



2025-2026 MINNESOTA STATE HIGH SCHOOL LEAGUE

Football Rules, Policies and Bylaws

General Information

See the [MSHSL Handbook Page](http://www.mshsl.org/governance) (www.mshsl.org/governance) for information regarding the following:

- Multiple level teams at Sub-Varsity levels
- Official Squad Size
- Substitution in MSHSL Tournaments
- Weather (heat, cold, lightning & air quality)

See the MSHSL Official Handbook [Bylaw 501](#) for information regarding:

- Maximum Number of Contests

See the MSHSL Official Handbook [Bylaw 502](#) for information regarding:

- Daily and Season Player Participation Limitations

CONTEST RULES

Refer to [Bylaw 402](#): Except as modified by the League, the National Federation of High School Association rules for the current year shall be the official game rules for all interscholastic contests in which League members participate.

END OF SEASON

Refer to [Bylaw 411](#): No school may engage in any meet or meets, practice, training or other activities between the end of the season and the opening of the next season in that sport.

1. Student Participation on a Non-School Team While the Season is Still in Progress:
 - A. The season shall end when the student or the student's team has been eliminated from further participation in a League tournament series.
 - B. Students who have been eliminated from further participation in a League tournament series may participate as an individual or as a member of a non-school team in that sport.
2. School Team Practice and Competition: The "end of the season" shall be defined to the last date of the state tournament in that sport.
 - A. Schools may continue to conduct practice and training for all squad members, including the students who have been eliminated from further individual competition in a League-sponsored series, until completion of the state tournament conducted by the League in that activity.
 - B. Dual contests may be scheduled after the start of the official League tournament series providing the school the school does not exceed the maximum number of games/matches/meets permitted in that activity.



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3. No school may engage in any meet or meets, practice, training or other activities between the end of the season and the opening of the next season.
4. During the Summer Vacation Period [Bylaw 208.3](#) Non-School Competition and Training—Team and Individual Sports) members of a high school team may participate on a non-school team, and they may receive coaching or training from a salaried or non-salaried member of the student's sophomore, B-squad, junior varsity or varsity high school coaching staff in that sport provided the school has approved a summer coaching waiver for the coach or coaches of that sport.

VIDEO RECORDING ANOTHER SCHOOL'S GAME

It shall be an ethical violation to capture on video another school's game, meet or contest without their permission. Further, it may be a violation of the laws governing copyrights. Each school owns the copyrights to their games, meets and contests. Recording another school's game without permission could constitute a violation of the copyright law.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR SPECTATOR CONDUCT

In order to elevate standards of sportsmanship and encourage the growth of responsible citizenship among the students, member schools, fans and school personnel, the MSHSL held a Sportsmanship Summit and asked student participants to identify behavior expectations they felt should be in place at every school event.

These minimum behavior expectations provide a foundation upon which member schools, conferences, administrative regions and the League's Board of Directors can build specific guidelines for activities under their control.

MSHSL [Bylaw 409](#), **RESPONSIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATING TEAMS, STUDENTS AND SPECTATORS**, speaks to this issue, directly, and [Bylaw 409-2](#) specifically states that, **"School officials shall be held responsible for the proper conduct of teams, team members, students and home spectators regardless of where the contest is being held."**

In all MSHSL activities, each participating school shall designate a person or persons from that school to serve as crowd control supervisors or chaperones. MSHSL tournament staff may require school administrators to contact the tournament manager prior to the start of the tournament game so that they can be immediately contacted to respond to behavioral issues regarding their team members, students and/or spectators at the tournament site. Each supervisor or chaperone should be immediately identifiable to the students and to the tournament site ushers and other security personnel. This will help to coordinate crowd control between school supervisors and tournament site personnel. 8/9/2005



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Football Information – Regular Season

See the MSHSL Official Handbook [Bylaw 508](#) for information regarding:

- Contests
- Equipment Issued
- Last Date to Join a Team
- Maximum Number of Contests Chart
- Player Participation Limitations
- Practice Sessions Before First Game
- Season Begins

RULE MODIFICATIONS

PLAY CLOCK

A visible 25/40 second play clock may be used when available at the discretion of the home team. There must be a clock operator and the clock must be available to both teams.

TIE-BREAKING PROCEDURES

If, at the end of the fourth quarter, the teams have identical scores the tie will be resolved by the "10-yard" Overtime Procedure as outlined in the National Federation Football Rulebook.

