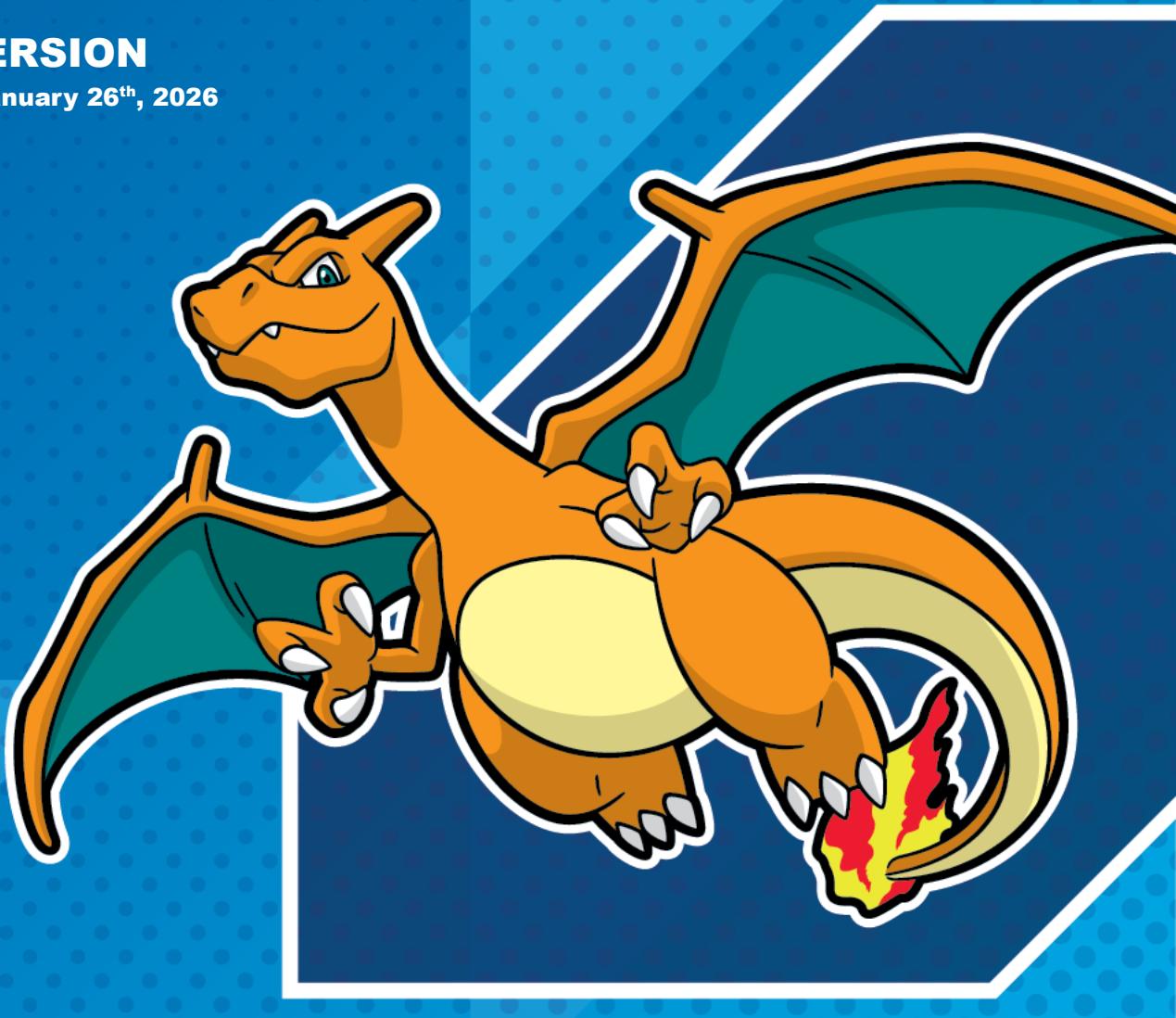




TCG Tournament Handbook

ENGLISH VERSION

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1 Introduction

Welcome to the Pokémon TCG Tournament Handbook. This is not a guide on how to learn to play the Pokémon TCG. This handbook is specifically about legalities, game management, tournament policies, and formats. By following all the rules and guidelines in this handbook, you will be ready to compete at all levels of Pokémon TCG play, from local events to our larger Championship Series events.

This handbook is required reading for all Pokémon TCG competitors and Pokémon TCG Judges.

1.1 Supporting Documentation

As part of using this handbook, it is highly recommended you read through the Pokémon TCG Rulebook, which outlines the base and advanced mechanics of the game.

It is also the responsibility of all Judges and competitors to familiarize themselves with the Tournament Rules Handbook and Standards of Conduct. Both of these resources outline expectations and procedures for tournament play and behavior at Play! Pokémon tournaments.

1.2 Competitor Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all competitors to follow the information outlined in this document and any supporting documentation. This information is reviewed on a quarterly basis, so we encourage you to check back regularly to ensure there have been no updates to the rules and guidelines outlined in this document and any supporting documentation.

Competitors are required to bring all the necessary implements to complete their match. Depending on the level of play and location, requirements may change (such as having to bring a deck list or providing one through an online client). Competitors are expected to follow posted instructions from the Tournament Organizers regarding the requirements of the tournament in which you compete.

If you have any questions regarding expectations at a tournament, reach out to the Tournament Organizer as soon as possible for more information. If you experience any violations of our rules, or if a tournament is not being run to the standards outlined in this handbook and the supporting documentation, we encourage you to open a ticket with us through our customer support portal.

