



## **Women's Premiership Rules & Regulations**

**Season 2023**

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## DEFINITIONS

<b>League</b>	The Northern Ireland Football League
<b>NIFL Women's Premiership</b>	The Women's section of the Northern Ireland Football League
<b>IFA</b>	The Irish Football Association
<b>Articles of Association</b>	Means the Articles of Association of the Irish Football Association
<b>Close Season</b>	Means the period of the year outside the Season
<b>WADA</b>	World Anti Doping Agency
<b>UKAD</b>	United Kingdom Anti Doping
<b>Member Club</b>	Means any club which from time to time is a member of NIFL Women's Premiership
<b>NIFL</b>	NI Football League
<b>NIWFA Championship</b>	Means the 2 <sup>nd</sup> tier of the Women's League Pyramid Structure.
<b>Laws of the Game</b>	Means the Laws of the Game of Association Football as approved by the International FA Board
<b>FIFA</b>	Federation Internationale de Football Associations
<b>Participation Agreement</b>	The annual agreement entered into by the member clubs with the NIFL
<b>IFA FMS System</b>	The Irish Football Association Football Management System which all clubs will be required to be registered for

In all NIFL Rules & Regulations unless the context otherwise requires words denoting any gender include all genders.

## NIFL WOMEN'S PREMIERSHIP

### 1. Title

- (a) For the purposes of Football Competitions, the NIFL Women's Premiership shall consist of no more than 10 clubs who achieve and maintain minimum operating standards as set out by NIFL and to be known as the NIFL Women's Premiership.
- (b) Membership of the NIFL Women's Premiership shall constitute an agreement between the NI Football League and each Club to be bound by and comply with
- (i) FIFA Regulations
  - (ii) The NIFL Articles of Association
  - (iii) The Rules of the NIFL Women's Premiership
  - (iv) The Rules and Articles of the Irish Football Association,
  - (v) Comply with IFA Licensing Scheme (if applicable),
  - (vi) The Laws of the Game,
  - (vii) The Rules and Regulations of any body of which the NIFL Women's Premiership is a Member,
  - (viii) The relevant Participation Agreement to be determined by the NIFL Board.
  - (ix) The terms of any commercial or broadcast agreement entered into by the NIFL, and the terms of any Cup or other Competitions conducted or controlled by the League, each of the aforesaid as altered, revoked or added to from time to time.
  - (x) WADA/UKAD Code
- (c) A member (club) shall be a legal entity fully responsible for the football team participating in the NIFL and such entity (which may be a legal company, limited liability company, private members club (Registration of clubs order 1996) or other like unincorporated association) shall have been in membership of the Irish Football Association for a period of at least one year.
- (i) **Procedures for club to change its legal entity**
- If any club wishes to change its legal entity, which is the recognised member of the Irish Football Association and the NIFL, it must submit full details of the proposed change to the IFA Football Committee and the NIFL Board.
- All of the following rules apply in order to change a legal entity:
- (a) Any application to transfer a club's membership of the Irish Football Association to a new entity must be submitted in writing and by Special Delivery post to the Chief Executive, Irish Football Association, and the Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Football League, at the registered offices of the IFA and the NIFL.
  - (b) A club's membership of the Irish Football Association may only be transferred to the new entity with the advance written permission of the Football Committee. Each case will be considered on its own individual merits.

## **2. Membership Fees**

- a) The Annual Subscription of each Club to the NIFL Women's Premiership shall be £400.
- b) All Annual Subscriptions shall be paid on or before the 9<sup>th</sup> April in each year to the NIFL who shall have notified each Club that the subscription is due.
- c) Any Club whose subscription is not paid by 9<sup>th</sup> April shall not be entitled to participate in any competition organised by the NIFL Women's Premiership or be represented at any meeting until same shall have been paid.

## **3. Dual Interests in Clubs**

**This rule should be read in conjunction with the IFA Football Regulation 46.**

- (a) Except with prior written consent of the NIFL Board, no club, or nominee of a Club, may at one time either directly or indirectly:
  - (i) Hold or acquire or deal in the securities or shares of another Club, or
  - (ii) Be a member of another Club, or
  - (iii) Be involved in any capacity whatsoever in the management or administration of another Club, or
  - (iv) Have any power whatsoever to influence the management or administration of another club.
- (b) Except with the prior written consent of the NIFL Board, no person, whether absolutely or as a trustee either alone or with one or more associates, may at one time, either directly or indirectly:
  - (i) Hold or acquire or deal in the securities or shares of more than one club, or
  - (ii) Be a member of more than one Club, or
  - (iii) Be involved in any capacity whatsoever in the management or administration of more than one Club, or
  - (iv) Have any power whatsoever to influence the management or administration of more than one Club.
- (c) For the purposes of Paragraph (b) of this Rule 'person' includes any body corporate and a partnership.
- (d) In considering whether to give any such consent the NIFL Board shall have regard to the need to promote and safeguard the interests and public profile of Association Football, its players, spectators, and others concerned with the game and shall have regard also to the Constitution and Rules of the NIFL and those bodies to which the NIFL is affiliated.
- (e) For the purposes of this Rule an 'Associate' means:-
  - (a) If the person referred to in Paragraph (b) of this Rule is an individual:

- (i) A close relative of that individual, including that individual's spouse, parents, step-parent, child, step-child, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece, or a child or step-child, of such parent or spouse or anyone else of close relationship to the individual who in the opinion of the NIFL Premiership is or is likely to be acting in conjunction with the individual.
- (ii) Any Company of which the individual is a director or over which the individual is able to exercise control or influence.
- (iii) Any individual who is an employee or partner of that individual or a close relative of any such employee or partner.
- (b) If the person referred to in Paragraph (b) of this Rules or any associate of that person is a body corporate:
  - (i) Any other body corporate associated with either through the holding of shares in it or by reason of control by contact or other form of agreement and
  - (ii) Any director or employee of that body corporate or any close relative of such director or employee, and
- (c) Where any person has an agreement or arrangement, whether legally binding or not, with any other person in relation to the exercise of their voting power in a Club or in relation to the holding or disposal of the interest of the Club, that other person.
- (d) For the purposes of Paragraph (c) above, the word 'person' shall fall to be defined under reference to Paragraph (c) above.

#### **4. Clubs Ceasing to be Members**

If any club is expelled, or resigns from the NIFL Women's Premiership without the consent of the NIFL the players who are registered with that club shall be granted 'free agent' status in accordance with the FIFA regulations governing the Status and Transfer of Players. Clubs failing to notify the NIFL Chief Executive Officer on or before 1<sup>st</sup> December of their intention to discontinue membership of the NIFL Women's Premiership shall forfeit the sum of £250 from any monies due to the funds of the NIFL and shall also be liable as the NIFL Board shall determine to pay their proportional share of any loss that may result to the League in the ensuing season by reason of the failure of such Club to give notice of withdrawal by the date aforementioned.

#### **5. Notices**

A notice may be given by the NIFL to any Club or any Club representative either personally or by sending it by email or by post to the registered address supplied by the club or representative for the giving of notices. Where a notice is sent by post service the notice shall be deemed to be effected by properly addressing, prepaying and posting a letter containing the notice, and to have been effected at the expiration of 24 hours after the letter containing the same was posted.

## **6. League Competitions**

- a) The NIFL shall, each Season, conduct and in every respect control a football competition to be called the NIFL Women's Premiership
- b) The NIFL Women's Premiership shall consist of 10 teams who shall play each other on two occasions ('home' & 'away')

## **7. Ranking of Teams**

- a) Teams shall be awarded 3 points for a win, 1 point for a draw and 0 points for a defeat. In the case of equality of points teams shall be ranked in accordance with the following criteria:

Records in the head-to-head matches in the following order;

- i. Most points in the head-to-head duels between the sides
  - ii. Goal Difference (Goals scored less goals conceded in all head-to-head matches)
  - iii. Goals scored in all head-to-head matches
  - iv. Most goals scored away from home in the head-to-head matches

Only if the clubs remain level in the table after this will a playoff be arranged, at a neutral ground, with the format, timing and venue being determined by NIFL Chief Operating Officer.
- b) At the end of the season the winners of the NIWFA Championship shall be promoted to the NIFL Women's Premiership and the club finishing in bottom position of the NIFL Women's Premiership shall be relegated to the NIWFA Championship.
- c) The winners of the NIWFA Championship shall be awarded promotion into the NIFL Women's Premiership, if they have applied for NIFL membership and confirm their ability to meet the required Women's Premiership criteria by 31 July
- d) Where any club believes that it will be in a position to qualify for promotion from the Championship to the NIFL Women's Premiership at the end of the current season they must apply to the NIFL Chief Operating Officer on the prescribed application form which will be available for download on the NIFL website (or on request) by 31<sup>st</sup> July along with advance payment of their league fee (returned if promotion not secured)
- e) If the Championship winners, do not apply or confirm their ability to meet the required Women's Premiership criteria by 31 July, the highest ranked club in the Championship that has applied shall be awarded a promotion
- f) Notwithstanding the above criteria in respect of promotion the NIFL Board shall consult with the NIWFA if alternative methods are required ensure full membership



## **THE NIFL COMMITTEES**

### **8. NIFL Competition Committee**

- a) The NIFL Competition Committee shall be formed in accordance with the appropriate Articles of the Association and shall have powers to deal with all matters delegated to it by the Board.
- b) The Competition Committee will be responsible for the drafting of competition rules and for the organisation of all the cup competitions played within the League, this will include decisions as to which clubs may participate, the eligibility criteria for players playing in these competitions, and the drawing of ties and dealing with all matters pertaining to the Competitions.