MERCY RULE

When the point differential reaches 35 points or more in the fourth quarter, the clock will go to running time. The clock will be stopped for any **(T)**eam timeout, **(I)**njuries, **(P)**enalties or **(S)**coring plays until the ensuing free kick. **TIPS** will be the only reasons the clock is stopped during running time. Regular timing rules will be used if the point differential drops back to less than 30 points. **Note:** Rule 3-1-3 remains in effect which allows the game to be shortened or terminated at any time, by mutual agreement of the opposing coaches and the referee.

9-PLAYER MODIFICATIONS

Modification of the football distance penalty in 9-Player football. All penalties that require a loss of 15 yards in 11-player football, will be penalized a loss of 10 yards on an 80-yard field. If a 100-yard field is used for 9-player all 15-yard penalties would be assessed as 15 yards.

- on the 9-Player field the "9-yard marks" in rule (1-2-3f & 1-2-3l) are placed 7 yards from the sideline.
- There are no uniform numbering requirements for 9-Player.
- The 45-point rule for 9-Player football will not be enforced in Minnesota.
- The free blocking zone is a square area extending laterally 3 yards on either side of the spot of the snap and 3 yards behind the line of scrimmage.



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FIELD DIMENSIONS

When facilities permit, 9-Player football should be played on a 100-yard field. If space does not allow for 100 yards, games can be played on an 80-yard field. In either case the width of the field is 40 yards. Distance from to hash marks is 48 feet, 4 inches.

EQUIPMENT

Footballs and football shoes may be issued at any time provided the school doesn't engage in any football game or games, practice or other football activities between the end of one season and the opening of the next season.

GAMES

Number allowed: Member schools shall not schedule or play more than eight (8) games per season, unless the section conducts a 4-team play-off, in which case a school may play a ninth (9) regular season game. The champion of any conference, section or division of a conference will, however, be allowed to play one extra game to determine an inter-conference or an intra-conference championship. The game must be on the school schedule.

No team may play more than 11 games total (12 with Conference Championship Game), during the regular season and Section playoff.

First Game: Interscholastic games may be scheduled and played on or after the second Thursday of organized practice, provided transfer students do not participate until they are enrolled. Two weeks of organized practice, plus five days of organized conditioning practice must precede the first scheduled game. Transfer students must be enrolled before participating.

PRACTICE SITE

Practice sessions shall be conducted within the local school environs. Special training camps are not permitted. Controlled interschool scrimmages may be held within the environs of one of the participating schools or at some point between the two schools. Exception: Schools may practice at sites outside of the school environs when it is necessary to secure indoor practice facilities due to inclement weather)

TEACHER STRIKE

A football game will be forfeited if a school is not able to play as contracted because of a teacher strike.

ZERO WEEK

1. The Zero Week application form that must be filed by both schools involved in the Zero Week game.
 - Requests will be accepted on or after September 1 of each year.
 - Schools may apply to schedule the same opponent on zero week for two years (home & home)



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2. A committee five members (2 coaches, 2 AD's and 1 MSHSL staff member) will review all applications and deny or approve the application within 3 weeks of receipt.
3. Teams who are approved to play a zero week game must start practice (conditioning week) one week earlier than that official starting date for football conditioning and complete 3 full weeks of practice prior to the first game.
4. Teams playing a zero week game must have a bye week during the season. During the bye week the team may practice any 3 of the five weekdays. (Saturdays may be used for team meetings, lower-level games or strength training)
5. Each application will be reviewed and approved based on its own merit. Care will be taken to prevent schools or coaches from manipulating their schedule to gain an advantage.

Football Information – Post Season

ELIGIBILITY DURING LEAGUE-SPONSORED TOURNAMENT – SUBSECTION, SECTION AND STATE

Refer to [Bylaw 206.4.B.1.d](#): A student must be fully eligible under all local school district policies and MSHSL Bylaws and Rules & Policies to be in uniform, occupy the bench or playing area, participate and receive individual/team awards, including all-tournament honors, in the awards ceremony.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION IN LEAGUE-SPONSORED TOURNAMENTS

Refer to [Bylaw 405](#): A member school must schedule a minimum of three interscholastic varsity games, meets or matches to qualify for League-sponsored tournament participation in that sport.

FOOTBALL PLAYOFF ORGANIZATION - SECTION PLAYOFF MANAGEMENT

The Board of Directors has delegated the management and administration of Sectional football playoffs to Region Committees organized by the member schools of each Section as follows:

ARTICLE 1. Football Playoff Committee.

- A. Furnish a full report of all proceedings of Playoff Meetings to members of the Region Committee.
- B. Keep accurate records of receipts and disbursements of Section funds and report annually the status of such funds to members of the Region Committee.
- C. Pay the necessary expenses of the representative of the official meetings of the Football Advisory Committee.
- D. The Region may employ a tournament manager to administer the sectional football playoffs.

