

**Northern Indiana Youth Football League (NIYFL)  
8 and Under Rules (8u)**



**Section A: Basic Rules and Approach**

1. This level of play will introduce seven (7) and eight (8) year olds to tackle football in a highly controlled player friendly environment. An athlete must be the age of seven (7) by the first scheduled game of the season and no older than eight (8) by the last game of the season.
2. This is a development league where all participants, with the exception of weight, learn to play all positions and will learn all skills required by the game of football. Participants known as “stripers” learn to play all linemen positions and skills required by the game of football.
3. Coaches will strive to maximize player enjoyment and development.
4. Coaches will ensure all players have meaningful playing time and the opportunity for improvement and success.
5. Play will be conducted on a smaller field that is appropriately scaled to the age and skill level of the players involved.
6. The format will encourage a more fast-paced game with more plays, greater activity for all players, and promote enjoyment of the game for all players.
7. An emphasis will be placed on skill development by isolating situations for players to showcase their abilities via formation regulations and limited field size.
8. The smaller field size will allow host areas to conduct two (2) games at once on a single full-sized football field.
9. Limiting roster sizes will foster participation and provide more focused, individualized coaching attention during practice and on game day.
10. This should help develop cooperation amongst EVERYONE including officials, coaches, players, and parents in all areas of the game, especially sportsmanship.

**Section B: Field Dimensions and Operations**

1. Play will be conducted on a 40 yard by 35- $\frac{1}{2}$  yard field of play. The sidelines will be the sideline of the regulation field and the far hash mark. The “sideline” on the hash shall be marked by flat cones or similar flat markers at least every five (5) yards. Play will be conducted from the 40-yard line to the goal line between the sidelines as set forth previously. Pylons should be used to mark the end zone.
2. Possessions start at the 40-yard line going in towards the end zone.
  - a. This leaves a 20-yard buffer when an area is hosting two (2) games on the same field at once (one at each end).
    - i. This buffer zone will be referred to as the Administration Zone.

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**Section B: Field Dimensions and Operations (Continued)**

- ii. The Administration Zone should be restricted to certified personnel and should be kept clear as possible.
- iii. It is suggested the Field Director for the host area observe games from the Administration Zone.
- b. Each team may have no more than two (2) coaches on the field and in the huddle at the same time.
- c. Players not in the game will stand on opposite sidelines with a certified coach supervising them. On the change of possession all players on the sideline are required to be rotated into the game.
- d. Areas must provide a minimum of one (1) referee.

**Section C: Injury and Concussion Protocol**

1. The NIYFL has adopted and adheres to USA Football's Heads Up Football initiative. This includes Heads Up Football's injury, concussion, practice, cardiac arrest, and heat protocols. Any NIYFL personnel (defined as coaches, Field Administrators, and field personnel) must complete the annual USA Football Heads Up training and certification.
2. The specific protocols are adjusted from year to year. USA Football should be consulted for the current year's protocols.
3. A game official or medical personnel may override the decision of a parent or coach regarding player injury and return to play or continuing to play.
4. If medical attention is sought, the Area Commissioner shall file an injury report with the League President. This applies to games and practices.
  - a. If a player misses game or practice time and requires the attention of a medical professional for an injury, a note clearing the player to return to play must be provided to the Area Commissioner.
  - b. All Heads Up Football return to play protocols must be followed.
  - c. In all cases, the opinion of the medical professional will prevail.

**Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL**

NIYFL 8u football uses the NFHS and IHSAA Football Rule Book as its base set of rules and implements the following adjustments.

1. Play is conducted with seven (7) players on offense and seven (7) players on defense.
2. There are no restrictions on jersey numbers. However, player positions are restricted by weight.

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**Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL (Continued)**

3. All turnovers are considered dead balls but DO NOT result in a change of possession.
  - a. The officials should blow their whistles to indicate the play has ended.
  - b. The offense retains possession but returns to the 40-yard line.
4. After each play the official(s) shall spot the ball in the middle of the playing field.
5. Penalties:
  - a. 15-yard infractions will be enforced as 10 yards due to the smaller field size.
  - b. No penalty against the offense may move the ball beyond the 40-yard line into the Administration Zone.
  - c. Penalties against the offense called between the 40-yard line and the end zone in which yardage is lost, even if limited in enforcement by the Administration Zone (above) are enforced as written in terms of down lost or replayed.
  - d. PERSONAL FOUL PENALTIES
    - i. Coaches/officials should explain to the player what they did which resulted in the penalty.
    - ii. The offending player must be substituted for at least one play. During this "Cooling Off Period" coaches are encouraged to address the ideals of good sportsmanship and discourage misconduct.
6. There are no safeties. Tackles of a ball carrier made in the Administration Zone result in the ball being set for play on the 40-yard line.

