



# **Athlete Handbook and Rules for Pairs Skating**

## OVERVIEW

The U.S. Figure Skating National Qualifying Series (NQS) was approved by the 2018 Governing Council and will go into effect in the summer of 2019 to serve the following purposes:

1. An additional / alternative way for singles athletes to advance to the Sectional Singles Final (*formally known as Sectional Championships*) and an additional path for pairs and dance athletes to advance to the U.S. Pairs or U.S. Dance Final (*new championship events, held in conjunction with one of the Sectional Singles Finals. Click [HERE](#) to see the details for advancement for pairs athletes*)
2. An opportunity for teams at the juvenile – senior levels to earn an official national ranking at their level and virtually compete against teams from all parts of the country.

The NQS is a series of official U.S. Figure Skating approved competitions hosted individually by member clubs nationwide, during the summer months, that are held in a standard format and in which athletes earn official scores towards a national rank. The competitions will be held between May 31, 2019 and September 15, 2019.

All competitions accepted into the NQS must agree to the following U.S. Figure Skating requirements:

1. Use a panel of officials, of a minimum level, approved by the Domestic Selections Committee
2. Conduct the NQS pairs events in accordance with U.S. Figure Skating rule 7060 / Composition of Pair Events, so all events are standard and comparable across the country.
3. Utilize U.S. Figure Skating's Event Management System (EMS) for registration, officials' management and results transmission.
4. Utilize the International Judging System (IJS) and the official calculation software with the latest related version of the software and official judging system hardware.

For NQS competitions approved for pairs, click [HERE](#).

## **ENTRIES, PARTICIPATION AND QUALIFYING PROCESS:**

**STEP 1: Enter the National Qualifying Series.** Entry deadline is May 28, 2019, by one partner logging onto Members Only, and selecting, **Event Management System (EMS)**. **Late entries are not accepted.** The overall entry fee to participate in the NQS is \$25.00 per event, (nonrefundable), paid at the time of entry. Teams are not required to select their competitions at this point, only to register as an overall participant.

**STEP 2: Determination of level.** There is test requirement for pairs teams. Teams may also choose to complete two separate entries (and pay two entry fees of \$25). They may enter two levels, if they wish, or if they are not sure which level they ultimately want to compete, they can enter both and decide later.

HOWEVER: Teams may not compete at two levels in the same competition.

**STEP 3: Determination of section.** The team's section does not matter for the purpose of the NQS. Rankings will be done on a national basis and the top three teams per level, nationwide will have earned an automatic advance (i.e. bye) to the U.S. Pairs Final.

*Note: Singles athletes will automatically be entered in the section of their home club at the time of entry for the NQS, with the top six athletes per section earning a bye to their Sectional Singles Final. If a singles athlete, also competing in pairs, finishes in the top 6 in their section, their bye will allow them to compete in whichever section is also hosting the U.S. Pairs Final. If they do not earn a bye in singles, and the team also doesn't earn a bye in pairs, the athlete may then enter whichever Regional Singles Challenge within their section is also hosting the Sectional Pairs Challenge.*

**STEP 4: Entry to individual competitions.** After officially entering the NQS, the team then selects competitions to enter. This can be as few or as many as desired, in any location around the country. Teams must enter each competition directly, via U.S. Figure Skating's EMS, in accordance with the entry deadline and entry fees set by that competition. It is the responsibility of the athletes to register for each competition and follow any entry rules set by that competition. Entering the NQS, does not enter the team into any competitions.

**STEP 5: Standings and Results.** After each NQS competition is completed, the combined Total Score earned by each team will be pulled by U.S. Figure Skating, and the running standings updated on Members Only / EMS. Standings will be posted for pairs events for the entire country. Only each team's current highest Total Score will be counted. (For example, if a team competes in competition #2, but had a higher Total Score in competition #1, their score from competition #1 would remain). The placements of team at any NQS competition are not relevant, only the Total Score earned by each team. (See conduct of competition below for details).

Teams that entered the NQS, but haven't competed yet, will not appear in the rankings until they skate a competition.

