

**NIFL
ACADEMY LEAGUE
RULES & REGULATIONS
SEASON 2021/22**

NIFL ACADEMY LEAGUE

1. Title
2. Applications for Membership
3. League Competition
4. Ranking of Teams

NIFL ACADEMY LEAGUE COMMITTEE

5. AL Committee
6. AL Powers
7. Protests
8. Appeals against Decisions of the NIFL Academy League

MATCHES

9. Matches
10. Match Postponements
11. International Duty
12. Substitute Players
13. Player Identification
14. Completion of Team Sheet
15. Kit Approval
16. Results
17. Referees

FINANCES

18. Expenses

REGISTRATIONS

19. Registrations
20. Squads
21. Ineligibility of Players
22. Penalty for Playing Unregistered or Ineligible Players

MISC

23. Registration of Grounds

24. Alterations to these Rules

NIFL ACADEMY LEAGUE

1. TITLE

a) For the purposes of the football competitions the NIFL Premiership Academy League (AL) shall be comprised 12 clubs in the U-20 division and up to 16 in the U-18 & U-16 division;

- i. U-20 division will consist of the 12 teams competing in the 2021/22 Premiership
- ii. U-18 & U-16 division will consist of up to 16 teams. 12 who compete in the 2021/22 Premiership and up to 4 additional teams who compete in the 2021/22 Championship

b) Membership of the NIFL AL shall constitute an agreement between the NIFL 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 AL
- iv. The Rules and Articles of the Irish Football Association
- v. The Laws of the Game
- vi. The Rules and Regulations of any body of which the NIFL AL is a member
- vii. The IFA Premiership Licence
 - Approved Youth Development Programme
 - Suitably qualified youth coaches and staff who adhere to recognised Safeguarding & First Aid requirements

2. MEMBERSHIP

a) Membership of the AL is mandatory for all clubs who compete in the 2021/22 Premiership.

- i. U-20 division will consist of teams competing in the 2021/22 Premiership
- ii. U-18 & U-16 division will consist of teams who compete in the 2021/22 Premiership and up to 4 additional teams who compete in the 2021/22 Championship

b) The Annual Subscription for each division;

- i. U-20 is included within the Premiership membership fee
- ii. Shall be £150 per team in U-18 & U-16

c) All clubs must be affiliated through their respective divisional association for up and coming season by the required deadline.

3. LEAGUE COMPETITION

a) The AL will consist of 12 clubs in the U-20 division and up to 16 teams in the U-18 & U-16 division

- I. U-20 shall consist of 12 teams who shall play each other on two occasions (1 at 'home' and 1 'away')
- II. U-18 & U-16 AL shall both consist of a maximum of 16 teams and split into 2 groups of 8 maximum;
 - a. Stage 1 – in their Group, teams to play each other Home & Away

When all teams have completed 14 matches, or when standings permit, the groups shall split in two sections. Teams ranked in positions 1 to 4 in their Stage 1 Group shall comprise Section A and teams ranked in positions 5 to 8 shall comprise Section B. Points achieved during the first phase of 14 matches are carried forward to the second phase.

- b. Stage 2 – teams to play each other Home & Away

4. RANKING OF TEAMS

a) Teams shall be awarded 3 points for a win, 1 point for a draw and 0 points for a defeat. At the end of the AL Championship the club scoring the largest number of points shall be declared the champion club of the league. In the case of equality of points teams shall be ranked in accordance with the following criteria:

- i. Goal difference (Goals scored less goals conceded in all matches)
- ii. Goals scored in all matches
- iii. Superior points gained in matches between the teams in question
- iv. Superior goal difference in matches between the teams in question

The ADL reserve the right to order a 'play off' match(es) at any time to determine the ranking at the completion of the league season should (a) to (d) above result in equality.

NIFL ACADEMY LEAGUE COMMITTEE

5. NIFL ACADEMY LEAGUE COMMITTEE

a) The NIFL Academy League 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.

