



2025-26 USA Climbing Youth Speed Guide

Updated: September 13, 2026

Overview

The Speed discipline for the U20, U19, and U17 categories involves competitors climbing a standardized route of specialized holds while harnessed into an auto-belay system, striving to reach the top of the route as fast as they can. The length of the route is either 10 or 15 meters tall. The U15 Category Speed routes do not have the same nationally standardized route requirements in terms of the type of holds, their placement, or the length of the route. USA Climbing maintains an [unofficial list of commercial gyms with Speed walls](#).

All Speed competitors are timed from the moment of the computerized starting “beep” until the moment that they touch the finishing pad at the top of the route. If a climber false starts or falls before reaching the finish pad, they do not receive a time for that attempt. More details on the rules for the Speed discipline can be found in the [USA Climbing Rulebook](#).

The Youth Speed Qualification Series operates differently from Boulder and Lead/Top Rope in several ways.

- Qualification Speed Trials (QSTs) are the equivalent of Qualification Events (QEs) in Boulder and Lead/Top Rope. QSTs are held at facilities that have the walls, holds, belay systems, and timing systems necessary to comply with USA Climbing’s certification standards.
- QSTs can be held from October 4 to June 7, so there may be QSTs that take place after the completion of the Boulder or Lead/Top Rope QEs. In addition, **an athlete may compete at and achieve a qualifying time at any QST in the country; it does not need to be located in their home Region or Division.** You can find dates and locations of QSTs by viewing the [All-Region QST Calendar](#).
- Official qualifying times recorded at any National-level, IFSC or Pan American Speed event after the completion of the prior year’s Youth National Championships (e.g., Youth Worlds, Elite National Championship, National Team Trials, North America Cup Series, and Collegiate National Championship) will also be considered for Youth Speed National Championship eligibility (Rulebook Section 12.11.3).
- Most Speed QSTs will only be open to athletes in the U20, U19, and U17 Categories on a standard speed wall. U15 Category athletes can compete on both the standard and Alternative Fields of Play. Therefore, Speed QSTs may include U15 competitors. **New for the 2025-2026 Season:** U13 athletes may only participate in a Speed QST, but only on the USA Climbing Official U15 speed route. There are no USAC-sanctioned Speed competitions for U11 Category athletes.
- The goals for those competing at QSTs are to train and improve their Speed climbing skills in a competition environment and, for U20, U19, and U17 athletes, to achieve a qualifying time that meets or beats the national benchmark time established by USA Climbing for their age/gender Category. Those benchmark times are listed later in this document.
- Eligibility for U20, U19, and U17 athletes to compete in the Speed discipline at the Youth National Championship is based on whether they achieve the relevant benchmark time on at least one of their runs at a QST, IFSC, or National-level Speed event. Their rank order finish at the event does not impact their eligibility. For example, an athlete could hypothetically finish first in their Category at a QST but not

achieve the benchmark time (and therefore not earn eligibility for Nationals), OR alternatively an athlete could finish last at a QST and successfully achieve the benchmark time and be eligible for Nationals.

- All U15 competitors (with the necessary active membership) are eligible for the Youth Speed National Championship. U15 competitors do not need to meet a benchmark time or complete an interest form to be invited to register for Speed at Youth Nationals. U13 competitors are not eligible to participate in Speed at Youth Nationals and do not have benchmark times.

Competition Format

At a minimum, a QST consists of a single Qualification Round, which provides each competitor with two runs. A race (untimed practice, qualification, or final) can include competitors from different categories. Unlike Boulder or Lead/Top Rope QEs, the format for a QST is highly flexible and may include any combination of the following. You will find information about the format on the Info Sheet.