**Section E: Weight Limits**

Weigh-ins will be done prior to each week's game at the game site under the direction of the Field Director for the host area or his designee. **Players weighing in above the limit** must be identified by a contrasting stripe on the center of the helmet running front to back. At no time may this stripe cover the helmet warning label. *These players will be referred to as "stripers" below.* Award stickers and helmet decals must be placed in a manner which will not obscure the contrasting stripe. Weight limits and restrictions vary by level of play.

1. Players recorded as being **15** pounds or more above the weight limit to carry the ball at the Week 1 pregame weigh-in will be considered a "striper" all season.
2. Players **MUST** weigh-in in the exact gear they will wear during the game; this includes shoes, mouthpiece, extra pads, shields, braces, etc. Failure to comply will make the player ineligible to participate in that game.
3. The League does not allow so-called "cutting weight". Players caught intentionally cutting weight will be classified as stripers for the rest of the season.
4. An unstriped player may play any offensive or defensive position.

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**Section E: Weight Limits (Continued)**

5. In full gear, any player who weighs more than **99** pounds will be considered a striper as defined above.
  - a. Stripers may only play on the line (Offensive and Defensive).
  - b. A striper may not advance the ball under any circumstances.
6. A “striper” may recover a live ball, whether kicked, batted, or fumbled, and may intercept a forward pass. **HOWEVER**, under no circumstance may any “striper” advance the ball. A recovery or interception made by a “striper” will result in the ball being blown dead at the spot of the recovery by the “striper”.

**Section F: Offense**

1. Each play must begin with three (3) offensive linemen, a Center and two (2) Guards. The Guards must align one on each side of the Center on the line of scrimmage. None of the offensive linemen are eligible for a first touch as receiver of a pass.
2. **<Point of Emphasis>** Players may begin play from a two (2) point stance or a three (3) point stance.
3. The Center may only have his snapping hand or hands on the ball. A three (3) point stance is not allowed.
4. The distance between offensive linemen, or their splits, may not exceed one (1) yard (three (3) feet). Their splits may be closer, but not longer than one (1) yard.
5. To encourage players to learn all eligible positions and skills, coaches should rotate players throughout the possession.
6. Once the formation is set:
  - a. Offensive linemen may not shift to an eligible first touch position.
  - b. The offensive linemen may not be the first player to touch the ball from the quarterback. This includes a Guard who is uncovered.
7. The Center-Quarterback exchange may be direct from Center to QB between the Center’s legs. Shotgun or Pistol snaps are not allowed.
8. All plays are initiated by the Center-Quarterback exchange then. . . .
  - a. The QB may run, handoff, or pass.
    - i. If the QB runs the ball it must be outside the Guard – there are no “QB sneaks” through the “A-Gaps” allowed.
    - ii. The handoff or pass may go to an eligible player except the Center or Guards.
  - b. The Center and Guards are not considered eligible ball carriers or receivers.

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**Section F: Offense (Continued)**

9. There must be four (4) players on the line of scrimmage – no more, no less.
10. The four (4) non-offensive line players must be aligned according to these rules:
  - a. One (1) player must align as the Quarterback directly behind the Center and initiate the play as set forth above.
  - b. One (1) player must be on the line of scrimmage as an End (Tight or Split). The End position is not required to abide by the “split” rules of the offensive linemen.
  - c. One (1) player must align directly behind the quarterback in the I-formation as a tailback or running back.
  - d. The 7<sup>th</sup> player must align off the line of scrimmage at the coach’s discretion.
11. All blocks **MUST** occur in front and above the waist. Any block below the waist is illegal and will be penalized as a ten-yard penalty.

