

## USA Climbing Competition Task Force: Update on Progress November 20, 2019

### Table Contents:

(Items below hyperlink to the relevant section)

- [Proposed Master Calendar for 2021 Season and Beyond](#)
- [Open Season Length and Format](#)
- [Open National Cup Series](#)
- [Youth Series Timing, Length and Format](#)
- [Youth Speed Qualifying Trials](#)
- [Youth C and D Events and Formats](#)
- [Paraclimbing Season](#)
- [Collegiate Season](#)
- [Adult Recreational Series](#)
- [Youth Recreational Season/Series](#)
- [Rules Update](#)

### Introduction:

As you may recall, USA Climbing established a **Competition Task Force (CTF)** in May of this year whose purpose was to look globally at the sport of competition climbing and make strategic recommendations to the USA Climbing Board of Directors on youth development, competition season, competition format, and IFSC rules alignment. Objectives of the task force were to position and align USAC for inclusiveness, athlete well-being, growth, and international success.

Fifteen members across three task force sub-groups have been working on recommendation development in recent months. CTF members were intentionally selected to represent perspectives of all key stakeholder groups affected by recommendations, including athletes, parents, coaches, gym owners, competition coordinators, competition officials, route-setters, and volunteers.

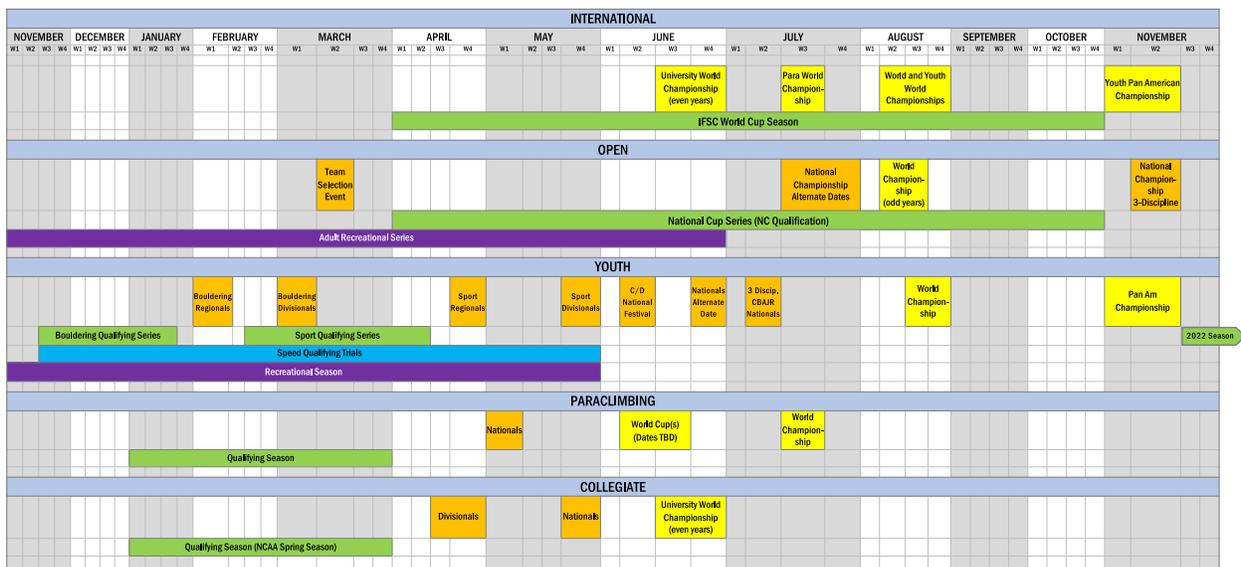
This communication serves as an update on the team's progress-to-date and preliminary recommendations. The CTF's final recommendations will be presented to the Board in February 2020 with an intent to implement recommendations for the 2021 competition season. The Realignment Task Force will then assess the recommendations to align the regions to meet the stated objectives.

Key inputs that have influenced and helped shape CTF recommendations include numerous emails that have been submitted to [Future@USAClimbing.org](mailto:Future@USAClimbing.org) (the email channel established for feedback after initial CTF progress was reported at the Youth Nationals Town Hall Meeting in July 2019), the Regional Coordinator community, input from US and international athletes via elite athletes on the CTF, feedback from USAC members and staff at regional and divisional events, and primary and secondary research on cross-sport and cross-federation approaches and youth development models.

