fines;
- Facility restrictions;
- Club sanctions; or
- Removal from MAPL competition.

21.4 Club Responsibility

MAPL expects clubs to actively manage the conduct of their coaches, players, and spectators.

Repeated misconduct may result in sanctions against the club in addition to sanctions against the individual team.

21.5 Developmental Standard

MAPL expects participating clubs to be proactive rather than reactive regarding behavior.

At the Foundational level, adults should model the behavior expected of young players.

The league's primary concern remains player development, safety, sportsmanship, and the quality of the competitive environment.

22. PROTESTS & COMPETITION REVIEW

22.1 Eligible Protests

A protest must involve an alleged violation of:

- MAPL Rules & Regulations;
- Applicable registration rules;
- Applicable governing-body policies; or
- The Laws of the Game.

A referee's judgment decision regarding a factual matter occurring during play is generally not protestable.

22.2 Who May Submit a Protest

Protests should be submitted by an authorized club official rather than an individual parent or spectator.

22.3 Submission Deadline

Protests must be submitted in writing within three (3) business days of the match unless MAPL establishes another deadline for a specific matter.

The submission should include:

1. Match information;
2. Specific circumstances giving rise to the protest;
3. Rule or policy allegedly violated;
4. Supporting documentation; and
5. Requested resolution.

22.4 League Review

MAPL League Management shall review competition matters and issue decisions it determines are appropriate and consistent with league policies.

MAPL may request statements or documentation from:

- Coaches;
- Club officials;
- Referees;
- Referee assignors; and
- Other appropriate parties.

23. PLAYER SAFETY & CONCUSSION PROTOCOL

Player safety takes priority over competition.

Teams must comply with applicable concussion protocols and return-to-play requirements established by their governing organization and applicable law.

When a player exhibits signs or symptoms consistent with a concussion, the player should immediately be removed from participation and should not return until permitted under applicable concussion procedures. Clubs, coaches, referees, and parents are expected to place player welfare ahead of the outcome of the match.

24. WITHDRAWALS

Teams accepted into the MAPL Foundational League are expected to complete the competition.

Any request to withdraw must be submitted by an authorized club official to MAPL League Management.

MAPL may apply administrative fees, forfeiture of league fees, scheduling penalties, or other sanctions depending upon when the withdrawal occurs.

Once league schedules have been released, teams should not assume that league fees will be refunded.

MAPL reserves the right to establish seasonal withdrawal and refund policies separately.

25. FINES & ADMINISTRATIVE SANCTIONS

MAPL may impose administrative sanctions when clubs or teams fail to meet league requirements.

Potential violations may include:

- Failure to schedule matches by required deadlines;
- Failure to respond to opponent communications;
- Improper game changes;
- Failure to reschedule canceled matches;
- Late cancellations;
- Failure to notify referee assignors;
- Failure to fulfill league matches;
- Use of ineligible players;
- Repeated misconduct; or
- Failure to comply with MAPL administrative procedures.

MAPL will publish applicable fine schedules and administrative deadlines separately or as part of seasonal league communications.

League Management reserves the right to waive, reduce, or increase administrative sanctions when circumstances warrant.

26. LEAGUE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

MAPL League Management has final authority over the administration and interpretation of Foundational League competition.

League Management may make decisions regarding:

- Team acceptance;
- Division formation;
- Geographic placement;
- Promotion and relegation;
- Scheduling disputes;
- Game changes;
- Player eligibility;
- Competition discipline;
- Forfeits;
- Protests;
- League sanctions; and
- Circumstances not specifically addressed within these Rules & Regulations.

When addressing situations not expressly covered by these rules, MAPL will consider:

1. Player safety;
2. Competitive integrity;
3. Player development;
4. Geographic practicality;
5. Club responsibility;
6. Sportsmanship; and
7. The overall best interests of the league.

MAPL reserves the right to modify, clarify, or supplement these rules when necessary. Participating clubs will be notified of material changes.

27. FOUNDATIONAL LEAGUE STANDARD

The Mid-Atlantic Premier Foundational League exists to create meaningful soccer experiences for developing players.

Every participating club shares responsibility for creating that environment.

The league expects clubs to compete hard, develop players, respect opponents, support officials, and keep the long-term experience of young players at the center of competition.

Geography First.

Development Always.

Competition With Purpose.

Foundational League → MAPL → National 1 → PDP / ID2