



**WOMEN'S ACADEMY LEAGUE
RULES & REGULATIONS
SEASON 2024**

WOMEN'S ACADEMY LEAGUE

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WOMENS ACADEMY LEAGUE

1. TITLE

- (a) For the purposes of the football competitions the NIFL Women's Academy League shall be comprised of no more than 9 clubs from the NIFL Women's Premiership
- (b) Membership shall constitute an agreement between the NIFL and each club to be bound by and comply with:
 - i. FIFA Regulations
 - ii. The NIFL Articles of Association
 - iii. The Rules of the NIFL Women's Academy League
 - iv. The Rules and Articles of the Irish Football Association
 - v. The Laws of the Game
 - vi. The Rules and Regulations of any body of which the NIFL Academy League is a member

2. MEMBERSHIP

- (a) The Women's Academy League shall consist of representative teams of the clubs in the NIFL Women's Premiership in the current season
- (b) All clubs must be affiliated through their respective divisional association for up-and-coming season by the required deadline.

3. LEAGUE COMPETITION

- (a) The Development League will consist of a maximum of 9 teams
- (b) Each team will play each other on three occasions (2 'home' and 1 'away' or visa versa)

4. RANKING OF TEAMS

Teams shall be awarded 3 points for a win, 1 point for a draw and 0 points for a defeat. In the case of equality of points teams shall be ranked in accordance with the following criteria:

Records in the head-to-head matches in the following order;

- i. Most points in the head-to-head duels between the sides
- ii. Goal Difference (Goals scored less goals conceded in all head-to-head matches)
- iii. Highest goals scored in all league matches
- iv. Least goals conceded in all league matches

Only if the clubs remain level in the table after this will a playoff be arranged, at a neutral ground, with the format, timing and venue being determined by NIFL Chief Operating Officer.

NIFL COMMITTEES

5. NIFL Competition Committee

- a) The NIFL Competition Committee shall be formed in accordance with the appropriate Articles of the Association and shall have powers to deal with all matters delegated to it by the Board.
- b) The Competition Committee will be responsible for the drafting of competition rules and for the organisation of all the cup competitions played within the League, this will include decisions as to which clubs may participate, the eligibility criteria for players playing in these competitions, and the drawing of ties and dealing with all matters pertaining to the Competitions.

The Competition Committee will be appointed annual by the NIFL General Assembly and consist of 7 members:

- (i) Three representatives from clubs playing in the Premiership
- (ii) Two representatives from clubs playing in the Championship
- (iii) One representative from clubs playing in the PIL
- (iv) One representative from clubs playing in the Women's Premiership

The Committee shall appoint annually a Chairman and Vice-Chairman who may serve for a period not exceeding two years. A Chairman retiring after a period of two years may not seek election either to the office of chairman or that of Vice-Chairman until a further period of two years has elapsed. Notwithstanding the above, the Committee reserve the right to extend the terms of the Chairman and/or Vice-Chairman by one year on an annual basis.

6. NIFL Discipline Committee

- a) The NIFL Discipline Committee shall be formed in accordance with the appropriate Articles of the Association and shall have powers to deal with all matters delegated to it by the Board.
- b) The NIFL Discipline Committee will deal with off field discipline issues delegated to it by the Board or Staff for consideration.

The committee shall not deal with on field matters which shall remain the responsibility of the Irish Football Association.

- c) All clubs participating in any Competition under the auspices of the NIFL shall as a prerequisite of entry into such Competitions agree to be bound by this Rule.

OFFENCES, INQUIRIES AND COMMISSIONS THEREON, DISPUTES AND APPEALS

7. Inquiry into and Punishment of Offences

- a) The NIFL, and any Committee duly appointed by the Board or relevant Committee, shall have power of enquiry into all financial arrangements between clubs and players, and into all matters constituting or pertaining to breaches or a breach of Regulations of the NIFL, and they shall be entitled for that purpose to require the attendance of all officials, players and other persons and for the production of all books, letters and other documents.
- b) The NIFL irrespective of whether or not it shall have appointed a Commission or Committee to hold an inquiry shall have full power to deal with all clubs, officials, and players which they shall deem guilty of having offended against or committed a breach of the Regulations of the NIFL Premiership, and they shall be entitled to take such action and award such punishments either by way of reprimand, fine, suspension, expulsion or any other form of punishment as they may think fit in the circumstances.

Note – This rule will not apply to any field offences or any other matter which would normally be dealt with by the IFA Disciplinary Committee.

