



2026 US Nationals General Briefing Notes

1. Staff Introductions

a. Sam Parks	Championship Director
b. Maury Sullivan	Deputy Director
c. Jim Cusick	Steward
d. Mark MacSkimming	Safety Officer
e. Don Day	Chief Meteorologist
f. Duncan Dunavent	Assistant Meteorologist
g. Robert Wise	Weather Assistant (Pibals)
h. JC Smith	Chief Scoring Officer
i. Patty Cramer	Chief Measurer
j. Mike Johnson	Landowner Relations (308-765-3493)

2. Jury Introductions

a. Mike Gilligan	On-Site Jury President
b. Debbie Speath	Off-Site Jury Member
c. Gary Britton	Off-Site Jury Member

3. Announcements

- a. Make sure you have updated your Balloon Live App to the latest version, which is 3024

4. Sportsmanship

Respect, civility and grace will be provided to each Competitor and their crew, please respond in kind. Unsportsmanlike behavior will not be tolerated

5. Common Launch areas

There are currently four (4) Common Launch Areas, others may be added if permission is granted by the property owner. You have permission to launch/land at all official Common Launch Areas. No further permission is needed.

6. Scoring Inquiries

For measurement questions, please contact Chief Measurer Patty Cramer (740-502-0677), for scoring inquiries, contact JC Smith (269-317-2768)

For safety issues, please contact Safety Officer Mark MacSkimming (717-805-8400)

For any other inquiry, contact Steward Jim Cusick (614-204-3982)

7. 2026 Rookies

The following Pilots are eligible for 2026 US Nationals Rookie of the Year

- a. Jennifer Brimley
- b. Chris Garcia
- c. Michael Stone
- d. Patrick Sullivan

8. Flight Report Forms

Submitting a Flight Report Form is required for each flight. Please submit using WMF

9. Pilot Briefings

All pilot briefings will be held at the Gering Civic Center. The address is 1050 M Street, Gering, Nebraska 69341.

Doors will open at 5:00 am and briefings will start at 5:15 am. (times are approximate)
The flight will go live when the doors are opened.

Flights will go "live" on WMF approximately fifteen minutes prior to flight briefings
Intended for 05:00 / 18:00

10. Propane Refueling

All propane refueling will be at Legacy Coop. The address is 401 S. Beltline Highway W, Scottsbluff, NE 69361

The Propane Manager is Alex Closson, if you are going to be late, please call him at 308-225-3462

If you plan to fly the Sunday morning practice flight, the cash price will be \$40.00

11. FAA

Designated Flight Crew

If you plan to have someone else in the basket during the US Nationals, please make sure they sign the Designated Flight Crew Form

Review Operations Manual and FAA CoW and Special Provisions

Review WhatsApp groups and need to sign up.

12. Landowner Relations

Positive landowner relations are vital to the continuance of competitive balloon events. There is an ongoing effort by all involved persons prior to, during and after a competitive event to maintain good landowner relations for the event. Additionally, as per rule 9.2.2, pilots must obtain permission to launch from private property; and per rules 10.5,6 and 7, minimize disturbing landowners. Each pilot must get their own permission when several balloons are launching from one property.

Public areas such as parks, schools, squares, industrial areas and appropriately sized road shoulders/nature strips are considered as places without need for permission for take-offs or landings so long as no damage is done and traffic is not obstructed. Church property may also be used in this manner as long as no basket or retrieve vehicle is on grassy areas. This data is subject to change. Changes to Landowner's Permission will be posted on the Official Notice Board and written supplements may be distributed at briefings, if necessary, should changes occur.

Provide the property owners contact information on the Flight Report Form.

Mike Johnson is the Landowner Relations Manager; he can be reached at 308-765-3493

13. Briefing Area WIFI

Pilots have access to an open WIFI at the Gering Civic Center.

14. Competition Rules

a. II.13 Location of Official Notice Board (5.3.3)

The Official Notice Board will be hosted online at Watchmefly.net. Any posting to the Official Notice Board will be accompanied by a pilot notification via email prior to the start of the competition or WhatsApp group text after the start of the competition.

b. II.10 Recall Procedure (10.15)

WhatsApp group texting will be used throughout the event. Make sure that you and your crew chief have scanned the QR code on the Official Notice Board to sign up for messages.

c. II.2 Out of Bounds (7.2)

All red and blue PZ's are considered out of bounds airspaces for scoring purposes. PZ infringement, ground contact and other penalties will be applied

d. II.3 PZ List (II.9, 7.3)

The details of the Prohibited Zones will be printed on the Official Competition Map. Written supplements may be distributed at briefings, if necessary, should changes occur.

