NORTHERN IRELAND YOUTH

FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

NIYFA CUP RULES

Northern Ireland Youth Football Association (NIYFA)

Season 2025 - 2026

NIYFA Cup *in Partnership with* SUBWAY

www.niyfa.co.uk

NIYFA IS AFFILIATED TO AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS
OF THE
IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

NIYFA COMPETITION RULES

1. REGISTRATION OF LEAGUES & CLUBS

All Clubs/Teams must submit their competition entries on the online Klubfunder NIYFA affiliation system https://klubfunder.com/Niyfa/NIYFA/NiyfaForm or on a completed affiliation form by 31st August annually, accompanied by subscription fees as detailed on the form. Any changes to the original details supplied must be notified to NIYFA in writing or by email within two working days of such change.

2. COMPETITIONS

(a) The competitions shall be called The Northern Ireland Youth F.A. Cups and reflect the relevant age groups U11 to U17. *In 2025/26 Season, Female competition will be offered at U11, U12, U13 & U14 x 9-a-side format (subject to minimum of 32 teams at each group).*

A Plate competition may be offered in the 9 a side format to teams eliminated in the first round of the Cup. A sponsor's name may be added to one or all titles, as and when such sponsorship is attracted. The competitions shall be open to all teams in membership of the NIYFA and who have paid the appropriate membership/affiliation fees, cup entry fee and NIYFA Insurance premium for the 2025/26 season by the 31st of August.

(b) The competitions for the Cups/Plates shall be played annually and shall be conducted within the Laws of the Game as settled by IFAB, and as directed by NIYFA including the 9 a side competition

(c) NIYFA committee will determine the format of competitions on an annual basis.

(d) Affiliated leagues will hold the right to the allocation of venues up to the Semi Final stage where the right then transfers to NIYFA for Semi Final and Final ties.

(e) The team listed first will be designated the home team (but will be subject to a venue appointed as per clause (d) above).

3. AGE QUALIFICATIONS OF PLAYERS

a) All competitions will be open to players who meet the qualifying dates as stated on the cup entry application. Teams wishing to play female players in mixed football (will be granted a concession of playing a female player in an age group 1 year below her date of birth across all age groups). The NIYFA will then issue an electronic ID Card (e-ID) as players with a one-year concession cannot be selected via Comet on match day. Note; in same gender matches this concession does not apply unless a player meets the concession criteria noted below.

Also, and in exceptional circumstances *consideration* will be given to applications from young players with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities to gain concession to participate in an age group of one year below their current age band. The procedure is as follows.

b) The player assisted by his/her parent/guardian seeks membership of an NIYFA affiliated member club.

c) The parent or guardian, with support from the club should then apply to NIYFA c/o gerry@niyfa.co.uk or william@niyfa.co.uk , for a dispensation for the player to participate at

a younger age group. This application must be supported with a letter from a relevant professional confirming clear and concise medical details and why they cannot play at their own age group e.g., Physiotherapist, School Teacher, Doctor etc.

d) The matter will then be considered by a panel consisting of members from Disability Sport NI, The Irish FA and a member of NIYFA. On reaching a decision the applicant, their club and league will receive a copy of the decision from NIYFA which will be final and binding on all parties.

e) If permission is granted, the club should register the player on Comet. The NIYFA will then issue an electronic ID Card (e-ID) as players with a one-year concession cannot be selected via Comet on match day.

f) If the player moves to another league a copy of the correspondence granting permission must be sent to the secretary of that league.

g) If the player moves clubs in season a new application must be submitted following the process outlined in the Rules.

h) Any dispensation will be monitored throughout the season and may be rescinded. Any dispensation granted must be renewed annually.

For Season 25/26 the applicable age groups are.

Under 11	(2015)	**Under 12**	(2014)	**Under 13**	(2013)
Under 14	(2012)	**Under 15**	(2011)	**Under 16**	(2010)
Under 17	(2009)				

4. **REGISTRATION OF PLAYERS**

A. Players registered within a league for a participating team and whose photographic ID has been uploaded to Comet will be deemed eligible to play. A team list of a Minimum of 12 and a maximum of 20 Players must be submitted on Comet before the 30th of September in any season. Teams with less than 20 can add up to a total of 20 players to their list in any season subject to the additional players not having played for any other club in the competition. New additions cannot take the number used overall in the competition to over 20. It is the club's responsibility to monitor the number of players used.

Players may only play for one team in their own age group for a club but may play for other teams within the same club in an older age group, only within the approved age bands (please refer to the conditions in Paragraph B) – Players who require International Clearance MUST have that process completed before they are eligible to participate in any football in Northern Ireland.

