

ARTICLE 19

FOOTBALL

Section 1. RULES

All contests under the jurisdiction of the RIIL shall be played according to the National Federation of State High School Association Football Rules, except for any special rulings adopted by the Committee.

An Emergency Action Plan with clearly defined written and practice protocols should be developed and in place at every high school. When possible, an athletic trainer should be present at all practices and games.

Rationale: An effective emergency action plan (EAP) should be in place as a prompt and appropriate response to any emergency situation that can save a life. The EAP should be designed and practiced to address all teams (freshman, junior varsity, and varsity) and all practice and game sites. An athletic trainer is a key component in any strategy to minimize injury risk and optimize safety for all participants.

A. Fall Football practice may start no earlier than seventeen (17) days before the Injury Fund game(s) with the following limitations: **Please see Article 7 Section 3.B – Heat Acclimatization Guidelines**

B. Use of Legal Cast in Athletic Contests

If the student-athletes' doctor gives clearance to participate with the use of a protective cast that is approved by the Rule of the Game (NFHS), the student-athlete will be required and must have an authorized letter from the doctor which shall be considered valid for a period of six (6) weeks from the date of the letter. (It shall not be necessary for the student-athlete to present a note each week.) At the end of the six (6) week period the student-athlete may provide another doctors note which shall remain valid for another six (6) weeks from the date of the letter. The school is required to have the doctor's authorization letter for review by the official prior to any RIIL contest.

C. Concussion Education:

The RIIL, the RIIAAA and each school should regularly educate its schools on current state concussion laws and policies and encourage schools to have a written Concussion Management Protocol. Schools should also be encouraged to share this information with coaches, parents, and students annually.

Rationale: Many schools experience frequent turnover of Athletic Directors and coaches. Frequent “refreshers” on state concussion laws and policies as well as sample concussion management protocols should be made available to ensure all schools are current on, and prepared for, safe and effective concussion management.

Contact Rule for Football:

Contact levels are defined below:

Air: Players should run unopposed without bags or any opposition

Bags: activity is executed against a bag, shield or pad to allow for a soft-contact surface, with or without the resistance of a teammate or coach standing behind the bag.

Wrap: Drills run at full speed until contact, which is above the waist with the players remaining on their feet.

Thud: Same as wrap but tempo is competitive with no pre-determined winner and the players are not tackling to the ground.

Fundamentals for Minimizing Head Impact Exposure and Concussion Risk in Football (**Recommended, developed and supported by the NFHS Concussion Task Force**)

1. Full-contact should be limited during the regular season. For purposes of these recommendations full-contact consists of both “Thud” and Live Action” using the USA Football definitions of *Levels of Contact*.

Rationale: By definition, “Thud” involves initiation of contact at full speed with no pre-determined winner, but no take-down to the ground. Accordingly, the task force supports that initial contact, particularly with lineman, is just as violent with “Thud” as with “Live Action.” However, the task force

also recognized that “Live Action” likely carries a higher risk for other injuries to the body than does “Thud.” The USA Football Levels of Contact “Air,” “Bags” and “Control” are considered no- or light-contact and thus no limitations are placed on their use.

1. During the regular season and post season, no football player is allowed to participate in more than thirty minutes per day and ninety (90) minutes of full contact practice per week. In addition, full-contact is allowed in no more than 2-3 practices per week. Athletes may not participate in games played on consecutive days or on the same day.

Rationale: The task force acknowledges that there are insufficient data to specify with certainty a research-validated “best practices” standard for contact limitations. Preliminary High School RIO Injury Surveillance Data suggest these states have seen a statistically significant decrease in concussion rates during practices, with no increase in concussion or other injuries during games.

- a. Note: Pre-season practices may require more full-contact time than practices occurring later in the regular season, to allow for teaching fundamentals with sufficient repetition. During pre-season twice-daily practices, only one session per day should include full-contact. While total full-contact practice days and time limitations may be increased during the pre-season, the emphasis should focus on the proper principles of tackling and blocking during the first several practices, before progressing to “Thud” and “Live Contact”.