- i. The control and management of the AL shall be vested in a Premiership Sub Committee
- ii. The AL Committee will invite a total of 1 representative of clubs not currently competing in the Premiership to ensure the views of Championship clubs are represented in U18 & U16 matters

b) The representatives shall appoint a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year and shall submit their names to the Premiership for approval. The Chairman, or in his absence the Vice-Chairman, shall preside as Chairman of the AL Committee meetings. If at any meeting neither be present within fifteen minutes after the time appointed for holding a meeting the representatives present shall choose one from their number to be Chairman.

c) 50% of any members present at any meeting of the AL Committee shall form a quorum

d) The Chairman shall have a casting vote in cases of equality of voting. The AL Committee may make rules or alterations thereto, as to all business duties, management or otherwise which may be required and same shall become operative seven days after posting to members and shall remain operative until the end of the season or until adopted or annulled.

e) The NIFL AL Committee shall cause minutes to be made and sent electronically to member clubs:

- i. of all appointments of officials made by the AL Committee
- ii. of all the names of members of the AL Committee present at each meeting thereof and of any Committee appointed by the AL Committee, and
- iii. of all resolutions and proceedings at all meetings of the AL Committee and of any Committee appointed by the AL Committee.

f) The AL Committee shall organise and arrange competitions as it thinks fit, and shall have power to organise and provide rules for any additional competitions, either on a knock out or on a league basis, as it considers appropriate.

6. NIFL ACADEMY LEAGUE COMMITTEE POWERS

a) which shall have full power to act as it thinks fit, including power to fine any club, club official or player guilty of a criminal offence, misconduct, infringing or failing to observe the rules of the NIFL Premiership or acting in a manner which could be construed as bringing the game into disrepute and contrary to the best interests of the league as a whole. The

Premiership Sub Committee shall also have power to deal with any other matters not provided for in the rules.

Note - This rule will not apply to any field offences or any other matter which would normally be dealt with by the Irish Football Association.

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

7. PROTESTS

a) Protests by all clubs must be received by the Chief Operating Officer of the NIFL per Special Delivery post, bearing postmark, within four days after the cause of the protest, accompanied by a deposit of £100 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 Special Delivery to the club protested against, if appropriate, bearing postmark within four days (excluding Sundays) after the cause of the Protest. In order to expedite the process clubs may submit their process via email and transfer the £100 deposit to NIFL via bank transfer.

b) Upon receipt of a Protest the NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall, in accordance with Rule 12 of Premiership Rules, 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 belongs or for which he played, to prove that he was qualified according to the Rules and Regulations of the NIFL Premiership.

d) A club may be represented at the hearing of a Protest or Inquiry. 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.

8. APPEALS

All appeals against a decision of the NIFL Premiership must be made to the IFA in accordance with the relevant IFA Articles of the Association.

MATCHES

9. MATCHES & KICK OFF TIMES

- a) Matches may be played on natural turf or artificial turf. In the U-20AL artificial turf must meet FIFA approved standard or equivalent. The owner of the artificial turf and the home club must be in receipt of a valid approved standard certificate. 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 AL. All NIFL AL matches shall be played on the dates scheduled at the commencement of the season, except:
- i. When otherwise directed by the NIFL AL Sub Committee; or when
 - ii. A club requests in writing a postponement of a fixture for exceptional circumstances.
 - iii. National Cup and/or Divisional Association Cup ties take precedence.
- c) Matches shall not be played out of sequence unless with the prior approval of the NIFL AL Sub Committee or NIFL MD.
- d) Premiership AL U-20 fixtures which incur a round trip of less than 90 miles will be scheduled for a Monday or Wednesday night. In advance of the season clubs must inform NIFL of their home match night.
- e) Premiership ADL U-20 fixtures which incur a round trip in excess of 90 miles will be scheduled for a Saturday afternoon. In the event of clubs wishing to change from a Saturday, the written agreement of both clubs must be served in writing by both clubs to fixtures@nifootballleague.com fourteen (14) days prior to the scheduled date of the tie
- f) ADL U-18 will be designated as a Friday night league. In the event of clubs wishing to change from a Friday, the written agreement of both clubs must be served by both clubs to fixtures@nifootballleague.com fourteen (14) days prior to the scheduled date of the tie
- g) ADL U-16 will be designated as a Saturday league. In the event of clubs wishing to change from a Saturday, the written agreement of both clubs must be served in writing by both clubs to fixtures@nifootballleague.com fourteen (14) days prior to the scheduled date of the tie;
- i. Games at U-16 should kick off between 11am and 2pm
- h) Clubs failing to comply with this rule shall be fined in a sum of £250 at U-20 / £150 at U-18 & U-16 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. Also, 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 a match. A team failing to fulfil an arranged match for a second time in the current season shall be dismissed from membership of the AL.