8. Commissions and Reports

- a) The NIFL, and any Committee may at any time appoint a Commission or Sub-Committee consisting of such number of persons as they deem the circumstances warrant for the purpose of inquiring into any matter appertaining to the NIFL or its affairs.
- b) The NIFL, and any Committee or any duly appointed Commission or Sub-Committee shall be entitled to publish in the public press or in any other manner they shall think fit report of their proceedings, acts, resolutions, and findings whether the same shall or shall not reflect on the character or conduct of any club, official or player and all evidence tendered on such inquiries, and all such inquiries and reports shall be privileged and every such club, official, player or shall be deemed to have assented to such inquiry and to such publication, and to regard the same as privileged in law. On any inquiry such order may be made as to payment of expenses by clubs, players, or officials as the NIFL Competition Committee may think fit.

9. Offences by Clubs, Players etc. Illegal Inducements:

Any club, official or player either directly or indirectly inducing or attempting to induce a player of another club to leave the club for which he is registered for any purpose whatsoever shall be deemed guilty of misconduct and shall be liable to be expelled, fined or otherwise dealt with by the NIFL Competition Committee as they shall see fit, in accordance with the FIFA regulations governing the Status and Transfer of Players. A club found to have induced a player from another club to sign a transfer form shall be fined £5000.

10. Misconduct in pre-arranging Results/Gambling on NIFL Development & Academy Matches

- a) Any club, official or player offering or receiving a payment or any form of undeclared inducement from any other person or organisation to win, lose or draw a match shall be deemed guilty of misconduct and shall be liable to a fine of £2000 and shall be subject to such further sanction as the NIFL Competition Committee shall see fit.
- b) All players, technical staff and officials are forbidden from taking part, either directly or indirectly, in betting, gambling, lotteries and similar events and transactions connected with football matches under the control and organisation of the NIFL.
- c) The NIFL shall have the power to investigate any such allegations brought to their attention and if deemed necessary/applicable shall pass the case, including all evidence relied on to the IFA Disciplinary Committee to impose such sanctions as they consider appropriate.

11. Protests

- a) Protests by all clubs must be sent by email to protests@nifootballleague.com within four days after the cause of the protest, accompanied by a deposit of £100 which shall be forfeited in all cases where the Protest has not been sustained. A copy of the Protest must also be sent by the appellant club by email to the secretary of the club protested against within four days after the cause of the Protest. Clubs must also transfer the £100 deposit to NIFL via bank transfer. Any club submitting a protest must retain proof of delivery that the protest was lodged within the required timescale.
- b) Upon receipt of a protest the NIFL Competition Committee shall, in accordance with Rule 8, appoint a Sub Committee or a Commission consisting of a minimum of three persons to hear and determine the protest. No person shall sit on a protest which involves himself/herself or any club in which he/she may have an interest. All protests shall be heard, where possible, within fourteen (14) days of receipt of the protest.
- c) In the case of a protest, if the NIFL has any doubts as to the qualification of any player taking part in any competition it shall have power to call upon such player, or the club to which he belongs or for which he played, to prove that he was qualified according to the Rules and Regulations of the League
- d) A club may be represented at the hearing of a Protest or Inquiry. Any person summoned to attend a Protest or Inquiry must attend personally.
- e) All questions of eligibility or qualification of clubs or players, or of the application of the Laws of the Game, or of the Articles of Association or Rules shall be referred for decision to the NIFL Board.

12. Appeals against Decisions of the NIFL

All appeals against a decision of the NIFL and any relevant Committee must be made to the IFA in accordance with the relevant IFA Articles of Association.