2 Trading Card Legality

Only genuine Pokémon Trading Card Game cards may be used at Play! Pokémon events, unless issued a proxy card by a Judge or Organizer.

Competitors must ensure that all cards they wish to use during each tournament are:

- Legal for the format in which the tournament is held.
- The correct language with respect to the region in which the tournament is held.
 - Mixed language decks are allowed so long as the backs are consistent.
- Not marked or altered in any way.

2.1 Disallowed Cards

The card should be in much the same state as it was when obtained from its original Pokémon TCG product. A certain amount of wear is acceptable. However, the following types of cards may not be played at Play! Pokémon tournaments:

- Marked cards
 - A card is considered marked if some aspect of the card makes it possible to identify it without seeing its face, including scratches, tears, discoloration, bends, etc.
 - Japanese cards are considered ‘marked’ for the purpose of this section as their card backs are different than the card backs of all other Pokémon trading cards
- Cards that have undergone post-production alteration
 - Examples of alterations include autographs, artwork, or other such amendments to the surface of the card, not including any official stamps applied by TPCi (such as League-stamped promos, Staff cards, etc.).

2.2 Card Sleeves

Card sleeves must satisfy the same criteria as the cards themselves with regard to markings and wear. In addition, to be legal for tournament play, all card sleeves within each competitor’s deck must:

- Enclose a single card in its entirety;
- Be the same color/design, condition, size, and texture;
- Have all edges be a single solid color (i.e. artwork should not extend to the very edge of the sleeve);
- Be either a single solid color or an officially licensed Pokémon design;
 - **Note:** Officially licensed Pokémon designs that do not have a single solid color border are not allowed
- Not be reflective to the extent that the faces of cards may be clearly determined from looking at their surface.

Competitors may use inner sleeves or over sleeves provided that the above criteria remain satisfied and that this does not affect the competitor’s ability to shuffle their deck. A competitor’s opponent should also be able to reasonably shuffle the deck without assistance, unless otherwise requested.

Play! Pokémon strongly recommends the use of sleeves with an opaque back. Using clear sleeves or declining to use sleeves at all may expose imperfections on the back of the card itself, leading the cards to being considered marked (see Section 2.1 on Disallowed Cards).

2.3 Legal Languages

Pokémon Trading Card Game cards are available around the world in a variety of languages.

To ease the linguistic complexity of tournament interactions, Play! Pokémon limits which languages are legal for play at Championship Series events according to the rating zone in which that Championship Series event is held.

For all other tournaments and League sessions, the decision regarding which languages are legal for play is at the discretion of the Organizer or League staff.

2.3.1 Legal Languages for Championship Series Events, by Rating Zone

Rating Zone	Legal Languages
US and Canada	English
Latin America	English, Spanish
Europe	English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish
Oceania	English
Russia	English, Russian
Middle East and South Africa	English

2.3.2 Additional Legal Languages for Championship Series Events, by Region

Region	Additional Legal Languages
Canada	French
Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru	Portuguese
Puerto Rico	English, Spanish

2.3.3 Exceptions

For the Pokémon TCG World Championships, International Championships, Regional and Special Championships, and for side events held at these events, regardless of which country they are hosted in, competitors are always permitted to use English cards as well as cards in any language that is legal in the competitor's home country.

While alternate languages are allowed at all Regional Championships and above, interpretation teams are only guaranteed at the Pokémon World Championships. Competitors should not expect interpretation resources outside of card language translations at any other Championship Series event.

In exceptional circumstances, the Head Judge or Organizer of any tournament may also choose to make an exception to rules regarding the legal languages. This is at their sole discretion and should only be considered where there would be no operational detriment to the tournament in doing so.

Competitors who believe their personal circumstances would make it difficult for them to fully comply with rules regarding legal card languages should make every effort to contact the event Organizer prior to the event itself.

2.4 Proxies

If a card becomes damaged during a tournament in such a way that results in the card becoming marked, a Judge may create a proxy of that card to act as the damaged card in all ways for the remainder of the tournament. This is the only situation in which a “non-genuine” Pokémon card may be used during tournament play.

Alternately, if the competitor has another copy of that card that is available for use, the competitor can simply replace the damaged card with an undamaged copy.

In some cases, a card is damaged due to a production error. Competitors should do their best to avoid playing with these cards, though sometimes that is not possible. If the Head Judge feels that this creates a marked-card situation, the Judge may create a proxy card to act as the damaged card in all ways for the remainder of the tournament.

In all cases, the damaged card must be retained to use as a reference when the proxy card is played.

Proxies may not be used at Play! Pokémon tournaments for any other reason and should be treated as any other counterfeit card if discovered.

3 Deck Legality

3.1 Deck Registration

All Play! Pokémon Championship Series events require that participants complete a deck list detailing the exact contents of the deck they wish to use during the tournament.

These deck lists can later be used by Organizers and Judges to verify that a deck has not been altered since the outset of a tournament, so competitors should take care to ensure the clarity and accuracy of their deck lists.

Depending on the level of play, competitors may be required to bring a legible deck list with them, or they must submit a deck list via an online client during registration for an event prior to the start of Round 1. Competitors are responsible for following any posted information regarding deck lists. Failing to follow proper deck-list procedures for an event can result in the appropriate penalties.

3.2 Deck Checks

Deck checks are required to be performed at all Championship Series events. Play! Pokémon expects that deck checks will be performed on at least 10% of decks but recommends that tournament staff strive to complete as many as is reasonable without loss of quality or disruption of tournament proceedings.

Deck checks may happen at any time during a tournament, from registration through the final round. Although competitors may be required to put the cards in their decks in the same order as the cards on their deck lists, they should not assume this and should always await direction from tournament staff before reordering their deck.