The Competition Committee will be appointed annual by the NIFL General Assembly and consist of 7 members:

- (i) Three representatives from clubs playing in the Premiership
- (ii) Two representatives from clubs playing in the Championship
- (iii) One representative from clubs playing in the PIL
- (iv) One representative from clubs playing in the Women's Premiership

The Committee shall appoint annually a Chairman and Vice-Chairman who may serve for a period not exceeding two years. A Chairman retiring after a period of two years may not seek election either to the office of chairman or that of Vice-Chairman until a further period of two years has elapsed. Notwithstanding the above, the Committee reserve the right to extend the terms of the Chairman and/or Vice-Chairman by one year on an annual basis.

### **9. NIFL Discipline Committee**

- a) The NIFL Discipline Committee shall be formed in accordance with the appropriate Articles of the Association and shall have powers to deal with all matters delegated to it by the Board.
- b) The NIFL Discipline Committee will deal with off field discipline issues delegated to it by the Board or Staff for consideration.

The committee shall not deal with on field matters which shall remain the responsibility of the Irish Football Association.

- c) All clubs participating in any Competition under the auspices of the NIFL shall as a prerequisite of entry into such Competitions agree to be bound by this Rule.

#### **10. Subdivision Committees**

The Premiership subdivision committee shall meet as and when required to discuss matters of mutual interest to the clubs and where required to elect members to sit on the NIFL Board and IFA Council and Committees.

Each Division playing under the auspices of NIFL shall have a committee made up of one representative of each club playing in them.

## **OFFENCES, INQUIRIES AND COMMISSIONS THEREON, DISPUTES AND APPEALS**

### **11. Inquiry into and Punishment of Offences**

- a) The NIFL Competitions Committee, and any Commission or Sub-Committee duly appointed by the Board shall have power of enquiry into all financial arrangements between clubs and players, and into all matters constituting or pertaining to breaches or a breach of Regulations of the NIFL Women's Premiership, and they shall be entitled for that purpose to require the attendance of all officials, players and other persons and for the production of all books, letters and other documents.
- b) The NIFL Women's Premiership irrespective of whether or not it shall have appointed a Commission or Sub-Committee to hold an inquiry shall have full power to deal with all clubs, officials, and players which they shall deem guilty of having offended against or committed a breach of the Regulations of the NIFL Women's Premiership, and they shall be entitled to take such action and award such punishments either by way of reprimand, fine, suspension, expulsion or any other form of punishment as they may think fit in the circumstances.

Note – This rule will not apply to any field offences or any other matter which would normally be dealt with by the appropriate Divisional Association or in the case of two teams playing from different Divisional Associations, by the IFA Disciplinary Committee.

### **12. Commissions and Reports**

- a) The NIFL Competitions Committee may at any time appoint a Commission or Sub-Committee consisting of such number of persons as they deem the circumstances warrant for the purpose of inquiring into any matter appertaining to the NIFL Women's Premiership or its affairs.
- b) The NIFL Competitions Committee or any duly appointed Commission or Sub-Committee shall be entitled to publish in the public press or in any other manner they shall think fit report of their proceedings, acts, resolutions, and findings whether the same shall or shall not reflect on the character or conduct of any club, official or player and all evidence tendered on such inquiries, and all such inquiries and reports shall be privileged and every such club, official, player or spectator shall be deemed to have assented to such inquiry and to such publication, and to regard the same as privileged in law. On any inquiry such order may be made as to payment of expenses by clubs, players, or officials as the NIFL Women's Premiership may think fit.

### **13. Misconduct in Pre-arranging Results/Gambling on NIFL Women's Premiership matches**

- a) Any club, official or player offering or receiving a payment or any form of inducement from any other person or organisation to win, lose or draw a match shall be deemed guilty of misconduct and shall be liable to a fine of £500 and shall be subject to such further sanction as the NIFL Competitions Committee shall see fit.
- b) All players, technical staff and club officials are forbidden from taking part, either directly, or indirectly, in betting, gambling, lotteries and similar events and transaction connected with football matches under the control and organisation of the NIFL Women's Premiership.
- c) The NIFL Competitions Committee shall have the power to investigate any such allegations brought to their attention and to impose such sanctions as they consider appropriate.

