



DEVELOPMENT
&
ACADEMY LEAGUE
Rules & Regulations
2024/25

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NIFL DEVELOPMENT & ACADEMY LEAGUES

1. TITLE

- a) For the purposes of the football competitions the NIFL Development & Academy Leagues shall comprise;
 - i. Premiership U-20 division which will consist of the 12 teams from clubs competing in the 2024/25 Premiership
 - ii. Championship U-21 division which will consist of teams from clubs competing in the 2024/25 Championship
 - iii. Premier Intermediate League U-21 division which will consist of teams from clubs competing in the 2024/25 Premier Intermediate League
 - iv. Academy U-18 & U-16 divisions will consist of up to 16 teams from clubs that competed in the 2024/25 Premiership & Championship

- 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 Development & 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 AL is a member
 - vii. The IFA Premiership Licence (if applicable)
 - Approved Youth Development Programme
 - Suitably qualified youth coaches and staff who adhere to recognised Safeguarding & First Aid requirements

2. MEMBERSHIP FEES

- a) The annual membership fee for each division;
 - i. Premiership U-20 division is £150 per club
 - ii. Championship/PIL U-21 division is £150 per club
 - iii. Academy U18 division is £150 per club
 - iv. Academy U16 division is £150 per club

- b) All teams must be affiliated through their respective divisional association for the upcoming season by the required deadline.

3. LEAGUE COMPETITION

a) Premiership U-20

Shall consist of 12 teams who shall play each other on three occasions (either 2 at 'home' and 1 'away' or vice versa as determined by the fixture schedule).

b) Championship U-21

Shall consist of 10 teams who shall play each other on three occasions (either 2 at 'home' and 1 'away' or vice versa as determined by the fixture schedule).

c) PIL U-21

Shall consist of 9 teams who shall play each other on three occasions (either 2 at 'home' and 1 'away' or vice versa as determined by the fixture schedule).

d) Academy U18 & U16

Each division shall consist of a maximum of 16 teams who shall play each other on two occasions (1 at 'home' and 1 'away').

4. RANKING OF TEAMS

Teams shall be awarded 3 points for a win, 1 point for a draw and 0 points for a defeat.

At the end of all competitions the team scoring the largest number of points shall be declared the champion club of the league. In the case of equality of points teams shall be ranked in accordance with the following criteria:

- i. Goal difference (Goals scored less goals conceded in all matches)
- ii. Goals scored in all matches
- iii. Superior points gained in matches between the teams in question
- iv. Superior goal difference in matches between the teams in question

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 has the power to deal with any relevant matters not covered by League rules.
- c) 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. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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. In the U-20 Development League artificial turf must meet 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 also of the NIFL. All NIFL matches shall be played on the dates scheduled at the commencement of the season, except:
 - i. When otherwise directed by the NIFL Competition 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 Competition Committee.
- d) **Premiership U-20** fixtures will be scheduled for a Monday or Wednesday night. In advance of the season clubs must inform NIFL of their home match night.

Any club requesting to reschedule a Premiership U-20 game which incurs a round trip in excess of 90 miles to a Saturday must make the request in writing to fixtures@nifootballleague.com fourteen (14) days prior to the scheduled date of the tie. The NIFL Competitions Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.

Match duration for Premiership U-20 fixtures shall be 90 minutes.

- f) **Championship & PIL U-21** will be designated as a Saturday morning league.

In the event of clubs wishing to change from a Saturday 11am, a written request must be served in writing to fixtures@nifootballleague.com fourteen (14) days prior to the scheduled date of the tie. The NIFL Competitions Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.

Match duration for Championship U-21 fixtures shall be 90 minutes.

- g) **Academy U-18** will be designated as a Friday night league.

In the event of clubs wishing to change from a Friday, the written agreement of both clubs must be served by both clubs to fixtures@nifootballleague.com fourteen (14) days prior to the scheduled date of the tie. The NIFL Competitions Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.

Match duration for Academy U-18 fixtures shall be 80 minutes.

- h) **Academy U-16** will be designated as a Saturday morning league.

In the event of clubs wishing to change from a Saturday 11am, a written request must be served in writing to fixtures@nifootballleague.com fourteen (14) days prior to the scheduled date of the tie. The NIFL Competitions Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.

Match duration for Academy U-16 fixtures shall be 70 minutes.

- i) Clubs failing to comply with the above kick off rules shall be fined in a sum of £500 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 team failing to fulfil an arranged match for a second time in the current season shall be dismissed from membership and fined at the level set by NIFL Competitions Committee.

- j) 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.
- k) Postponed or abandoned matches shall be played on a date to be determined by the NIFL Chief Operating Officer.

14. PITCH INSPECTIONS/MATCH POSTPONEMENTS

- a) **Premiership U-20**

- i. In case of unfavourable weather conditions or concerns regarding the playing surface the Home Club must request the NIFL for an early inspection not later than five hours before kick-off. The Match Referee or an alternative Referee appointed by the NIFL must inspect the ground at least three hours or more previous to the advertised time of kick-off and shall decide as to the fitness of the ground not later

than three hours prior to the pre-arranged time of kick-off, his decision being final after consultation with the Club Secretary and the NIFL.

