

CIAC Football Committee

May 21, 2026

Agenda

1. Approve Minutes 4-23-26
2. Review 2026 Football Information Packet
3. Review Six Divisions
4. Future Agenda Items

CIAC Football Committee

Minutes

4/23/26

1. WELCOME - Chris welcomed everyone to the meeting on Zoom.
2. MINUTES - The committee approved the meeting minutes from 1/20/26
 - 2.1. Notes from the subcommittee meeting on the CCC proposal is included
3. SITES - There are difficulties with championship sites that have been conveyed to the committee in the past.
 - 3.1. We are not going back to Rentschler field which is cost prohibitive
 - 3.2. Central has become expensive as well
 - 3.3. We have paid New Britain for 4 games what Central costs for two
 - 3.4. Crowds are down
 - 3.5. The committee suggested several locations and Gregg will explore those
4. SUCCESS IN TOURNAMENT - The committee had a chance to give feedback on the success in tournament formula.
 - 4.1. Vo-Ag schools are no longer considered teams of choice
 - 4.2. Discussion on coops
5. SIZE OF DIVISIONS -
 - 5.1. Keep the divisions "blind" where we don't know specific teams in divisions
6. INSTANT REPLAY -
 - 6.1. Has been discussed in the past
 - 6.2. Looking for a sub committee from the CHSCA to bring together ideas
7. CONTINUE USE OF OTAs
 - 7.1. Are OTAs still necessary with summer coaching?
 - 7.2. Keep for now and look at some changes in the future
8. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS
 - 8.1. None

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51st ANNUAL 2026 FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

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CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE
2026 CIAC FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

ALERT PAGE

SUMMER OUT-OF-SEASON COACHING OPPORTUNITIES – START JUNE 15, END AUGUST 8

Teams must have a minimum of three (3) days of practice prior to scheduling a full team scrimmage. All sports teams and individual athletes must have a minimum of ten (10) physical/exertional practice days with their school before the date of the first scheduled competition. No team/athlete shall practice/compete with their school more than six (6) consecutive days to provide a day of rest. Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays may be used unless prohibited by local board policy. Sunday practices may be counted to fulfill the 10 day requirement..

DISQUALIFICATION RULE – The CIAC Board of Control has enhanced its disqualification rule for coaches. When a coach is ejected from a contest, the coach is ineligible to participate in the next **TWO (2)** contests at the same level of play.

All coaches who are disqualified at any level will be suspended for the next two games (see page 96 in the CIAC Handbook), take two NFHS coaching courses (“Teaching and Modeling Behavior” and “Sportsmanship”) and the school will pay a \$50 fine. In addition to the two-game suspension and fine, the CIAC reserves the right to review any incident that results in a coach’s disqualification and may assess additional game suspensions up to and including a one-year ban. The fine and proof of taking the coaching courses must be submitted to the CIAC office before the coach can resume his coaching responsibilities.

WEATHER DELAY RECOMMENDATIONS – A delay or combination of delays should exceed no more than 90 minutes total, calculated from the time the field is cleared initially to the time the most recent delay is begun because of continued thunder/lightning.

1. Any combination of suspension (continued thunder/lightning) totaling 90 continuous minutes would be subject to suspending/shutting down the contest. Teams would then determine to suspend the game or accept the game score and recognize the game as complete.
2. Suspension of a contest for a second or subsequent time should not exceed an aggregate time of 90 minutes total. Teams would determine suspension or completion as in #1.

The decision to shut down the contest should be made in coordination with the game administration, coaches, officials, and any ADs present as under Rule 3-1-4.

Consideration for contests played either in the morning or afternoon can exceed this recommended standard with the agreement of the participating schools in consultation with the referee.

TOURNAMENT ROSTER / ENTRY FEE – Tournament rosters must be submitted on the eligibility center by November 23, 2026. Entry fee of \$150 must be mailed to the CIAC office, 30 Realty Drive, Cheshire, CT 06410.

TOURNAMENT FORMAT FOR 2026 – The 2026 championships will be played in a three game format – quarter-finals on Tuesday, December 1, 2026, semi-finals on Sunday, December 6, 2026 and finals on Saturday, December 12, 2026. The top forty-eight (48) teams, eight from each of the six divisions, will qualify for the championships. Quarter-finals (6:30 p.m.) and semi-finals (12:30 p.m.) will be played at the site of the higher ranked team. The sites for the finals will be determined by the Football Committee. **Sites must have permanent lights except for CIAC championship sites.**

THE PRACTICE WEEK STARTS ON A SUNDAY FOR THE PURPOSE OF COUNTING CONTACT PRACTICE MINUTES PER WEEK.

CIAC LATE ENTRY POLICY

- No tournament entries will be accepted after the deadline established by each sports committee except those approved by the CIAC Board of Control.
- Corrections requested by a school to an entry form that was submitted by the established deadline but prior to seeding/pairing data being published on the web site, will be assessed a fee of \$50 per correction to a maximum of \$250.

TOURNAMENT REGULATIONS VIOLATIONS – If a school fails to comply with tournament regulations, and such requires the CIAC tournament sports committee, central office staff, or the CIAC Board of Control to redo any portion of the tournament pairings or such non-compliance adversely impacts the management of the tournament, an administrative violation fee of \$50 will be imposed upon the school before entry into the tournament will be allowed.

TIE BREAK – It is now mandatory that all games played against member schools will use the CIAC tie-break procedures during the regular and post-season.

All games played against out-of-state teams who are members of their state association will not be bound by this rule when the game is played at the site of the out-of-state team.

OVERTIME IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME – The CIAC Football Committee voted that all final games that are tied will continue to use the CIAC tie-break procedures until a winner is declared.

RECONDITIONING/RECERTIFYING FOOTBALL HELMETS – Effective September 1, 2012 NAERA members will not recondition/recertify any football helmet ten years of age or older.

National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association, NAERA, announced a new ten year policy adopted in their winter meeting. The ten years shall be determined by the manufacturers date as required by NOCSAE document 001.

For example, at the end of this upcoming 2026 football season, any helmet dated 2017 or older will not be reconditioned / recertified.

REPORTING GAME SCORES – In order to ensure that standings and rankings on both the CIAC's websites and other sites which draw their data from us are timely and accurate, all regular season scores must be entered online no more than 24 hours following the game's completion. It is highly recommended that scores are entered from the site as soon as the game ends.

Students with Special Needs – Coaches are reminded to inform contest officials prior to each competition of any student with special needs who could be competing in the contest when his/her disability could impact the individual's performance or the conduct of the competition.

CIAC TOURNAMENT SITE MEDIA POLICY – The CIAC places tremendous value on the role the media plays in promoting and highlighting high school sports. To that purpose CIAC tournament venues and hosts should make every effort to provide a working environment conducive to all media (print, broadcast and internet based) covering our events. The following are **minimum standards**, developed in consultation with the CIAC Media Advisory Committee, which should be provided for working media at all CIAC tournament sites:

1. A minimum of one hour following the conclusion of post-game interviews to write in the press box, press area or a suitable facility in close proximity to the site of the event (i.e. office, classroom, etc.).
2. Access to electric power (shared power strip, etc.).
3. Access to wireless internet service.