**STEP 6: Results / The conclusion of the NQS.** After the last event in the NQS, the scores become final, with only one Total Score (the highest) per team counting. The following will be the official results of the series:

1. There will be a National Ranking for each level, with all teams that competed in at least one competition earning a certificate and a pin.
2. Teams earning a Total Score that is in the Top 3 of their level, nationwide, will be offered an automatic advancement (bye) to the U.S. Pairs Final.
3. Teams that register for the NQS but fail to skate in a competition will not receive a competitor certificate / pin.

### **STEP 7: The Qualifying Season Starts**

After the conclusion of the NQS, the regular qualifying season starts. All teams, regardless of ranking, that wish to continue advancing through the qualifying season must enter the Qualifying Season (Sectional Pairs Challenge) by September 1, 2019, no exceptions. All current rules regarding the qualifying system come into play (this has not changed):

- a. Teams must have passed the appropriate test for the level they wish to enter by September 1.
- b. All teams must enter the section of the home club of at least one partner, by Sept 1. (Singles skaters not earning a bye must enter the region of their home club, or the region that is also hosting the Sectional Pairs Challenge, if also competing in pairs).
- c. How byes earned in the NQS are handled:
  - The top 3 teams, nationwide, in each level, that have also entered the qualifying season (Sectional Pairs Challenge) by September 1, are contacted via email and offered a bye to the U.S. Pairs Final. They may choose to accept the bye or compete at their sectional. Regardless, they have secured their spot at the U.S. Pairs Final. If the team chooses to compete, and finishes lower than 5<sup>th</sup>, they still advance to the U.S. Pairs Final. (If they finish in the top 5, the next highest placing team without a bye also advances.)
  - Byes may not cross levels. If a team competed in two levels in the NQS, for example, placing 1<sup>st</sup> in juvenile and 5<sup>th</sup> in intermediate, and wants to use the bye to the U.S. Pairs Final, they must compete in juvenile, and be test eligible. If the team wants to compete intermediate, the juvenile bye would be forfeited, and be offered to the next team.

**NOTE:** The NQS and official qualifying season, which consists of the Sectional Pairs Challenge, the U.S. Pairs Final and the U.S. Figure Skating Championships or National High Performance Development Team, are considered two separate programs/events, with two separate results and rewards. Teams may compete in either or both to be considered qualifying competitors. The only thing that applies to both programs is the “bye” to the U.S. Pairs Final earned by the top three teams in each level. Teams **ARE NOT** required to compete in the NQS to enter the Sectional Pairs Challenge, and can advance through the qualifying system, simply by entering only the Sectional Pairs Challenge by September 1.

**Illustration of the NQS and Qualifying Season –  
They are two separate programs. Athletes may enter either or both:**

NQS.  
Register by May 28<sup>th</sup>.

Official qualifying season. All athletes must register for the qualifying season by Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> and be test / age eligible continue. NQS registration does not carry over.



Time	June - September	October	November	January
Event	NQS - Pairs	Sectional Pairs Challenge	U.S. Pairs Final	U.S. Champs. Or National HPTDC
Entry	Open entry	Open entry	3 from NQS + 15 from sectional	Top 12 Jr / Sr    Top 9 Juv/ Int /Nov
Advancement / Result	Top 3 nationwide are offered a bye to the U.S. Pairs Final	Top 5 per section advance to U.S. Pairs Final	Top 12 advance to U.S. Championships (Jr. / Sr.) Top 9 advance to NHPDT (Juv., Int., Novice)	Athletes selected for international competitions or High Performance programs

**EVENTS TO BE SKATED and CONDUCT of COMPETITION:**

Pairs events at all NQS pairs competitions will be conducted in accordance with Rule 7060 / Composition of Pairs Events. This states that senior, junior and novice pair events will consist of a short program and a free skate. If a qualifying round is necessary, only the free skate will be skated in the qualifying round. Intermediate and juvenile events will consist of a free skate only.

NQS Pairs Events will consist of the following events, in accordance with the noted technical rule:

- Juvenile Pairs / Rule 7450
- Intermediate Pairs / Rule 7440
- Novice Pairs / Rule 7430
- Junior Pairs / Rule 7420
- Senior Pairs / Rule 7410

Technical Information regarding the short program and free skate, is as of the latest information posted on the U.S. Figure Skating [Technical Info](#) web page for singles and pairs.