Rationale: The task force acknowledges regular season practice limitations may need to be revised during the pre-season. This should be done in a specific and systematic manner to allow coaches to spend sufficient time teaching proper tackling and blocking progressions with “Air,” “Bags” and “Control” using the USA Football definition of “Levels of Contact”.

Rationale: The adolescent brain needs sufficient recovery time following full-contact practices. In addition, concussion signs and/or symptoms may not develop for several hours after the initial injury.

- b. Pre-season acclimatization protocols and regulations regarding heat and hydration take precedent and should always be followed.

2. Five Days between Varsity games:

- During the regular season teams must wait 5 days between games
- Exception: Prior to the annual Thanksgiving Day game teams must wait 4 days between games.

3. Six (6) quarters per week JV/Varsity.

The football week is designated as Wednesday to Wednesday.
During this period players are required to play no more than 6 quarters.

Section 2. SCHEDULE/GAMES

The Director of Football will make up the schedules and order of games. No school can make any change to the order of games on the schedule. All games shall be played in accordance with the adopted Home Confirmation Schedule. See Article 1, Section 17.

- A. Principals are urged to give personal attention to the condition of the football field before all games, markings, playing surface, and handling of crowds. The playing surface especially should be free from objects such as surveying stakes, stones, and other material(s) likely to cause injury.

- B. No football games will be scheduled prior to the Round Robin Injury Fund Contest.

C. Five days between Varsity games:

- During the regular season teams must wait 5 days between games
- Exception: Prior to the annual Thanksgiving Day game teams must wait 4 days between games

- D. Home teams shall set a date/time for all contests.

1. If there is a conflict in the date/time of the contest and mutual agreement cannot be reached, the visiting school shall submit *a written request* to the Director of Football, who will review the circumstances of the disagreement and render a decision. **This must be done prior to the submission of the Home Confirmation Schedule.**

- E. Once the Home Confirmation Schedule is submitted, changes will not be allowed unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- F. Decisions involving extenuating circumstances will be made by the Director(s) of Football.
- G. Use of Portable Lights at Football
1. Portable lighting would be allowed at regular season and play-off games. Minimum standard is 6 light towers each side (each tower must have 4-1000 watt bulbs), height 25-30'.
- H. The scoreboard clock at varsity football games is the official time.
- I. The home school should provide the services of a licensed doctor and/or a licensed athletic trainer at all football games. ***The medical personnel must introduce himself/herself to both coaches and referee prior to the start of the game.*** S/he shall sit on the home team bench so that s/he will be available at all times.
- J. **Football “Mercy Rule”:** In all regular season and playoff games:
- If there is a 35-point differential during the 4th quarter, the game clock will not be stopped unless there is an injury time out or a regular team time out.
- K. The home school shall:
1. Provide an adult chain crew to assist the assigned officials.
 2. Provide yardage chain and a down indicator in complete conformity with the National Federation of State High School Association Football Rules. The referee shall declare a forfeit for failure to comply with this rule. Should such a forfeit be declared, the home team shall forfeit all points, which it may have earned if the game was played and the visiting team shall be awarded a victory.
 3. Provide suitable parking and dressing or meeting facilities.
 4. Provide an adult game supervisor. The Principal of the home school and/or his/her designee shall be the game supervisor. The supervisor shall not be a student or a coach involved with the game. The supervisor shall identify him/herself to the game officials thirty (30) minutes prior to the start of the game. The supervisor shall be responsible for game administration.
- L. All RIIL member schools who play football teams from Massachusetts must play by NFHS Football Rules beginning in the fall of 2018.

Section 3. POSTPONEMENTS

The postponement rules contained in Article 4, unless otherwise stated, shall govern all postponed football games. Regularly scheduled games can be postponed only by mutual agreement of the Principals involved to a definite date before the end of the regular season. Failure to carry out this provision will automatically forfeit the points for tie or victory for both schools. If one school insists on playing the game as scheduled, it must be played or the points shall be forfeited to the school wishing to play.

