

**Northern Indiana Youth Football League (NIYFL)
12 and Under Rules (12u)**



Section A: Basic Rules and Approach

The NIYFL plays according to the rules set forth by the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) and National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations (NFHS). Exceptions to, or departure from, the rules of these governing bodies are those noted in the following Sections. It is suggested that each NIYFL Member Area maintain the current year's IHSAA Rules Book, Case Book, and Officials Manual in addition to these rules along with their Commissioners Manual.

1. Players who turn eleven (11) on, or before, the last regular game of the season and may not exceed the age of thirteen (13) by the last regular season game will play at this level. Additionally, the athlete must be in 6th grade or lower.
2. The NIYFL has adopted and adheres to USA Football's Heads Up Football initiative and all its protocols and requirements. We will make every effort perennially to be a 100% compliant league. Heads Up Football specific protocols are adjusted year to year and USA Football should be consulted for the current year's protocols.
3. The NIYFL is an instructional league with player safety and experience as our top priorities. Therefore, every participant player, coach, parent, volunteer, and official will sign and be held accountable to our Zero Tolerance Agreement.
 - a. A copy of the Zero Tolerance Agreement is available on our league website, from each Area Commissioner, and our Board Members.
 - b. The Zero Tolerance Agreement is not an all-inclusive list of prohibited behaviors. Good sportsmanship and character are expected of all in our league.
4. **<Point of Emphasis>** The NIYFL has adopted a so-called "24 Hour Rule". All participants are asked to wait 24 hours before talking with a coach, official, or Board Member with constructive criticisms or complaints. This should be done in a private meeting, by phone, email, or text; this should never be a conversation in front of others, especially children.

Section B: Game Officials and Game Oversight

1. The NIYFL will strive to recruit, train, and license a pool of licensed IHSAA officials from which one (1), or more, will be assigned to each league game. These will be assigned based on availability and an Area's ability or willingness to pay their fees. In addition to any league provided lead officials, each Area Commissioner will be responsible to recruit, train, and compensate supporting officials for each league game. Supporting officials will be considered qualified if they have attained at least sixteen (16) years of age and are not a close relative of any participant in the game they are officiating. *Close relative is defined as parent, sibling, grandparent, step-parent, step-sibling, aunt/uncle, niece/nephew, first cousin, or in-law.*
2. All game officials should have a complete knowledge of IHSAA and NIYFL Rules. It is the responsibility of the area commissioner to arrange for a minimum of two (2) qualified supporting officials for each game and to provide each official with a copy of the NIYFL Bylaws, Operating Directive, and Game Rules. Officials have the complete support of the NIYFL as evidenced by the field director's support of them.

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Section B: Game Officials and Game Oversight (Continued)

3. Keep in mind that game officials should be able to maintain complete control of the game at all times, and if necessary, the official may eject players, coaches, and fans from the sidelines or game.
4. **<Point of Emphasis>** Officials should conduct the pre-game meeting with coaches and captains of both teams simultaneously. This is to be conducted just prior to the coin toss.
 - a. During this meeting officials should describe their expectations of the teams and coaches and discuss good sportsmanship and character.
 - b. The officials should remind everyone that this is an instructional league.
 - c. 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.
 - i. TDY for 12u
 - d. The officials should update everyone with regards to special concerns for the day and location such as weather (heat, cold, rain, etc.) or grounds issues (danger areas, missing pads or markers, mud, holes, etc.).
 - e. Officials should also review any points of emphasis with all contained in the rules. These will be in bold and red in the official league rules for the year.
5. If at any time during the course of the game the officials are unsure of a call they should confer with a single coach from each team and field director if warranted. Under no circumstance should officials confer with a coach from only one team or just the field director.
6. Once a game has begun, the game officials are in charge of the field. Their judgement is final.
7. **<Point of Emphasis>** Any ejection from play will be handled like the IHSAA Rule; specifically, that an ejection carries with it a one (1) game suspension. Therefore, it should be made clear that any player, coach, or NIYFL official ejected from that day's game will also miss the next game. This will be communicated through the league's officers to the member areas. This will also bring the Zero Tolerance Rule into play as well as the Code of Conduct for Coaches and Board Members.
8. The NIYFL follows the NFHS Lightning Protocol. This can be found on the league's website, or you may obtain a copy from your Area Commissioner or any Board member.
 - a. If a game is cancelled or postponed due to weather it can be made up as arranged by both coaches, respective Area Commissioners involved, and the Scheduler. As per our Operating Directive there must be four (4) days between games.
 - b. If a game has reached halftime before being cancelled it may be considered complete and final.
 - c. Games which are suspended will be picked up where the game left off when it resumes.