- ii. No game shall be postponed without an inspection by a referee appointed by the NIFL, who shall take due cognizance of local advice and the travelling supporters.
- iii. Notwithstanding the above, in the event of extreme weather conditions and forecasts the NIFL Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the NIFL Competition Committee Chair, may declare any match or matches postponed without a formal pitch inspection.
- iv. Where possible the officially appointed match referee should carry out the pitch inspection but if he/she should not be available for an inspection then the NIFL will appoint an alternative official from a panel approved by the committee, who will decide on the state of the pitch. If obviously 'playable' he will then declare his decision.
- v. It is agreed that in addition to the £5 fee an allowance of £5 per hour be paid up until 1hr before the match when the referee would be due to arrive at the ground in normal circumstances. This will only apply when the match referee has had to travel 30 miles or more (single journey/one way). Any distances shorter than this would result in the match referee returning home following the inspection and travel back to the ground at the normal time and he would of course be entitled to add this extra travel and £5 inspection fee onto his expenses for the game.
- vi. The Referee shall be paid half match fee and expenses for a postponed match which they have arrived at and inspected.

b) All other divisions

- i. In cases where the Home Team has a registered venue of which they own or control 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.
- ii. Where venues have been booked 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.
- iii. 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.
- iv. The reason for the non-fulfilment of any fixture shall be investigated by NIFL Competition Committee.

15.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 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.

16. SUBSTITUTE PLAYERS

Premiership U20 & Championship & PIL U21

- a) A club may at its discretion use five substitute players at any time in any match, except to replace a player who has been suspended from the game by the referee. The substitutions can be made in accordance with the Laws of the Game.
- b) Only five substitutions by each side will be permitted in any match and clubs may nominate up to a maximum of seven substitute players prior to the commencement of the match.
- c) Substitutions may only be made on at most 3 occasions during the game (excluding half time).

Academy U18 &U16

- d) A club may at its discretion use five substitute players at any time in any match, except to replace a player who has been suspended from the game by the referee. The substitutions can be made in accordance with the Laws of the Game.
- e) Only five substitutions by each side will be permitted in any match and clubs may nominate up to a maximum of five substitute players prior to the commencement of the match.
- f) In Academy U-18 & U-16 rolling substitutes are permissible.

All divisions

- g) A substitute player shall be construed as taking part in the game for which he was nominated only if he is required to play.
- h) 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.

17. PLAYER IDENTIFICATION

- a) The players shirts must be clearly numbered on the back and must correspond exactly with the instruction input into the IFA FMS System or the team sheet handed to referee should the match venue not have a data signal
- b) The team captain shall wear a distinguishing armband to indicate this.

18. COMPLETION OF TEAM SHEET

- a) At Premiership U-20 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 45 minutes prior to kick off
- b) For all other division 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

19. KIT APPROVAL

- a) Details of club playing kit(s), including goalkeeper's kit(s), colours shall be notified by clubs to the NIFL on the official club information questionnaire which shall be completed annually and returned not later than 30th June.
- b) In addition each club shall deliver to the referee's dressing room a sample of their playing kit (shirts, shorts and socks) including goalkeeper kit not later than 30 minutes prior to kick off. In the case of a clash of colours the referee shall have the right to request clubs to change any item of their presented kit. In such cases the home team shall change as directed by the referee although clubs should be in communication with each other in advance if clashes are expected.
- c) Clubs must input their kit colours, including goalkeeper kit, on the Comet System not later than 72 hrs prior to kick off in the next fixture.

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.

21. REFEREES

All competitive matches must be officiated by an official referee.

FINANCES

22. EXPENSES

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

REGISTRATIONS

23. 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 all players must be registered with the club which is a member of the NIFL

24. SQUADS

Premiership U-20 Squads

- a) An Under 20 Player means a Player born on or after 1st January 2005
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of five Players over the age of 20 in each matchday squad.

Championship & PIL U-21 Squads

- a) An Under 21 Player means a Player born on or after 1st January 2004
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of five Players over the age of 21 in each matchday squad.

Academy U-18 Squads

- a) An Under 18 Player means a Player born on or after 1st January 2007
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of three Players over the age of 18 in each matchday squad.
- c) Maximum age for over aged players must not exceed year of birth 2005

Academy U-16 Squads

- a) An Under 16 Player means a Player born on or after 1st January 2009
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of three Players over the age of 16 in each matchday squad.
- c) Maximum age for over aged players must not exceed year of birth 2007

25. 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.

26. PENALTY FOR PLAYING UNREGISTERED OR ELIGIBLE PLAYERS

- a) Any club playing an ineligible player or players in any match under the jurisdiction of the Development & 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 scoreline 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 scoreline was of greater benefit to that teams goal difference.
- c) Should both clubs play an ineligible player or players in any match under the auspices of the Development & 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 Competition Committee to deduct points or impose fines for registration committed by any club during any previous season. (For the purpose of all the regulations a season will be deemed to end on 31st May in each year).

MISC

27. REGSITRATION OF GROUND

- a) At Premiership U-20 each club shall register its ground (IFA Intermediate standard with floodlighting, (300 Lux) as a minimum) with the NIFL and no club shall register another ground without first obtaining the consent of the NIFL. Clubs will be permitted to register an additional venue for such matches which must be of the above standard.
- b) In all other divisions clubs, were possible, will register venues. If venues change week to week clubs must notify NIFL by Monday of match week.
- c) In the event of the league appointing a match venue the notification of the venue will be received via Comet. 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.
- d) 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.
- e) 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.

- f) Technical areas should be clearly marked out.

28. ALTERATIONS TO THESE RULES

Alterations to these rules shall only be considered during the closed season, except in the case of exceptional circumstances as determined by the NIFL Board. Any club wishing to have a proposal considered, must forward same in writing to the NIFL Chief Operating Officer no later than 1st March.