### **14. Protests**

- a) Protests by all clubs must be received by the Chief Operating Officer of the NIFL per via email within four days after the cause of the protest, accompanied with a deposit of £100, payable via e-banking, which shall be forfeited in all cases where the Protest has not been sustained. A copy of the Protest must also be sent by the appellant club by email to the club protested against, if appropriate, within four days after the cause of the Protest
- b) Upon receipt of a Protest the NIFL Competitions Committee shall, in accordance with Rule 11, appoint a Sub Committee or a Commission consisting of a minimum of three persons to hear and determine the Protest. No person shall sit on a Protest which involves himself/herself or any club in which he/she may have an interest. All Protests shall be heard, where possible, within fourteen days of receipt of the Protest.
- c) In the case of a Protest, if the NIFL has any doubts as to the qualification of any player taking part in any competition it shall have power to call upon such player, or the clubs to which he/she belongs or for which he/she played, to prove that he/she was qualified according to the Rules and Regulations of the NIFL Women's Premiership, and failing satisfactory proof shall deduct three points in the competition from the offending club or may disqualify it from the competition, and may expel, fine or otherwise deal with the offending player as they think fit.
- d) A club may be represented at the hearing of a Protest or Inquiry by one or more of its members. Any person summoned to attend a Protest or Inquiry must attend personally.
- e) All questions of eligibility or qualification of clubs or players, or of the application of the Laws of the Game, or of the Articles of Association or Rules shall be referred for a ruling to the NIFL Board.

## **15. Appeals**

All appeals against a decision of the NIFL Competitions Committee or any relevant body must be made to the IFA in accordance with the relevant IFA Articles of the Association.

## **GROUND**

### **16. Registration of Ground**

- a) Each club shall register its ground with the NIFL and no club shall register another ground without first obtaining the consent of the NIFL.
- b) Ground sharing will only be approved at the discretion of the NIFL Women's Premiership.

### **17. Objection to Ground, etc.**

Any objection to the field of play or goal posts, which must include adequate netting, must be lodged with the Referee before the game is started, and the Referee shall have power to have such objections made right before the match is started.

### **18. Technical Areas**

- (a) Each club shall provide separate areas adjacent to the pitch for the sole use of team officials, medical staff and substitute players for both teams in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

6 team officials (must include physio) and 7 substitute players are allowed to sit on the substitutes' bench. The names of all these persons and their functions must be listed on the match sheet. In addition, clubs may nominate a club doctor to take up a position in the technical area.

Technical areas shall be clearly marked 'Home' and 'Away', shall have direct access onto the pitch, shall be located equidistant from the halfway line on the same side of the pitch (unless not possible) and shall be under cover.

- (b) Any player who is dismissed from the field of play shall proceed immediately to a suitable location as directed by a club steward.
- (c) Smoking/Vaping is not permitted in the Technical Area. Any club found in breach of this will be dealt with by the NIFL Competition Committee.

## MATCHES

### 19. Matches and Kick-off times

- a) Matches may be played on natural turf or artificial turf, provided that such artificial turf meets the “FIFA Quality” standard or alternative standard approved by the IFA.

The owner of the artificial turf must be in receipt of a valid FIFA Certificate or approval from the IFA.

The NIFL cannot be held responsible for any damages to third parties resulting from the use of artificial turf.

- b) All matches shall be played under the Laws of the Game as approved by the International Football Association Board and in accordance with the Articles and Rules of the IFA and also of the NIFL Women’s Premiership. All NIFL Women’s Premiership matches shall be played on the dates scheduled at the commencement of the season, except:

- i. When otherwise directed by the NIFL Competitions Committee
- ii. IFA Women’s Challenge Cup or Divisional Association Cups take precedence
- iii. Agreed by the two competing clubs and agreed by the NIFL Chief Operating Officer

- c) Clubs failing to comply with the above (19b) shall be fined in a sum of £250 and shall forfeit three points, such points shall be accredited to the opposing team and a score line of 3 goals to nil awarded to their opponents.

- d) In the event of a home club wishing to change from the date or time of a scheduled fixture, advance notice must be served in writing to both the Secretary of the away club and the NIFL Chief Operating Officer four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled date of the tie.

The NIFL Competition Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.