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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 any 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

These are the items where the NIYFL departs from, adds to, or takes away from the IHSAA and NFHS rules mentioned in Section A.

1. **Time of Quarters:** 10 minutes
2. **Time and so-called "Play" Clocks:** The time clock will be kept on the field (or scoreboard if available). The play clock is the same as the IHSAA rule.
 - a. At any time, by agreement of both coaches and the game officials, the game clock may run continuously.
 - b. For games that are played with temperatures at or above ninety degrees (90°) the duration of each quarter will be reduced to 8 minutes.
 - i. The decision to reduce quarter duration will be determined by the League President.
 - ii. A timeframe for the reduced quarter duration will also be established by the League President.
 - Timeframe Example: Games played between 1:00pm and 4:00pm
 - Only games played during the timeframe will be subjected to the reduced quarter duration.
 - iii. The League President will then communicate the decision to the League Board, Area Commissioners, and Field Directors.

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Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL (Continued)

3. Intermissions:

- a. Between the 1st & 2nd and the 3rd & 4th Quarters => 2 Minutes
- b. Halftime (between 2nd & 3rd Quarters) => 10 Minutes
- c. NOTE => These times may be adjusted subject to mutual agreement of the Field Director and BOTH head coaches.

4. Scoring:

- a. Touchdown (TD) => 6 points
- b. Point After Touchdown (PAT) => Scoring team **MUST** announce intent to run/pass or kick.
 - i. Run or Pass => 1 point
 - ii. Kick => 2 points
- c. Field Goal => 3 points
- d. Safety => 2 points

5. Overtime (OT): First OT, coin toss will determine who will receive the ball. The team that wins the toss will get a choice of what end of the field they want. The ball will be placed on 10-yard line.

- a. First OT period will have extra points scored by both run or kick.
- b. Second OT period will have extra point scored only by a kick.
- c. One time out per OT period
- d. Two (2) OT periods max.

6. PAT/FG:

- a. Alignment – The kicking block must be set between the outside hip of the offensive tackles extended back from the line of scrimmage. The offensive line splits may be no wider than double arm length (fingertip to fingertip).
- b. Attempt – For the PAT/FG kick, the offense has one (1) chance to execute a successful center to holder snap. If the attempt requires the holder to leave his position and take more than one (1) step to retrieve the ball, this is considered an unsuccessful try and the try is considered “No Good” or missed.
 - i. Block style kicking tees approved for NFHS use may be used by the holder and kicker but are not required.
 - ii. Kickoff style tees may not be used whatsoever.
 - iii. Missed attempts are dead balls and may not be advanced.
- c. Rushing – The defense is not allowed to rush on any kicking attempt.
 - i. Merely jumping into the neutral zone by a defender will not be penalized.
 - ii. Rushing the kick attempt will be considered encroachment and penalized as such => *Five (5) yard penalty and repeat the down/attempt.*

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Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL (Continued)