- **Untimed Practice Period** - This set block of time will give competitors a chance for unstructured warm up. The runs will be untimed and not count towards achieving benchmarks.
- **Qualification Round(s)** - This consists of 2 runs for each competitor (one in each lane). Competitors are paired according to a randomly generated starting list and run head to head. This provides two opportunities to achieve a benchmark time. A QST may include multiple qualification rounds.
- **Alternative Speed Starting Order Qualification Round** - This is like a Qualification Round, but without a specified Starting Order. Competitors present themselves at the speed wall during the designated time, published on the official competition schedule or announced during the Technical Meeting. Competitors shall be allowed to have up to one (1) race on each route (A and B), racing against another competitor, a “rabbit,” or racing alone.
- **Semi-Final Round** - This consists of 2 runs for each competitor (one in each lane) using a start list based on the best times from the qualification round(s).
- **Knockout Final** - In a Knockout Final, the two, four or eight competitors are then matched up in a standard single elimination bracket, run as a series of head-to-head races, with the fastest climber from the Qualification Round paired with the slowest climber, etc., and the winner of each race advances to the next stage. When you lose a race or false start, you do not move forward.
- **Timed Open Period** - A Timed Open Period allows for climbers to do timed runs up the wall, singularly or in pairs. There is no start list, no set number of runs, and no requirement to change lanes. Basically, there is a wall and a means to record an official time.
- **Speed Training Clinic** - A QST event may include a “training clinic,” perhaps with a presentation and/or demonstration by a top-level speed climber. Speed clinics do not count towards achieving benchmarks.

Timer

Most QSTs are run using an automated timing system that has a series of audible tones to start the climbers, monitors for false starts, and displays the climbers' time when they touch the finish pad. In cases where a gym does not have an automated timing system, a QST may use volunteers to record times with manually operated stopwatches, with at least two timers per lane and the average of the times calculated as the recorded time.

False Start

In the event a climber false starts, they cannot re-run that race. However, any valid times recorded in previous races will still count towards Nationals eligibility, and the climber may still compete in subsequent races at the QST (i.e., they can still compete in the Final Round if their time in other Qualification run is fast enough).

- In the Untimed Practice Period, if one competitor has a false start, the other should continue climbing.
- In a non-knockout round if a competitor makes a false start, both competitors should stop climbing. The run is over for the competitor with the false start, but the other competitor can re-run the race.
- A false start does not erase any previous or subsequent Valid Time.
- In other words, if you False Start you only forfeit that race.

Notable Details

- Climbers are given a minimum of five minutes rest between their two runs.
- Climbers from multiple categories can be combined to race against each other in a round.
- On the Info Sheet, U15 climbers will be alerted if they will be using the Standard wall or an Alternative Field of Play route. U13 climbers are only allowed to climb the USA Climbing Official U15 speed route.
- U15 does not need to meet a benchmark time to participate in Speed at Youth Nationals.
- U13 is not eligible to participate in Speed at Youth Nationals.

Youth Series Speed Video Submission

USA Climbing will allow U20, U19, and U17 climbers to submit video documentation that they have successfully recorded a time on a 10-meter or 15-meter Speed wall that meets the minimum Competition Standard/Event Standard (explained in the [USAC Speed Certification Standards](#)) and is equal to or faster than the relevant benchmark time for their age and gender category that qualifies them to compete at the 2026 Youth National Championships. (U15 does not need to meet a benchmark time to participate in Speed at Youth Nationals.) The video must meet the following criteria:

- Be framed to show the entire wall.
- Show the climb from start to finish - uninterrupted and unedited.
- If the run is on a wall with an automatic timing system, zoom in on the timer at the end of the run.
- If a manual timer is used the stopwatch must be displayed in the camera field for the full video.

Use the [Youth Series Speed Video Submission Form](#) to submit the video evidence. Should an issue be identified with the submission or there are additional questions, someone will reach out to the competitor. In a timely manner, the climber will be added to the updated preliminary list of qualified athletes. The deadline for video submission is June 22, 2026 at noon MST.

Benchmark Times for 2026 Youth National Championships

A U20, U19, and U17 competitor with at least one time at a Qualification Speed Trial, National-level or International-level Speed event that meets or is faster than their Category's Qualification Speed Benchmark time for the Speed wall height where they achieved that time shall be awarded Speed Youth National Championship (YNCH) eligibility if the time was achieved since the immediately prior Speed National Championship. See [2026 Youth Speed Benchmark Times](#) for details. Note: The benchmarks will be the same for a QST with automated timing and QST with manual timing.

Individual QST Results will be posted on the event Info Sheet. USA Climbing maintains an [updated list](#) of U20, U19, and U17 athletes who have qualified to compete in Speed at the 2026 Youth National Championships.

We look forward to seeing you at an upcoming QST!