**Additional Pairs Events:**

Competitions may choose to offer short program only or free skate only competition events for novice – senior pairs, if there is demand from teams that may want to “practice” competing only one event segment. (i.e., in early summer a team isn’t ready to officially compete in the NQS, and just wants to get feedback on their free skate). Please note these separate events are **NOT** part of the NQS and will not be counted. Please pay close attention when entering competitions to ensure you are selecting the events you wish to enter.

## COMPETITION RESULTS, STANDINGS, TITLES and AWARDS

**Results:** Each NQS competition will post event results on-site and distribute awards, such as trophies, medals, ribbons, etc., as usual. These are specific to that competition (not the NQS overall) and are not under the jurisdiction of U.S. Figure Skating. Please see the individual competition announcements for awards on-site at each event.

**Standings:** At the end of the NQS competition, each team's Total Score (combined SP + FS for novice and higher), is transmitted to the final standings in EMS, which are updated continually, and as soon as possible following each event. Only a team's current highest Total Score is officially recorded. If a team finishes a competition and beats their previous high score, their score will be updated. If a team competes, but does not beat their current high score, the previous score stands.

Teams are welcome to compete as many or as few times as they wish, with only their highest Total Score officially counting towards the national ranking and advancing directly to the U.S. Pairs Final. Earning a lower score at a subsequent competition, will not negatively impact a team's standing.

**Awards:** At the end of the last NQS competition of the season, all scores will become "official" and competitors will receive the following:

1. A national ranking; with the Top 3 teams per level being offered a bye to the U.S. Pairs Final.
2. A national ranking; their ranking among all pairs teams at their level in the U.S.
3. A certificate with either their ranking number or "competitor" designated. (*Teams ranking below the top 50% of all competitors, will receive a certificate that says "competitor" in lieu of their actual ranking number*).
4. Teams finishing in the Top 25% nationally will receive a gold pin.
5. Teams finishing in the Top 26-50% nationally will receive a silver pin.
6. All teams below the Top 50%, will receive a competitor pin.
7. Teams that register for the NQS but don't skate complete any competitions will not receive a competitor certificate or pin.

**Titles:** There are NO titles or championships awarded through the National Qualifying Series. Athletes earn a rank, a pin, a certificate and the opportunity to earn a bye to the next level of competition. The highest placing team in the NQS is **NOT** considered a national champion. That title is reserved for the U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

## APPENDIX / FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ***How involved will U.S. Figure Skating be in the running of the individual NQS competitions?***

U.S. Figure Skating requires that NQS competitions follow a set of standards to provide a consistent, high quality competition for competitors to compare scores across the U.S. This includes using the Event Management System (EMS) for registration and transmittal of IJS scores, the approved standard of event conduct (with regards to a combined event), the newest IJS software and the approved level of officials.

U.S. Figure Skating only oversees the conduct of the official NQS events within the competition (Juvenile – Senior), and will not have any authority over the schedule, entry fees, practice ice, deadlines, etc. In addition, U.S. Figure Skating will have no authority over specialty or other events such as Excel, showcase, levels below juvenile, specialty events, etc.

### ***We forgot to enter the NQS by May 28<sup>th</sup>. Can we still compete in competitions that are part of the series?***

**Yes!** Any teams can enter any competition, regardless of NQS status, in fact, there may be some non-U.S. competitors participating! If a team is not registered as part of the NQS, their Total Score will not be extracted from the competition scores transmitted to EMS and will simply be ignored in the NQS standings. So, while you will not receive a national ranking in the NQS, you can still compete as usual for participation and experience.

### ***We didn't start skating together until June, so missed the NQS deadline. Can we still go to the Sectional Pairs Challenge?***

**Yes!** You may still enter the qualifying system by September 1, compete at the Sectional Pairs Challenge and have an opportunity to advance to the U.S. Pairs Final, and thus the National High-Performance Development Team Camp or U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

### ***We entered the NQS by May 28<sup>th</sup>, but I forgot to send in our entry to the competition we wanted to enter and missed their entry deadline. What should I do?***

Each NQS competition entry is handled by the host competition. See the competition announcement for their policy on late entries. If late entries are not accepted, you will not be allowed to enter that competition. However, there are no limits or restrictions which event you can enter, so enter a different competition that has a later entry deadline.