## Proposed Master Calendar for 2021 (Nov 2020 – Nov 2021) Season and Beyond

As a major objective of the CTF was to drive alignment of US competition seasons and formats with international standards and across categories (e.g. between Youth and Open/Adult), the CTF has designed a high level “calendar” which provides one view across US climbing groups/categories and the International season. This calendar serves as a guideline with which to look at the competition season as a whole -- Exact dates for the season and competitions may vary slightly from those presented here. The CTF specifically addressed season length, season timing, and event formats based on the following Guiding Principles:

- To harmonize US seasons for Youth, Adult, and Paraclimbing with the International (IFSC) schedule
- To harmonize US seasons for Collegiate with the NCAA seasons
- To provide sufficient training periods without competition and sufficient rest periods for athletes
- To support developmentally appropriate competition approaches for young athletes, particularly in the Youth D category
- Identify opportunities for a recreational series for Youth and Open classes to provide life-long climbing opportunities



## Explanation of Key Calendar Changes

### Open Season Length and Format

The primary goals of the proposed changes to the Open Season are to better align it with IFSC season, provide more developmental opportunities for Open athletes not competing at IFSC level, and to provide ample opportunities for training without competition and for rest.

- The Open season will consist of a Team Selection Event, National Cup Series (described further below), and a National Championship

- The Open National Championship will be a three-discipline Championship event hosted in densely populated urban centers, featuring the sport's three disciplines for a broader audience.
- The Team Selection Event is a National level competition used to select members of the US National Teams (3 disciplines + overall). Eligible participants for the Team Selection Event will be determined by Open National Championship results.

### **Open National Cup Series**

The goal of the National Cup Series is to provide high-level, developmental opportunities for Open athletes, especially those not yet competing on the international stage. The Series will run in parallel with the IFSC World Cup season. Key recommendations for the Series are as follows:

- There will be four to six Cup events per year in the US with the potential for Cups in Canada and other Pan American countries
- Each Cup event may involve one, two, or all three climbing disciplines
- The objective is to include an equal number of events per discipline, e.g., three Boulder, Lead, and Speed events across a six-Cup season
- Cups will serve as qualifiers for Open Nationals and International Competitions

### **Youth Series Timing, Length and Format**

The changes proposed for the Youth series are aimed at reducing the overall length of the current season while still encouraging athletes to reach their full potential in each discipline. Additionally, the establishment of a Youth Speed Season is intended to elevate the discipline to equal footing with the Bouldering and Lead disciplines and to raise the overall level of Speed performance. Key recommendations include:

- Creation of a single, three-discipline National Championships for the C, B, A and JR categories
- Establishment of a 'qualifying season' for each discipline which replaces the existing "local" season; Qualifying events will be USA Climbing events (similar to Regional Championships) with set standards for formats, routesetters, judging, registration, and other elements fostering fair competition
- The qualifying season will qualify athletes for Regionals Championship events and will help USA Climbing address crowding issues at Regionals
- Non-qualifying (recreational) local events will still be encouraged (See Youth Recreational Series below).

### **Youth Speed Qualifying Trials**

The goals for the new Youth Speed season are to increase athlete participation and drive higher-level performance in Speed through season-long competition and objective performance requirements for Nationals qualification. Key recommendations for the season include:

- A Speed qualification season that will run for the entire length of the Bouldering and Lead seasons, providing as many opportunities as possible for athletes to participate in Speed Qualifying Trials

- Establishment of a Speed Qualifying Trial (SQT), which is a 'local' competition that can be run as either a standalone event or a component of a Bouldering or Lead local event
- USAC-established certification standards for 10m and 15m Speed walls. Sanctioned SQTs may only be held at facilities with a USAC-certified 10m or 15m Speed wall
- 10m and 15m minimum qualifying times (established by USAC on an annual basis) for each Youth category. In order to qualify for Youth Nationals in Speed, athletes must run the minimum qualifying time or better at an SQT.

### **Youth C and D Events and Formats**

Below is the proposed new approach for how climbers in the C and D categories will participate in USA Climbing competitions **beginning with the 2020-21 season**. These changes are intended to provide climbers in these age groups a more developmentally appropriate, fun, and collaborative competition experience, while continuing to measure and recognize individual achievement and prepare young climbers to compete at higher levels.

- C and D climbers will continue to compete at USAC-sanctioned locals, in either Qualifying Series events (for those hoping to earn a spot at Regionals) or the new Recreational level events (see below). . To compete at Regionals, competitors must meet the qualifying requirements established by USAC (still under development).
- Competition formats for the C and D categories at Regionals will change in the following ways:
  - **Bouldering:** Climbers will compete in a single-round, "Rotation Redpoint" format (*see details below*)
  - **Lead/Top-Rope:** Climbers will compete in a single-round, flash format on top-rope
  - **Speed:** Based on recent studies suggest climbers continue to use a non-standardized jug route that is set consistent with new height and other USAC guidelines designed to minimize the chance of injury to younger climbers, such as those we have seen too often caused by repeated, excessively dynamic movement
- The championship season for the D category will end at Regionals, with the top ten finishers at each Regional championship receiving an invitation to participate in the new, end-of-year national C/D Climbing Festival (*see details below*).
- C climbers can advance to Divisionals and Nationals as they currently do. At those events, they will compete in the same formats as the B, A, and JR categories, though in Lead/Top-Rope, they will continue to climb top-rope instead of lead, and in Speed, they will continue to have their own, non-standardized jug route.
- C climbers in each discipline who reach Divisionals but do not qualify for Nationals will receive an invitation to participate in the end-of-year national C/D Climbing Festival.

