

2026

GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL



COACHES' HANDBOOK



2026 GHSA Football



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GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION BEGINNING AND ENDING DATES FOR 2026-27

SUMMER OF 2026:

Dead Week TWO-Summer **2026** is June 29-July 5, 2026 (Monday-Sunday)

2026 Football Season Information

- Varsity Games may be played on the Thursday before the date of Week 1, or on the Saturday after the date ONLY, unless by special permission from GHSAA. Remember only 1 varsity game per week during the season.
- The first contest date for Varsity Football is the WEEK 1 date. NO Sub-Varsity games are permitted before this date.
- Football weeks are 1-12, there is **NO ZERO** week anymore.
- You may play 10 Varsity Games in the 12 week season. (Two open weeks).
- Football weeks 2026 season are listed below:

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>2026 Season</u>
Week 1	August 21
Week 2	August 28
Week 3	September 4
Week 4	September 11
Week 5	September 18
Week 6	September 25
Week 7	October 2
Week 8	October 9
Week 9	October 16
Week 10	October 23
Week 11	October 30



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Week 12	October 30
*Playoff Round 1	November 6
Playoff Round 2	November 13
Playoff Round 3	November 20
Playoff Round 4	December 4
Finals	December 15-16 (4 Games per Day)

- The GHSAA will attempt to play all first-round games on Friday, November 14, 2026. However, if there are not enough playoff certified officials available, a classification may be moved to Thursday, November 13, 2026.



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FOOTBALL

REGULAR SEASON:

- A. Football is a state championship sport in each classification, and schools are aligned on a Region basis.
 1. In the reclassification year (see Article III of the GHSA Constitution), all regions will meet after reclassification has been finalized by the Executive Committee and after any sub-divisions have been finalized and cross-over games have been arranged.
 - a. No schedule is valid until the plans of all regions have been approved.
 - b. *Plans for determining the Region Champion for the playoffs must be drawn by the respective regions before the football season begins.*
 - c. All contracts should be drawn to coincide with the two-year reclassification period and show the day, date, time, opponent and game site.
 2. Each school must file its football schedule with the GHSA Executive Director no later than March 1, each year.
 - a. The schedule must show the day, date, time, opponent, and game site.
 - b. The GHSA Executive Director must be notified concerning any changes made to the schedule after the submission date.
 - c. Any changes made for a region game must be made prior to the date for beginning football practice.
 1. Any change of opponent after that date will cause the game not to count as a sub-region or region game.
 2. Limitations regarding schedule changes shall also be construed to prevent a school from canceling a game when such a game could affect the region and/or sub-region standings.
 3. A change in date or time with the same opponent is not considered a change affecting region or sub-region status.
 - d. Contracts with officials for varsity games must be signed by June 1 each year, and copies of the schedules must be submitted to the proper official's association(s).
 - e. Each school must have a signed contract for its football scrimmage, and a school may be fined for failure to comply with that contract.
 - f. There may be a \$250 penalty for schools that change their football schedules after June 1. (NOTE: Appeal procedures are available.)
- B. All schools are **REQUIRED** to enter all game results into the GHSA MIS site immediately following their respective contests. This is imperative as it will impact *all classifications* in the Post Season Ranking System. Schools are to enter team schedules, rosters and weekly game



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results during the season on MaxPreps as well and be responsible for updates as needed. This information will support statewide media, event programs, broadcasts partners and GHSFA Region Standings. Teams are encouraged to maintain team/individual statistics on MaxPreps.

- C. All GHSFA football games must be played according to the rules as published by the National Federation of State High School Associations, and any other rules found in this section.
- D. The number of football games allowed (excluding state playoffs) is ten (10).
 1. No varsity football game may be played on a night preceding a school day without specific authorization from the GHSFA Executive Director.
 2. Only one football game may be played per week (the schedule week is a traditional week - Sunday through Saturday) by the same level team (varsity/sub-varsity) except in the case of make-up games due to special circumstances that have been approved by the Executive Director.
 3. Football players playing on both the varsity and one sub-varsity team are limited to six quarters of competition in any seven (7) calendar day period beginning with the date of the varsity game. The penalty for violation of this rule will be forfeiture of the game in which the violation occurred and a \$1,000.00 fine.
 4. The football season ends for a team or individual when that team, having completed its regular-season schedule, is eliminated from playoff competition or wins the State Championship.
 5. All JV games will be played with 10-minute quarters. If there is an 8th grade student(s) on the JV team, then 8-minute quarters must be played.
 6. Schools may play 10 Mini Games at the JV level, instead of seven (7) regular games, the combination of which cannot exceed the current 28 quarters allowed for sub-varsity play. Each Mini Game will be one-half of a regular game. Four (4) schools would meet at one site, with two schools playing a half and then the other two schools playing a half. Officials would be paid the regular fee for a single game.
 7. Any football contest MUST have an on-site WBGT monitor and take measurements 15 minutes prior to the start of the contest and again during halftime. The following requirements for hydration breaks must be followed:
 - a. Kick-off WBGT equal or above 87.0 F – referees will take a mandatory hydration break at or near the 6-minute mark of each quarter lasting three (3) minutes (change of possession or touchdown and PAT). All participants must remove their helmets and no coaches are permitted on the field at this time. It is recommended that players who are actively engaged in the competition and come to the sideline remove their helmets and hydrate until such time that they re-enter the field of play.
 - b. Kick-off WBGT equal or above 90.0 F – referees will take a mandatory hydration break at or near the 4-minute and 8-minute mark of each quarter lasting 3 minutes (change of possession or PAT). All participants must remove their helmets and no coaches are permitted on the field at this time. It is recommended that players



