

# USTA SOUTHERN

## Q&A Regarding 2024 USTA Southern Mixed Doubles Changes

Announcement: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/ustaassets/assets/701/15/2024\\_mixed\\_announcement.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/ustaassets/assets/701/15/2024_mixed_announcement.pdf)

### **Question: Why is the decline in Mixed Doubles league participation considered a big drop?**

Our Southern Adult League Committee (“ALC”), which is comprised of volunteers from every Southern state, commonly uses league participation as a factor when discussing potential changes within our league program. The 12% drop is a big decrease when comparing Mixed Doubles to similar doubles-specific league programs. Examples of this include Tri-Level (83% increase) and Combo Doubles (49% increase), which have seen tremendous growth over the past decade. Instead of showing reasonable increases in league participation over the years, Mixed Doubles has declined, as Southern lost many players in the Mixed Doubles program in the last decade. Our goal is to continue a program that emphasizes competitiveness and fair play with our current Mixed Doubles league players, new players and returning players.

### **Question: Won't this limit my playing opportunities? How does this increase participation?**

There is still ample opportunity for players to compete on multiple Mixed Doubles league teams throughout the year. USTA Southern will still continue to host the Mixed Doubles 18 & Over and Mixed Doubles 40 & Over Sectional championships. There is currently a Mixed Doubles 55 & Over Sectional Invitational, and some states also have a Mixed Doubles 65 & Over state program. As players can play “up” one level (similar to the Adult League program), players can continue to play on as many Mixed Doubles teams as eligible. For example, a 45-year-old 3.5 player could still participate on Mixed 18 & Over 3.5 and 4.0 teams and Mixed 40 & Over 3.5 and 4.0 teams.

We realize that there will be players and teams that are impacted by the change, so we understand that there are some challenges for teams, and participation numbers may decrease initially. However, we hope that we will see the program eventually thrive again in the next 3-5 years as our program adjusts to the changes. In making decisions for the Southern Adult League programs, the Southern ALC considers a significant amount of information, including regulations, data, player feedback through annual player surveys, local league coordinator input, discussions with the local and state organizations and additional feedback from players who attend our League Championships. Regulation proposals are reviewed with the assistance of Southern’s nine District League Coordinators. After consideration of all of the information, both the ALC and nine District League Coordinators considered and voted on this Mixed Doubles change, which was passed by both groups overwhelmingly. In approving these changes, the ALC had a long-term growth goal in mind.

### **Question: Why are ratings calculations relevant to this change? What does dynamic disqualification mean regarding Mixed Doubles? Is this new?**

Currently, only our Adult 18 & Over, Adult 40 & Over and Adult 55 & Over league programs take part in the “daily dynamic” process, which computes a new match calculation after every match played. Per National Regulation 2.04B, if a self-rated and/or appealed player is shown to be out of his/her current NTRP threshold (known to some as a “strike”), that player is dynamically disqualified and must cease play immediately and move to the next higher NTRP level.

Starting in 2024, our understanding from USTA National is that self-rated, appealed and/or Mixed-exclusive-rated players will also be subject to the “daily dynamic” process during Mixed Doubles league play. This means that under the current format, with players who are as much as one point apart, more players are likely to be “dynamically disqualified.” The use of “straight levels” means that players will be closer in NTRP level, which will result in more accurate ratings and less disqualifications.

## **Question: What do you mean by “fair-based play?” How will this help with NTRP complaints?**

The goal is for each player to compete against opponents of similar skill level. Complaints from players (through annual surveys and feedback) have consistently been that the “combined” levels are not fair or accurate combinations (e.g., a 3.0 self-rated player whose level is closer to a 3.5 or 4.0 player combines with a 4.0 player in the 7.0 combined level). Because Mixed Doubles consists of large numbers of self-rated and Mixed-exclusive-rated players, the “straight” levels will help alleviate this problem, since players would not have the option of choosing a rating simply to play with a higher-rated partner (and vice versa). The majority of our NTRP Grievances and lapsed player feedback arise from this type of scenario in the Mixed Doubles League.

## **Question: Won’t this make us not competitive at nationals?**

No. We have seen responses that other sections will have an advantage. This is not supported by any facts or data. We currently have the same format set-up for our Adult 55 & Over league programs. (Southern is the only section that uses “straight” levels through the 55 & Over Sectional championship, but all other sections use “combined” levels, which is also used at the National League Championships.) Southern is very competitive each year in the Adult 55 & Over National League Championships. For example, at the 2022 Adult 55 & Over Nationals, Southern’s “straight” level teams took home the winning trophy for the 6.0 women and 7.0 women, were finalists in the 8.0 men’s division and took 3<sup>rd</sup> place for 7.0 men.

Although the National League Championships is a great accomplishment for any team, the number of Southern Mixed Doubles players who attend a National Mixed Doubles League Championship represents approximately only .35% of our player base, and our Southern ALC is committed to making the best decisions for all of our players.

## **Question: Has Southern received feedback after the changes were announced?**

Southern certainly reads messages that players send regarding our league programs and/or changes. In most instances, Southern typically goes through our State and Local Coordinators to disseminate messaging to our players, but we believed that this was an announcement that we should post in many places to increase communication. We understand that some players have negative comments about the change, but we have also received positive comments from players who are excited about the new format. We encourage feedback, but we ask for respectful feedback and conversations.

## **Question: Is this a final decision?**

The planned structure for the 2024 Southern Mixed Doubles program has been reviewed and approved by the Southern ALC. The notification was created to communicate those planned changes to USTA Southern League players. However, the final regulation will be reviewed by the Southern ALC and published in Fall 2023. Although there may be tweaks to the planned structure, there are no plans to revert to our current “combined” NTRP levels in 2024. USTA Southern will ensure that our players are surveyed at year-end 2024 to evaluate the program and consider feedback and suggestions as appropriate.

## **Question: Who do I contact for questions?**

Please contact your Local League Coordinator for questions relating to scheduling and/or local regulations. For questions relating to the structure of the 2024 Mixed Doubles League program, please contact your State and Section League Coordinator.