B. Teams may include players from an age group below. Players are restricted to playing for those age groups either immediately 1 year or 2 years above the age group for which he or she qualifies. In all cases it is the responsibility of coaches and parents to assess the player is physically capable of meeting the demands of an older age group.

C. NIYFA may permit a registered Goalkeeper to be replaced in an NIYFA Cup or Plate competition where the number of players used would exceed the 20-player limit on production of certified medical evidence that the original registered goalkeeper is incapable of further participation. This replacement is subject to the goalkeeper not having played for any other Club in the competition and must not occupy any other playing position in any remaining games other than that of Goalkeeper.

D. Anyone who, in football related activities, forges a document, falsifies an authentic document or uses a forged or falsified document to deceive in legal relations will be sanctioned within the disciplinary rules as are in place at the time of the offence.

5. MATCH SCHEDULING

(5.1) Notification of cup-ties shall be sent to the leagues and to the listed secretaries of participating clubs. The draws will also be posted on Comet and the association's website www.niyfa.co.uk as soon as practically possible after the draw.

(5.2) All cup-ties must be played on or before the date specified on the match notification. Fixtures can only be postponed from their scheduled date if the league of the "Home" team or NIYFA are unable to provide a venue to host the fixture, teams that use a "Home" venue will be allocated a venue by their league in the event of their "Home" venue being unavailable or unplayable or in exceptional circumstances if a date has been pre-booked with their league for a bye by the team/s involved in any individual fixture. Teams who fail to meet this criterion will forfeit the cup tie in the event of not fielding on a scheduled date. Any pitch booked by a league that is unused for a match in NIYFA competitions will be charged in full to the defaulting team.

NIYFA will not agree to any team organising two games on the same day to facilitate the playing of a league fixture and NIYFA Cup tie.

(5.3) Any club refusing to play the club against which it has been drawn shall be reported to NIYFA, which shall take any action deemed appropriate.

(5.4) All matches will be listed on Comet, it is the Club/Team responsibility to check Comet for the venue and kick off time up to and including match day. Venue addresses are available on that system, if any travelling club is unsure of the exact location of the venue, they should contact the home club as soon as possible to get directions.

(5.5) For any late cancellation of matches, if having travelled, the away club may submit a claim for travel expenses against a home club. Only travel expenses incurred and receipted will be considered. Where negligence is proven against the home club the relevant committee may apportion all or part of the travel costs against the home club.

6. POSTPONEMENTS

Any tie that is postponed should take place (14 days for 11 a side) (7 days for 9 a side) after the original date unless the competition is being held up, in which case NIYFA will ask the relevant leagues to permit arrangement of the tie to take place earlier. Where a postponement occurs, the team drawn at home initially will have the opportunity to arrange the game on **one** further occasion thereafter the away team will, in conjunction with their league, facilitate the tie. Each switch of responsibility will permit teams two opportunities to host the game.

7. REFEREES

(7.1) **The league** in which the home team plays are responsible for appointing a referee to the tie other than for the semi-finals and finals when NIYFA will appoint all officials.

(7.2) In the event of a referee not turning up the clubs may mutually agree on a referee but failing same the referee will be decided by toss of a coin. A referee should officiate for all the game unless injured and requiring to be replaced during the game.

(7.3) The referee's fee shall be paid by the home team up to and including the Quarter Finals, the fees for semi-final and final ties will be paid by NIYFA.

(7.4) Protests about the ground, goalposts, crossbar, or other appurtenances of the game must be made in writing to the referee and to the secretary or official in charge of the opposing team prior to kick off whereupon the referee will decide if the game will proceed on the day.

(7. 5) When a referee has travelled, and the match does not proceed for any reason he shall be paid half of the referee's fee which will be met by the home team.

8. **MATCH DAYS**

(8.1) 11 a side matches played in NIYFA Cup competitions will be of the following duration:

U13	30 minutes each way.
U14 U15 U16 U17	35 minutes each way.

If these ties are still undecided after normal time, then a further 10 minutes each way extra time will apply. If the tie is still undecided, the result of the tie shall be decided by the taking of penalty kicks in accordance with the rules of the game as set down by IFAB.

9 a side matches played in NIYFA Cup/Plate competitions will be of the following duration:

U11, U12 & U13	25 minutes each way.

In 9 a side all ties up to Semi-Final and Final matches that end in a draw will go straight to penalties in accordance with the rules of the game as set down by IFAB. In Semi- Final and Final ties only for the 9 side competitions extra time of 5 minutes each way will apply. If the tie is still undecided, the result of the tie shall be decided by the taking of penalty kicks in accordance with the rules of the game as set down by IFAB.

