



Football

Sport Handbook – Fall 2026

Section 1: Rules

- A. All contests under the jurisdiction of the RIIL shall be played according to the National Federation of State High School Association Rules, except for any special rulings adopted by the RIIL and listed in this handbook below.
- B. The RIIL strongly recommends head coaches/officials obtain a copy of the most recent NFHS Rulebook.

Section 2: Mandatory Coaches Certification & Continuing Education

- A. ALL Coaches must be appointed by their School Administration and upload their valid certificates to the Coaches' Certification website below. A coach is any adult with access to student-athletes through education-based athletic programs.
 - a. Including, but not limited to: Volunteer Coaches, Assistant Coaches, and Head Coaches.
- B. Coaching Requirements: RIIL R&R Article 13
- C. Coaching Out of Season Rules: RIIL R&R Article 7, Section 8

Section 3: Medical Coverage/Emergency Action Plans

- A. Medical Coverage should be provided by the host school, be in attendance and on duty for the duration of all interscholastic scrimmages and games during the regular season and all tournament round games. The medical personnel must introduce themselves to both coaches and referee prior to the start of the game.
 - a. RIIL R&R Article 2, Section 2.G : In the absence of medical coverage for any home contest in the sport of Football, Ice Hockey, Wrestling, and Lacrosse, the home school Athletic Director shall notify the visiting Athletic Director no later than 48 hours prior to the event.
 - b. Pre-Game Safety Checklist is located on the Documents page of the RIIL website
- B. Schools are responsible for providing Medical Coverage for their team throughout the playoffs, including the Semis and Finals/Championships.
- C. Home team medical coverage shall be responsible for both teams unless the visiting school provides its own medical coverage.

D. Levels of Medical Coverage:

<i>Medical Professional Legal Limitations</i>
A. <i>Education/Schooling/Training & Licensure</i> B. <i>Scope of Practice</i> C. <i>Able to Return to Play</i>
Medical Doctors-MD/DO or Advanced Practice Provider-NP/PA
A. Advanced degree (Medical School/Successfully passed the licensing board, and RI Licensed) B. Preventative Care, On field Evaluation, Immediate Care, Diagnosis C. Can they Return to Play – Yes
Athletic Trainer (RI Licensed)
A. Minimum Bachelor's Degree (Successfully pass the BOC exam, and RI licensed) B. Preventative Care, On field Evaluation, Immediate Care, Assessment of injury, referral for further diagnosis C. Can they Return to Play during a game/contest? – YES
Physical Therapist (RI Licensed)
A. Degree varies from BS, MS to DPT (Successfully pass the board exam, and RI licensed.) B. Preventative Care, Rehabilitation, Orthopedic exam evaluation C. Can they Return to Play during a game/contest? – NO
Physical Therapist w/ Orthopedic Clinical Specialist (OCS) credential (RI Licensed)
A. Advanced Certification (Successfully pass the board exam, successfully complete requirements for and pass the OCS exam, and RI licensed) B. Rehabilitation, Orthopedic exam evaluation. On the field coverage - not qualified, no emergency training incorporated into initial certification or required to be annually updated. C. Can they Return to Play – NO (During a Game/Contest), Yes (In Clinical Setting)
Physical Therapists w/ Sports Certified Specialist (SCS) credential (RI Licensed)
A. Advanced Certification (Successfully pass the board exam, successfully complete requirements for and pass the SCS exam, and RI licensed) B. Rehabilitation, Orthopedic exam evaluation. On-the-field coverage – Qualified C. Can they Return to Play during a game/contest? – YES
EMT - Basic, Intermediate & Paramedic
A. Successfully complete the EMT program, pass the board exam, and RI licensed) B. Emergency care C. Can they Return to Play during a game/contest? - NO, per RI EMS laws/regulations/protocols
School Nurse (RN)
A. Successful completion of a nursing program (Successfully pass the board exam, and RI licensed) B. Emergency care, referral for further treatment/diagnosis C. Can they Return to Play during a game/contest? – NO