Site directors should communicate these requirements to any staff person who may be responsible for the administration of the event. If for some reason a site will not be able to provide these items for a contest, a site representative should inform the CIAC in advance and work with the media on site before the game and work to provide a reasonable solution to the issue. Members of the media who will be covering events are directed to contact the appropriate site as far in advance as possible to inform them they will be at the event and discuss what arrangements will be made for working media at the site.

UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEMS AT CIAC-SANCTIONED EVENTS – The use of unmanned aerial systems, often referred to as drones, is prohibited for any purpose by any person(s) at all CIAC-sanctioned events. This policy includes not only the restricted playing area of the venue(s), but also the physical confines of the entire stadium / field / arena structure. For the purpose of this policy, an unmanned aerial system is any aircraft without a human pilot on board.

CONCUSSION AND SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST LEGISLATION AND CIAC REQUIREMENTS – All CIAC member schools are required to educate all parents and student-athletes on the signs and symptoms of concussion and return-to-play requirements as well as signs and symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest. Educational information both written and video that schools can use to meet this requirement are available online at the CIAC web site. Additionally, all parents and student-athletes must sign off that they have been educated in the signs and symptoms of concussion and sudden cardiac arrest using the consent forms that are available on the CIAC web site or through the school athletic department. No athlete can participate in football or any other sport until properly educated and there are signed consent forms on file.

Further, the new State Statute requires parents/guardians to be notified within twenty-four (24) hours when an athlete has been removed from play due to an injury. Schools will need to determine who is the responsible school personnel who will make contact with the parent. Schools will also be required to report all concussions sustained in or out-of-school annually to the State Department of Education. Schools will need to develop protocol on who reports such information. This requirement went into effect July 1, 2014.

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES

- 1-5-3c(9)** The committee has approved the wearing of play cards on both the forearm/wrist and belt areas of the body.
- 9-4-7** The committee approved new rules language that no player may use the hand(s) to slap the opponent's head.
- Rules Reminders:**
- 1-5-1d(5)a – 4, 5** The committee clarified and restricted attachments on tooth and mouth protectors, effective with the 2026 season.
- 1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6)** New arm sleeve specifications developed to guide manufacturers, players and coaches effective with the 2027 season.

2026 Football Editorial Changes

1-1-8; 1-3-5b; 1-5-1d(5)a – 4, 5; 1-5-3a(2); 2-15-1; 2-32-6; 3-5-7g; 4-1-3; 5-3-1; 5-3-2; 8-2-2; 8-2-3; 8-2-4; 8-2-5; 9-4-3p; 9-8 Penalty; 10-4-2; 10-4-2b; 10-4-4a; 10-5-3; Football Fundamentals – Penalty Measurement (4); Resolving Tied Games – (3-1); Six-player Rules Differences; NFHS Official Football Signals – (21)

2026 Football Points of Emphasis

1. Flagrant and Unsportsmanlike Fouls
2. Helping the Runner
3. Sideline Management and Control
4. Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls

MANDATORY BYE WEEK – REGULAR SEASON

One week has been added to the season to allow for a bye week which **should** be in weeks 4-6 and provides for no contact in that week. The bye week begins on a Sunday and applies to all levels of play. **It is strongly encouraged that the bye week is the same week for all three levels of play.**

THE PRACTICE WEEK STARTS ON A SUNDAY FOR THE PURPOSE OF COUNTING CONTACT PRACTICE MINUTES PER WEEK.

Live person-to-person contact be limited in practice to the following:

- **OTA** – Three days – No contact
- **Week 1** – Pre-season conditioning – No contact
- **Weeks 2 & 3** – Maximum 60 minutes per week plus one scrimmage per week. There will be no contact if teams conduct a second scrimmage.
- **Weeks 4-13** – Competition season – Maximum 44 minutes per week. Must include a bye week – No (zero) contact in practice allowed. Must be in weeks 4-6 and applies to all levels of play.
- **Week 14** – 23 minutes of contact in practice per that week
- **Week 15 Thanksgiving Day Game & State Tournament** – (Starts the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving Day Game) – Zero contact in practice allowed

Definition of Contact

1. **Full Contact** – Football drills or live game simulations where live action occurs.
2. **Live Contact** – Contact at game speed where players execute full tackles at a competitive pace taking players to the ground.
3. **Thud** – Initiation of contact at or up to full speed with no pre-determined winner and no take-down to the ground.

Definition of Non-Contact

1. **Air** – Players run unopposed without bags or any competition.
2. **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.
3. **Control** – Drill is run at an assigned speed (not full) until the moment of contact, one player is pre-determined the winner by the coach. Contact remains above the waist and players stay on their feet.
4. **Engage and Release** – Activity is run at game speed up until prior to the moment of contact at which time the opposing players will pull back and come to a balanced stance and engage each other above the waist and immediately release each other after proper leverage and balance has been established to prevent being taken to the ground.
5. **Fly-By** – Activity is run at game speed up until prior to the moment of contact when both players totally avoid each other and the tackler runs by or tags the ball carrier avoiding any contact. There is no established winner or loser and no one is taken to the ground.

Contact Questions and Answers

1. **How much contact can my football team have during the mid-season bye week?**
The mid-season bye week has zero contact for the entire week. There is to be no contact in practice nor in a scrimmage or simulated game. You can run drills, condition and conduct a walk through but with no contact.
2. **What do I do if during my bye week for the varsity and JV the freshman team has a game?**
All teams at all levels, therefore all athletes are required to have a bye week in the mid-season where there is zero contact. (It is strongly recommended that all three levels have the same “bye” week.)
3. **What day of the week does my weekly contact period begin?**
The contact period for each week begins on Sunday and ends on Saturday.

4. **What if my contact period begins in the middle of the week?**

You cannot use the full contact minutes allowed during a partial week. An adjustment should be made to correspond to the amount of contact that would ordinarily have taken place during the partial week.

5. **What if I have two scrimmages scheduled in the same pre-season week?**

The 60 minutes of contact is in addition to one (1) scrimmage. If a second scrimmage is needed there will be no contact that week.

6. **What is the penalty for violating this regulation?**

The CIAC Board of Control would consider a violation of this rule to be negligent behavior and therefore seriously consider a penalty which will include a fine and may also result in the program being put on probation or prohibition from tournament participation. Violation of this regulation can have serious liability consequences.

Six quarter rule and defining a week

1. Football student-athletes may not participate in more than two (2) levels of competition in any one-week time period. (Examples of levels – varsity, JV, freshman, other)
2. Football student-athletes may not exceed participation in more than six (6) quarters in any one competition week period.

Penalty

When there is a violation of this (six-quarter) rule:

- The varsity head coach will be disqualified and will be ineligible to participate in all contests until he/she sits out for the next contest at the same level of play.
- He/she must retake Coaching Education Module 51 by the end of the same school year.
- The program will review its procedures for keeping track of student-athlete playing time and create a process/plan that ensures that athletes in the program do not exceed the number of quarters played per week again.
- The athlete will be deemed ineligible for the remainder of the year until reinstated by the CIAC Board of Control.
- The game in which the violation occurs is forfeited. A fine will be levied at \$100 per occurrence to a maximum of \$500.