**Section G: Defense**

1. Defenses may only utilize two (2) defensive linemen unless the offense aligns with a Tight End. In this case, the defense may utilize a third defensive linemen who must align head up over the Tight End.
2. **<Point of Emphasis>** All defensive linemen **MUST** begin play in a three (3) point stance. There are no exceptions.
3. No defensive linemen may align over the Center; players must be heads up or outside shade of the offensive Guards and must engage the Guard.
  - a. Defensive linemen **MUST** engage with the offensive Guard prior to entering the “A-Gap” and may not slant or stunt into the “A-Gap”.
4. Defensive linemen not aligned over the Tight End must align head up to outside shade of the Guards and must keep their inside leg inside the stance of the opposing Guard.
5. One defensive player must be aligned no closer than 10 yards from the line of scrimmage. He may align anywhere in the field of play as long as he is at least 10 yards deep.
6. Any player not covering a Guard or Tight End must be four (4) yards off the line of scrimmage anywhere on the playing field at the coach’s discretion.
  - a. This alignment is even required when the line of scrimmage is inside the four (4) yard line.
  - b. Defenses are not required to cover Tight Ends with a defensive linemen. They may play with two (2) defensive linemen versus a three (3) or four (4) player offensive front.

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**Section G: Defense (Continued)**

7. No blitzes are allowed.
  - a. This is a safety issue. The restriction on blitzing is intended to encourage skill development within the passing game and allow young players to execute a successful handoff with limited penetration.
  - b. It is **NOT** a blitz if the Quarterback rolls out or initiates play action.
  - c. It is **NOT** a blitz if the defensive linemen force the Quarterback out of the pocket in their pass rush.
  - d. It **IS** a blitz if the Quarterback drops straight back to pass.

**Section H: Special Teams**

1. There are no special teams.
2. There are no PATs following a touchdown.
3. Play always returns to the 40-yard line as set forth above.

**Section I: Time of Play**

1. Each game is made up of four (4) 12 minute quarters with a running clock.
2. There will be a two (2) minute break following the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters to allow for instructions, rest, hydration, and to ensure proper rotation of players to different eligible positions as the game progresses.
3. Halftime will be five minutes in duration.
4. Each team will get two (2) quarters on offense and two (2) quarters on defense.
  - a. The team winning the coin toss will elect offense or defense.
  - b. Then teams will rotate offense and defense each quarter.
  - c. **EXAMPLE:**
    - i. Team A wins the coin toss and chooses offense.
    - ii. Team A will play offense the entire 1<sup>st</sup> quarter and Team B will play defense the entire 1<sup>st</sup> quarter.
    - iii. Team B will play offense the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter and Team A will be on defense the entire quarter.

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**Section J: Proper Equipment**

1. A football helmet with facemask which meets NOCSAE standards for compliance, reconditioning, time of use, and safety.
2. Gym shoes or shoes with rubber or plastic molded cleats. Screw in style football cleats and metal cleats of any kind are strictly forbidden.
3. **<Point of Emphasis>** One (1) mouth guard attached to the facemask. The only exception to not having the mouth guard attached to the facemask is a specialty mouth guard to protect dental and orthodontic appliances and fixtures. This should be discussed with the officials prior to the coin toss.
  - a. It is recommend players use a mouthpiece of contrasting color that is easily identified by game officials.
  - b. Do not let your players cut the straps from the mouthpiece.
  - c. Only one (1) mouthpiece is to be attached to the facemask and used by the player. No double mouthpieces.
4. **<Point of Emphasis>** Pants with knee, thigh, hip, and tailbone pads.
  - a. Any of these pads may be provided by a girdle worn under the pants.
  - b. Knee pads must be appropriately worn at the knee.
    - i. No removing, cutting, or folding the knee pads above the knee.
    - ii. A player found to have removed, cut, or folded the knee pads will be ineligible to play until the knee pads are worn correctly or replaced.
5. Shoulder pads meeting NOCSAE standards.
6. The officials and coaches should inspect and approve the game balls to ensure they match the level of play with regards to type, size, and inflation.
  - a. K2 or TDJ for 8u.
7. Eyeshields or visors:
  - a. Eyeshields or visors must be made of clear, rigid material.
  - b. Tinted visors are not allowed; the player's eye must be clearly visible, and there are no exceptions to this rule.
  - c. If an athlete has a medical need for tinted eye protection, they must wear tinted eyeglasses or athletic goggles.