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who are actively engaged in the competition and come to the sideline remove their helmets and hydrate until such time that they re-enter the field of play.

8. Regulation of 7-on-7 Contests Clarification of Terminology: 7-on-7 play between 2 or more teams where there are NOT any officials present will be viewed as a "PRACTICE" and therefore will fall under the GHSAA Interscholastic Contests and Practices (Section 2.60) and the Practice Policy for Heat and Humidity (Section 2.67) along with the following guidelines:
 - a. Teams that participate in back-to-back play periods lasting a maximum of 60 minutes, must be followed by a 30-minute break in a shaded area before resuming activity.
 - b. It is recommended that medical personnel (athletic trainer or EMT) be present during said practice session.
 - c. 7-on-7 play between 2 or more teams in the presence of officials will constitute a "CONTEST" and therefore will follow guidelines listed below:
 1. WBGT Temperature will be taken and recorded prior to the start of all contests.
 2. The host school will notify the Head Official and both Head Coaches of the WBGT reading prior to the start of the contest.
 3. Hydration breaks will be implemented when the WBGT is equal or above 90.0 F. Referees will take a mandatory three-minute hydration break at the 10-minute mark of each contest.
 4. Ice immersion tub on-site and ready for use when WBGT is equal or above 86.0 F.
 5. Medical Time-out taken prior to start of contest to discuss procedures for possible heat exhaustion or heat stroke treatment.
 6. Teams that participate in back-to-back play periods lasting a maximum of 60 minutes, must be followed by a 30-minute break in a shaded area before resuming activity.
 7. It is recommended that medical personnel (athletic trainer or EMT) be present on each field during all contests.
- B. Football practice may begin five consecutive weekdays prior to *July 27th* (NOTE: Schools are reminded of the special Heat and Humidity Acclimatization restrictions listed in By-Law 2.67-b pertaining to football).
1. In the first five days of practice for any student, the practice may not last longer than two (2) hours, and the student may wear no other protective football equipment except helmet and mouthpieces. NOTE:
 - a. The time for a session shall be measured from the time the players report to the practice or workout area until they leave that area.
 - b. During acclimatization practices, teams may hold a walk-through as long as there is at least a two-hour break between the two activities.



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2. Beginning *July 27th*, any student may practice in full pads and may practice a maximum of two (2) times in a single calendar day under the following stipulations:
 - a. A student must have participated in five conditioning practices wearing no other protective football equipment except helmet and mouthpieces before being allowed to practice in full pads.
 - b. In a single calendar day:
 1. No single session may last longer than three (3) hours.
 2. If two (2) practices are held, the TOTAL time shall not exceed five (5) hours.
 3. There must be at least a three-hour time of rest between sessions if two (2) sessions are held.
 4. There may not be consecutive days of two-a-day practice sessions. All double-session days must be followed by a single-session day or a day off.
 5. A walk-through may not be held on days when two practices are conducted.
 - c. These procedures are derived from recommendations created by the Inter-Association Task Force for Preseason Secondary School Athletics Participants in the paper "Preseason Heat-Acclimatization Guidelines for Secondary School Athletes."
3. Full contact should be limited during practices as well as during activity outside of the traditional fall practice. (Note: No limitation is placed on activities defined below as "AIR, BAGS or CONTROL" contact.)
 - a. For purposes of this by-law, the following definitions shall apply: AIR - Players run a drill unopposed without contact; BAGS - Players run a drill against a bag or another soft-contact surface; CONTROL - Players run a drill at assigned speed until the moment of contact and one player is pre-determined the "winner" by the coach. Contact remains above the waist and players stay on their feet; THUD - Players run a drill at competitive speed through the moment of contact with no pre-determined "winner." Contact remains above the waist; players stay on their feet and a quick whistle ends the drill; LIVE ACTION - Players run a drill in game-like conditions and is the only time that players are taken to the ground; FULL CONTACT - Contact which meets the definition of Live Action or Thud.
 - b. Pre-Season & Spring Practice & Summer Contact Camps:
 1. Full contact shall be allowed in no more than 2 consecutive practice days per week.
 2. Full contact during practice shall be limited to not more than 45 minutes per day.
 3. Full contact during practice shall be limited to not more than 135 minutes per week; and
 4. During any twice-daily practice, only one session per day shall include full contact.
 5. In Summer Contact Camps, the only form of Full Contact allowed is Thud.