Definitions

- “**Level of Competition**” is defined as varsity, junior varsity, freshman or other.
- A “**quarter**” is counted towards participation once an athlete has been involved in at least six (6) plays in any one quarter.
- A “**one competition week period**” is defined as a period of time during any week that includes a successive block of freshman, varsity and JV games and starts at the beginning of the freshman game and concludes with the completion of the JV game. Note: The “bye week” starts on a Sunday and a Monday JV game cannot be played during the bye week.
- A “**play**” is defined as any offensive, defensive or special team’s participation during a scheduled contest.

Six Quarter Participation Questions and Answers

1. **Can a JV football athlete, who is a special team’s player on the varsity team, play in all four quarters of the varsity game and then play the entire ensuing JV game?**
Yes, provided that during the varsity special team’s participation the JV athletes did not participate in more than five plays in two of the four quarters.
2. **Due to the weather we have to move our varsity football game to a Sunday night. How does this affect my next game scheduled for next Friday night?**
The CIAC regulations for counting quarters are in effect for regularly scheduled events. Cancellations for inclement weather would not have an impact on this regulation.

3. **Can a freshman who plays in an entire freshman game, and then participates on special teams the following night in the varsity game, but does not participate in more than five plays in any one quarter, participate in two full quarters of the ensuing JV game?**
No, football athletes may not participate in more than two levels of competition in any one-week period.
4. **How do I effectively monitor who plays in how many quarters?**
Each program must devise a way to monitor this requirement. You should make sure every athlete is aware of the regulation and that the purpose is to lessen the number of contact exposures to the head.

NON-EXERTIONAL ORGANIZED TEAM ACTIVITIES

The CIAC Board of Control adopted the CHSCA proposal for the creation of three “Non-Exertional Organized Team Activities” days (OTA’s). These three OTA’s immediately precede the start of the football conditioning week in August and will not exceed 90 minutes each day. **(Sunday, August 16 cannot be used for an OTA day for the 2026 season.)**

Rationale – The proposal supplements the elimination of spring football by allowing schools that traditionally used that time to organize and properly plan for their program.

What Will Be Allowed During OTA’s:

- Equipment distribution and proper helmet fitting
- Issuing lockers
- Review of program rules and locker room behavior
- Review of team expectations
- Issuing playbooks and pertinent handouts
- Chalk talks and video review
- Teaching proper stretching
- Teaching of proper safety techniques
- “Walk through teaching” of drills, stances, spacing and cadence
- Any other organizational team activity needed to prepare the student athletes for the upcoming conditioning week

What Will Not Be Allowed During OTA’s:

- The use of any equipment including helmets, pads, footballs or the simulation of a football
- Any full speed activities
- All exertional activities such as pass patterns or sled work, etc.

FALL FOOTBALL PRACTICE CONDITIONING / CONTACT – AUGUST 2026

Regular Season Practice Guidelines

1. Football physical conditioning practice must be conducted for at least five (5) days prior to contact and no earlier than Monday, **August 17, 2026.**
2. On days 1-5 there cannot be more than 1 practice session per day AND the total practice time must not exceed 3 hours in any one day.
3. On days 1 and 2 footballs may not be used for the first hour on either day. Only helmets may be used on both days.
4. On days 3-5 footballs may not be used for the first hour on each day. Only helmets and shoulder pads may be used AND contact ONLY with sleds and tackling dummies may be initiated.
5. **A coach must be present at all conditioning sessions.**

Contact Practice with Pads

6. Teams may start practice with pads and contact beginning **Saturday, August 22** provided the minimum number of conditioning sessions have been held. No contact is permitted prior to these dates
7. **A coach must be present at all practice sessions**
8. Live contact in full gear may not begin before the 6th day.
9. On days 6-14 live person-to-person contact is limited to a maximum of 60 minutes plus one full team scrimmage. There will be no contact during practices if teams conduct a second scrimmage.
10. On days 6-14 a double practice day in full gear must be followed by a single practice day in full gear. On single practice days, one walk through without full gear is permissible as long as it is separated from the full practice by at least 3 hours. When a double practice day in full gear is followed by a day of rest then another double practice day in full gear is permitted after the rest day.
11. On any double practice day, neither practice should exceed three hours in duration, and no more than five total hours of practice in the day. Warm-up, stretching, cool down, walk through, conditioning and weight room activities are included as part of the practice time. The two practices should be separated by at least three continuous hours in a cool environment.
12. Teams must have a minimum of three (3) days of practice prior to scheduling a full team scrimmage. All sports teams and individual athletes must have a minimum of ten (10) physical/exertional practice days with their school before the date of the first scheduled competition. No team/athlete shall practice/compete with their school more than six (6) consecutive days to provide a day of rest. Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays may be used unless prohibited by local board policy. Sunday practices may be counted to fulfill the 10 day requirement.
13. Teams found in violation of the above rules will be subject to disciplinary review by the CIAC Board of Control.
14. Coaches are required to review with their players the suggestions for reducing head and neck injuries and “hot weather hints.”

Football Practice Calendar – August 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				August 13 OTA Day	August 14 OTA Day	August 15 OTA Day
August 16 Cannot be used For OTA day	August 17 Day 1 Conditioning	August 18 Day 2 Conditioning	August 19 Day 3 Conditioning	August 20 Day 4 Conditioning	August 21 Day 5 Conditioning	August 22 Pads – No earlier than this date
August 23 Optional Pads	August 24 Pads	August 25 Pads	August 26 Pads *	August 27 Pads	August 28	August 29

*First allowable day for any scrimmage.

Reminder: No team/athlete shall practice/compete with their school more than six (6) consecutive days to provide a day of rest.

CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE
30 Realty Drive, Cheshire, Connecticut 06410

Re: **FOOTBALL SELECTION SYSTEM**

1. Six (6) classes of competition will be used for the tournament. Thus a champion will be determined in the

Class LL	758 and Over
Class L	599 - 757
Class MM	517 - 598
Class M	394 - 516
Class SS	331 - 393
Class S	Up to 330

2. The Football Committee uses a “success in tournament” formula for use in placing teams in division for the CIAC Football State Tournament. The CIAC Board of Control has provided the option to any team sport to adopt “success in tournament” for tournament placement if the sport committee so desired. The “success in tournament” formula will be applied to all schools of choice as defined by CIAC rules (more than 25 gender-specific students attend from out-of-district).

The Football Committee will use the “success in tournament” for placement during the 2026 season.

- a. All schools will be placed in divisions based on their enrollment as of October 1 of the previous school year as reported to CIAC and/or the State Department of Education.
- b. The Football Committee will set a pre-determined number of schools in each division.
- c. The “success in tournament” factor will then be applied to all schools of choice – “success in tournament” is defined as having reached the semi-finals during the last three years. If a school has reached the semi-finals in one of those three years that school will be moved up two divisions.

If a school has reached the semi-finals in two of those three years that school will be moved up three divisions.