- i) Any match not completed may be ordered to stand as a completed fixture, or the unfinished time may be ordered to be played, or the fixture ordered to be replayed in its entirety.
- j) Postponed or abandoned matches shall be played on a date to be determined by the NIFL Chief Operating Officer.

10. MATCH POSTPONEMENTS

- a) Where venues have been appointed by NIFL in conjunction with a local authority or private body it will be the final decision of the local authority/private body as to the fitness of the ground for play.
- b) In cases where the Home Team has a registered venue not owned or controlled by local authority it will be the decision of the Home Team grounds man or other club appointee responsible for grounds maintenance in the first instance to decide on the fitness of the ground for play or failing such then the decision of the referee will be final.
- c) The home Club must immediately inform NIFL and the visiting club if postponement is necessary, in default of which the Home Club may at the discretion of NIFL be required to pay half of the referee's match fee and the travelling expenses, in whole or part of the Visiting Club.
- d) The reason for the non-fulfilment of any fixture shall be investigated by AL Committee.

11. INTERNATIONAL DUTY

- a) In the event of a club having two or more players selected to represent their National Association representative team(s), in matches recognised by the FIFA International Calendar, 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.
- b) In the event of a club having three or more players selected and/or on standby to represent their National Association representative team(s) in matches not recognised on the FIFA International Calendar or Development and Schools FA squads, 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.

12. SUBSTITUTE PLAYERS

- a) In all AL games a club may at its discretion use five substitute players at any time in any match, except to replace a player who has been dismissed from the game by the Referee. The substitutions can be made in accordance with Law 3 of the Laws of the Game.
- b) At U-16 & U-18 rolling substitutes are permissible
- c) A substitute player shall be construed as taking part in the game for which he was nominated only if he has actually played in such game.
- d) Should any nominated player or substitute sustain an injury or become otherwise incapacitated after the submission of the team sheet to the referee and before the kick-off he may be replaced provided that the referee and the opposing club are informed prior to kick-off.

13. 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 referee should the match venue not have a data signal
- b) The team captain shall wear a distinguishing armband to indicate this.

14. COMPLETION OF TEAM SHEET

- a) At U-20 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 the names of the nominated substitutes) via the IFA Football Management System not later than 45 minutes prior to kick off
- b) At U-18 & U-16 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 the names of the nominated substitutes) via the IFA Football Management System not later than 30 minutes prior to kick off

15. KIT APPROVAL

- a) Details of club playing kit(s), including 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 30th June.
- b) In addition each club shall deliver to the referee's dressing room a sample of their playing kit (shirts, shorts and socks) including goalkeeper kit not later than 30 minutes prior to kick off. 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 home team shall change as

directed by the referee although clubs should be in communication with each other in advance if clashes are expected.

c) Clubs must input their kit colours, including goalkeeper kit, on the Comet System not later than 72 hrs prior to kick off in the next fixture.

16. RESULTS

a) The home club shall be responsible for the communication of the match result to the Results Co-ordinator.

b) Any club who does not provide match results to the Results Co-ordinator or does not meet required deadline will be fined in the sum of £25.

c) All results must be communicated to results co-ordinator within 1hr of the match in question.