(8.2) NIYFA cup/plate-ties, up to the semi-final stage, will take place on the scheduled weekend. Kick-Off time should reflect and allow for the travel time for the away team. Arrangements about alternative kick off times or dates must be notified to NIYFA. Any dispute about kick-off times or dates will be resolved by NIYFA. NIYFA will determine the kick off times, dates and venues for semi-finals and finals.

Where local teams are drawn against each other, the league facilitating the fixture may set the day and kick off time subject to pitch availability.

(8.3) Match Day team sheets generated by Comet MUST include the club officials name, (photographic ID optional) and player's photographs or in exceptional circumstances a laminated ID card for each player as per *Rule 3 Age Qualifications of Players*. Teams who fail to have all their clubs' players photographs visible on matchday will be fined £20 for each offence (missing photograph) and if subsequent checks prove any player to be ineligible the offending team will forfeit the result of the relevant match with all resultant expenses charged. NIYFA reserves the right to make the necessary checks and where a team or teams are in default of their obligations NIYFA will apply this sanction even if the match has been played.

(8.4) When clubs have the same or similar colours ***the visiting*** team will have the choice of colours. In the semi-final and final the decision will be made by the toss of a coin. Clubs must not use kit branded with any form of Alcohol, Tobacco, or gambling promotion logo. Teams should record their colours on Comet.

(8.5) A Team official of the WINNING TEAM **must** report the result immediately after the match to the number supplied via competition information emails.

(8.6) In 11-a-side games 16 players can be named on the Comet Team Sheet and up to 5 substitutes can be used. In 9-a-side games (15) players can be named and up to (6) substitutes can be used. Rolling substitutions will be permitted in the following manner:

Any player, who has been substituted, himself becomes a substitute and may replace another player at any time subject to the substitution being carried out in accordance with Law 3 of the Laws of Association Football.

Law 3—The Number of Players

Other than small-sided games where each team consists of 9 players one of whom is a goalkeeper, A match is played by two teams, each consisting of not more than eleven players, one of whom is the goalkeeper. A match may not start if either team consists of fewer than seven players. The rules of the competition must state how many substitutes may be nominated; for all 11 a side matches organised under the jurisdiction of the NIYFA (Five) 5 substitutes may be used. For all small sided 9 a side matches 6 substitutes may be used.

All Matches—In all matches, the names of the substitutes must be given to the referee prior to the start of the match. Substitutes not named on the match card may not take part in the match.

Substitution Procedure—To replace a player by substitution, the following conditions must be observed:

- The referee is informed before any proposed substitution is made - A substitute only enters the field of play after the player being replaced has left and after receiving a signal from the referee
- A substitute only enters the field of play at the halfway line and during a stoppage in the match
- A substitution is completed when a substitute enters the field of play. From that moment, the substitute becomes a player and the player he has replaced is now a substitute.
- All substitutes are subject to the authority and jurisdiction of the referee, whether called upon to play or not.

Changing the Goalkeeper— any of the other players may change places with the goalkeeper, provided that:

- The referee is informed before the change is made
- The change is made during a stoppage in the match.

Infringements/Sanctions—If a substitute enters the field of play without the referee's permission:

- Play is stopped
- The substitute is cautioned, shown the yellow card, and required to leave the field of play
- Play is restarted with an indirect free kick at the place the ball was located when play was stopped.

If a player changes places with the goalkeeper without the referee's permission before the change is made:

- Play continues
- The players concerned are cautioned and shown the yellow card when the ball is next out of play.

For any other infringements of this Law:

- The players concerned are cautioned and shown the yellow card.

Restart of Play:

- If play is stopped by the referee to administer a caution:
- the match is restarted by an indirect free kick, to be taken by a player of the opposing team from the place where the ball was located when play was stopped.

Players and Substitutes Sent Off—A player who has been sent off before the kick-off may be replaced only by one of the named substitutes. A named substitute, who has been sent off, either before the kick-off or after play has started, may not be replaced.

(8.7) Substitutes must be listed on the Comet Team Sheet before the match commences. Any substitute who does not take the field of play will not be cup tied.

(8.8) Ties at U11, 12 & 13 size 4 footballs will be used. U14 – U17 level a size 5 Football will be used. The HOME Team shall provide (2) match standard footballs. The Away team shall carry (2) match standard footballs to each game as back up.

(8.9) Teams are responsible for the behaviour of their players and officials and for the behaviour of spectators who are deemed to be attached to that club. Any reported misbehaviour on the part of any of the above will be dealt with by NIYFA by whatever penalties it thinks fit up to and including expulsion from the competition.