- d. After all moves are made the committee will re-balance the divisions to conform to the pre-determined number of schools in each division.
 - e. Every year, the Football Committee will follow the same process as outlined, reviewing data for the past three years and moving schools as appropriate.
 - f. Use of “success in tournament” only applies to schools of choice as defined by CIAC rules. All other schools will remain in the division as determined by their base enrollment.
3. To be eligible for the Playoffs a minimum of eight (8) games must be played.
4. The top eight teams in each division will be selected using a point system as follows:

Games which are against Connecticut schools which are not member of the CIAC or out-of-state schools which are not members of their state’s NFHS-affiliated association do not count towards tournament qualifying. No points of any type will be awarded for the result or opponent’s record in relation to such games.

Six classes of competition will be used with the point system.

Division LL / Division L / Division MM / Division M / Division SS / Division S

- a. Under the new six division format, schools will be grouped in three sections, Class S/SS, Class M/MM and Class L/LL. A school will receive points for each of its wins and ties, based on the section of the opponent it defeated or tied. Schools will receive:
- 100 points for defeating an opponent in its own section or a league opponent in a section lower than its own.
 - 130 points for defeating an opponent in two higher sections.
 - 110 points for defeating an opponent in one higher section.
 - 90 points for defeating a non-league opponent in one lower section.
 - 80 points for defeating a non-league opponent in two lower sections.
 - 50 points for tying an opponent in its own section
 - 65 points for tying an opponent in two higher sections.
 - 55 points for tying an opponent in one higher section.
 - 40 points for tying an opponent in one lower section.
 - 35 points for tying an opponent in two lower sections.

Note: Since there are no ties in games played in Connecticut, the points for ties only apply to games played out-of-state where a tiebreaker is not used.

- b. A school will receive five points for each victory and 2.5 points for each tie earned by each opponent on its schedule **REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME OF THE GAME PLAYED AGAINST EACH OPPONENT**
- c. A school will receive 10 points for each victory and five points for each tie earned by any opponent it has defeated.
- d. A school will receive five points for each victory and 2.5 points for each tie earned by an opponent it has tied. A school will not receive any bonus points for a tie where they were the opponent.
- e. The total number of playoff points will be divided by the total number of games played to determine the point value earned by each school.
- f. The following five steps will be used in breaking ties in divisional pairings when two or more schools finish with the same point value.
- 1) In the event there are exactly two schools tied at the point value and the two schools have met during the regular season, the winner wins the position in question (head-to-head).
 - 2) The wins and ties of each of the opponents are added (2 points per win and 1 point per tie) and the team with the greatest number of points wins the position in question. This includes each opponent regardless of whether the game was won or lost.
 - 3) The team that defeated the highest rated (CIAC point system) team wins the position in question.
 - 4) The team with the best winning percentage wins the position in question.
 - 5) Each team will be assigned a computer-generated random by-lot number two weeks prior to the end of the season. If there is still no winner after the other criteria in this section are applied, the team with the highest random by-lot number will be the winner of the position in question.
- g. The top eight (8) teams in each division will qualify for the quarter-final games (48 teams total).

Tournament Format for 2026 – The 2026 championships will be played in a three game format – quarter-finals on December 1, 2026, semi-finals on Sunday, December 6, 2026 and finals on Saturday, December 12, 2026. The top forty-eight (48) teams, eight from each of the six divisions, will qualify for the championships. Quarter-finals (6:30 p.m.) and semi-finals (12:30 p.m.) will be played at the site of the higher ranked team. The sites for the finals will be determined by the Football Committee and all sites for all levels of tournament play must have lights. If a site is a natural grass field, an alternative site that is artificially surfaced, must be named prior to tournament play in case weather conditions dictate that a grass field is not playable. The CIAC Football Tournament Director has the authority to move the game if the site is deemed unplayable.

- h. TOURNAMENT SITES:** All must have permanent lights, be properly lined, access to lavatory facilities, a sheltered, heated and lighted area for teams to prepare both at half-time, and prior to the game. While a locker room may be used, some better choices may be available as long as they meet the criteria and maintain privacy and security for the athletes. Wearing cleats must be allowed in these areas. The final determination as to whether a site can be used is up to the Tournament Director.

CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

2026 CONNECTICUT HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYOFF INFORMATION

TIE-BREAK REQUIREMENT – The CIAC Football Committee voted that starting with the 2013 season it is now mandatory that all games played against member schools will use the CIAC tie-break procedures during the regular and post-season.

All games played against out-of-state teams who are members of their state association will not be bound by this rule in 2026 when the game is played at the site of the out-of-state team.

TEAM ROSTER AND ENTRY FEE – The CIAC Football Committee will meet on Friday, November 27 to select those schools that will take part in the playoffs. All schools wishing to take part are required to submit tournament rosters on the CIAC eligibility center by Monday, November 23, 2026. You need an access log in from your athletic director to complete the roster form. To complete the team roster form:

- Go to the CIAC website at casciac.org
- In the lefthand column select “Eligibility Center”
- Select “Team Roster/Tournament Roster”
- Check off each player that is on your roster

Entry fee of \$150 should be mailed to the CIAC office, 30 Realty Drive, Cheshire, CT 06410. If a school needs an invoice in order to pay its tournament fee, contact Judy Sylvester.

THE LAST DATE TO COUNT WILL BE THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26. No school may pre-schedule a game after November 26.

GAMES PLAYED ON THE FRIDAY OR SATURDAY AFTER THANKSGIVING CAN BE CONSIDERED IN THE SELECTION PROCESS IF THEY OCCUR AS THE RESULT OF A POSTPONEMENT OF A THANKSGIVING DAY GAME.

GAME RESULTS / SUBMIT SCORES – All regular season scores must be entered online on the day of the game as soon as possible following the game’s completion.

- Scores must be entered on the new CIAC website at <https://ciac.fpsports.org/>
- In the lefthand column select “Schedules – High School”
- At the top of the page select the school and Football as the sport, then the team’s schedule will be displayed
- Click on the green score entry button to make the entries
- Only logged in users with security permission to enter scores for this sport will see the score entry button for their school’s games
- The system will display a score entry screen that is specific for football
- Enter the team scores

Late entries will be disqualified.

FORFEITED GAMES – **Football exclusively** – The option of choosing to accept or not accept the win does not exist. This applies to the sport of football only. All scheduled games shall be played as a victory, loss, or tie, or shall be declared as a forfeit. **The Football Committee is empowered to review and make decisions in individual cases when teams are directly affected by the inability to schedule a game on the final Saturday and yet comply with this regulation.**

DATES / TIMES OF GAMES – All quarter-final games will be played on Tuesday, December 1 and semi-final games will be played on Sunday, December 6 at the site of the higher ranked team. Postponements of quarter-finals will be played on December 2 and semi-finals will be played on December 7.

All final games will be played on Saturday, December 12, 2026. The postponement date will be December 13, 2026.

CANCELLATION – Postponements after December 13 may not be possible. The Tournament Director, CIAC staff and Football Committee Chairman will make the final decision to play or not to play beyond December 13.

COLLEGE BOARD EXAMINATIONS – There shall be no postponement of games because of College Board or ACT Examinations. Schools that feel they have a good chance of making the Playoffs should encourage team members to make arrangements to take the examinations on another date.

DETERMINATION OF RATINGS – The CIAC Football Committee will classify, by enrollment, opponents that are out-of-state, and prep schools. Out-of-state high schools must be affiliated with their state high school athletic association.