- e) However, notwithstanding the above, no match shall be played on a Sunday unless the two (2) competing clubs are in agreement.
- f) Matches shall not be played out of sequence unless with the prior approval of the NIFL Chief Operating Officer.
- g) NIFL Women’s Premiership matches will have a common kick-off time 7:45pm on Friday evening unless otherwise directed by the NIFL Competitions Committee or requested by home club and approved by the NIFL Competitions Committee. This does not include Public Holidays or Bank Holidays.

All evening games must be played at venues with floodlights and teams should have access to the pitch a minimum of 60 minutes before kick-off.

Weekend games with a kick off time no later than 3pm can play on grounds without floodlights but the ground must meet Intermediate standard.

- h) In the event of a club failing to fulfil an arranged fixture the appropriate Committee shall be empowered to grant compensation to the other club for actual expenses incurred for such match. A club failing to fulfil an arranged match for the second time in the current season shall be dismissed from membership of the NIFL Women's Premiership.

## **20. International Duty**

- a) In normal circumstances International Duty applies only to Full International and Under 19 International call up.
- b) A club whose goalkeeper is selected for International Under 17 duty and has made first team debut in a senior NIFL competition may also be considered.
- c) In the event of a club having two (2) or more players selected and/or on standby to represent their National Association representative team(s), they shall be permitted to request a postponement of their scheduled fixture during the period of release in respect of such International Duty. Furthermore, a club whose goalkeeper is selected for such International Duty shall also be permitted to request a postponement due to the specialist position.
- d) The NIFL Competitions Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.

## **21. Kit Approval**

- a) Details of club playing kit(s), including the goalkeeper's kit(s), colours shall be notified by clubs to the NIFL on the official club information questionnaire which shall be completed annually and returned not later than 31 March.
- b) Home teams are requested to wear their nominated home kit and any clashes of colour should be considered by the away team in advance of the fixture. In the case of a clash of colours the referee shall have the right to request clubs to change any item of their presented kit. In such cases the away team shall change as directed by the referee.
- c) Clubs must input their kit colours, including goalkeeper kit, on the Comet System not later than 72 hours prior to kick off in their next fixture.



- d) In accordance with the Laws of the Game clubs must have the availability of additional kit should any item of the kit sustain blood coverage.

## **22. Player Identification**

- a) The players' shirts must be clearly numbered on the back and must correspond exactly with the instruction input into the IFA FMS system or the team sheet handed to the referee should the match venue not have a data signal.
- b) The team captain shall wear a distinguishing armband to indicate this.

## **23. Pitch Inspections**

- a) In case of unfavourable weather conditions or concerns regarding the playing surface the Home Club must request the NIFL for an early inspection not later than five hours before kick-off. The Match Referee or an alternative Referee appointed by the NIFL must inspect the ground at least three hours or more previous to the advertised time of kick-off and shall decide as to the fitness of the ground not later than three hours prior to the pre-arranged time of kick-off, his decision being final after consultation with the Club Secretary and the NIFL.
- b) No game shall be postponed without an inspection by a referee appointed by the NIFL, who shall take due cognizance of local advice and the travelling supporters.
- c) Notwithstanding the above, in the event of extreme weather conditions and forecasts the NIFL Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the NIFL Competition Committee Chair, may declare any match or matches postponed without a formal pitch inspection.
- d) Where possible the officially appointed match referee should carry out the pitch inspection but if he/she should not be available for an inspection then the NIFL will appoint an alternative official from a panel approved by the committee, who will decide on the state of the pitch. If obviously 'playable' he will then declare his decision.
- e) It is agreed that in addition to the £5 fee an allowance of £5 per hour be paid up until 6:45pm when the referee would be due to arrive at the ground in normal circumstances. This will only apply when the match referee has had to travel 30 miles or more (single journey/one way). Any distances shorter than this would result in the match referee returning home following the inspection and travel back to the ground at the normal time and he would of course be entitled to add this extra travel and £5 inspection fee onto his expenses for the game.

- f) The Referee, Assistant Referees and 4<sup>th</sup> Official shall be paid half match fee and expenses for a postponed match which they have arrived at and inspected.

#### **24. Postponed or Abandoned Matches**

- a) In the case of matches where it is found necessary to stop play owing to weather conditions the referee must wait for a period of 15 minutes before deciding upon abandonment.
- b) If through any cause a match has been abandoned before the completion of the full playing time the NIFL Competitions Committee shall have power at its discretion to allot the points according to the goals scored at the time of such abandonment, or order the unfinished time to be played, or to order the match to be re-played in its entirety, on a subsequent date to be fixed by the NIFL Competitions Committee under such terms and conditions as it may impose.
- c) Postponed or abandoned matches shall be played on a date to be determined by the NIFL Competitions Committee.