The Blue PZ is **10,000' MSL**

All red road PZ's will have an altitude of **4,300' MSL** at the road center line and extend 300' from the center line

e. **II.23 2D/3D Scoring Altitude**

The separation altitude between 2D and 3D scoring is **5,000' MSL**

f. **II.25 Map Coordinates**

To Identify a point on the Competition Map, the coordinates must be written in the following format:

4-4 format: this format uses two times four digits. First four digits easting and the second four digits northing. (e.g. 2976/0388), leaving out the 1m digit (1-meter digit is 0).

g. **II.18 DETAILS FOR THE USE OF GPS-LOGGERS (See Chapter 6)**

Please review (d) Handling by competitor:

Start/Stop Flight Scoring Policy – do not drive looking for launch site with logger on and don't drive after landing with logger on

h. **8.2.2 VALID TASK**

The Director has the authority to cancel task(s) for safety reasons and for reasons out of control of the director at any time before official task scores are published.

i. **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION BY ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION TOOLS (COH 2.4.9)**

- For individual launch areas and as a further possibility for common launch area, electronic communication tools may be used to publish additional or revised information to competitors.
- At a common launch area competitors will be informed of the change by a method defined in the general briefing.
- Safety related announcements (cancellations, danger warnings) can be made at any time using electronic communication tools. (8.2.2)
- Minor amendments to task data can be made, provided the electronic communication is made at least 20 minutes before the start of the launch period at ILPs and at least 10 minutes before the start of the launch period at CLAs.

j. Retrieve Crew shall not be within any MMA or within 100m of a target except with permission and in the presence of an official. (3.10.1)

k. All Vehicles used to aid the retrieval of a balloon shall be marked with the competition number. (3.10.2)

Retrieve Vehicles shall not be parked within any MMA or within 100m of a goal/target set by the Director or selected by the competitor. (3.10.3)

l. Target not displayed (R12.4)

A target is intended to be displayed within 100m of a goal coordinate on the task data sheet. If no target is displayed within 100m, the competitor should aim for the coordinates and make an electronic mark.

Per the question from a pilot during the Practice Flight on 8/9, in the event this happens to one goal of a HWZ task, how we will proceed will be determined by the timing and other circumstances of the task. However, we will NOT introduce hybrid scoring where an electronic mark could supersede a physical marker. In the event the task cannot be scored appropriately due to unforeseen circumstances, the task may be cancelled under rule 8.2.2

m. Vertical Speed (rule II.11)

Please review the vertical speed limits and associated penalties in section II.11. Flight tracks will be reviewed for each flight. Warnings may only be considered where indicated in the penalty table.

n. Common Launch Areas.

Quick Releases must be used when inflating in the Common Launch Area (9.3.2).

Not more than one vehicle per balloon may be present in the Common Launch Area (9.4.1).

o. Logger Handling Issues

Logger handling warnings/penalties for starting a flight early or stopping a flight late will generally only be issued where a competitor is driving with an active flight. While the rules allow for a penalty after 10 minutes (per section II 17 d), we want to prioritize safe handling of your equipment. This is not consistent with what you may see at International event where the 10-minute limit is followed. Every effort should be made to start your flight 5-10 minutes before launch and stop your flight 5-10 minutes after landing.

p. Inappropriate Declarations

In the event a declaration does not follow the requirements outlined on the task data sheet, here is the process outlined in the rules and COH to resolve that declaration.

1. If the declaration meets the criteria for an inappropriate but unambiguous declaration (rule 7.8), the task will be scored to the intended goal coordinate with up to a 100-point penalty. The most common example of

this application is the inverting of the easting and northing coordinates. Additional examples are in the COH penalty guide.

2. If the declaration is appropriate, except for not meeting a relative distance requirement (such as a distance or altitude difference between declaration point and declared goal), the declaration will be scored (rule 12.3.7) with the appropriate distance infringement penalty (rule 13.3.6).
3. If the appropriate declaration is not resolved in steps 1 or 2, it will be deemed invalid. This also includes any declarations violating absolute boundaries for time or position (rule 12.3.6, 12.3.7). If a prior valid declaration exists, a competitor will be scored to that declaration (section II 12.2, II 18e). Otherwise, the task will be scored as a no result (rule 12.3.8)

Questions and requests from Pilots during the General Briefing.

#1 Request to Eliminate the Red Road PZ's on the Competition Map.

Director's Response.

Reduced the Red Road PZ's on the competition map from 4,300' MSL to 4,100' MSL.

#2 Request to Allow goals selected by the competitor to be within 200 meters of a power line, motorway, or railway. (Section II.12)

Director's Response.

I have reviewed the rule under II.12 that stipulates that a competitor's declared goal may not be within 200m horizontally of a motorway, power line or railway. While this rule was important in the days of observers and physical markers, this creates an unnecessary burden on competitors and officials given the electronic capabilities for the pilot declared goals.

Under Rule 8.5.2, the rules of section II can be modified without further approval. As such I am amending rule II.12 to read as follows:

II.12 Goals Selected by a competitor (12.2), Goal Center (12.1)

Goals defined by coordinates:

To identify a goal on the competition map, the competitor must declare it by coordinates to be written in eight-digit format (first four digits west/east and the second four digits south/north. Easting then Northing) or one of the formats as defined in II.25.

Altitudes do not need to be declared unless otherwise stated in the TDS.

Altitudes must be indicated with the minimum needed digits.

No goal may be selected with 200m horizontally of:

- No goals may be selected in blue or red PZ's
- ~~A motorway or a road designated to be a motorway status~~
- ~~A power line and railway shown on the competition map~~

#3 Discrepancy in Altitudes section of the Operations Manual

Director's Response:

Found a typo in section "b" of the Altitudes section of the Operations Manual. Changed the number "800 feet" to "1,000 feet" to match the "Minimum Altitude Diagram" chart in the same section.

#4 Question about making a mistake and declaring a goal below ground level.

Director's Response:

Clarified that any declaration below 4,000' MSL would be considered an invalid declaration.