SCORE MANAGEMENT POLICY - The following score management policy will be in place for the 2026 season.

The following running clock rules would apply to all CIAC-sanctioned football games played in the State of Connecticut, including varsity, junior varsity, sub-varsity, and freshmen games. These rules would apply to quarter-final and semi-final games but would not be applied to state championship game(s).

Point Differential for Consideration

- When one team leads by 35 or more points in the third quarter or the fourth quarter, the officials shall use a running clock to time the game.
- If the score differential is reduced to less than 35 points in the third quarter or the fourth quarter, the officials shall revert to regular timing until the point differential again reaches 35 (third quarter) or (fourth quarter) points.

Running Clock Operations Rules

- 1) The clock will run continuously when:
 - First down is awarded to either team, including following a change of possession
 - Ball or runner with the ball goes out-of-bounds
 - Legal or illegal forward pass is incomplete
 - Penalty enforcement
- 2) The clock shall be stopped for:
 - End of a period
 - Scores (touchdown, field goal, safety)
 - Try plays following a touchdown
 - Charged team timeout
 - Official's timeout
 - Injury timeout

COACHES DISQUALIFICATION RULE: All coaches who are disqualified at any level will be suspended for the next two (2) games (see CIAC Handbook), take two NFHS coaching courses (“Teaching and Modeling Behavior” and “Sportsmanship”) and the school will pay a \$50 fine. In addition to the two-game suspension and fine, the CIAC reserves the right to review any incident that results in a coach's disqualification and may assess additional game suspensions up to and including a one-year ban. The fine and proof of taking the coaching courses must be submitted to the CIAC office before the coach can resume his coaching responsibilities.

ALL GAMES PLAYED WILL COUNT TOWARD THE TEAM'S RATING EXCEPT THE FOLLOWING:

1. Games against junior varsity teams will not be counted in the ratings.

2. Games contracted after September 10, 2026, will not be considered in determining a school's point value for playoff consideration. The deadline may be extended ten (10) days to permit a school to complete negotiations for a specific game contract provided a written request for extension is made to the CIAC office. The written request must be received in the CIAC office no later than 3:00 p.m. on September 10, 2026.
3. To be eligible for the playoffs a minimum of eight (8) games must be played.
4. Playoff games to determine a league champion will not be considered.
5. Games played against high schools who are not members of their state association will not be considered.

SCHEDULES – In some leagues teams play each other twice, home and home. Where this occurs both games will be counted in determining the team's point value. This policy only applies to league teams, not home and home games with teams in different leagues or independents. In those cases only the first game will count toward tournament.

REQUEST FOR CHANGE OF DIVISION – Schools will not be permitted to request a change of division.

REGULAR SEASON AND PLAYOFF TIE BREAKERS – It is now mandatory that all games played against member schools will use the CIAC tie-break procedures during the regular and post-season. All games played against out-of-state teams who are members of their state association will not be bound by this rule if the game is played at their site.

TIE GAMES – If a regular season or playoff game ends in a tie, the following tie-breaker system will be used:

1. Immediately following the conclusion of the fourth quarter, a coin toss is to be held with the visiting team captain calling heads or tails. The winner of the toss shall be given the choice of offense or defense or designating the end of the field. The loser gets the remaining option.
2. After a three-minute rest period, during which both teams may confer with their coaches, the offensive team shall put the ball in play, first and goal, on the ten (10) yard line.
3. The rules for loss of possession are the same as during the regulation game. If a touchdown is scored the try for an extra point(s) will follow. Field goal attempts are permitted during any down. When a team scores via either a field goal or the try for point following a touchdown it gives up possession of the ball.
4. If the score remains tied after each team has been given one series of downs in an overtime period, then the procedure shall be repeated with other overtime periods until a game winner is determined. In this case, there shall be an intermission of two minutes. At the subsequent meeting of team captains, the loser of the overtime coin toss will be given first choice of the options. If additional overtime periods are required, then first options will be alternated with no coin toss.
5. Each team will be permitted one time out during each overtime period.
6. Rules pertaining to offensive and defensive pass interference remain the same in the overtime period.
7. If the defensive team gains possession of the football by recovering a fumble or intercepting a pass, the ball immediately becomes dead. The defensive team may not score points.
8. The team scoring the greater number of points in the overtime shall be declared the winner. Overtime periods will continue until a winner is declared.

Regular season, quarter-final, semi-final and final game(s) will continue using the above tie-breaker procedures until a winner is declared. **Beginning with the third overtime period, teams must go for two after a touchdown.**

HOME TEAM – VISITING TEAM – The home team is the team having the highest point value. The home team will wear the dark colored jersey – the visiting team will wear white.

SELECTION OF OFFICIALS – The CIAC Football Committee will select the game officials in accordance with the following procedures:

1. The CIAC Football Committee or its designee shall, with the commissioners from the six officiating boards, select the officials, chain crews and clock operators to work all tournament games. Neutral boards will always be assigned to work tournament games.
2. Each commissioner will provide the list of officials selected to work the tournament to the tournament director prior to November 5. Boards failing to do so by that date risk being excluded from working tournament games.
3. Teams qualifying for the tournament will be provided with the list of tournament officials prior to November 13.

RESOLVING DISPUTES AT CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES – A dispute procedure has been developed for championship games to address a disputed call.

1. Purpose – The Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference Football committee desires to provide a process for resolving problems and disputes which may arise during the football playoffs. In establishing this process, it is hoped that all parties will feel that they have proper recourse and that all possible steps will have been taken to have the state championships decided on the merits of the competing teams.
2. Clarification – It will be the responsibility of the Tournament Director to clarify the dispute procedure to the assigned game officials, to the head coaches and to the site director prior to the game.
3. Game Disputes – Disputes regarding game situations can only be made by the head coaches. In a dispute situation the head coach will notify the nearest official that he desires a time out to confer with the referee as per the National Federation Rules.

The referee will immediately notify the head coach of the other team and the site coordinator of the nature of the disagreement. He must then meet with all game officials to discuss the issue. The referee is encouraged to also confer with the officials who are assigned to the sideline crew and the clock operator. Every attempt should be made to obtain as much information as possible before rendering a decision. The decision of the referee, based on his discussion with the other officials, is final and must be delivered before the game can continue.

The site director will be responsible for informing the crowd and the media personnel of the dispute and the decision. The site coordinator will also be responsible for reporting the details of the dispute to CIAC officials.

4. Decisions by Game Officials – Disputes arising from the decisions, interpretations and/or misapplications of National Federation or CIAC game rules by officials during the contest must be resolved at the time of the dispute and cannot be contested after the event. All decisions of the game officials are final.

VIDEO EXCHANGE – Playoff teams must make available to their opponents films or video tapes of any two of their games that the opposing coach desires. (Note: For quarter-final and semi-final games – not later than the Saturday after Thanksgiving and by Monday following the semi-finals.) If one of the teams does not take game films, films of their games taken by opponents will be obtained.

MEDICAL COVERAGE – The site director at the game (quarter-final, semi-finals and finals) will have in attendance the services of a doctor who will be available to either team. A participating team may, if it so wishes, have in attendance its own personal physician who will be permitted to attend to its needs. The expense for the personal physician will be the responsibility of the school. An ambulance must be on site at the start of all playoff games. **Schools must have their athletic trainer in attendance.**

GAME BALLS – The Spalding Alpha 72-6758 is the official football for tournament play. Other Spalding balls may be used with CIAC approval.