7. **Coaches on the Field:** <Point of Emphasis> Only one (1) coach per team is allowed in the huddle and on the field with the exception of timeouts (TOs).
 - a. The on field coach must not interfere with play in any manner. The coach must be ten (10) yards from the line of scrimmage (LOS) and may not “coach”, or even cheer, once the offense is set for play.
 - b. Interfering with play is defined as influencing the outcome of the play by physically moving, verbally instructing, or alerting the coach’s players after the offense is considered “set”. “Set” is defined as the point after which an offensive linemen may not lift his hand to reset without incurring a penalty.
 - c. Examples of interference include, but are not limited to: calling audibles, moving a player into the correct position, shifting the defense, calling out the direction of the play, changing or calling off a blocking scheme (please note that this list is not exhaustive).
 - d. Electronic communication is not allowed in any circumstances.
 - i. Failure to comply with this rule will result in an Unsportsmanlike Penalty being assessed against the offending coach. Refer to the Penalty Section.
 - ii. NOTE => A second unsportsmanlike penalty for any reason will result in the coach being ejected from the game and suspension from the next game as well.

8. **Timeouts:**
 - a. Each team is permitted three (3) timeouts per half and may use the timeouts at any time in the half.
 - b. A timeout is one (1) minute in length.
 - c. There is no penalty for calling a timeout when a team has none left.

9. **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.
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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.
 - d. An unstriped player may play any offensive or defensive position.

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Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL (Continued)

- e. In full gear, any player who weighs **MORE THAN 135** pounds will be considered a single striper (one (1) contrasting stripe and any player who weighs **MORE THAN 150** pounds will be considered a double striper (two (2) contrasting stripes).
 - i. Offensively single stripers can play **ANY** position but are ineligible to carry or receive the football. Double stripers must play on the offensive line (OL), including tight end (TE), must play in a three-point stance, and are not eligible receivers (*this applies even if aligned as a TE*).
 - ii. Defensively single stripers may play any position. Double stripers are restricted to the defensive line (including DE) but must play in the down position (three or four point stance).
 - iii. A striper (single or double) cannot advance the ball under any circumstance. (See **Section D.9.f** below).
 - f. 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”.
10. **Kicking Situations:** During all kicking situations (punt, PAT, or FG) the offensive coach must announce to the officials and the defense whether or not his team will kick. If the coach announces his intention to kick, neither team may cross the line of scrimmage until the ball has been kicked (no rushing the kicker and no releasing gunners on a punt).
- a. Controlled kickoffs, punts and returns are live.
 - i. Kickoff will be from the 40-yard line.
 - ii. A kickoff must still travel ten (10) yards from the point of kickoff.
 - b. Failure to travel 10 yards results in:
 - i. A re-kick on the 1st attempt.
 - ii. An illegal procedure penalty of five (5) yards on each subsequent unsuccessful try to advance the kicked ball ten (10) yards.
 - c. **<Point of Emphasis> No blind side hits**
 - d. Announcing your intention to kick and faking is an Unsportsmanlike Penalty against the offense. Likewise, announcing your intention to kick and not aligning in a kicking formation is considered an unsportsmanlike penalty.
 - e. Kicking the ball without announcing your intention to do so (quick kick) is an Unsportsmanlike Penalty against the offense.
 - f. Rushing the kicker is an Unsportsmanlike Penalty against the defense and the offense will retain possession of the ball.
 - i. **NOTE =>** Jumping offsides or stepping across the line of scrimmage post snap **IS NOT** rushing the kicker.
 - g. Illegal defensive alignment is any alignment which does not meet the criteria of **Section D. 11**. You may drop three (3) players to receive the punt but must otherwise adhere to the guidelines set forth below. Illegal Alignment is an Unsportsmanlike Penalty against the defense and the offense will retain possession of the ball (this is an automatic 1st down).