During a deck check, tournament staff will check the following:

- The list is complete and legible.
- The deck described is legal for tournament play.
- The contents of the deck match the list exactly.
- The cards and sleeves are free of features that could cause them to be classified as marked.

3.3 Open Deck Lists

Open deck lists may be used for certain Championship Series events held at Regionals and above. Open deck lists will be announced at the time of registration for events where they will be used. During asymmetrical top cut, Masters Division players will have time to review their opponent's deck list (**Deck List Preview**) while setting up at the beginning of their match.

3.3.1 Deck List Preview

Competitors will be provided a printed copy of their own deck list. This list includes all the cards present in their deck. This list must be provided to the competitor's opponent at the start of the match. Deck lists should be exchanged and reviewed while players randomize their decks for the first game of the match. This preview, and all actions taken to set up for the first game, must be completed within the two minutes outlined for game start in section 7.4.5 of the TCG Tournament Handbook.

Players may **not** take notes while reviewing their opponent's deck list. If a competitor does not understand or recognize a card on their opponent's deck list, they should call a Judge immediately for assistance.

Deck lists must be returned to each deck's owner and put away before either player draws their opening hand. Deck lists can only be reviewed at the start of a match. They must remain put away until the match concludes and the match slip is completed.

4 Constructed Tournament Formats

The deck construction rules for Constructed formats are as follows:

- The deck must contain exactly 60 cards.
- Decks may not contain more than 4 copies of a single card, as defined by the card's English language translation, except for Basic Energy cards.
- Matches are played for 6 Prize cards.

Play! Pokémon allows the use of three Constructed formats for its sanctioned tournaments, all of which are detailed below.

4.1 Standard Format & Expanded Format

4.1.1 Legal Expansions

Legal Regulation Marks			
Legality Date	Regulation Mark	Standard	Expanded
April 14, 2023	G	✓	✓
April 5, 2024	H	✓	✓
April 11, 2025	I	✓	✓

Expanded Format Regulation Marks			
Legality Date	Regulation Mark	Standard	Expanded
	D		✓
	E		✓
	F		✓

Expanded Format Black & White Series Expansions			
Legality Date	Set Name	Standard	Expanded
	<i>Black & White</i>		✓
	<i>Emerging Powers</i>		✓
	<i>Noble Victories</i>		✓
	<i>Next Destinies</i>		✓
	<i>Dark Explorers</i>		✓
	<i>Dragon Vault</i>		✓
	<i>Dragons Exalted</i>		✓
	<i>Boundaries Crossed</i>		✓
	<i>Plasma Storm</i>		✓
	<i>Plasma Freeze</i>		✓
	<i>Plasma Blast</i>		✓
	<i>Legendary Treasures</i>		✓

Expanded Format XY Series Expansions			
Legality Date	Set Name	Standard	Expanded
	<i>Kalos Starter Set</i>		✓
	<i>XY</i>		✓
	<i>Flashfire</i>		✓
	<i>Furious Fists</i>		✓
	<i>Phantom Forces</i>		✓
	<i>Primal Clash</i>		✓
	<i>Double Crisis</i>		✓
	<i>Roaring Skies</i>		✓
	<i>Ancient Origins</i>		✓
	<i>BREAKthrough</i>		✓
	<i>BREAKpoint</i>		✓
	<i>Generations</i>		✓
	<i>Fates Collide</i>		✓
	<i>Steam Siege</i>		✓
	<i>Evolutions</i>		✓

Expanded Format Sun & Moon Series Expansions			
Legality Date	Set Name	Standard	Expanded
	<i>Sun & Moon</i>		✓
	<i>Guardians Rising</i>		✓
	<i>Burning Shadows</i>		✓
	<i>Shining Legends</i>		✓
	<i>Crimson Invasion</i>		✓
	<i>Ultra Prism</i>		✓
	<i>Forbidden Light</i>		✓
	<i>Celestial Storm</i>		✓
	<i>Lost Thunder</i>		✓
	<i>Team Up</i>		✓
	<i>Dragon Majesty</i>		✓
	<i>Unbroken Bonds</i>		✓
	<i>Unified Minds</i>		✓
	<i>Hidden Fates</i>		✓
	<i>Cosmic Eclipse</i>		✓

Additional Releases			
Product Name	Standard	Expanded	
McDonald's Collection 2011–2021		✓	
<i>Black & White Trainer Kit</i>		✓	
<i>XY Trainer Kit</i>		✓	
<i>XY Trainer Kit—Bisharp & Wigglytuff</i>		✓	

<i>XY Trainer Kit—Latias & Latios</i>	✓
<i>XY Trainer Kit—Pikachu Libre & Suicune</i>	✓
<i>Sun & Moon Trainer Kit—Lycanroc & Alolan Raichu</i>	✓
<i>Sun & Moon Trainer Kit—Alolan Sandslash & Alolan Ninetales</i>	✓
<i>Detective Pikachu</i>	✓

“Black Star” Promo Cards			
Prefix	Numbered	Standard	Expanded
BW	01 and higher		✓
XY	01 and higher		✓
SM	158 and higher		✓

4.1.2 Release & Legality Schedule

Expansions are expected to be released on a regular schedule, averaging six new expansions per calendar year. Newly released cards will become legal on the second Friday following that product or expansion’s US market release date.

The release and subsequent tournament legal date for promo cards can be confirmed by visiting [the Pokémon TCG Promo Card Legality Status page](#), which is updated monthly.