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR’S MEETING – The Tournament Director will oversee that the participating schools, site directors and site coordinators know the following: field location, field passes, postponement notification, pre-game time schedule, team introductions, dressing facilities, reserved parking, spectator parking, reserved seating sections (bands), press box, tickets and admission prices, police protection, filming of game, half-time program, faculty supervision, reimbursement of approved school expenses, medical services. This information will be reviewed at the “Press Conference” (date listed below).

PRESS CONFERENCE – CIAC will host a press conference for all schools that advance to the finals on Tuesday, December 8 (snow date Wednesday, December 9, 2026).

REIMBURSEMENT FOR QUARTER-FINAL AND SEMI-FINAL GAMES –CIAC will reimburse the home team in the quarter-final and semi-finals up to \$1,700 for costs associated in staging the game. CIAC will assume the cost of the officials and site director.

PRICE OF ADMISSION – (Subject to change)

<u>Quarter-final / Semi-final Games</u>		<u>Final Games</u>
Free	Children five (5) and under	All tickets will be \$10.00
Free	Military in uniform or with I.D.	Military in uniform or with I.D. - Free
\$5.00	Students / Senior Citizens	
\$10.00	Adults	

All ticket sales for CIAC tournament games will be sold and redeemed via digital ticketing.

GAME RULES – There will be full compliance with National Federation Rules – NO EXCEPTIONS.

FINALS – POST GAME AWARDS PRESENTATION – Immediately following the conclusion of the game, each team will report to the 40 yard line on the side of the field they used during pre-game activities. The CIAC football representative will instruct the announcer to announce the post-game awards presentation.

SPORTSMANSHIP – Member schools are expected to conduct their relations with each other at all levels of competition in a spirit of good sportsmanship. The school administration is responsible for the athletic program, including the policies and procedures relating to sportsmanship and the conduct of activities in the school. The CIAC “Class Act” standards will be used in all CIAC contests. The CIAC Standards for Sportsmanship as defined in the Class Act program are found at http://ciacsports.com/site/?page_id=10438.

CIAC TOURNAMENT SPECTATOR EXPECTATIONS (INCLUDING PARENTS)

Positive Cheering and Behavior

- Spectators will cheer positively to support their team, not negatively against the opponent. “No Negatives, No Names, No Numbers”.
- Spectators will show respect for the game officials and their decisions.
- Spectators will respect CIAC tournament/site directors, tournament staff, and security when behavior is addressed and if asked to leave the event.

Dress Code

- For CIAC tournament contests, all spectators should be appropriately attired according to their school’s policy. No attire with visible degrading or demeaning writings/logos is permitted.

Signs, Banners, Flags and Powder

- Any signs must be positive in nature, reference only the school supported by the sign maker, be small enough not to obstruct the view of other spectators and be pre-approved by the school's athletic director reference in the sign. Spectators are not permitted to bring flags for safety reasons. When asked to remove a sign, banner, or flag, participating schools will respect and follow the direction of any CIAC tournament/site director, tournament staff, or security personnel.
- All signs, banners, and flags may be restricted pending facility usage requirements or at the discretion of the CIAC tournament director. CIAC tournament directors/staff will notify the athletic director when such restrictions are necessary.
- Powder or powder-like substances are prohibited at all visiting and neutral sites.

Noisemakers

- Outdoor Sports – No air horns, horns of any kind, or whistles will be used. Any other noisemakers may be allowed with approval from the host athletic/site director and the spectator's school athletic director. Noisemakers can only be used during "dead ball" situations to celebrate good play.
- Indoor Sports – No noisemakers will be allowed. Pep bands are allowable with the prior approval of the CIAC tournament and site director, provided the school band has adult supervision, and the band only plays during "dead ball" situations.

Tailgating

- Tailgating is prohibited on the grounds of any CIAC tournament or championship event.

Streaming

- CIAC championships are streamed on the NFHS Network. Any streaming, broadcasting, or reproduction of a CIAC tournament game or championship without the expressed written consent of the CIAC is strictly prohibited.

WEATHER DELAY RECOMMENDATIONS – A delay or combination of delays should exceed no more than 90 minutes total, calculated from the time the field is cleared initially to the time the most recent delay is begun because of continued thunder / lightning.

1. Any combination of suspension (continued thunder/lightning) totaling 90 continuous minutes would be subject to suspending/shutting down the contest. Teams would then determine to suspend the game or accept the game score and recognize the game as complete.
2. Suspension of a contest for a second or subsequent time should not exceed an aggregate time of 90 minutes total. Teams would determine suspension or completion as in #1.

The decision to shut down the contest should be made in coordination with the game administration, coaches, officials, and any ADs present as under Rule 3-1-4.

Consideration for contests played either in the morning or afternoon can exceed this recommended standard with the agreement of the participating schools in consultation with the referee.

COACHING CERTIFICATIONS – For a list of all coaching certifications and links to forms go here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KnzXy81GK9x88bY1-5JBSuP-8SY34sdc/edit?usp=sharing&oid=104830910406558409235&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Volunteer Coaches – The State of Connecticut Department of Education does not distinguish between volunteer or paid coaches when considering certifications or responsibilities. All coaches who are responsible for or instruct students in any way must follow Connecticut State Law for certifications and responsibilities. Therefore, volunteer coaches are required to obtain the same certifications as all other coaches.

KOREY STRINGER INSTITUTE HEAT ACCLIMATIZATION GUIDELINES INCORPORATED INTO CIAC PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The CIAC Board of Control has adopted the Korey Stringer Heat Acclimatization Guidelines in the sport of football.

Regular Season Practice Guidelines

1. Football physical conditioning practice must be conducted for at least five (5) days prior to contact.
2. On days 1-5 – there cannot be more than one practice session per day AND the total practice time must not exceed three hours in any one day.
3. On days 1 and 2 – footballs may not be used for the first hour on either day. Only helmets may be used on both days.
4. On days 3-5 – footballs may not be used for the first hour on each day. Only helmets and shoulder pads may be used AND contact ONLY with sleds and tackling dummies may be initiated.
5. Live contact in full gear may not begin before the 6th day.
6. On days 6-14 a double practice day in full gear must be followed by a single practice day in full gear. On single practice days, one walk through without full gear is permissible as long as it's separated from the full practice by at least three hours. When a double practice day in full gear is followed by a day of rest then another double practice day in full gear is permitted after the rest day.
7. On any double practice day, neither practice should exceed three hours in duration, and no more than five total hours of practice in the day. Warm-up, stretching, cool down, walk through, conditioning and weight room activities are included as part of the practice time. The two practices should be separated by at least three continuous hours in a cool environment.
8. A coach must be present at all practice sessions.
9. On days 6-14 live person-to-person contact is limited to a maximum of 60 minutes plus one full team scrimmage. There will be no contact during practices if teams conduct a second scrimmage.
10. Teams must have a minimum of three (3) days of practice prior to scheduling a full team scrimmage.
11. All teams/individuals must practice a minimum of 10 physical/exertional practice days with their school before the date of the first scheduled competition.
12. **No team/athlete shall practice/compete with their school more than six (6) consecutive days to provide a day of rest. A scrimmage is an exertional practice.**

Questions and Answers

1. **Q. May a coach run a three-hour conditioning practice followed by a one-hour weight room session?**
A. No, any one day during conditioning cannot exceed three hours of practice time.
2. **Q. May a coach run a three-hour conditioning practice period followed by a one-hour chalk talk or film session in a classroom?**
A. Yes, the practice does not exceed three hours of physical activity.