(8.10) Matches involving male and female players may be played provided all the participating players comply with the Registration Procedures of the NIYFA. The following conditions are recommended:

a) NIYFA must be informed of a club's wish to involve male and female players in the same team.

b) Clubs wishing to play male and female players in the same team have both male and female committee members and appropriate parent /guardian present as good practice.

c) The club secretary of any club wishing to play male and female players in the same team will be responsible for informing their opponents and checking that separate changing facilities are available when arranging any match. On arrival at the match venue, it is the club's responsibility to check that the facilities are suitable before players can change.

If no suitable facilities are available, it is the responsibility of the club wishing to play male and female players in the same team to make alternative arrangements.

Officials and players of opposite gender are not permitted to be in the dressing room or immediate surrounds when players or officials of the opposite gender are in the process of changing.

Club members, who receive injuries during any club activity, should only be treated by a qualified First Aider or a medically qualified person. It is the responsibility of any club with members of the opposite gender to aim to have the following in place:

1. A first aider of each gender

2. A medically qualified person who is registered with the UK Central Council of the GMC or similar authorised medical body. This person to identify himself or herself to the match official before the match commences.

3. Any such person must, prior to commencement of the match identify to the match referee any personal relationship with any player/s and exceptionally would then be allowed to treat any such injured player.

4. If points 1, 2 and 3 are not met and if the first aider is of the opposite gender to the club member being treated, they must be accompanied when the first aid is administered, by a club official of the same gender as the club member being treated.

The above conditions are recommended to be in place for the duration of all club activities.

(8.11) Clubs who wish to video games for their own performance analysis purposes should also request permission to do so from their opposition at least 24 hours before the game concerned *and share the video recording with the opposition if requested*. This is in relation to good safeguarding practice. In any event agreement must be sought prior to kick off. Any such video content must be released to the Disciplinary Committee should they request same. NIYFA reserve the right to video record any nominated game of their choice but will always advise the teams selected in advance.

9. **MONITORS**

NIYFA reserve the right to appoint monitors to any game who will have the power to check player and official IDs and to report on any misconduct or matters affecting NIYFA games.

10. **UNFINISHED GAMES**

(a) Results for matches that are abandoned because of inclement weather having played a minimum of 80% of the scheduled time of the match will stand.
(b) The status of matches that are abandoned because of inclement weather having played less than 80% of the scheduled time will be decided by NIYFA.
(c) The status of all other matches that are abandoned or unfinished shall be determined by NIYFA.

11. **MATCH POSTPONEMENTS**

(a) Where venues have been appointed by a League in conjunction with a local authority it will be the final decision of the local authority 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 person 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 their league, referee, visiting club and NIYFA if a postponement is necessary, in default of which the Home Club may at the discretion of NIYFA 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 NIYFA

12. **MATCH PRIORITY**

Competitions of the NIYFA shall have precedence over member League competitions.

13. **REPRESENTATIVE GAMES**

(a) NIYFA shall have the power to select player/s from any Team, to represent the association. Such representation shall be on a voluntary basis and no penalty for non-participation shall ensue.

(b) A team may apply for a postponement of a fixture should two or more players including a goalkeeper be selected to play for any NIYFA or IFA Representative team.

14. **TROPHIES**

Trophies for NIYFA Competitions shall be presented to the respective winners. The maximum number of medals that will be issued to any teams in any competition will be limited to 20 unless the actual number of players registered is less than twenty (20).

15. **MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS**

(a) Any Club intending to forfeit a game must give notice to the Secretary of the opposing Club and NIYFA prior to the date of the tie. NIYFA will impose whatever penalties it thinks fit up to and including disqualification from the competition for the following year.

(b) NIYFA shall fix the venue for the semi-final and final tie and have direct control of games, receipts and donations from funds raised in connection therewith.

(c) No player shall play for more than one Club in a cup or plate competition during any one season and this rule shall also apply irrespective of any transfer made in season.

(d) All cup-ties will be played to a finish at the first time of asking.

(e) Players who wear glasses will only be permitted on the field of play if approved prescription safety glasses are in place for the duration of the match.

(f) Clubs in default of their financial obligations to a league or NIYFA for more than 30 days after an invoice for same from a league or NIYFA may be suspended/eliminated from the competition after assessment of the debt with the relevant league or NIYFA.

(g) For 9 a side Competitions, the size of goals will be 16 x 7 however NIYFA are aware that these may not be available at every venue that may be used. If that size is not

available, then 12 x 6 is an accepted alternative.

For 11 a side Competitions, the size of goals will be 24 x 8 however NIYFA are aware that these may not be available at every venue that may be used. If that size is not available, then 21 x 7 is an accepted alternative.

16 **BREACH OF NIBFA RULES**

Any breach of NIYFA rules may render the player, official or Club liable to censure, fine or suspension or a combination of such penalties as NIYFA deem fit to impose