17. REFEREES

All competitive matches must be officiated by an official referee.

FINANCES

18. EXPENSES

In all AL fixtures the home club shall be responsible for all expenses including, pitch hire, the referee's fee and their travelling expenses.

REGISTRATIONS

19. REGISTRATIONS

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) To be eligible for U-20 AL players must be registered from 9 June 2021 to 31 August 2021 or 1 January and midnight 31 January 2022

c) To be eligible for U-18 & U-16 AL players must be registered from 9 June 2021 to 31st October 2021 or from 1st January until midnight on 31st January 2022

- d) Professional players are not permitted to play in the ADL U-18 & U-16 divisions
- e) To be eligible all players must be registered with the senior team which is a member of the NIFL

20. SQUADS

U-20 Squads

- a) An Under 20 Player means a Player under the age of 20 as at the 1st January in which the Season concerned commences (i.e. for Season 2021/22 born on or after 1st January 2002).
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of five Players over the age of 20 in each matchday squad.

U-18 Squads

- a) An Under 18 Player means a Player under the age of 18 as at the 1st January in which the Season concerned commences (i.e. for Season 2021/22 born on or after 1st January 2004).
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of three Players over the age of 18 in each matchday squad.
- c) Maximum age for over aged players must not exceed year of birth 2002

U-16 Squads

- a) An Under 16 Player means a Player under the age of 16 as at the 1st January in which the Season concerned commences (i.e. for Season 2021/22 born on or after 1st January 2006).
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of three Players over the age of 16 in each matchday squad.
- c) Maximum age for over aged players must not exceed year of birth 2004

21. INELIGIBILITY OF PLAYERS

Failure to comply with any of the conditions relating to a registration will render the player ineligible to play for the club concerned as not being a bona-fide player.

22. PENALTY FOR PLAYING UNREGISTERED OR ELIGIBLE PLAYERS

- a) Any club playing an ineligible player or players in any match under the jurisdiction of the AL shall be fined in a sum of £50 per player for the first offence and £10 per player for subsequent offences.
- b) Should the match(es) in question result in a defeat for the offending team a scoreline 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 scoreline 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 AL then both clubs will be fined, in a sum of £50 per player for the first offence and £10 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 Premiership to deduct points or impose fines for registration committed by any club during any previous season. (For the purpose of all NIFL Premiership regulations a season will be deemed to end on 31st May in each year).

MISC

23. REGISTRATION OF GROUND

a) At U-20 each club shall register its ground with the NIFL and no club shall register another ground without first obtaining the consent of the NIFL. Clubs with teams playing in the U-20 AL will be permitted to register an additional venue for such matches which must be of IFA Intermediate standard with floodlighting, (300 Lux) as a minimum.

b) At U-18 & U-16 where possible clubs will register venues. If venues change week to week clubs must notify NIFL by Monday of match week.

c) In the event of the league appointing a match venue the notification of the venue will be received via email. If a Club makes a venue booking then the NIFL and travelling Club MUST be notified as soon as possible before the scheduled date for the fixture to enable the website notices to be verified or updated.

d) The NIFL will have the power to decide whether facilities are suitable for matches in the competition, and to order the Club concerned to play its fixtures on another ground. The NIFL reserves the right to move any game to a neutral venue. Match kick-off times will be fixed by agreement of the home Team and the NIFL. Times for kick-offs shall be determined by the league and the availability of facilities.

e) In all matches played under the jurisdiction of the NIFL the accommodating authority or home team will try to ensure that suitable changing accommodation facilities are available for all teams.

f) Technical areas should be clearly marked out and if grounds being used at U-18 & U-16 do not have fencing clubs must rope areas for spectators

24. ALTERATIONS TO THESE 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 Chief Operating Officer no later than 31 May.

It shall be entirely at the discretion of the Chief Operating Officer to consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.