3. **Q. May a coach run two 3-hour practices with players in full gear during days 6-14 of the fall pre-season period?**
A. *No, total practice time for double sessions cannot exceed five total hours.*
4. **Q. May a coach run two 2-hour practices with players in full gear during days 6-14 of the fall pre-season period?**
A. *Yes, provided the two practices are separated by at least a three-hour rest period.*
5. **Q. May a coach run a 3-hour single practice in full gear followed by a 2-hour walk through in helmets only as long as there are three hours of rest time separating the two sessions during days 6-14 of the fall preseason?**
A. *Yes.*
6. **Q. May coaches run a one 5-hour practice during days 6-14 of the fall pre-season period?**
A. *No, no one practice session can exceed three hours in length at any time. The 3-hour session includes warm-up, stretching, cool down, walk through, conditioning and weight room activities.*
7. **Q. May teams have a full scrimmage against another school on the first day of full contact in full gear?**
A. *No, teams must practice for three days in full gear before having an interscholastic scrimmage or combined practice.*
8. **Q. May an individual join the football team for the first time on the teams fourteenth day of practice and compete the next day in the school's first regular season game?**
A. *No, individuals must have ten days of practice prior to competition.*
9. **Q. May an athlete who has been injured and being held out from practice during the season for a period of two weeks rejoin the team when medically cleared and play immediately?**
A. *Yes, provided during that two week period the athlete was attending practice and doing some prescribed light conditioning workouts on uninjured areas.*

REDUCING HEAD AND NECK INJURIES IN FOOTBALL

Frederick O. Mueller, Ph.D.

Head and neck injuries in football have been dramatically reduced since the late 1960's. Several suggestions for continued reduction are as follows:

1. Pre-season physical exams for all participants. Identify during the physical exam those athletes with a history of previous head or neck injuries. If the physician has any questions about the athlete's readiness to participate, the athlete should not be allowed to play.
2. A physician should be present at all games. If it is not possible for a physician to be present at all games and practice sessions, emergency measures must be provided. The total staff should be organized in that each person will know what to do in case of head or neck injury in game or practice. Have a plan ready and have your staff prepared to implement that plan. Prevention of further injury is the main objective.
3. Athletes must be given proper conditioning exercises which will strengthen their necks so that participants will be able to hold their head firmly erect when making contact. Strong neck muscles may help prevent neck injuries.
4. Coaches should drill the athletes in the proper execution of the fundamentals of football skills, particularly blocking and tackling. **KEEP THE HEAD OUT OF FOOTBALL.**
5. Coaches and officials should discourage the players from using their heads as battering rams. The rules prohibiting spearing should be enforced in practice and in games. The players should be taught to respect the helmet as a protective device and that the helmet should not be used as a weapon.
6. All coaches, physicians and trainers should take special care to see that the player's equipment is properly fitted, particularly the helmet.
7. Strict enforcement of the rules of the game by both coaches and officials will help reduce serious injuries.
8. When a player has experienced or shown signs of head trauma (loss of consciousness, visual disturbances, headache, inability to walk correctly, obvious disorientation, memory loss) he/she should receive immediate medical attention and should not be allowed to return to practice or game without permission from the proper medical authorities. Coaches should encourage players to let them know if they have any of the above mentioned symptoms (that cannot be seen by others, such as headaches) and why it is important.

Recommendations and Guidelines for Minimizing Head Impact Exposure and Concussion Risk in Football

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)
Report from the July 2014 NFHS Concussion Summit Task Force

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its member associations firmly believe that athletic participation by students promotes health and fitness, academic achievement, healthy lifestyles, and good citizenship. While there will always be a risk of injury, minimizing the risk of head trauma and concussion in all sports is a priority for the NFHS. Over the past several years, the NFHS and the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) have:

- 1) Produced a 20-minute online educational course with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on “Concussion in Sports.”
- 2) Specifically addressed concussion management in the rule books of all sports, including football.
- 3) Written several Points of Emphasis in the football rules book focused on limiting helmet-to-helmet contact and blows to the head with the shoulder, forearm, and hand.
- 4) Disseminated multiple publications regarding concussion management to the member state associations.

In July of 2014, at the request of the NFHS Board of Directors, a task force of medical and scientific experts, high school football coaches, state association personnel, and representatives of several stakeholder organizations met to discuss strategies to reduce head impacts and minimize concussion risk in high school football players during contests and practices, as well as during activities conducted outside of the traditional fall football season (spring and summer practices). The fundamentals outlined below represent the task force’s recommendations and guidelines developed following two days of presentations and discussion of the relevant medical literature and current expert opinion.

The members of the task force fully acknowledge the present limited – though evolving – scientific evidence available to support the fundamentals outlined below with absolute certainty and explicit detail. Accordingly, the outcomes and clinical relevance of an increasing number of research studies may eventually alter these recommendations and guidelines. Ideally, this emerging data will clarify the potential for long-term adverse cognitive, emotional, and/or neurologic effects from concussions and repetitive blows to the head that may not result in the clinical symptoms of concussion. Based on what is currently known, the guiding principles in developing this report for young athletes and those who oversee, support and administer high school football programs were to reasonably limit overall exposure to multiple blows to the head and body (*head impact exposure*) and minimize concussion risk, while maintaining the integrity of the game and attempting to avoid unintended consequences.

The fundamentals below are designed to allow flexibility for the state associations that collectively oversee the more than 15,000 high schools playing football across the country. The teams fielded by these schools may vary tremendously in the number of available players. Team size dictates numerous variables that may affect an athlete’s potential head impact exposure. Those variables cannot be easily accounted for by stringent guidelines. For example:

- An athlete playing on offense, defense and special teams will have greater cumulative head impact exposure and will be at higher risk for injury than an athlete playing a single position.
- The fewer number of players on a team, the greater the chance some players will need to participate in repeated drills, raising head impact exposure and potential injury risk.

As additional evidence emerges, these fundamentals will evolve and may become more or less restrictive. While the current level of knowledge keeps this task force from making proposals that are specific and rigid, there is consensus that lessening the frequency of contact (and thus head impact exposure) is likely beneficial to overall brain health. The task force also recognizes multiple contributing factors that affect head impact exposure and the parallel effects on an individual football player’s brain. For example:

- Position played (linemen receive more total blows than other positions)
- Two-way players versus those who only play offense or defense
- Tackling and blocking techniques
- Practice frequency and duration

- Players that practice and/or compete on multiple levels (such as varsity and sub-varsity) *
- Concussion history
- Genetic predisposition to concussion

*Note: This contributing factor was added to the document by the NFHS SMAC.