ARTICLE 2. Policies for Administering Section Playoffs.

- A. These policies are intended to lend uniformity to Section Playoffs as conducted on a statewide basis.
 1. The tournament manager and representatives from section schools must adopt a seeding procedure based on MSHSL Seeding Policies.



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3. The tournament manager must set a final date for the official seeding meeting.
4. The Region Committees must establish a seeding format.
5. The tournament manager must adopt a policy for determining site and home team designation.
6. The Class AAAAAA, AAAAA, AAAA, AAA, AA, A, and 9-Player Committees must choose one of the following options:
 - a. If the schools in the Section play a nine-game schedule, only four teams may be seeded to the playoff and no team may play more than two games in the Section playoff.
 - b. If the Committee chooses an eight-game schedule, eight teams may be seeded to the playoffs and no team may play more than three games in the section playoffs.
 - c. Schools not qualifying for the playoffs may schedule a ninth (9th) game.
 - d. No team may play more than a combined total of eleven (11) games during the season and Section playoffs.

ARTICLE 3. Recommended Section Policies: General, Seeding and Pairing.

One of the most sensitive areas in the development of the football playoff system is the establishment of confidence in Section management procedures. It is difficult for any school to feel comfortable when they are assigned to a Section with other schools that represent other football conferences and some that are independent. There will be a feeling of apprehension that the Section organization and management will be dominated by one conference. However, enrollment and geography are the principle components for the establishment of the Sections and the members will find it necessary to develop guidelines that will respect and protect the interests of all of the members. The following recommendations are intended to assist region committees in developing procedures that will ensure equitable treatment for all of the member schools of each Section.

A. General Policies:

1. That each Section make the necessary long-range schedule adjustments within their jurisdiction which will enable the members to qualify and be ready to play on the selected Section playoff date i.e., eight or more game schedules.
2. That all participating team allowances be in accordance with the League's policies for State quarter-final and semifinal games.

- B. Seeding Policies: When seeding for section tournaments at the discretion of the Region Committee the Section must adopt one of the following seeding systems. With either Face to Face or Electronic, there should be criteria established by which coaches are to rank the teams.

REGION/SECTION SEEDING CONSISTENCY – [Seeding Consistency \(www.mshsl.org/sectionseeding\)](http://www.mshsl.org/sectionseeding)



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MANAGEMENT

The Board of Directors has delegated the management of sectional football playoff games to Section Committees. Each Section Committee is responsible for the general supervision of planning, controlling and managing the section football playoffs.

OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT BALL

The official MSHSL ball for football is the **Spalding Alpha**. This ball will be provided for Quarterfinal, Semifinal, and Championship games.

Schools/teams are encouraged to use this football during the regular season but that is not required.

Beginning with the Quarterfinal round, schools/teams must either use the ball provided (Spalding Alpha) or they can provide their own as long as the ball that is used is a Spalding.

END OF GAME AND HALFTIME RULE ADOPTION FOR SECTION AND STATE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS GAMES

The National Federation of High Schools Football Rule Book provides the opportunity for the MSHSL Board of Directors to approve the following rule adoption, effective for the section and state playoffs: (NFHS Rule Book)

In the unlikelihood that a section or state playoff game cannot be completed due to darkness, weather or other issues outside the control of game management, the Game Manager in consultation with the Tournament Director, has the authority to decide whether or not the game will continue from the point of interruption or be terminated. The Game Manager also has the authority to shorten halftime to 10 minutes in the case of bad weather or other issues that would make it necessary to conclude a game as soon as possible. (Note the current rule allows halftime to be shortened at the consent of the head coaches, this change gives this authority to the game manager, without approval from the coaches).

INSTANT REPLAY

It will be utilized in a limited capacity during the post season only during the semifinals and finals of the Prep Bowl Championships at US Bank Stadium.

NUMBER OF SECTION PLAYOFF GAMES

Classes AAAAAA, AAAAA, AAAA, AAA, AA, A, 9-Player: The committee must choose one of the following options:

- A. If the schools in your Section play a nine-game schedule, four teams may be seeded to the playoff and no team may play more than two games in the Section playoff.
- B. If the Committee chooses an eight-game schedule, eight teams may be seeded to the playoffs and no team may play more than three games in the Section playoffs.



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Schools not qualifying for the playoff may schedule a ninth (9th) game if they played less than 9 games during the regular season.

PLAYOFF SITES - SECTION GAMES

The Region Committee will determine the Section playoff sites.