### **End-of-Year National C/D Climbing Festival**

The new National C/D Climbing Festival is designed to be a combined competition that includes all three disciplines and features learning/training sessions by leading coaches and routesetters, "mentoring" and/or demonstrations by pros or older youth climbers, and fun activities that foster connections amongst climbers from across the country.

- **Timing:** The Climbing Festival will be a single national event held on a weekend between Lead/Top-Rope Divisionals and C/B/A/JR Nationals.
- **Eligibility:** D competitors who earn a top-10 finish at Regionals and C competitors who competed at Divisionals are eligible to participate. C competitors earning invites to Nationals may choose to compete at either Nationals or the Climbing Festival, but not both.
- **Longer-Term Vision:** We hope that the Festival concept will expand to multiple, sub-national events around the country to reduce travel requirements and increase the total number of kids participating, including potentially those on a more recreational path.

Benefits of the new National C/D Climbing Festival include:

- Supports and is aligned with the creation of a sports development model for climbing
- Offers a fun and enriching event that integrates educational components for athletes, parents, and coaches
- Supports the goal of creating life-long climbers by strategically introducing young athletes to the physical and mental demands of competition in a developmentally appropriate way

### **New Format for C/D Bouldering Regionals - “Rotation Redpoint”**

The goal of the “Rotation Redpoint” format is to create a competitive experience in which individual climbing performance is assessed, scored, and recognized, while helping young climbers meet and collaborate with others in their region. This format also reduces the challenges of long isolation times for our youngest climbers.

- All competitors in a category are divided into cohorts of up to six climbers each. Cohorts could be selected to each include a spread of ability levels based on local competition rankings.
- Each cohort works a single problem before moving to the next, with each competitor having the standard 4-minute period on the wall, but also the ability to watch and talk through beta with their cohort-mates and coaches between attempts (but not while on the wall).
- The rotation order will change for each problem so that each climber experiences being the first climber on a problem at least once (ideally, an equal number of times).
- When all competitors in a cohort have completed their 4-minute sessions on a problem, there will be a built-in transition time as the cohorts (and their scorecards) rotate to their next problems.
- The rotations continue until all cohorts have completed their attempts on every problem. Depending on the numbers of competitors, competitors per cohort, and boulder problems, it is possible that multiple rounds of cohorts might be needed. These will be called “Cohort Rounds.”
- Competitors in each Cohort Round will be required to check-in at least one hour before their round begins climbing. They may not watch earlier Cohort Rounds.
- After warm-up and a rules meeting, cohorts will be taken to their starting problem, with one cohort assigned to each problem.

- Only competitors, judges, and certified coaches are permitted in the designated competition zone.
- To minimize confusion, it is expected that the C and D categories will not compete in this new format at the same time as the B/A/JR categories, who will continue to use the onsite format.
- OPTION: Each problem could have a video demonstration available for viewing by competitors in the warm-up area before their Cohort Round begins.
- OPTION: In addition to individual scores being calculated, cohort scores could also be calculated with awards given to the highest scoring cohorts.

[This timing grid example](#) lays out a scenario of 6 cohorts of 3 climbers each, with 6 problems, 4 minutes of climbing time per problem, and 1-minute cohort transition time between problems. In this scenario, a Cohort Round of 18 climbers can complete 6 problems in about 1 hour and 15 minutes. By comparison, our current onsite format would require 2 hours to accommodate those same 18 climbers across 6 problems with 30-second transition times.

Benefits of this new Rotation Redpoint format include:

- Significantly shorter and less stressful isolation times.
- Less total time per category, while maintaining the same amount of individual climbing time for competitors.
- A more collaborative, learning-oriented competition experience with beta sharing and coaching, while still rewarding individual climbing performance.
- No additional volunteers needed.
- Competition integrity as scorecards stay with the judges at all times.

## **Paralimbing Season**

Participation in Paralimbing Nationals has grown tremendously over the past few years and we anticipate that growth to continue. In order to foster continued participation and address the growing size of Paralimbing Nationals, we propose the creation of a 'local' season for paralimbing. A formal season will create opportunities for existing paralimbing athletes to gain more experience and lower the barrier to entry for new, interested athletes. The season will also serve as a qualifying series for Paralimbing Nationals when Nationals becomes too large to remain an open event. The exact timing, number, formats, and other details of the paralimbing local season are yet to be defined.