MATCHES

13. Matches & Kick-off times

- (a) Matches may be played on natural turf or artificial turf, provided that such artificial turf meets a FIFA approved standard or equivalent. The owner of the artificial turf and the home club must be in receipt of a valid approved standard certificate. The NIFL cannot be held responsible for any damages to third parties resulting from the use of artificial turf.
- (b) All matches shall be played under the Laws of the Game as approved by the International Football Association Board and in accordance with the Articles and Rules of the IFA and of the NIFL Women's Academy League. All NIFL Academy League matches shall be played on the dates scheduled at the commencement of the season, except:
 - i. When otherwise directed by the NIFL Women's Premiership Management Committee; or when
 - ii. A club requests in writing a postponement of a fixture for exceptional circumstances.
 - iii. National Cup and/or Divisional Association Cup ties take precedence.
- (c) Matches shall not be played out of sequence unless with the prior approval of the NIFL Women's Premiership Management Committee.
- (d) The Academy League will be designated as a Sunday league. In the event of clubs wishing to change from a Sunday, the written agreement of both clubs must be served in writing by both clubs to the NIFL Chief Operating Officer five (5) working days prior to the scheduled date of the tie;
- (e) Clubs failing to comply with this rule shall be fined in a sum of £150 and shall forfeit three points, such points shall be accredited to the opposing team and a score line of 3 goals to nil awarded to their opponents. Also, in the event of a club failing to fulfil an arranged fixture the appropriate Committee shall be empowered to grant compensation to the other club for actual expenses incurred for such a match. A club failing to fulfil an arranged match for a second time in the current season shall be dismissed from membership of the Academy League.
- (f) Any match not completed may be ordered to stand as a completed fixture, or the unfinished time may be ordered to be played, or the fixture ordered to be replayed in its entirety.
- (g) Postponed or abandoned matches shall be played on a date to be determined by the NIFL Chief Operating Officer.

14. INTERNATIONAL DUTY

- (a) In the event of a club having two or more players selected to represent their National Association representative team(s), in matches recognised by the FIFA International Calendar, they shall be permitted to request a postponement of their scheduled fixture during the period of release in respect of such International Duty. Furthermore, a club whose goalkeeper is selected for such International Duty shall also be permitted to request a postponement due to the specialist position.
- (b) In the event of a club having three or more players selected and/or on standby to represent their National Association representative team(s) in matches not recognised on the FIFA International Calendar or Development and Schools FA squads, they shall be permitted to request a postponement of their scheduled fixture during the period of release in respect of such International Duty. Furthermore, a club whose goalkeeper is selected for such International Duty shall also be permitted to request a postponement due to the specialist position.

15. MATCH POSTPONEMENTS

- (a) Where venues have been appointed by NIFL in conjunction with a local authority or private body it will be the final decision of the local authority/private body as to the fitness of the ground for play.
- (b) In cases where the Home Team has a registered venue not owned or controlled by local authority it will be the decision of the Home Team grounds man or other club appointee responsible for grounds maintenance in the first instance to decide on the fitness of the ground for play or failing such then the decision of the referee will be final.
- (c) The home Club must immediately inform NIFL and the visiting club if postponement is necessary, in default of which the Home Club may at the discretion of NIFL be required to pay half of the referee's match fee and the travelling expenses, in whole or part of the Visiting Club.
- (d) The reason for the non-fulfilment of any fixture shall be investigated by NIFL

16. KIT APPROVAL

The NIFL Kit Approval Regulations are made pursuant to Irish FA Football Regulations and to the Laws of the Game. Clubs participating in other International competitions, such as UEFA Cup Competitions, must also comply with all relevant regulations. For more information on approval and permission please see [NIFL Kit Regulations.pdf](#)

In season;

1. Both teams will, not less than 72 hours before the scheduled match, submit to The League, Match Referee and their opponents the details of the colours of shirts, shorts and socks of all players via Comet.
2. The colour of the Goalkeeper's shirt must, in all cases, be clearly distinguishable from the colours of the shirts worn by the Match Officials and all other Players.

3. In the event that The League requires either Club (Away or Home) to make amendments to its selection, the Club will, within 24 hours of receiving the notification of the same, resubmit its selection to The League, Match Referee and opponent via Comet.
4. A team may be requested to combine items from more than one of its approved outfield player and/or goalkeeper attires (shirt, shorts or socks), in order to create a visible contrast with the other team. The order of priority for the selection of colours for a match is as follows:
 - a. home team outfield player attire;
 - b. away team outfield player attire;
 - c. home team goalkeeper attire;
 - d. away team goalkeeper attire;
 - e. referee team attire.

However if there is a clash for one of the above participants that cannot be resolved (i.e. none of the approved attires offer the required level of colour contrast) then other participants may have to change (in reverse order) until a suitable contrast can be found.

5. If the referee decides on the spot (matchday) that the two teams' selected colours could lead to confusion, the home team must change playing attire, for practical reasons.
6. For a final, both teams should wear their first-choice outfield player attire. If this would create a colour clash, the designated away team must wear its second-choice (or other approved alternative) outfield player attire. If that too would create a colour clash, the administration decides on the playing attire to be worn by each team in consultation with the referee.
7. Disciplinary action in accordance with the Rules may be taken against a Club for any breach of these regulations.