Region Committees are advised that the selection of the home field provides many advantages which lead toward success of the tournament game. These advantages include: All out community support; special care in field and facility preparation; extra help in crowd control; convenient accessibility to support personnel (ticket sellers, ticket takers, game hosts, bands, chain gang, parking assistance, press, box help, medical stand-by, etc.); minimum cost in game expenses to participating schools; and convenient accessibility to dressing room facilities.

Seating for the visiting team should be comparable to the home team. If adequate seating is not available additional bleachers should be moved in or another site should be considered.

PLAYOFF SITES - STATE QUARTERFINALS

All State Quarterfinal playoff games will be played at neutral sites on artificial turf fields. Quarterfinal games may be scheduled on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday of the week following the section play-offs. All site assignments will be made by the League Office.

OFFICIAL SQUAD FOR SECTION AND STATE PLAYOFFS

Schools participating in MSHSL Section and State Tournaments may dress, have on sidelines, and play all players who were on the regular season varsity team roster.

Classes	Players	Coaches	Student Managers	Total
AAAAAA	62	5	3	70
AAAAA	62	5	3	70
AAAA	53	4	3	60
AAA	45	3	3	51
AA	39	3	2	44
A	36	3	2	41
9-Player	27	2	2	31

Sideline numbers may exceed the official roster at Section and State Tournament Games for FOOTBALL ONLY.

STATE TOURNAMENT QUALIFYING SCHOOL INFORMATION



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Specific information for qualifying schools is available on the MSHSL Administrative Dashboard under Tournament Resources.

PLAYOFF SITES - STATE TOURNAMENT

The Board of Directors will determine the sites for all state tournament games.

FUTURE PAIRINGS

Quarterfinals (Class 9P-5A)

- Seeded 1-4 – North & 1-4 - South

Semifinals

- High Seed (i.e. #1); Low Seed (i.e. #4)
- Low Seed – South vs. High Seed – North
- Low Seed – North vs. High Seed - South

PLAYOFF PLAN FOR CLASS 6A FOOTBALL

- Top 32 schools – 4 sections of 8 schools
- Each section seeds #1 – 8 – choice of seeding procedures based on current policy.
- No game on Tuesday after MEA

The morning after the last regular season games, each of the four 6A sections will seed their section as per MSHSL seeding policy and will be placed into 1 of 6 random brackets will be selected (at random) at a time to be determined by the tournament committee.

Class 6A will then play out their tournament. The first two rounds will be played on the succeeding Friday evenings at the higher seed. The winners of round 2 would be awarded “State Qualifier” trophies for having qualified for the state tournament. The third round would consist of 8 remaining teams and would be the State Tournament under the direction of the State High School League.

The Creation (Design) of the 6 Random Brackets

These brackets are each a 32-team single elimination tournament brackets that will consist of eight 4-team subgroups.

Four of these subgroups will consist of the following seeds (#1, #4, #5, and #8). These teams will all come from different sections. The remaining four subgroups will consist of the following seeds (#2, #3, #6, and #7). These teams will also come from different sections.



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A subgroup with a #1 seed and a subgroup with a #2 seed is paired in each quarter of the bracket. Thus, each side of the bracket will consist of two of these pairings.

The #1 and #2 seeds from each of the original 4 sections are always on the opposite sides of the bracket and, therefore, could only meet in the state championship. The #1 seed can only meet another #1 seed in the state semi-finals. The first two rounds of the tournament would always involve teams from different sections. Teams could not play a team from their section until the first round of the state tournament. This matchup could never be a #1 vs a #2 from the original 4 sections. Once again this can only happen in the state championship. The selected "random bracket" will be taken out of circulation for two seasons.

A completely pre-determined tournament is now ready to be played.

STATE TOURNAMENT POLICIES

NOTE: The MSHSL will be sponsoring the entire State Tournament which will include the quarterfinals, semifinals, and the championships in each class. Supplemental management policies and regulations will be forwarded to member schools and tournament managers.

Policies and regulations will include: (1) pairings and site locations of the quarterfinal and semifinal games; (2) the championship games at U.S. Bank Stadium; (3) ticket information for schools; (4) complimentary ticket policies; (5) expense allowance provisions; (6) band allowances; and (7) cheerleader allowances.

EXCHANGE OF VIDEO

The exchange of game films/videotapes is required. Teams shall make all regular season and post-season games available to their opponents. Game films/videotapes must be made available to the opposing team by noon on Monday of the week in which the next playoff game is scheduled.

RECORDING GAMES

Each participating school may choose to film/videotape its game. The filming/videotaping will be done at the expense of each participating school. The schools wishing to film/videotape their game will be instructed to make arrangements with the Site Manager for a spot to locate their cameras.