- E. The judgment of the medical personnel will be final with regard to the medical condition of a player. No player may continue to play against the medical personnel's advice under any circumstance.
- F. An Emergency Action Plan with clearly defined written and practice protocols as required by RI General Laws must be developed and in place at every high school.
 - a. When possible, an athletic trainer should be present at all practices and games. An athletic trainer is a key component in any strategy to minimize injury risk and optimize safety for all participants.
 - b. *Rationale*: An effective emergency action plan (EAP) must 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.

Section 4: General Regulations for all Sports

- A. Heat Acclimatization: RIIL R&R Article 7, Section 3
- B. Definition of a Game/Scrimmage: RIIL R&R Article 7, Section 2
- C. Coaching Out of Season Rules: RIIL R&R Article 7, Section 8
- D. Use of Equipment During the Summer: RIIL R&R Article 6, Section 13
- E. Sportsmanship Expectations for Coaches, Student-Athletes, & Spectators: RIIL R&R Art. 12, Sect. 3
- F. Loyalty to Home School: RIIL R&R Article 7, Section 7
- G. National Events: RIIL R&R Article 7, Section 11
- H. Penalties for Ejections: RIIL R&R Article 6, Section 7
- I. Protest Procedure: RIIL R&R Article 5

Section 5: Sport Advisory Committee

- A. Each Sport Advisory Committee is comprised of Member School Administrators, Athletic Directors, Coaches, Officials, and other relevant individuals who work with and report to the RIIL on all matters concerning their sport.
- B. Football Sport Advisory Committee Membership:

Committee Role	Member	School & Position
PCOA Representative	Scott Barr	Classical Principal
PCOA Representative	Mike Green	West Warwick Assistant Principal
Co-Director (RIIAAA)	Terry Lynch	South Kingstown Athletic Director
Athletic Director	Anthony Ficcocelli	North Providence
Athletic Director	Dino Campopiano	Pawtucket
Athletic Director	Mike Traficante	Cranston
Coach	Jason DaLawrence	Tolman
Coach	Henry Cabral	Davies
Coach	Kris McCall	Classical
Coach	Blake Simpson	Pilgrim
Coach	Genarro Ferraro	Burrillville
Official	Bruce Guindon	

- B. The 2026-27 and 2027-28 Alignment received the following endorsements & approvals:
- Sport Committee Approval: 12/02/25
 - Survey of all Member Schools: 12/11/25
 - RIIAAA Executive Board Endorsement: 01/16/25
 - Principal's Committee on Athletics Approval: 01/27/26

Section 6: Regular Season:

A. Important Dates:

Season	Fall of 2026	Fall of 2027
Sport	Football	Football
Start Date	Monday, August 17, 2026	Monday, August 16, 2027
Multi-Team Practice	Tuesday, August 25, 2026	Tuesday, August 24, 2027
Scrimmage Weekend	Friday, August 28, 2026	Friday, August 27, 2027
Injury Fund Weekend	Friday, September 4, 2026	Friday, September 3, 2027
Weekend #1	Friday, September 11, 2026	Friday, September 10, 2027
Weekend #2	Friday, September 18, 2026	Friday, September 17, 2027
Weekend #3	Friday, September 25, 2026	Friday, September 24, 2027
Weekend #4	Friday, October 2, 2026	Friday, October 1, 2027
Weekend #5	Friday, October 9, 2026	Friday, October 8, 2027
Weekend #6	Friday, October 16, 2026	Friday, October 15, 2027
Weekend #7	Friday, October 23, 2026	Friday, October 22, 2027
Weekend #8	Friday, October 30, 2026	Friday, October 29, 2027
Playoff Rounds/Events	3 consecutive weekends	3 consecutive weekends
Quarterfinal Weekend	Friday, November 6, 2026	Friday, November 5, 2027
Semifinal Weekend	Friday, November 13, 2026	Friday, November 12, 2027
Championship Weekend	Friday, November 20, 2026	Friday, November 19, 2027
Championships Concluded	Sunday, November 22, 2026	Sunday, November 21, 2027
Thanksgiving	Thursday, November 26, 2026	Thursday, November 25, 2027