4.1.3 Reprinted Cards in the Standard & Expanded Formats

Cards that have previously existed in the format are occasionally reprinted in newer expansions. In these cases, the older version of the card may be played if:

- The name of the new card is identical to that of the older card;
- All text printed on the new card is functionally identical to that of the older card.

In addition, provided it meets the criteria above, a newer version of a card that is currently playable in the Standard or Expanded format may be played immediately in that format upon its release.

Consider the following examples when determining whether any two cards are functionally identical:

- Copycat (CES, 127) and Copycat (TRR, 83) are functionally identical. Although the wording has been altered, the effect described remains unchanged.

Rainbow Energy (CES, 151) and Rainbow Energy (TR, 17) are not functionally identical, as the former “put[s] 1 damage counter” while the latter “does 10 damage”—damage counters and damage are separate mechanics in the Pokémon TCG and cannot be referenced interchangeably.

4.1.4 Banned Cards

The list of cards banned in tournament play can be found [here](#).

Tournament results and community feedback will continue to be analyzed to maintain a healthy play environment. In particular, the Expanded format will be aggressively monitored because there are so many cards and potential combinations available to use.

4.2 Unlimited Format

Unlimited decks may contain cards from any Pokémon Trading Card Game expansions and promotional cards that have been released in the United States.

4.2.1 Release & Legality Schedule

Cards from each new expansion will become legal on the second Friday following that expansion's US market release date. Expansions are expected to be released on a regular schedule, averaging six new expansions per calendar year.

Promo cards such as those found in Pokémon TCG Boxes and Collections will be legal on either the first or third Friday following the expansion's US market release date. This tournament legal date is consistent worldwide and can be confirmed by visiting the Pokémon TCG Promo Card Legality Status page, which is updated monthly.

4.2.2 Reprinted Cards in the Unlimited Format

As there is no restriction on the number of expansions legal for play in the Unlimited format, competitors will occasionally come across Trainer cards from older expansions that have the same name as newer cards but completely different effects.

Competitors may still include those older versions of the card in their decks, provided that the wording of the most recent version is used wherever that card is concerned.

4.2.3 Banned Cards

There are currently no banned cards in the Unlimited format.

5 Limited Tournament Formats

The deck construction rules for Limited formats are as follows:

- The deck must contain exactly 40 cards.
- There is no limit to the number of cards with the same name that can be included, provided there is no restriction detailed in the card text itself.
- Matches are played for 4 Prize cards.

Play! Pokémon allows the use of three Limited formats for its sanctioned tournaments, all of which are detailed below.

5.1 Sealed

In a Sealed event, competitors receive either a Build & Battle Box or a predetermined number of booster packs (usually between four and six) from the Organizer at the beginning of the event.

5.1.1 Deck Construction

Competitors open their booster packs at a signal from the Organizer and construct a 40-card deck using only those cards (including any cards in their Build & Battle Box) and any Basic Energy cards provided by the Organizer.

Competitors have 30 minutes to construct their decks.

5.2 Booster Draft

In a Booster Draft event, competitors receive booster packs from the Organizer at the beginning of the event (recommended four to six boosters per competitor). Competitors split into equal-sized groups, which should not exceed eight competitors per group, and are seated in a circle.

5.2.1 Drafting Process

At a signal from the Organizer, each competitor opens one booster pack without revealing its contents to the other competitors. Each competitor then selects one card from their booster pack and lays it face down in front of them.

Once a card has been placed in a competitor's stack, it is considered selected and cannot be returned to the pack in exchange for another card. Competitors then pass the remaining cards, face down, to the person on their left. The cards selected by each competitor should remain private knowledge during the drafting process.

Each competitor continues to select one card from among the cards handed to them until all the cards have been selected. This process repeats for each remaining booster pack, with the passing pattern alternating from left to right as each new pack is opened.

5.2.2 Deck Construction

After all the booster packs have been opened and all the cards have been selected, each competitor constructs a 40-card deck using only the cards they selected, and any Basic Energy cards provided by the Organizer.

Competitors have 30 minutes to construct their decks.

5.3 Build & Battle Draft

In a Build & Battle Draft event, each competitor receives a Build & Battle Box from the Organizer at the beginning of the event. Competitors split into groups of four and are seated in a circle.

At a signal from the Organizer, each competitor opens their 40-card Build & Battle deck first, without revealing its contents to the other competitors. Competitors can take a few minutes to look through these cards, which can be used to build their deck at the end. When they're finished, the competitors will put these cards back into their Build & Battle Box.

5.3.1 Drafting Process

When everyone is ready, the Organizer will signal the competitors to begin drafting. Each competitor opens one booster pack without revealing its contents to the other competitors. Each competitor then selects one card from their booster pack and puts it into their box, along with the Pokémon TCG Live code card and the non-foil Basic Energy card.

Once a card has been placed in a competitor's box, it is considered selected and cannot be returned to the pack in exchange for another card. Competitors then pass the remaining cards, face down, to the person on their left. The cards selected by each competitor should remain private knowledge during the drafting process.

Each competitor continues to select one card from among the cards handed to them until all the cards have been selected. After all cards from a booster pack have been taken, competitors will have one minute to review the cards they have so far. This process repeats for each remaining booster pack, with the passing pattern alternating from left to right as each new pack is opened.

5.3.2 Deck Construction

After all the booster packs have been opened and all the cards have been selected, each competitor constructs a 40-card deck using only the cards in their box and any Basic Energy cards provided by the Organizer.

Competitors have 20 minutes to construct their decks.

6 Gameplay Management

6.1 Game Area Management

The Game Area is the space that competitors utilize during their match. It is each competitor's responsibility to keep the space clear and easily utilized for the match in progress.