HOME TEAM DESIGNATION

The Region Committee will designate the home team in the Section playoff games.

The Board of Directors will designate the home team in the State Tournament. When a school has been designated as the home team for a football playoff game, it shall: (1) act in that capacity unless excused by the



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Section Committee or the Board of Directors, (2) be considered the home team regardless of where the game is played, and (3) wear a dark-colored jersey. The visiting team shall wear a white jersey.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS, CONSOLIDATIONS, COOPERATIVE SPONSORSHIPS, and PAIRINGS

School closings, consolidations, cooperative sponsorships, or pairings may cause an individual school to be reassigned to a different classification or to a different Section. However, such movement of school(s) will not change the overall classification alignment during the term of the playoff format.

SCOUTING

Audio taping may be used as a scouting tool, as well as written observations of the team that is being scouted. THE USE OF VIDEO EQUIPMENT OR ANY TYPE OF CAMERA IS PROHIBITED BY A COACH, TEAM

MEMBER, OR ANY AGENT THEREOF.

AWARDS

Section

- Trophies: First – second place teams
 - 6A only: two–first place tr.; two-second place tr.
- Medals: First – second place teams: 6A (70) 5A (70), 4A (60), 3A (51), 2A (44), A (41), 9P (31)
 - 6A only: two sets of first place; two sets of second place

State

- Trophies: First through fourth place teams
- Medals:
 - First – second place teams: 6A (70) 5A (70), 4A (60), 3A (51), 2A (44), A (41), 9P (31)
 - First – second place coaches: 6A (5), 5A (5), 4A (4), 3A (3), 2A (3), 1A (3), 9P (2)
- Certificates:
 - Official Squad: 6A (70) 5A (70), 4A (60), 3A (51), 2A (44), A (41), 9P (31)
 - Coaches: 6A (5), 5A (5), 4A (4), 3A (3), 2A (3), A (3), 9P (2)
 - Cheerleaders + Cheer. Coach (1)

It is a violation of MSHSL policy for a member school or a representative of a member school to establish, distribute or accept any awards not provided by the MSHSL for section or state tournament.



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These policies “elevate standards of sportsmanship and encourage the growth of responsible citizenship among the students, members schools and their personnel,” consistent with the Minnesota State High School League’s Founding Purposes and the belief that sportsmanship needs to have a constant presence in all school-based activity programs. The League and its member schools work intentionally to create safe, welcoming and inclusive environments for fine arts activities and sports in our schools and competitions.

School officials are responsible for the proper conduct of teams, team members, students, and spectators regardless of where the contest is being held. (Bylaw 409).

Behavior Expectations

To create safe, welcoming and inclusive environments in fine arts and sports in our school and competitions, I will:

- Lead by positive example and demonstrate respect and support for others.
- Follow all MSHSL, school and venue expectations.
- Refrain from using profanity or ethnic, racial, religious, ability or gender-based comments, posts or messages directed at participants, directors, coaches, officials, spectators, or team representatives.
- Act as a responsible and respectful digital citizen who positively uses social media platforms.
- Speak or act in support of others when they are harmed by words or actions.
- Honor each contest and all involved, including participants, directors, coaches, officials, spectators, and team representatives.



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Requirements of Attendees

Prohibited Items

- Flags, whiteboards, large signs on sticks, signs with vulgar, obscene or inappropriate language or images, or that obstruct the views of others or similar items
- Balloons, confetti, glitter, baby powder, pom poms or other similar celebratory items
- Artificial noise makers (i.e., megaphones, cowbells, sirens, whistles, thunder sticks and other similar items)
- Drones and laser lights
- Firearms or other weapons
- Vapes, alcohol, tobacco, cannabis or illicit drugs
- The following are prohibited at MSHSL postseason events. These may be prohibited as determined by the venue during the regular season:
 - Backpacks and other bags
 - Outside food and drink
 - Professional cameras and tripods
 - Pets

Dress Code/Attire

- Spectators may not wear masks or costumes that limit the ability to identify individuals. Masking for medical purposes is allowed
- Spectators must wear clothing that covers the torso
- Clothing worn must not be vulgar, obscene or inappropriate

Behaviors

- No one may interfere with the contest in any way
- Only members of the official squad may be on the contest surface
- The use of appropriate language is always expected. Profanity, negative chants, booing, trash talk, name calling, personal attacks or other acts of disrespect are unacceptable
- Respect the Flag and the National Anthem

*Venues may have additional requirements and prohibited items.

*For most contests, spectators may bring cameras, including cell phones, that are basic point and shoot, consumer-grade cameras without detachable lenses. Spectators should confirm restricted items for contests with contest management.