B. Divisions:

State Championship Division (Div. 1)	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
10 Teams	10 Teams	12 Teams	10 Teams
Barrington	Burrillville	Davies	Central Falls/BV/AF Co-op
Bishop Hendricken	Classical	Chariho	EWG/Prout Co-op
Central	Coventry	Cranston East	Hope/SPA Co-op
Cranston West	East Providence	East Greenwich	Juanita San./PCD Co-op
Cumberland	Johnston	Lincoln	Narragansett
La Salle	Pawtucket Co-op	Moses Brown	North Smithfield
North Kingstown	Ponaganset	Middletown	Scituate
Portsmouth	Westerly	Mt. Hope	Smithfield
South Kingstown	West Warwick	Mt. Pleasant/T2 Co-op	Tiverton
St. Raphael	Woonsocket	North Providence	Toll Gate
		Pilgrim	
		Rogers	

C. Game Cap: 9 Regular Season Games prior to the start of the playoffs (not including Thanksgiving)

- a. Game Cap includes all League and Non-League varsity competitions
 - b. Scrimmages are strictly defined in Article 7, Section 2 and must be conducted in full compliance
- D. Score Reporting for all Regular Season and Postseason League Games: In accordance with Article 6, Section 14, all contest scores are to be reported on-line on the RIIL Website. Coaches obtain access to the system through their Athletic Director.
- E. It shall be the responsibility of school officials/administrators/supervisors to provide a safe and secure environment for the teams and officials by ensuring the playing field and sidelines are continuously cleared of **everyone** except certified & appointed coaches, team managers/scorers, student-athletes, medical personnel, and school designated personnel. Media are allowed with prior permission of the host school.
- F. Home teams shall set a date/time for all contests.
- a. If there is a conflict in the date/time of the contest with the visiting team(s) and mutual agreement cannot be reached, the visiting school Principal/Athletic Director shall submit **a**

written request to the RIIL to review the circumstances of the disagreement and render a decision. **This must be done prior to the submission of the Home Confirmation Schedule.**

- b. Once the Home Confirmation Schedule is submitted, changes will not be allowed unless there are extenuating circumstances.

G. Postponement of Regular Season Varsity Games after the confirmation deadline:

- a. Where unusual circumstances prevail or where weather conditions are unfavorable, a game may be postponed by mutual consent of the Principals and/or Athletic Directors
- b. Postponed games shall be rescheduled to the next day when the teams, facility, and officials are available.
 - i. Includes weekends and/or school vacations.
 - ii. League games must take precedent over non-league games or lesser events
 - iii. Rescheduled games must be within all other guidelines contained in this handbook and the RIIL Rules & Regulations.
- c. Additional Officials Fees for Games Changed within Two Weeks of original date/time:
Article 6, Section 5

H. Practice Limitations:

- a. Preseason Practice Limitations are also located in Heat Acclimatization: RIIL R&R Article 7, Section 3
- b. Football:
 - i. Days 1 & 2: Helmets only
 - ii. Days 3 - 5: Helmets and Shoulder Pads only
 - iii. Days 6 – 10: Full equipment and intrasquad contact permitted