***Can we compete out of our section?***

**Yes!** Teams can enter any NQS competition, in any location they wish. (This is ALSO true for singles skaters).

***Is there an advantage to competing at one NQS competition vs. a different one based on how “competitive” I think it will be?***

**No.** A team’s placement in a competition doesn’t matter, only their Total Score. The Top 3 scores in the U.S. may come from the same competition or may be scattered all over the country. Each competition, you are trying to earn your “personal best,” to see if you can top a previous score.

***My partner and I entered the NQS, skated one competition and then broke up. I have a new partner now and want to finish the season competing with him. How does that work?***

**That’s not a problem.** You will receive your national ranking with partner #1, which will be based on the score you earned in the one competition you completed. You can enter any subsequent competition you want with partner #2, however, since you didn’t register for the NQS, your score is simply not counted, and you won’t receive a national ranking with partner #2.

**However,** when it comes time to re-enter the qualifying system, simply enter with partner #2, and compete at the Sectional Pairs Challenge, with the opportunity to continue advancing through the system. Since the NQS, and the remaining qualifying competitions are considered separate programs, it is okay to compete in each with different partners.

***I found a partner on May 1<sup>st</sup>! We want to enter the NQS, but we aren’t sure whether or not we’re going to skate at intermediate or novice this year. We haven’t passed any pairs tests. What should we do?***

**No problem.** Complete two entries in the NQS – one in intermediate and one in novice. There are no test requirements for the NQS, and teams may enter two levels. As you progress, simply enter the NQS competition(s) you want at the level you want. If you end up skating intermediate at one, and novice at another, you’ll receive two national ranks and two sets of awards!

However, at the end of the NQS, to continue in the qualifying season, you must enter the Sectional Pairs Challenge, by September 1<sup>st</sup>, in only one level, which you are test eligible for. Further, byes do not cross levels. For example, if you finish 3<sup>rd</sup> in intermediate and 10<sup>th</sup> in novice, you must **either** a) enter the qualifying system as an intermediate team and accept a bye to compete intermediate at the U.S. Pairs Final **or** b) skate novice, but decline the bye, and enter the qualifying system in novice pairs, entering the Sectional Pairs Challenge. Keep this in mind and plan accordingly throughout the summer.



**We competed in Novice Pairs at the NQS and finished 2<sup>nd</sup> – so we earned a bye! But, we feel it is important for our development to compete in the Sectional Pairs Challenge. Can we do that? What if we finish lower than 5<sup>th</sup>?**

**Yes!** Your 2<sup>nd</sup> place national ranking in the NQS has reserved you a spot at the U.S. Pairs Final, if you enter the qualifying system, regardless of whether you compete at your sectionals. You may choose to compete at your Sectional Pairs Challenge, but your placement there won't be considered in advancement. If you finish in the top 5, you'll advance to onto the U.S. Pairs Final, and so will the 6<sup>th</sup> place team in your event. If you finish below 5<sup>th</sup>, you will also advance onto the U.S. Pairs Final, along with those who placed 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>. No matter what, 18 teams (3 from the NQS + the top 5 from each section who don't already have a bye) in each level, will get to compete at the U.S. Pairs Final.

**What happens if a team ranked in the top 3 at in the NQS forgets to enter the qualifying system by September 1<sup>st</sup>?**

All teams must enter the qualifying system by September 1<sup>st</sup> (just like now), to compete, regardless of whether they earned a bye to the next event. There are no exceptions this rule; if a team fails to enter the qualifying system by September 1<sup>st</sup>, they may not advance, their bye is forfeited, and the next team is offered their bye. Byes earned in the NQS will be treated the same way international byes are treated currently. Teams progress automatically, if they enter the qualifying system by the entry deadline.

**Does the five-or-fewer rule apply for the Sectional Pairs Challenge to the U.S. Pairs Final? If we don't place in the top 3 in the NQS, but there are only 4 teams entered in our Sectional Pairs Challenge, do we have to compete, or can we just go right to the Final?**

The five-or-fewer rule does NOT apply to juvenile – novice teams. Teams not earning a bye are REQUIRED to compete at the Sectional Pairs Challenge, to advance to the U.S. Pairs Final (as long as there are at least two entries).

It DOES apply to junior and senior teams. If there are five or fewer teams entered in one section, or 15 in the country, junior and senior teams may elect to bypass the sectional challenge and advance directly to the U.S. Pairs Final. From there, the top 12 teams advance to the U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

This ensures that all teams can compete in a minimum of two qualifying competitions during the season.