## **Collegiate Season**

USA Climbing is seeking NCAA sanctioning for climbing as an Emerging Sport and eventually a Sponsored/Varsity sport. As such, we are recommending changes to the Collegiate season in order to align better with NCAA requirements. Below are the key recommendations:

- The Collegiate season will run from January to June which aligns it with the NCAA definition of a spring sport
- In the short term, the existing Regional structure will be retained for the local competition season
- The existing Regional Championship competitions will be replaced with a smaller number of Divisional level championships (i.e., combining climbers from multiple

Regions to compete at a single Divisional championship to determine advancement to Nationals) in order to address host shortage issues and expose a greater number of Collegiate athletes to high level competition

- Longer term, we will consider geographic realignment of Regions/Divisions to align with NCAA conferences

### **Adult Recreational Series**

Details around the Adult Recreational Series are still being discussed, however the idea is to establish a Nationwide series for recreational climbers of all abilities from ages 18 and up.

### **Youth Recreational Season/Series**

The significant growth in the number of Youth climbers at local competitions is putting pressure on USA Climbing's ability to meet two distinct but equally important goals:

- To give newer climbers a positive, fun competitive experience
- To offer a fair and challenging environment for developing climbers to test their skills and attempt to earn a qualifying placement at Regionals

Currently, USAC attempts to achieve both goals at the same events ("local" comps). A potential solution to this challenge is to create a new type of USAC-sanctioned competition - called "Recreational" - targeting youth climbers who seek opportunities to be challenged outside of training and to participate in a group competitive experience, without the expectation (and stress) of qualifying to advance to higher levels of competition in a given year/season. This new Recreational series could be launched in the 2020-2021 season along with the other changes outlined above.

Below are the key elements of the Youth Recreational proposal:

- Participation in Youth Recreational competitions would be limited to youth climbers up to 17 years of age.
- Participants would be required to purchase a USAC recreational membership. This could include the existing Introductory membership or could involve the creation of a lower cost membership level.
- Recreational competitions would take place from November to May, in parallel with the new overall Youth Competitive Series competition year. One consideration will be whether Recreational comps will be required to match the discipline-specific seasons of the Youth Competitive Series or if they can offer any discipline at any time during the November to May period.
- Recreational comps could be stand-alone events or could be combined with Qualifying Series events (and/or Adult Recreational events) happening at the gym on the same day/weekend
- Gyms would be free to experiment with different formats and scoring approaches at Recreational comps in a way that creates a fun, collaborative, developmental, and appropriate experience for youth climbers not currently seeking (or ready for) the Youth Qualifying Series track.
- USA Climbing would only track whether members participated in Recreational comps, not how they placed.

Benefits of creating a Recreational level of competitions include:

- A fun, low-stress, development-focused, relatively inexpensive way for new climbers to get introduced to competition climbing
- Less-crowded Youth Qualifying Series competitions, with routesetting at a difficulty level geared to preparing those climbers for Regionals
- Potential for more revenue for gyms as they can attract more climbers to Recreational comps who might otherwise be intimidated by the setting and competitiveness at Youth Qualifying Series comps
- Opportunity for coaches to better focus their attention on differently skilled athletes at distinct events (vs. both competing at the same time).

## Rules Update

The IFSC-Competition-Rules subgroup has been meeting weekly to discuss and formulate recommendations that will provide guidance to the USA Climbing Rules Committee as they begin working on a new Rulebook for the 2021 season. Key recommendations are as follows:

- Align USA Climbing Rules More Closely with IFSC Rules
  - Conversion from USA Climbing nomenclature to IFSC (“Chief Judge” to “Jury President”, “Sport” to “Lead”, etc.).
  - Addition of a glossary of terms – IFSC rulebook already uses one
  - Identification of rules to be copied from IFSC and others that require adaptation and/or more explanation, as well as definition of the applicable level of competition (local, Regional, Divisional, National; Open/Youth/Collegiate, etc.).
  - Consideration to the challenges associated with IFSC rules potentially being inconsistent with the insurance and legal requirements that US-based gyms must follow.
  - Maintaining options for USAC to experiment with alternative rules and formats at non-championship events
  - Potential process for USAC to consider adoption of rule changes as they are made by IFSC
- Make Significant Changes to Speed Rules
  - For this current 2019-20 season, Speed competitors will need to do more than just participate at Divisionals to qualify for Nationals; Regionals would be Sport-only. Local Speed events could still take place.
  - Speed advancement to Nationals will be a combination of knock-out placement and best time.
  - For 2020-21, add Speed qualification events leading up to Divisionals, with a defined minimum qualification time to receive a “bye” to Nationals.
  - Create a certification process for Speed walls and Speed judges and Speed wall standards for National-level and Qualifier-level competitions.
  - Consideration be given for Speed auto belays to become required.