#### **25. Completion of Team Sheet**

- a) Each club shall input their team line up including the names of players and club officials and their functions taking part in each match (including names of the nominated substitutes) via the IFA FMS System not later than 60 minutes prior to kick off.
- b) Should a match venue not have a data signal secretaries or other responsible persons acting for competing clubs shall forty five minutes prior to kick-off notify in writing the names of players taking part in each match under the jurisdiction of the league (including the name of the nominated substitute or substitutes and club officials and their functions) to the referee.
- c) Clubs failing to do so will be fined in the sum of £50.

#### **26. Substitute Players**

- a) A club may at its discretion use five substitute players at any time in any match, except to replace a player who has been suspended from the game by the referee. The substitutions can be made in accordance with the Laws of the Game.
- b) Only five substitutions by each side will be permitted in any match and clubs may nominate up to a maximum of seven substitute players prior to the commencement of the match.

- c) Substitutions may only be made on at most 3 occasions during the game (excluding half time).
- d) A substitute player shall be construed as taking part in the game for which he was nominated only if he is required to play.

## **27. Replacement of Players on the Team Sheet**

After the team sheets have been completed and submitted to the Football Management System to the Referee and if the match has not yet kicked off, the following shall apply:

- (a) If any of the first eleven players named on the team sheet are not able to start the match due to unexpected physical incapacity, they can be replaced only by any of the seven (7) substitutes named on the initial team sheet. The substitute(s) in question can then be replaced by a player(s) not named on the initial team sheet, so that the quota of substitutes is not reduced. During the match, five (5) players can still be substituted. The replaced player(s) must be removed from the team sheet and not be available for selection for this fixture.
- (b) If any of the seven (7) substitutes named on the team sheet are not able to be fielded due to unexpected physical incapacity, they can be replaced by any player not named on the initial team sheet, so that the quota of substitutes is not reduced. During the match, five (5) players can still be substituted. The replaced player(s) must be removed from the team sheet and not be available for selection for this fixture.

Any amendments to the team sheet in accordance with points (a) and (b) above must be communicated to the opposing team manager in the presence of one of the Match Officials as soon as possible prior to the commencement of the match.

## **28. Late Start**

The NIFL Competitions Committee may fine clubs for late start of matches in the sum of £250 except in exceptional circumstances. Referees must report late starts to the NIFL.

## **29. Official Match Ball & Goal Nets**

- a) The official match ball to be used in all matches shall be the ball approved by the NIFL and supplied to the clubs at the commencement of the Season. Additional match balls, if required, may be purchased from the NIFL.
- b) Goal nets must be used in-line with UEFA regulations.

## **30. Processional Entry and Fair Play Handshake**

The match officials shall lead both teams on to the field of play five minutes prior to kick-off time. The teams shall line up either side of the officials, at the half way line and the visiting

team shall move towards the home team, when both teams will shake hands with all match officials and players

### **31. Half-time Interval**

In all matches the half time interval shall be 15 minutes.

## **FINANCE**

### **32. Admission to Grounds**

The admission policy for all NIFL Women's Premiership matches shall be determined by the NIFL Competitions Committee annually.

### **33. Gate Receipts**

The admission charges to the ground in all NIFL Women's Premiership matches shall be retained by the home clubs, unless otherwise determined by the NIFL Competitions Committee.

### **34. Fines**

- a) All fines imposed by the NIFL Women's Premiership, unless appealed against, shall be paid within 21 days from the date of the letter imposing the fine unless a payment plan has been agreed with the club.
- b) Otherwise offending clubs will be fined £50 per week or part of a week that a fine is outstanding.
- c) If any club fails to make any payment to the NIFL in accordance with the requirements of these rules NIFL shall be empowered to deduct the amount of any such payment(s) from any money payable to the debtor club.

## PLAYER REGISTRATIONS

### 35. NIFL Player Registration/Eligibility Guidelines

- a) All players must be registered in accordance with the IFA Professional Game Player Registration regulations and the NIFL Player Registration Regulations.
- b) Where an amateur player is paid expenses, then payments are to be supported by an expenses claim form, signed by the player and club official/accountant, in a format acceptable to HMRC and that such forms are retained by the Club; Such payments must comply with HMRC “ Tax treatment of Association footballers”.

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/eimanual/EIM64100.htm>

Expenses paid to a player of amateur status must not exceed HMRC scales that would render such status invalid. Claim forms must be retained for 2 complete seasons and may be requested for inspection by NIFL at any time.