So long as there is no hinderance to the match, competitors are permitted to have good luck charms or objects in the play space but must keep the space neat for both competitors. No food or drinks are permitted on the play table.

6.1.1 The Play Area

Cards in play should be managed in such a way that they are organized, neat, and easy for opponents and Judges to interpret.

Cards that are placed into the play area from the hand without the effect of another card, Ability, or effect are considered played at the point the competitor physically releases the card from their hand. This additionally applies to cards chosen as part of the effects of an Ability, previously played card, or other game effect. If a competitor does not wish to play a card, they should not place it into the play area. The boundaries of the play area are defined according to the image overleaf.



A: Each deck should be oriented in a north/south direction, with the short sides of the cards facing each competitor. Card sleeve openings should face the opponent.

B: Each competitor may have only one discard pile, though certain cards in the discard pile may be rotated slightly to make them more visible.

C: Prize cards must be spaced out in a way that ensures that both competitors and the tournament staff can see at a glance how many Prize cards each competitor has remaining. Prize cards must be on the opposite side of the play space from that competitor's deck and discard pile.

D: Keep all Energy cards aligned in the same direction under the Pokémon in play, and make sure each card is kept visible.

E: Make sure Benched Pokémons are separated enough from each other and from the Active Pokémons so that it is clear which Pokémons have cards attached to them. If you have a card that would extend your Benched Pokémons area, place the cards underneath your current bench with the same separation.

F: Put Stadium cards between both competitors' Active Pokémons so that the card is visible to all competitors.

6.1.2 The Lost Zone

A competitor's Lost Zone should be located directly above their Prize cards and should be neatly stacked to ensure that it does not interfere with any other cards in play.

6.1.3 Randomizers

Competitors are permitted to use two types of randomizers during a Pokémon TCG match: coins or dice. Competitors are always permitted to use their opponent's randomizer.

6.1.3.1 Coins

Coins can be obtained from preconstructed theme decks, Trainer Kits, and other special Pokémon TCG products.

Competitors should consider the following when choosing to use a coin as a randomizer:

- When flipped, a coin should be held at shoulder height and fully rotate at least three times before landing on the table.
- Coins should land as flat on the table as possible.
- If both competitors cannot agree on the result of the flip, a Judge may be called to determine whether the result is conclusive or if the coin must be flipped again.
 - Once a Judge has ruled that a result is conclusive, it cannot be redone.
- Coin flips that land outside the play area are considered invalid and must be flipped again.
 - Everything contained inside the blue and white mat shown in Image A is the play area for your game.

Any coin released with any official Pokémon product from EX Ruby & Sapphire on should be considered fair and impartial.

6.1.3.2 Dice

Dice can be obtained from Pokémon TCG Elite Trainer Boxes. Any six-sided die is permitted for use as a randomizer, so long as the die is a cube, where each side has the same surface area.

Competitors should consider the following when choosing to use a die as a randomizer:

- Dice used as randomizers must be transparent or translucent.
- Dice must have well-rounded corners to ensure that they roll on the playing surface.

- Dice should be of an appropriate size so that the result can easily be understood by both the competitors and the Judges.
 - This includes size and lettering or numbering on the die.
- One side may have custom-precision etching in place of the 1 or the 6 as long as all custom dice being used by that competitor have the same side customized and both competitors approve the use of the die.
- The numbers or pips on the opposite sides of the die must add up to 7 (i.e., 1 must be opposite 6). A custom-etched side uses the number replaced when determining if the opposite sides add up to 7.
- Even numbers (2, 4, 6) on the dice should be treated as heads. Odd numbers (1, 3, 5) should be treated as tails.

6.2 Shuffling & Deck Randomization

Each competitor's deck is expected to be fully randomized at the start of each game and during the game, as card effects require. Randomization must be done in the presence of the competitor's opponent and must be done in a reasonable amount of time. Care should also be taken to ensure that the cards in the deck are not harmed or revealed during the shuffle.

Once the deck is shuffled, it must be offered to the competitor's opponent to be cut once. Cutting the deck consists of creating two separate stacks of cards by removing a portion of the top of the deck, and then placing it under the remaining portion. Competitors should take care to not reveal any of their opponent's cards while cutting.

Instead of cutting, the opponent may choose to shuffle the deck. This shuffle should be brief, and when it concludes, the deck's owner may cut the deck once as described above. Cutting into more than two stacks is considered a shuffle.

6.2.1 Judge Intervention

If either competitor does not feel that either deck is sufficiently randomized immediately following a shuffle, or if a competitor prefers not to offer their deck to an opponent for randomization, a Judge must be called over to shuffle the deck(s) in question. No competitor may shuffle or cut after the Judge's shuffle.

6.2.2 Insufficient Randomization

Insufficiently randomizing the deck is a rules violation that may carry a penalty. It is therefore in the interest of each competitor to become comfortable with a shuffling technique that is both quick and thorough.

6.3 Game Information & Communication

Information in a Pokémon TCG game must be communicated clearly and understood by all competitors during a game. In tournament play, this is evaluated at three different levels: Public, Inferred, and Private.

6.3.1 Public Information

Public information is game information that all competitors have the right to access to during the match without being tampered with or obscured by their opponent. If a competitor is ever refused a request for public information as outlined below, they should call a Judge and explain the issue. Public information consists of:

- Details of game actions or past game actions that occurred this turn or still affect the current game state.
- Number of cards in a competitor's hand or deck.
- Cards revealed to validate game actions taken this turn.
- The name and text of any card in play.
- The number of damage counters and condition markers on a given Pokémon and any Special Conditions that Pokémon currently has.
- The number of Prize cards a competitor has remaining.
- Usage of once-per-turn (Energy attachment, Supporter played, Stadium played, retreat, etc.) or once-per-game (GX attack, VSTAR Power, etc.) game actions.
- The current state (attached to, in play since that competitor's last turn, Ability used, Basic/evolved, etc.) or zone (discard pile, Bench, Active Spot, Lost Zone, etc.) of any card.
- The game score of the current match.