August Preseason Practice Requirements			
Practice Day	Time Limit	Equipment Progression	Max Contact Level
1st Day	3 hrs	Helmet Only	Air & Bags
2nd Day	3 hrs	Helmet Only	Air & Bags
3rd Day	3 hrs	Helmet & Shoulder Pad	Control
4th Day	3 hrs	Helmet & Shoulder Pad	Control
5th Day	3 hrs	Helmet & Shoulder Pad	Control
6th Day	3 hrs	Full Pads	Live
7th Day	3 hrs	Full Pads	Live
8th Day	Art.7.3.A (4,5,6)	Full Pads	Live
9th Day	Art.7.3.A (4,5,6)	Full Pads	Live
10th Day	Art.7.3.A (4,5,6)	Full Pads	Live*
Notes: - Sundays during the football preseason are mandatory days off for all teams - Days immediately prior to a Scrimmage shall be non-contact (Air & Bags) - Days immediately following a Scrimmage shall be non-padded practices			

I. Fundamentals for Minimizing Head Impact Exposure and Concussion Risk in Football -

Recommended, developed and supported by the NFHS Concussion Task Force

- 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*.
- Levels of Contact are defined by USA Football in 2023 as: **Air:** Student-athlete runs a drill unopposed without contact. **Bags:** Drill is run with a bag or against another soft contact surface. **Control:** Drill is run at assigned speed until the moment of contact. One student-athlete is pre-determined the winner by the coach. Contact remains above the waist and players stay on their feet throughout the drill. **Control to Ground:** Drill is run at an assigned non-competitive speed until the moment of contact. One student-athletes is pre-determined as the winner. Student-athletes are allowed to take their opponent to the ground in a competitive manner. **Thud:** Drill is run at a competitive speed through the moment of contact. There is not a pre-determined winner. Contact is limited to above the

waist. Student-athletes stay on their feet and a quick whistle ends the drill. **Live:** Drill is run at a competitive speed in game-like conditions.

- i. *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.
- c. During the regular season and post season:
 - i. No football player is allowed to participate in more than thirty minutes per day and ninety (90) minutes of full contact practice per week.
 - ii. Full-contact (Live) is allowed in no more than 3 practices per week.
 - iii. Athletes may not participate in games played on consecutive days or on the same day.
 - iv. Practices the day before a game (or scrimmage) shall be limited to Air, & Bag levels of contact.
 - v. Practices conducted the day after a game (or scrimmage) can not include helmets and/or any pads and must be non-contact.
 - vi. *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.
- d. 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”.
 - i. *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*”.

- ii. *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.
- e. Pre-season acclimatization protocols and regulations regarding heat and hydration take precedent and should always be followed.
- f. Sundays during the preseason are mandatory days off with no team events
- J. Five Days between Varsity games:
 - a. RIIIL Rule: During the regular season teams must wait 5 days between games.
 - b. Prior to the annual Thanksgiving Day game and by mutual consent of both teams, current NFHS Rules can be utilized.
 - c. NFHS Rules mandate 72 hours between games.
- K. Maximum of Six (6) quarters per week during all Sub-Varsity and Varsity games.
 - a. The football week is designated as Wednesday to Wednesday.
 - b. During this period players are required to play no more than 6 quarters in games scheduled at all levels of play.

Section 7: Postseason Qualification & Format:

- A. **League Games Required to be Eligible for the Postseason: 7 league games**
- B. Teams will be ranked within their division according to their RPI in all league games
- C. Single Elimination throughout the playoffs, straight brackets with no reseeding
- D. Postseason Qualification:
 - a. Division 1, 2, 3, & 4
 - i. The Top-6 (six) Eligible Teams by RPI will Qualify for each Division Playoff
 - 1. Quarterfinals (3 v. 6, 4 v. 5, 1 & 2 bye), Semifinals & Championship
- E. **Postseason Tiebreaker**
 - a. Playoff Seeding will be determined by a team's RPI as calculated on the RIIIL website.
 - b. RPI Tiebreaker:
 - 1) Head-to-Head result(s) in League Games between the tied teams
 - 2) Winning Percentage in all League Games vs teams in your division
 - 3) Total Wins in all League Games vs teams in a higher division
 - 4) Highest-rated win in Division (according to the final RPI standings)
 - 5) Next-highest-rated win (exhaust all possibilities)
 - 6) Coin Toss

