

Horse Nations Indian Relay Council 2026 Rules

1. Actions or Conduct Resulting in Disqualification and Forfeiture of Prize Money

The following actions or behaviors will result in immediate disqualification from the event and forfeiture of all prize money:

- a. Any team member found to be intoxicated or under the influence of alcohol or drugs while on racetrack grounds.
 - b. Striking, hitting, abusing, or physically harming another team's horse or rider.
 - c. Intentionally using a horse to block another team's horse or rider from entering their assigned exchange area.
 - d. Entering, cutting through, or running a horse through another team's exchange area, as determined by the judges.
 - e. Harassment, arguing, fighting, threatening, intimidating, or abusive behavior directed toward judges, track officials, starters, workers, event staff, contestants, or spectators will not be tolerated.
 - f. If interference occurs, the team responsible for the interference may be disqualified at the discretion of the judges. Example: catchers or team members outside their assigned box attempting to deter, distract, or spook horses.
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2. Horse Welfare

- a. Horses showing signs of lameness, illness, injury, exhaustion, or unsafe conditions may be removed from competition at the discretion of HNIRC officials or judges.
 - b. Abuse, excessive whipping, mistreatment, or neglect of horses will not be tolerated and may result in disqualification and removal from the event grounds.
 - c. HNIRC reserves the right to require veterinary evaluation of any horse at any time during the event.
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3. Tribal and Team Identity

- a. Team members must provide a Tribal ID or proof of Native American descent.
 - b. Riders are required to wear traditional tribal attire.
 - c. Team members must wear matching attire and colors that clearly identify them as a team.
 - d. Ball caps are not permitted by riders. Any non-related tribal or commercial logos on footwear must be covered.
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4. Riders, Dismounts, Exchanges & Bareback Riding

- a. Riders must fully dismount and touch the ground with both feet before mounting the next horse.
 - b. Only one rider per team is allowed per race.
 - c. All horses must be ridden bareback.
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5. Horses

- a. Three horses will be allowed per race.
 - b. No horse substitutions will be permitted once the race has started.
 - c. Any loose horse interfering with another team during the race may result in disqualification at the discretion of the judges.
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6. Riders

- a. If a rider falls from their horse, maintains control of the horse, and is able to remount, no disqualification will occur.
 - b. The use of twitches, neck ropes, stud chains, lead ropes, or any similar devices will result in disqualification from the entire race. (*Men's Relay*)
 - c. Team members are prohibited from jumping on, sitting on, or riding horses once the team has entered the track, except for the designated rider during competition.
 - d. Indian Relay riders may only compete for the team they were registered with at entry. Riders will not be allowed to ride for another team during the event.
 - e. In the event a rider is injured and unable to compete, the Team Captain must provide a qualified replacement rider who is not registered on another team.
 - f. The use of fences, walls, rails, or any outside assistance to mount a horse is prohibited and will result in disqualification.
 - g. Delaying the start of the race by a rider remaining mounted after a judge's warning may result in disqualification.
 - h. Outside assistance or contact with horses by individuals outside the registered team, including grabbing tails or handling horses, after a judge's warning may result in disqualification.
 - i. Catchers and team members must remain within their assigned exchange box while catching horses.
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7. Starting Line, Standing Start & Horn

- a. Riders must report to the starting line on time or will be disqualified.

- b. All races will begin with riders standing on the ground, except for Women's Relay and Junior Relay events, which will have mounted starts.
 - c. All races will begin with the sound of a horn.
 - d. No team will be allowed more than two false starts. Test jumping or schooling horses at the starting line is prohibited.
 - e. Teams will be assigned an exchange box by draw and must operate only from their assigned box.
 - f. Men's Relay races will consist of three laps with two exchanges.
 - g. Women's Relay and Junior Relay races will consist of two laps with one exchange and a mounted start.
 - h. If a judge determines a horse is unruly at the starting line and is causing excessive delay or disruption to other horses or riders, the team may be required to start behind the other teams. The judge will issue a verbal warning and place the team "on the clock." The team will have 30 seconds from the verbal warning to settle the horse before being disqualified.
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8. Judges' Decisions & Team Inquiries

(Each exchange box will have an assigned judge)

- a. All judges' decisions are final.
 - b. One judge will be assigned to each exchange box.
 - c. Any rider or team inquiry must be directed to the assigned box judge before the race is declared official.
 - d. Once a race has been declared official, the results may not be contested. Judges do not have the authority to overturn the official order of finish once the race has been finalized.
 - e. If interference occurs, the team responsible for the interference may be disqualified at the discretion of the judges. Example: catchers or team members outside their assigned box attempting to deter, distract, or spook horses.
 - f. Judges may review only official HNIRC video footage when making race determinations or reviewing inquiries.
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9. Entries, Draws & Qualification for the Championship Race

- a. The event will consist of qualifying heats, followed by consolation races and the Championship Race on Championship Day.
- b. Heat draws will be conducted the evening before the race unless otherwise announced. Championship Day heat draws will take place immediately following the final race on Saturday.
- c. On Sunday, teams with the fastest combined times from Friday and Saturday will advance to the Championship Race. Remaining teams will compete in consolation races.