17. COMPLETION OF TEAM SHEET

- (a) Each club shall input their Team Line Up including the names of players and club officials and their functions taking part in each match (including the names of the nominated substitutes) via the IFA Football Management System not later than 30 minutes prior to kick off

18. PLAYER IDENTIFICATION

The players shirts must be clearly numbered on the back and must correspond exactly with the team sheet handed to referee before any match under the jurisdiction of the League, and the team captain shall wear a distinguishing armband to indicate this.

19. SUBSTITUTE PLAYERS

- (a) In all Academy League games a club may at its discretion use five substitute players at any time in any match, except to replace a player who has been dismissed from the game by the Referee. The substitutions can be made in accordance with Law 3 of the Laws of the Game.
- (b) Rolling substitutes are permissible

- (c) A substitute player shall be construed as taking part in the game for which he was nominated only if he has played in such game.
- (d) Should any nominated player or substitute sustain an injury or become otherwise incapacitated after the submission of the team sheet to the referee and before the kick-off he may be replaced provided that the referee and the opposing club are informed prior to kick-off.

20. RESULTS

- (a) The home club shall be responsible for the communication of the match result to the Results Co-ordinator.
- (b) Any club who does not provide match results to the Results Co-ordinator or does not meet required deadline will be fined in the sum of £25.
- (c) All results must be communicated to results co-ordinator within 1hr of the match in question.

FINANCES

21. EXPENSES

In all fixtures the home club shall be responsible for all expenses including, pitch hire, the referee's fee, and their travelling expenses.

REGISTRATIONS

22. REGISTRATIONS

NIFL Player Registration/Eligibility Guidelines

- (a) All players must be registered in accordance with the IFA Professional Game Player Registration Regulations and the NIFL Player Registration Regulations
- (b) To be eligible players must be under the age of 19 as at the 1st January in which the Season concerned commences
- (c) Players must attain the age of 16 by the end of the current playing season (31 October) before they can be deemed suitable by their club and eligible to play in the Academy League
- (d) Clubs may nominate a maximum of three Players over the age of 19 in each matchday squad.

23. INELIGIBILITY OF PLAYERS

Failure to comply with any of the conditions relating to a registration will render the player ineligible to play for the club concerned as not being a bona-fide player.

24. PENALTY FOR PLAYING UNREGISTERED OR ELIGIBLE PLAYERS

- (a) Any club playing an ineligible player or players in any match under the jurisdiction of the Academy League shall be fined in a sum of £50 per player for the first offence and £10 per player for subsequent offences.
- (b) Should the match(es) in question result in a defeat for the offending team a score line of 3-0 shall be recorded in the favour of their opponents. Notwithstanding the above the winning team shall not be disadvantaged if the original score line was of greater benefit to that team's goal difference.
- (c) Should both clubs play an ineligible player or players in any match under the auspices of the Academy League then both clubs will be fined, in a sum of £50 per player for the first offence and £10 for subsequent offences involving the same player. In addition, neither club will be awarded any points for the fixture and both clubs shall have a minus three (-3) goal difference recorded against them.
- (d) Nothing in these Regulations shall entitle the NIFL Premiership to deduct points or impose fines for registration committed by any club during any previous season. (For the purpose of all NIFL Premiership regulations a season will be deemed to end on 31st May in each year).

MISC

25. REGSITRATION OF GROUND

- (a) Were possible clubs will register venues
- (b) In the event of the league appointing a match venue the notification of the venue will be received via email. If a Club makes a venue booking, then the NIFL and travelling Club MUST be notified as soon as possible before the scheduled date for the fixture to enable the website notices to be verified or updated.
- (c) The NIFL will have the power to decide whether facilities are suitable for matches in the competition, and to order the Club concerned to play its fixtures on another ground. The NIFL reserves the right to move any game to a neutral venue. Match kick-off times will be fixed by agreement of the home Team and the NIFL. Times for kick-offs shall be determined by the league and the availability of facilities.
- (d) In all matches played under the jurisdiction of the NIFL the accommodating authority or home team will try to ensure that suitable changing accommodation facilities are available for all teams.

- (e) Technical areas should be clearly marked out and if grounds being used do not have fencing clubs must rope areas for spectators

26. ALTERATIONS TO THESE RULES

Alterations to these rules shall only be considered during the closed season. Any club wishing to have a proposal considered, must forward same in writing to the NIFL Chief Operating Officer no later than 31 Jan.

It shall be entirely at the discretion of the Chief Operating Officer to consider all such requests and determine whether such requests are approved or rejected.