### 36. Undisclosed Payments

- a) It is strictly forbidden to make any payment to a player, either directly or via a related party, which has not been detailed in the official players’ contract or registration, lodged with the Irish Football Association or the NIFL, or not documented in line with related party transactions outlined in b) and c) below, or at variance to the requirements of Regulation 35b).
- b) A party is related to a club/entity if:
  - i) directly or indirectly through one or more intermediaries, the party:
    - a) controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with, the entity (this includes parents, subsidiaries and fellow subsidiaries;
    - b) has an interest in the entity that gives it significant influence over the entity; or
    - c) has joint control over the entity;
  - ii) the party is an associate of the entity;
  - iii) the party is a joint venture in which the party is a venture;
  - iv) the party is a member of a key management personnel of the entity or its parent;
  - v) the party is a close member of the family of any individual referred to in i) or iv)
  - vi) the party is an entity that is controlled, jointly controlled, or significantly influenced by, or for which significant voting power in such entity resides with, directly or indirectly any individual referred to in iv) or v); or
  - vii) the party is a post-employment benefit plan for the benefit of employees of the entity, or of any entity that is a related party of the entity.

Close members of the family of an individual are those family members who may be expected to influence, or be influenced by, that individual in their dealings with the entity. They may include:

- a) The individual's domestic partners and children;
- b) Children of the individual's domestic; and
- c) Dependents of the individual or the individual's domestic partner.

Control is the power to govern the financial and operating policies of an entity so as to obtain benefits from its activities.

Key management personnel are those persons having authority and responsibility for planning, directing, and controlling the activities of the entity, directly or indirectly, including any director (whether executive or otherwise) of that entity.

- c) A related party transaction is a transfer of resources, services, or obligations between related parties, regardless of whether a price is charged.

Any related party transaction involving partners must be documented by the club in writing to the IFA and NIFL. These shall include, but not be limited to:

- A player in any other paid service within the club (e.g. coach, barman)
- Payments made to players by club directors, management committee or staff members
- Payments made to players by companies or organisations owned or controlled by club directors, management committee or staff members
- Payments made to players by sponsors
- Payments made to players by supporters clubs, trusts or organisations

- d) The Board or Chief Executive Officer of the NIFL or its appointees may at any time, in order to:

- satisfy itself as to the accuracy of the contractual / registration information provided to it by a club;

and / or to

- consider any suspicion of undisclosed payments made by or on behalf of a club carry out such investigations, interviews and/or audits it considers (in its sole and absolute discretion) appropriate shall be entitled to take such action and award such punishments as detailed in Rule 36(j) where a player and/or club has acted contrary to the best interests of the league and its member clubs.

In any investigation, any person if requested shall:

- provide the NIFL or its appointees with all information, documents and/or records that the NIFL or its appointees considers relevant to an investigation;
- cooperate fully with any interview process carried out by the NIFL or its appointees;
- verify the accuracy (or otherwise) of any information or document provided;

- provide written confirmation of all offers made to a player regardless of whether the player subsequently concludes a professional contract or amateur registration with the club.
- e) Where a party to an investigation fails to comply with i) to iv) above, that party shall be liable to be fined not less than £5,000 and the investigation shall continue with a reasonable adverse inference being drawn from any failure to comply with i) to iv) above.
  - f) An investigation into any suspected breach must be initiated within a period of five seasons from the suspected season of any such breach.
  - g) For the avoidance of doubt, this provides the scope to initiate an investigation into any suspected breach having occurred in the five seasons prior to any current season.
  - h) Similarly, following the close of any investigation, the case can be reopened should new information become available which alters the status of previous conclusions within this same two season period.
  - i) The standard of proof to be applied is that of comfortable satisfaction. That is to say that the Committee does not have to be satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt but should be more than satisfied that, on balance, the allegation is made out. The more serious the allegation, the less likely it is that the event occurred and therefore the higher the threshold of satisfaction.
  - j) *Any **club** found to have breached Rules 29(b) and 30(a) will be subject to the following sanctions by the NIFL Board or its appointees:*
    - *Automatic demotion*
    - *Immediate points deduction for current season*
    - *Fine*
    - *Prize money from the season to be withheld / returned and redistributed.*
    - *The return of prize money from any previous season(s) during the course of the player's / football staff member's contract with the club.*
    - *Suspension / disqualification of individuals from involvement in the running of a football club*
    - *Removal of any competition title wins*
    - *Reporting of club to HMRC*

### **37. Eligible Players**

Players who are 16 years of age by the end of the calendar year when the match is played are eligible to play.