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Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL (Continued)

11. **Defensive Formations:** There shall be **NO MORE THAN** eight (8) players within five (5) yards of the line of scrimmage extended sideline to sideline; and **NO MORE THAN** six (6) players within three (3) yards of the line of scrimmage extended sideline to sideline. In short, **NO MORE THAN** eight (8) players in the so-called “box” and **NO MORE THAN** six (6) within Linebacker (LB) level or within three (3) yards of the line of scrimmage extended sideline to sideline. [*“Box” is defined as the area which is a rectangle extending along the line of scrimmage, running from sideline to sideline, to a depth of five (5) yards from the line of scrimmage on the defensive side of the ball*].
- a. There must be a minimum of three (3) players on the line of scrimmage and **NO MORE THAN** six (6) players on the line of scrimmage.
 - b. Players aligning within the outside shoulders of the offensive tackles must be in a down position; those aligning outside the outside shoulders of the offensive tackles may be in either up or down position, but striping and formation rules apply.
 - c. No lining up directly over the Center.
 - i. **NO MORE THAN** one (1) defender may slant into the “A-Gap” and/or engage the Center at the same time.
 - d. The penalty for illegal defensive alignment is five (5) yards.
12. **No Blitzing:** **<Point of Emphasis>** No Exceptions
- a. This is a safety issue plain and simple. It is difficult for high school players to pick-up and protect against the blitz; we can’t expect youth players to effectively do it.
 - b. It is **NOT** a blitz if the quarterback initiates play action or rolls out.
 - c. It is **NOT** a blitz if the defensive linemen force the quarterback out of the pocket.
 - d. It **IS** a blitz if the quarterback drops straight back.
13. **Unsportsmanlike or Personal Foul Penalties:** All fifteen (15) yard infractions will require:
- a. Clear communication of the offense to the penalized player and the player’s coach on the field.
 - b. Removal of play for at least one (1) play of the offending player.
 - c. Examples of infractions which would result in this include Chop Blocks, Horse Collar, Facemask, Personal Foul, helmet to helmet hit, crack back block, etc. Essentially, any infraction which is deemed to be a safety issue.
14. **<Point of Emphasis> Defined:** Any area of our game rules which is designated as a point of emphasis at the annual rules meeting will get extra attention during the upcoming season. It will be reviewed and explained with extra attention during the coaches’ clinics. The Area Commissioners will take extra time to describe the emphasis in his/her area’s parent meeting and stress it to the area’s qualified officials (see **Section B.1**). Rules designated with the *Point of Emphasis* tag must be discussed by the Field Administrator with the coaches of both team at the pre-game weigh-in and the game officials must address the point of emphasis during their pre-game meeting (see **Section B.4**).

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Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL (Continued)

15. **Minimum Playing Time:** The NIYFL is an instructional league and therefore maintains a strict rule regarding playing time for all eligible players. Each player must play a complete series each half or a minimum of four (4) plays on offense or defense per half. A series is defined as the beginning to the end of any possession of the ball. This could be an offensive or defensive series. Additional playing time shall be determined by the player's attendance at practice, active participation at practices, attitude, etc. as determined by the team coaching staff.
- a. At the discretion of the Head Coach and coaching staff, the playing time of a player can be reduced for things such as:
 - i. Poor attendance at practices because this is a safety issue.
 - ii. Illness or injury of the player during the game or from a previous game or practice which the coach deems prudent.
 - iii. Poor attitude or performance at school.
 - iv. This list is not exhaustive but is meant to give the coaching staff discretion to make a decision on playing time which is outside the league's rules.
 - b. Any such exercise of coach's discretion should be communicated to the player, the player's parents or guardians, that week's opposing coach, and the NIYFL Board.
16. **Mercy Rule:** This rule will go into effect in the second half when a team has a lead of twenty-eight (28) points or more.
- a. Running clock at twenty-eight (28) points or greater in the second half.
 - b. **No** Reverses or trick plays.
 - c. Any game with a point difference of twenty-eight (28) or great, the head coach must submit a written explanation to the League President.
17. **Reporting of Scores:** Area Commissioners, or their designees, must report the scores of all games contested in his area within forty-eight (48) hours of the last game's completion to the NIYFL Board.

Section E: Proper Equipment

Every Player must be equipped with the following:

- 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.

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Section D: Rules Specific to the NIYFL (Continued)

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. 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. 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.

Section F: Awards

Area Commissioners will be responsible for determining wether or not that member area will have individual and team awards. No championship trophy will be awarded at any NIYFL level. The NIYFL is an instructional league, and we believe all players are champions.