6.3.2 Inferred Information

Inferred Information is any information that competitors have the right to access but is not the responsibility of their opponent to provide. Inferred Information consists of:

- The characteristics of all objects in play not defined as public information.
- Pokémon TCG Rulebook rules, Tournament Rules Handbook rules and policies, and localized card text of any card in play or revealed during the course of a match (cards are considered to have their localized text on them).

6.3.3 Private Information

Private Information is any information that only the competitor themselves should have access to during the course of a game. Private information consists of:

- Any information not defined as public or inferred information is considered private information, such as:
 - The names or text of any unrevealed cards in your hand.
 - The current content of a competitor's deck.

6.3.4 Effective Game Communication

During the course of a game, competitors are expected to communicate effectively. They are to do so by:

- Communicating any game actions or changes to public information as they occur during a game. If competitors notice a mistake within any communicated public information, they are expected to call it out as soon as it is noticed.
 - Should this action result in a gameplay error, a Judge should be called immediately (see the Penalty Guidelines, section 5.5.1).
- Representing public and inferred information correctly.
 - Purposely miscommunicating to confuse an opponent can be considered unsporting behavior and a procedural error, which will result in a penalty (see the Penalty Guidelines, section 5.1 and 5.3).
- Answering questions asked of them by a Judge about any information completely and honestly, regardless of the type of information requested. To protect inferred or private information, competitors may request to answer these questions away from their game.
 - Purposely stalling or misusing the ability to answer questions away from a game in progress can be considered a pace of play issue and gameplay error (see the Penalty Guidelines, section 5.6 and 5.7).

7 Tournament Play

7.1 Match

A Pokémon TCG match begins when the time allotted for play begins to count down. The match ends when both competitors have agreed upon the result and signed the accompanying match slip.

7.2 Game

A Pokémon TCG game begins at the time the competitor who will take the first turn is determined.

In best-of-three match play, after a game has been completed, the loser of that game decides who goes first in the next game instead of determining it by a coin flip. This decision is made at the same point during setup that the coin flip would take place.

The game ends when any single competitor achieves the number of win conditions required to be declared the winner.

In best-of-three match play, a game may also end:

- If any single competitor loses two games. In this scenario, their opponent will be declared the winner.
- If each competitor has already lost a game and then receives simultaneous Game Loss penalties:
 - In Swiss formats/rounds, this match will be recorded as a tie.
 - In single elimination or in a match that requires a winner, the competitors must then play a tiebreaker game to determine the winner.

7.3 Turn

A turn in the Pokémon TCG begins when the active competitor draws a card into their hand as their first action. The turn ends when the active competitor completes a valid attack, indicates that their opponent may proceed to the turn that follows, or completes any other action that carries the stipulation that the end of that competitor's turn must immediately follow (for example, Steven's Resolve, CES 145).

7.4 Beginning the Game

7.4.1 Mulligans

If either competitor has no Basic Pokémons in their opening hand, that competitor must take a mulligan.

The opposing competitor may draw a card for each extra mulligan their opponent took. For example, if both competitors took 2 mulligans, and then Competitor A took 3 additional mulligans, Competitor B may draw up to 3 cards. These cards may be drawn only once Competitor A has placed an Active Pokémon, and Competitor B must announce how many cards they will draw before doing so.

If any of those cards are Basic Pokémons, they may be put onto the Bench. The Active Pokémon must remain unchanged.

7.4.2 Judge-Enforced Progression

On extremely rare occasions, a situation may occur where one competitor is unable to draw a Basic Pokémon despite completing an unprecedented number of mulligans—for example, this may occur if that competitor has a very low number of Basic Pokémons in their deck.

In the interest of preserving a lively tempo of play, the following process may be initiated by the Head Judge once any one competitor has completed 8 mulligans without drawing a Basic Pokémon:

1. Shuffle the competitor's deck.
2. Reveal cards from the top of the competitor's deck until a Basic Pokémon is found.
 - a. Place that Basic Pokémon aside.
3. Shuffle the competitor's deck once more.
4. The competitor then draws 6 cards from the top of their deck.
 - a. Add the previously revealed Basic Pokémon to create a hand of 7 cards.
5. Indicate that the game may now proceed as normal.
 - a. A time extension should be issued for the time taken to complete this process.

7.4.3 Game Resolution

Once time is called, games still in progress do not end immediately. Instead, they go into the end-of-round process.

The end-of-round process functions as follows:

- When the round start is called, the timer begins counting down from the communicated allotted time to 0.
- Time is called when the timer hits 0, which triggers overtime.
- Competitors have 15 additional minutes from when the timer hits 0 to complete an additional three turns (+3 turns).
- When the timer reaches 15 additional minutes, the round ends.

A new timer is not started. Overtime begins for everyone simultaneously. Everyone will have the allotted time for the round, plus an additional 15-minute period that begins as soon as time is called. The round ends for everyone when the timer reaches 15 additional minutes.

If time is called during Pokémon Checkup, there is no currently active competitor. When the next competitor begins their turn, that will be considered the first of the +3 turns.