- d. Race positions and heat assignments will be determined from fastest to slowest qualifying times within each heat.
 - e. In the event of a tie, tied teams will participate in a draw to determine position or heat assignment.
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10. Collecting Prizes

- a. Only a pre-designated team member or the registered owner of the team may collect prize money.
 - b. A completed W-9 form and valid photo identification are required prior to the start of competition.
 - c. Participation in this event constitutes permission for HNIRC to use participants' names, photographs, and likenesses for promotional purposes without additional notice or compensation.
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11. Signed Waivers & Team Conduct

- a. All team members must have a signed waiver on file prior to competition. It is strongly recommended that waivers be completed for any individual who may participate as part of the team.
 - b. If a team replaces a member during the event, the replacement member must have a signed waiver submitted before competing. Failure to do so will result in team disqualification.
 - c. All youth team members must have a parent or legal guardian signature on their waiver.
 - d. Unsportsmanlike conduct, disrespectful behavior, abusive actions, or the use of vulgar language by team members may result in disqualification at the discretion of event officials.
 - e. Team owners and managers are responsible for the conduct of all individuals associated with their team and may be held accountable for violations of event rules or conduct policies.
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12. Safety

- a. All participants, team members, and support personnel must remain aware of their surroundings at all times. The safety of contestants, livestock, race workers, officials, and spectators is the highest priority of HNIRC.
- b. Participants must follow all instructions given by judges, race officials, announcers, gate personnel, medical staff, and event personnel. Failure to comply may result in disqualification or removal from the event grounds.
- c. Unsafe, reckless, abusive, or dangerous behavior toward horses or individuals will not be tolerated and may result in immediate disqualification.
- d. Only authorized personnel and registered team members will be allowed in designated competition and exchange areas during races.

- e. HNIRC reserves the right to remove any rider, horse, team member, or participant deemed unsafe or unfit to compete.
 - f. In the event of an emergency, all participants and team members must immediately follow directions from event officials and emergency personnel.
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13. Men's Relay –

All participants ages 17 and under must have a signed waiver completed by a parent or legal guardian prior to competition.

- a. Each team will compete with three (3) horses.
 - b. Each team will consist of four (4) members:
 - One (1) rider
 - One (1) mugger
 - Two (2) holders
 - c. All races will have a standing start.
 - d. No team member may touch or assist the rider during the start or exchanges.
 - e. Teams must wear matching tribal regalia that clearly identifies them as a team.
 - f. Teams must participate in three (3) accredited HNIRC races to qualify.
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14. Women's Relay (18 & Over)

Participants under 18 years must have a signed waiver completed by a parent or legal guardian prior to competition.

- a. Each team will compete with two (2) horses.
- b. Each team will consist of three (3) members:
 - One (1) rider
 - One (1) mugger
 - One (1) holder
- c. All races will have a mounted start.
- d. Riders may receive assistance at the starting line only.
- e. Riders may use a knee to assist during exchanges. Neck ropes are optional.
- f. Teams must wear matching tribal regalia that clearly identifies them as a team.
- g. Teams must participate in two (2) accredited HNIRC race meets to qualify.

15. Junior Relay (Ages 13–15)

(Age as of May 31 prior to the season opener. Proof of age is required.)

An adult responsible for the team must sign all required waivers prior to competition.

- a. Each team will compete with two (2) horses.
- b. Each team will consist of three (3) members:
 - One (1) rider
 - One (1) mugger
 - One (1) holder
- c. All races will have a mounted start.
- d. Riders may receive assistance at the starting line only.
- e. An adult mugger and exchange holder are preferred.
- f. Riders may use a knee to assist during exchanges. Neck ropes are optional.
- g. Teams must wear matching tribal regalia that clearly identifies them as a team.
- h. Teams must participate in two (2) accredited HNIRC race meets to qualify.

16. Youth Relay (Ages 10–12)

(Age as of May 31 prior to the season opener. Proof of age is required an adult responsible for the team must sign all required waivers prior to competition)

- a. Each team will compete with three (3) ponies sized 49”–54” (approximately 12.2–13.2 hands).
- b. Each team will consist of four (4) members:
 - One (1) rider
 - One (1) mugger
 - Two (2) holders
- c. All races will have a standing start.
- d. Riders may receive assistance at the starting line.
- e. Riders may use a knee to assist during exchanges. Neck ropes are optional.
- f. Teams must wear matching tribal regalia that clearly identifies them as a team.
- g. Teams must participate in two (2) accredited HNIRC race meets to qualify.
- h. Riders will be evaluated by judges at check-in to determine appropriate size suitability for their ponies.
- i. All ponies will be tagged at check-in. Any substitute ponies must also be tagged and approved prior to competition.

17. Kid Relay (Ages 7–9)

(Age as of May 31 prior to the season opener. Proof of age is required by an adult responsible for the team must sign all required waivers prior to competition)

- a. Each team will compete with three (3) ponies sized 40”–48” (approximately 10–12 hands).
- b. Each team will consist of four (4) members:
 - One (1) rider
 - One (1) mugger
 - Two (2) holders
- c. All races will have a standing start.
- d. Riders may receive assistance at the starting line only.
- e. Riders may use a knee to assist during exchanges. Neck ropes are optional.
- f. Teams must wear matching tribal regalia that clearly identifies them as a team.
- g. Teams must participate in two (2) accredited HNIRC race meets to qualify.
- h. Riders will be evaluated by judges at check-in to determine appropriate size suitability for their ponies.
- i. All ponies will be tagged at check-in. Any substitute ponies must also be tagged and approved prior to competition.