It is very likely that each athlete has a unique level of resilience or susceptibility to concussion and further brain injury. While there is currently no definitive way to measure or quantify this resilience or susceptibility, the task force recommends reasonably limiting head impact exposure through the fundamentals presented below. Individual risk factors that are modifiable, such as position played, total time spent on field, and sport technique, must be also considered when implementing contact limitations.

Fundamentals for Minimizing Head Impact Exposure and Concussion Risk in Football

- 1) Full contact should be limited during the regular season, as well as during activity outside of the traditional fall football season. For purposes of these recommendations and guidelines, full contact consists of both “Thud” and “Live Action” using the USA Football definitions of *Level of Contact*.

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

- 2) Member state associations should consider a variety of options for limiting contact in practices. The task force strongly recommends full contact be allowed in no more than 2-3 practices per week. Consideration should also be given to limiting full-contact on consecutive days and limiting full-contact time to no more than 30 minutes per day and no more than 60-90 minutes per week.

Rationale: The task force acknowledges that there are insufficient data to specify with certainty a research-validated “best practices” standard for contact limitations. Several states (Alabama, Arizona, Maryland, and Texas) adopted varying limitations on contact prior to the 2013 football season. 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.

- 3) 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.
 - a. Pre-season acclimatization protocols and regulations regarding heat and hydration take precedent and should always be followed.
 - b. 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 techniques. Emphasis should be placed upon inexperienced players, as they slowly work through tackling and blocking progressions with “Air,” “Bags,” and “Control” using the USA Football definitions of “*Levels of Contact*.”

- 4) During pre-season twice-daily practices, only one session per day should include full 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.

- 5) Each member state association should review its current policies regarding total quarters or games played during a one week time from.

Rationale: High School RIO Injury Surveillance data consistently show that competition presents the highest risk for concussion. The task force is concerned that participation in games at multiple levels of competition during a single week increases risk for head injury and unnecessarily increases head impact exposure. In addition, games played on consecutive days or those scheduled on the same days (freshman and junior varsity games or junior varsity and varsity games) may not allow the brain an opportunity to adequately recover. Consideration should be given to moderating these situations as much as possible.

- 6) Consistent with efforts to minimize total exposure to full contact, head impact exposure, and concussion risk, member state associations with jurisdiction over football outside of the traditional fall football season should review their current policies to assess if those policies stand in alignment with the fundamentals discussed within this report and, if needed, modify the policies accordingly.

Rationale: Football played outside of the traditional fall football season presents an opportunity for learning, physical activity, and skill development. However, athletes are at further risk for head impact exposure and concussion during any full contact activity. Consideration should be given to significantly limiting the total time of full contact. Other factors to consider include time elapsed since the previous football season and whether individual athletes have recently been, or are currently, participating in other contact/collision sports (e.g., ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer and wrestling).

- 7) Each member state association should reach out to its respective state coaches' association on designing and implementing a coach education program that appropriately integrates youth, middle school, and high school football programs in every community. USA Football and the NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching courses should be the primary education resources for all coaches. Education for coaches should also include the proper fitting and care of helmets.

Rationale: The game of football continues to evolve and proper coaching technique at each level is fundamental to keeping the game safe and enjoyable. A proper fitting helmet may help decrease, but not eliminate concussion risk.

- 8) Each member state association should regularly educate its schools on current state concussion law 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.

- 9) An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) with clearly defined written and practiced 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 EAP should be in place, as a prompt and appropriate response to any emergency situation 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.

Resources:

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Football 2026

LL (758 and over) (22)

Bridgeport Central	838
Brien McMahon	899
Crosby	758
Danbury	1729
East Hartford	937
Fairfield Prep.	835
Glastonbury	892
Greenwich	1301
Hamden	973
Manchester	809
New Britain	1282
Norwalk	932
Norwich Free Academy	965
South Windsor	762
Southington	922
Stamford	1140
Staples	814
Trumbull	1099
Warren Harding	790
West Haven	969
Westhill	1090
Wilbur Cross/Career *	818

L (599-757) (21)

<i>Abbott Tech/Immaculate</i> * ##	486
Amity Reg.	692
Cheney Tech/Windham Tech *	680
Cheshire	619
Conard	651
Darien	662
Enfield	679
Fairfield Ludlowe	625
Fairfield Warde	648
Farmington	648
Kennedy	721
Lewis Mills/Wolcott Tech *	614
Maloney	683
Naugatuck	623
New Canaan	641
<i>Notre Dame, WH</i> ##	450
Ridgefield	715
Shelton	684
Simsbury	605
Wilby	670
Wm. Hall	674

MM (517-598) (22)

Bethel	583
Bristol Central	556
Bristol Eastern	526
Grasso Tech/Norwich Tech *	570
Hillhouse	569
<i>Holy Cross</i> ##	201
Middletown	565
New Milford	570
Newington	565
Newtown	598
Plainfield /Ellis Tech / Putnam/Tourtellotte *	558
Platt	596
Pomperaug	528
SMSA/University/Bulkeley/ HMTCA *	598
<i>St. Joseph</i> ##	299
Stratford	559
Torrington	523
Vinal Tech/Goodwin Tech *	588
Wethersfield	557
Wilton	582
Windsor	580
Xavier	537

*Cooperative Team

Success in tournament

Wilcox Tech/Kaynor Tech * 708
OPT OUT

Football 2026

M (394-516) (22)

Avon/St. Paul *	515
Bassick	516
Branford	449
Brookfield	413
Bunnell	514
CompSci/International/AAE/ Innovation *	501
E.O. Smith	443
East Haven	477
East Lyme	446
Fitch	498
Guilford	463
Lyman Hall	422
Masuk	511
New London	463
North Haven	497
Northwest Catholic ##	188
Notre Dame Prep. ##	237
Platt Tech.	488
Rockville	482
Weaver/Hartford Public/ Classical *	443
Windsor Locks/Suffield/East Granby/East Windsor *	403
Woodstock Academy	487

SS (331-393) (22)

Amistad	359
Ansonia	370
Berlin	392
Bullard Havens	379
Daniel Hand	382
Ellington	352
Foran	381
Gilbert/NW Reg/Housatonic *	376
Griswold/Wheeler	339
Joel Barlow	369
Jonathan Law	379
Killingly	342
Ledyard	357
Nonnewaug/Lakeview/Shepaug*	393
O'Brien Tech.	364
Plainville	372
Prince Tech.	366
RHAM	345
Rocky Hill	360
Waterford	360
Watertown	385
Weston	359

S (Up to 330) (24)

Bacon Academy/Lyman Mem. *	304
Bloomfield	244
Capital/Achievement *	157
Coginchaug/Hale Ray/ East Hampton *	321
Cromwell/Portland *	276
Derby	192
East Catholic	201
Granby/Canton *	320
Haddam-Killingworth	239
Montville/St. Bernard *	305
Morgan/Old Saybrook/ Westbrook *	289
New Fairfield	330
North Branford	233
Oxford	219
Seymour	282
Sheehan	314
Stafford/ Somers*	239
Stonington	237
Tolland	308
Valley Reg./Old Lyme *	274
Waterbury Career	324
Windham/Coventry/Bolton/ Parish Hill *	319
Wolcott	300
Woodland	261

*Cooperative Team

Success in Tournament