Depending on the format of the tournament, it may or may not be necessary for each game within a match to resolve with a declared winner. For example, single-elimination tournaments require each game to have a winner, as only one competitor from each match may advance to the next round. However, Swiss tournaments have no such requirement, and games may remain unresolved while the match is recorded as a tie. For more information on match resolutions, see section 7.4.4 below.

The following practices are used to help games resolve when they remain incomplete after time is called, +3 turns have elapsed, and the tournament format demands that a winner must be declared.

7.4.3.1 Tiebreaker Games

If time elapses on an incomplete game that requires a winner, if both competitors take their last Prize card (or Knock Out their opponent's last Pokémon) at the same time, or both competitors simultaneously receive their second Game Loss in a single-elimination match, and no other win conditions have been met, competitors must determine the winner of that game by engaging in a tiebreaker game.

The competitors should set up as though they were playing a normal game, including setting up 6 Prize cards and flipping a coin to decide who goes first. The winner of the tiebreaker game is the first competitor to gain a Prize card advantage over their opponent or to win the game outright by any other method.

When time is called, a tiebreaker game should end after +3 turns. If a tiebreaker game is unresolved at this time, the game (1, 2, or 3 of the match) remains incomplete.

7.4.3.2 Resolving a Game That Cannot Otherwise Reach a Natural End

On extremely rare occasions, competitors may encounter a situation in which it is impossible for a game to reach a natural conclusion without outside assistance—for example, when it is impossible for either competitor's deck to take any further Prize cards.

In these cases, the following process may be initiated by the Head Judge:

1. The match time must have elapsed, +3 turns have been completed, and the Head Judge must be satisfied:

- a. That the loop entered is infinite and unbreakable by either competitor;
 - b. That the intention of both competitors is to avoid their own loss and not simply to prolong the game by not advancing the game state;
 - c. That continuing play without a concession from either competitor would result in a game without end.
2. From the point at which this decision is made, the Head Judge informs both competitors of their observation. A further +1 turn will then be played, with the current turn being Turn 0.
 3. If the game remains unresolved after this point, the competitors must play a tiebreaker game to determine the winner of that unresolved game.*
 4. If the Head Judge observes the situation to repeat during the tiebreaker game, then the game is resolved as follows.
 - a. From the point at which this decision is made, the Head Judge informs both competitors of their observation. A further +1 turn will then be played, with the current turn being Turn 0.
 - b. After this point, the competitor who was seeded highest in Swiss rounds will be declared the winner of that game.

** If the Head Judge determines that the loop will inevitably reoccur during any tiebreaker game played, they should forgo this step and proceed immediately to step 4b.*

7.4.4 Match Resolution

7.4.4.1 Tardiness Clause

To prevent delays to the tournament, competitors are expected to present themselves for play in a timely manner. The Tardiness Clause serves as the primary tiebreaker for any match that remains unresolved after time has been called and is applied in addition to any penalties a competitor may earn for their absence from a match in progress.

If one competitor was late to the match or was away from the match without a Judge's permission at any time during the round, that competitor loses the match immediately after time is called and the allowed +3 turns have elapsed.

7.4.4.2 Swiss Tournament Rounds

These results should be applied only if no single competitor satisfies the Tardiness Clause

Tournament Type: Swiss Rounds	Match Type: Single Game
Time Called	Match Result
During game 1	Tie

Tournament Type: Swiss Rounds	Match Type: Best of Three
Time Called	Match Result
During game 1	Tie
Between games 1 & 2	Winner of game 1 wins the match
During game 2	Winner of game 1 wins the match
Between games 2 & 3	Tie
During game 3	Tie

7.4.4.3 Single-Elimination Tournament Rounds

Matches during single-elimination tournaments may not result in a tie, and so additional tiebreaker criteria are used to determine the outcome of a match.

Should neither competitor satisfy the tiebreaker—both competitors have the same number of Prize cards remaining, for example—the game must continue until one competitor either satisfies this tiebreaker or wins the game outright, whichever occurs first.

These results should be applied only if no single competitor satisfies the Tardiness Clause.

Tournament Type: Single Elimination	Match Type: Single Game
Time Called	Match Result
During game 1	Competitor with the fewest Prize cards remaining wins the match

Tournament Type: Single Elimination	Match Type: Best of Three
Time Called	Match Result
During game 1	Competitor with the fewest Prize Cards remaining wins the match
Between games 1 & 2	Winner of game 1 wins the match
During game 2	Winner of game 1 wins the match
Between games 2 & 3	Winner of tiebreaker game wins the match
During game 3	Competitor with the fewest Prize Cards remaining wins the match

7.4.5 Tempo of Play

The pace of a Pokémon TCG match should be lively without being excessively fast, and each competitor should receive approximately half of the allotted time for the game.

Play! Pokémon has set forth the below guidelines by which to assess whether a game action is completed in a reasonable time frame.

Game Action	Suggested Reasonable Time
Shuffle and set, game start	2 min
Shuffling and deck search, first of game	45 sec
Shuffling and deck search, mid-game	15 sec
Perform the actions of a card attack	15 sec
Consider game position before playing a card	10 sec
Starting the turn after opponent's "end of turn" announcement	5 sec

Competitors attempting to compartmentalize their turn in order to consistently use every second of the time allowed for these actions will be subject to penalties associated with stalling.

7.4.6 Note-Taking

Competitors may take written notes during a match and may refer to those notes at any time during that match. Competitors may choose not to share these notes with other competitors, but a Judge may ask to see a competitor's notes and request an explanation if needed.

A competitor's note sheet must be completely free of text, handwritten or otherwise, at the start of each match.

Competitors must be timely with their note-taking and may not use a device that can send or receive messages as a note-taking device. A competitor may not refer to notes taken during previous rounds while the tournament is still in progress. Written notes taken during a match may not be given to other competitors during the tournament.