- A. The only exception to this regulation will be when the referee or the Director(s) of Football, (or if s/he cannot be reached), the Executive Director, determines that playing conditions are sufficiently hazardous to necessitate a postponement even though there be no mutual agreement.
- B. For football postponements, the Principal or his/her designee of the home school is to notify the referee no later than 2 1/2 hours before the scheduled game time of the postponement and the new date when the game is to be played. The referee will then contact his/her colleagues and determine who is able to work the rescheduled game. The referee will then notify the home school Athletic Director, who will notify the RIIL Office of the postponement and the need (if any) for officials for the rescheduled game.

Section 4. OFFICIAL(S)

RIIL assigned official's authority extends to pre and post-game oversight. Fighting and unsportsmanlike penalties will be within the authority of the officials at all times at the contest site.

- A. Police protection, when necessary, must be provided by the home school. The home school is responsible for all crowd control measures. There is an urgent need for increasing vigilance in this matter. Schools must make every effort to insure that players, officials, and spectators are protected. Duties of the police will be determined and outlined by the home school.
- B. With the assistance of the police it shall be the responsibility of the officials to see that benches are cleared of everyone except coaches, assistant coaches, managers, scorers, players, school physician, and a representative of the press.

Section 5. PLAYOFFS

The Championship Playoffs will be conducted under the direction of the Director of Football using a format determined by the Director of Football, approved by the Committee, and published with the RIIL Football Schedule.

A. Football Playoff Qualification:

The concept behind this system is that in any step of the tie-breaking process only one team advances to the playoffs and is given the highest seed involved in the tie. When one team wins the tie-breaker, all other teams revert to step #2 of the applicable two-team or three or more format.

1. Wins & losses in League games.
2. If there is a tie between two (2) teams, head-to-head competition will be the tie breaker.
3. If there are more than two (2) teams tied for playoff qualification, pool records will be the first tie breaker. Pool records will be the win/loss record among the tied qualifying teams only. If one team has the best won-lost record among the tied teams, that team wins the tie-breaker and becomes the highest seed in the tournament. If all teams remain tied., the next step is Quality Points. If two teams tie for the best record, they revert to step #2. The team defeated in that step, along with the other remaining team(s) will then revert to step #2. If this process leaves two (2) teams still tied, revert back to #2 (head-to-head competition).
4. If pool records do not break the tie among three (3) or more teams, then quality points shall be the criteria. Teams will be awarded one quality point for each game won by the teams they have defeated. Every attempt will be made during an overtime game to determine a winner and a loser. However, in the event that the referee ends the game and a tie still exists; the following will occur: Each team will receive ½ quality point for every League game won by the other team. If one team has the most quality points among the tied teams, that team wins the tie-breaker and becomes the highest seed in the tie. If all teams remain tied the next step will be defensive points allowed. If this process leaves two (2) teams tied with quality points, revert back to #2 (head-to-head competition). The team defeated in that step, along with any other remaining team(s) will revert to step #2.
5. If #4 does not break the tie, total defensive points allowed in the games between the teams involved in the tie breaker only shall be used. If one team has given up the fewest points among the teams tied, that team wins the tie-breaker and the highest seed in the tie. All remaining teams revert to step #2. If two teams remain tied, the next step will be a coin toss. If two teams tie with the fewest defensive points, they will revert to step #2. The team defeated in that step, along with any other remaining teams(s) will revert to step #2.

When applying the Breaker #5 (defensive points allowed) any games involving forfeits will be calculated using the score of 1-0. By Federation Rule, this is the official score of a forfeited game.

6. Coin toss/random drawing. The method used will be at the discretion of the Football Director. The winner of the coin toss/random drawing will receive the highest seed available in the tie. The losers of the coin toss/random drawing will revert to step #2.

B. Halftime – the length of the halftime of RIIIL playoff games will not exceed twenty-five (25) minutes.

C. Playoff Practice Format

1. Friday after Thanksgiving

- Wednesday after first playoff game
- Practice with helmets only
- no pads
- no contact

2. Practice days before first playoff game and Superbowl

- Light practices
- helmets, shoulder pads and mouth guards only