Section 8: RIIL Rules & Regulations Specific to Football – Article 19

- A. **Rosters** shall be completed via the RIIL website and made available to the public no later than 10 days after the start of practice. Rosters must be updated when students are added/removed from the team. Rosters must include: full name, grade, and jersey number.
- B. **Uniforms:**
 - a. Schools shall consult the NFHS Rulebook for specific regulations pertaining to uniforms
 - b. In football, the home team shall wear “dark” uniforms, while the away team shall wear “white” uniforms.
- C. **RI Interscholastic Injury Fund:**
 - a. The Injury Fund is a non-profit organization separate from the RIIL.
 - i. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.injuryfund.org/>
 - b. The purpose of the nonprofit Injury Fund is to establish, raise, maintain and distribute funds to the athletic departments of high schools participating in the Rhode Island Interscholastic League. Distributions will be made to assist athletes, coaches or officials injured in sanctioned interscholastic competitions and practices with their medical expenses that exceed the amount paid by the injured party’s primary, required medical insurance. Any and all financial assistance rendered by the RI Injury Fund to RIIL Member Schools shall be given purely on a voluntary basis and in such amounts and in such manner as the Board of Directors in its sole discretion shall determine.
 - c. Non-League competitions scheduled to spread awareness of and benefit the Injury Fund are allowed by RIIL Rules in addition to any stated game caps contained herein.
 - d. Students, Coaches, and Officials whose teams participate in an Injury Fund event in a given sport are covered by the Injury Fund
 - e. **Injury Fund Format:** Teams will schedule multiple contests at one facility on a designated Friday night prior to the first weekend of the regular season (doubleheader or tripleheader). Injury Fund games will consist of two quarters of 12 minutes each with normal/stoppage time, and three timeouts per team.
- D. **Game Ball:** The official game ball for the 2024 season shall be the Wilson GST (WTF1003B) through the 2027-28 school year.
- E. In the event a “playoff game” must be suspended because of conditions which make it impossible to continue to play, the game will be rescheduled and restarted from the exact point of the suspension of play.
- F. **Playoff Warmup:** Teams must be allowed no less than 30 minutes to warm up on the field prior to the start of any playoff game unless specific warmup procedures are contained elsewhere in this handbook.

- G. **Score Differential Rule:** During regularly scheduled RIII games and playoff games, a team ahead by 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.
- H. During all Games, it shall be the responsibility of the home team to:
- a. Occupy the Sideline closest to the main spectator area/press box at their home facility
 - b. Schedule Saturday games no earlier than 12:00pm unless agreed to by the visiting team
 - c. Provide an adult chain crew to assist the assigned officials.
 - d. 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.
- I. Concussion Education: The RIII 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.
- a. *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.
- J. Halftime – the length of the halftime of RIII playoff games will not exceed twenty-five (25) minutes.
- K. 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 RIII contest.
- L. Use of Portable Lights at Football
- a. 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’.

Section 9: Officials

- A. 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.
- B. 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 ensure that players, officials, and spectators are protected. Duties of the police will be determined and outlined by the home school.
- C. With the assistance of the home team supervision, it shall be the responsibility of the officials to see that benches are cleared of everyone except certified & appointed coaches, team managers, scorers, players, medical personnel, and school designated personnel.
- D. The home team should provide an adult game supervisor at all home events. In particular, an adult game supervisor must be present at ice hockey, basketball, field hockey, lacrosse, baseball, softball, football, soccer, volleyball and wrestling contests. The supervisor shall not be a student nor a coach involved with the game. The supervisor shall identify himself or herself to the game officials thirty (30) minutes prior to the start of the game. The supervisor shall be responsible for game administration and crowd control. They should notify police, and rink representatives to seek appropriate assistance when applicable. In the event of a problem, the Principal/Athletic Director must notify the RIIL office the next day and submit a written report detailing the incident(s).