Because a Judge may ask to see a competitor's notes while a match is in progress, the use of codes, ciphers, abbreviations, or any other method of obscuring the meaning of the information is not permitted. Additionally, notes taken by a competitor may not contain misinformation intended to deceive tournament staff. Should a Judge request clarification, or a translation for notes written in a language not spoken by tournament staff, the competitor must oblige.

7.4.6.1 Turn Trackers

Please note that turn trackers are not considered a pre-written aid (TRH 3.2.1) and may be used during tournament play; however, competitors are responsible for turn tracker use, and any gameplay error infractions that occur from misuse can result in a corresponding penalty.

8 Rules Violations & Penalties

Whether intentional or not, errors and infractions are made during a tournament. While we may not be excited to give a penalty, it is everyone's responsibility to protect the integrity of each game, match, and tournament. It may

be required that members of tournament staff (Judges and Organizers) take corrective action regarding base infractions and their effects on a match's game state.

For detailed information regarding penalties, application, and deviations from standard penalties, please see the Play! Pokémon Penalty guidelines.

Information present here is a brief overview, and information in the Penalty Guidelines supersedes the information present in this handbook.

8.1 Penalties

Currently, Play! Pokémon utilizes the following penalties across our tournaments:

1. **Caution:** The most basic of assigned penalties; this is verbal and not reported to Play! Pokémon.
2. **Warning:** A reported penalty that denotes a minor penalty; similar to Caution.
3. **Double Prize Card Penalty (Pokémon TCG Only):** A competitor needs to take two less Prize cards to win their game.
4. **Quadruple Prize Card Penalty (Pokémon TCG Only):** A competitor needs to take four less Prize cards to win their game.
5. **Game Loss:** Applied when a mistake severely impacts the integrity of the game state. The game is recorded as a loss for the competitor receiving the penalty. In extreme cases where significant errors have been made by both competitors in a game, a Game Loss penalty may be issued to both competitors simultaneously.
6. **Match Loss:** More severe than a Game Loss, applied when an action impacts the integrity of the entire match. The match immediately ends and is recorded as a loss for the offending competitor. In extreme cases where significant errors have been made by both competitors in a match, a Match Loss penalty may be issued to both competitors simultaneously.
7. **Disqualification:** The most severe penalty applied when a competitor's actions significantly and negatively impact the integrity of the entire event. The offending competitor's match ends immediately, they are removed from the tournament standings and become ineligible to receive prizes. This can result in removal from the event.

8.2 Delivering Penalties

Whenever a penalty is assessed and delivered, that delivery should include the following:

- An explanation of how the competitor's actions are not allowed.
- Explanation of the base infraction and severity of that infraction to the competitor.
 - Cite the specific section or category for the base infraction.
- How the assessed penalty will impact the competitor's tournament.
- A reminder that the competitor may appeal this or any other penalty to the Head Judge.

Judges should also treat information pertaining to penalties with sensitivity to prevent potential embarrassment to competitors involved. For this reason, and because Judges may lack complete information regarding penalties

they were not involved in, Judges should refrain from commenting publicly on penalties in which they were not directly involved.

Should a Judge use a specific situation for training purposes, the issue should be sufficiently anonymized.

8.3 Reporting

Play! Pokémon tracks each competitor's penalty history to differentiate intentional repetition of infractions from unintentional occurrences and to determine if disciplinary action is necessary.

It is the Organizer's responsibility to provide Tournament Penalty Summaries to the Play! Pokémon program within seven (7) days of the event concluding. An example document can be found at the end of the Play! Pokémon Penalty Guidelines.

For any disqualification, the Head Judge is responsible for providing a Disqualification Report. These reports must be provided to the Play! Pokémon program within seven (7) days of the event concluding. Select "Disqualification Report" from the relevant drop-down menu in the Play! Pokémon customer service portal.

9 Summary of Changes

Date of previous issue: November 20, 2025

Date of current issue: January 26, 2026

1 Introduction		
Section	Page #	Change

2 Trading Card Legality		
Section	Page #	Change

3 Deck Legality		
Section	Page #	Change

4 Constructed Tournament Formats		
Section	Page #	Change

5 Limited Tournament Formats		
Section	Page #	Change
5.3.1	13	Updated Pokémon TCG Online to Pokémon TCG Live

6 Gameplay Management		
Section	Page #	Change

7 Tournament Play		
Section	Page #	Change
7.4.3	19-20	Clarified end-of-round process
7.4.3	19-20	Updated to +3 turns end-of-round structure
7.4.3.1	20	Changed to state: <i>If time elapses on an incomplete game that requires a winner, if both competitors take their last Prize card (or Knock Out their opponent's last Pokémon) at the same time, or both competitors simultaneously receive their second Game Loss in a single-elimination</i>

		<i>match, and no other win conditions have been met, competitors must determine the winner of that game by engaging in a tiebreaker game.</i>
7.4.3.1	20	Updated to +3 turns end-of-round structure
7.4.3.2	21	Updated to +3 turns end-of-round structure
7.4.4.1	22	Updated to +3 turns end-of-round structure
7.4.5	23	Added: <i>Shuffling and deck search, first of game – 45 sec to Tempo of Play table</i>
7.4.6.1	23	New section: <i>Please note that turn trackers are not considered a pre-written aid (TRH 3.2.1) and may be used during tournament play; however, competitors are responsible for turn tracker use, and any gameplay error infractions that occur from misuse can result in a corresponding penalty</i>

8 Rules Violations and Penalties		
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