### **38. Ineligibility of Players**

Failure to comply with any of the conditions relating to the IFA Professional Game Player Registration Regulations, the NIFL Player Registration Regulations or the rules of the NIFL Women's Premiership will render the player ineligible to play for the club concerned as not being a bona-fide player.

### **39. Penalty for Playing Unregistered or Ineligible Players**

- a) Any club playing an ineligible player or players in any match under the auspices of the NIFL Women's Premiership shall be fined a sum of £250 per player for the first offence and £25 for subsequent offences involving the same player. In addition, should the match(es) in question result in a win for the offending team, or end in a draw, then such points shall be forfeited by the offending club and its opponents awarded three points in respect of that match and a score-line of 3-0 recorded in its favour.
- b) Should the match(es) in question result in a defeat for the offending team a score line of 3-0 shall be recorded in the favour of their opponents. Notwithstanding the above the winning team shall not be disadvantaged if the original score line was of greater benefit to that teams goal difference.
- c) Should both clubs play an ineligible player or players in any match under the auspices of the NIFL Women's Premiership then both clubs will be fined £250 per player for the first offence and £25 for subsequent offences involving the same player. In addition, neither club will be awarded any points for the fixture and both clubs shall have a minus three (-3) goal difference recorded against them.
- d) Nothing in these Regulations shall entitle the NIFL Women's Premiership to deduct points or impose fines for registration committed by any club during any previous season. (For the purpose of all NIFL Women's Premiership regulations a season will be deemed to end on 31<sup>st</sup> October in each year).

## MISCELLANEOUS

### **40. Conditions of Membership of Clubs comprising the NIFL Women's Premiership**

- a) All clubs in membership of the NIFL Women's Premiership acknowledge that they are bound by the rules of the NIFL Women's Premiership and the decisions of its committees which are final and binding, except insofar as an appeal may lie to the appropriate committee of the IFA.
- b) Clubs shall be obliged to sign a participation agreement and to abide by the conditions contained therein.
- c) Any club not adhering to this rule or the terms of the agreement shall be dealt with as the NIFL Board consider appropriate.

### **41. Medals**

The NIFL shall award up to eighteen (18) medals to the winning clubs for presentation to their players each of whom shall have taken part in a minimum of 50% of games constituting the NIFL Women's Premiership. Additional medals may be purchased by the clubs concerned, if so warranted and the NIFL Chief Operating Officer shall consider all such requests.

### **42. Trophies**

The club declared Champions shall receive a trophy, which shall at all times remain the property of the NIFL and must be returned in good order when requested by the NIFL. It is the responsibility of the Champion Club to abide by the conditions imposed by the NIFL Insurers in respect of the safe keeping of the trophy throughout the period it is held by the club and arrange appropriate insurance cover for the trophy throughout the period when it is held by the Club.

### **43. Referees**

Referees shall be appointed by the IFA. Once an appointment has been made no objections to such appointment can, under any circumstances, be entertained by the NIFL. Two Assistant Referee's will be appointed for all NIFL Women's Premiership matches. Their role and duties are as outlined in the guidelines approved by the IFAB.

#### **44. Ball Tenders**

- a) The colours of clothing worn by ball tenders must not clash with the colours of either of the competing clubs.
- b) Clubs may utilise a multiball system to the immediate replacement of a match ball when it has left the field of play. Clubs who adopt this procedure must ensure that the system is used consistently for the duration of the match, and for both teams, unless directed otherwise by the referee and/or the host club safety officer following permission from the 4<sup>th</sup> official.

Any club found guilty of removing multiball system without direction will be referred to the NIFL Competition Committee for an appropriate sanction.

#### **45. Match Observers**

The NIFL may appoint match observers to any match played under its jurisdiction and such match observers shall be required to complete a report as determined by the NIFL Women's Premiership. All match observers must be independent of any club in membership of the NIFL Women's Premiership or NIWFA Championship, and must not hold a position in another football organisation which may be deemed a conflict of interest. A list of Match Observers approved annually by the NIFL Chief Operating Officer. The NIFL shall provide guidelines to each club on how Match Observers should be facilitated at matches.

#### **46. League Structure**

The NIFL Board may at any time during the present season implement and make changes to the league format and structure which would then become effective prior to the commencement of the following playing season and nothing in these rules and regulations will so prevent the board from introducing and formulating any such structure provided that the board hereby undertakes to enter into a full consultation exercise with the member clubs of the league before any such changes are made.

#### **47. Alterations to Rules**

Alterations to these rules shall only be considered during the closed season. Any club wishing to have a proposal considered, must forward same in writing to the NIFL Women's Premiership no later than 1 January.