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6. Schools will be limited to attending no more than two (2) padded Team Contact Camps per summer: one in June for two days during a three consecutive day period, and one in July for two days during a three consecutive day period (no more than four (4) days total). There must be at least four (4) participating schools or the camp cannot be held.

c. Regular & Post Season Practice:

1. Full contact during practice shall be allowed in no more than three (3) practice days per week.
2. Full contact during practice shall not be allowed on more than two (2) consecutive days.
3. Full contact during practice shall be limited to not more than 30 minutes per day.
4. Full contact during practice shall be limited to not more than 90 minutes per week.

- d. Written Practice Plans: A written practice plan in compliance with this by-law shall be prepared in advance by the head coach prior to every practice and maintained by the school for a period of at least twelve (12) months. Such practice plans shall be made available to the GHSFA upon request.

- e. Violations: The penalty to be imposed upon any school member found to have violated this by-law in any substantial manner shall be as follows:

1. First Offense: A fine of not less than \$500 nor more than \$2,500 per violation at the discretion of the Executive Director.
2. Second Offense: The school shall be placed on probation and shall not be eligible to participate in post season play.

4. From the end of school in the spring until the first day of preseason practice, players may wear no other protective football equipment except helmets and mouthpieces for all voluntary workouts and passing league games. Institutional heat policies are also in effect for voluntary workouts supervised by school personnel.
5. All applications for team summer camps at GHSFA schools or other facilities must be submitted to the GHSFA office by May 1, and all subsequent correspondence to complete the application must be completed by May 15. Coaches for these players must verify that the participants have had acclimatization practices for five days immediately preceding the camp.
6. Equipment in summer (contact) camps is limited to helmets and mouthpieces, shoulder pads, and compression style shorts (girdles) that have thigh pads and/or girdle pads. **NO FOOTBALL PANTS OR KNEE PADS CAN BE WORN AT ANY TIME DURING SUMMER.**

- B. All varsity football games shall be played with a minimum of five (5) officially dressed field officials who are registered under the GHSFA plan for registering officials. The officiating crew also shall have an electric clock operator whose only duty is to operate the game clock.



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1. In all games, the host school must provide some type of dressing facilities for officials at or near the game site that can also be used to hold the pre-game conference.
2. During the regular season, the host school is responsible for providing a crew to work the sideline chains. These individuals must be responsible adults.
3. In accordance with By-Law 2.71-c, the host school is responsible for providing security escorts for the officials at all regular season and playoff games.

B. The following regulations are in place for GHSAA football games.

1. All GHSAA football games will have a twenty (20) minute halftime unless both school administrators agree in writing by Thursday of game week to shorten the halftime period to fifteen (15) minutes, or unless NFHS weather-condition rules supersede.
2. Artificial noisemakers, except airhorns and whistles, are legal at football games unless the host school has a policy excluding other artificial noisemakers that may hinder on-field communication. The illegal noisemakers are to be confiscated when visible and/or used.
3. Bands/artificial noisemakers that hinder communications are not to play during live-ball situations. NOTE: This includes the situation in which there is no timeout, and the teams are in a huddle.
 - a. If, during a football game, a team claims interference with communications due to band noise and or artificial noisemakers, the Referee shall give a warning to one or both head coaches and the bands/noisemakers must cease playing.
 - b. If there is a second offense by the same school's band/artificial noisemakers, a delay of game penalty will be administered.
 - c. The third offense results in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty imposed against that school's team.
4. During the state playoff series, a crew of seven (7) field officials will be used.
5. Fans shall not be allowed to enter the playing field either before the game or at halftime to form a tunnel for players to run through.
6. In the regular season, a school may utilize a visible 25/40-second clock as long as the time is visible on both ends of the field and the clock is operated by a paid game official.
7. Football stadiums may never be completely dark during the use of any flashing stadium lights. The ability to see from one endline to the opposite endline must be maintained at all times before, during and after the game, until the officials have left the competition area.

B. Spring Football Practice for each school year may be held from February 1 until the end of the school year, consisting of 10 practices spaced over 13 consecutive school days. (Note: Spring and fall scrimmage games and jamborees are considered to be extensions of practice as far as eligibility rules are concerned.)

1. Schools must choose by February 1 each year as to whether they will have spring football practice.



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- a. If a school conducts spring practice, all preseason practice schedules remain the same (See item D. 3(b) for a listing of contact limitations).
 - b. If a school chooses not to conduct spring practice, the team will be allowed to hold an additional (second) scrimmage game or controlled scrimmage against another school, or a jamboree with three teams playing a half against the other two teams, in the fall.
 - c. Schools hiring a new coach may appeal to the Executive Director to change an earlier decision.
2. Schools that have scrimmage game/games canceled or suspended by inclement weather will have the following options:
- a. Play on another night during the same calendar week (defined as Sunday to Saturday.) Sunday play is not allowed.
 - b. Play during another week when the school does not have another scrimmage or regular season game scheduled. (Note: No scrimmage game may be played after a school's first varsity contest.)
3. Schools which participate in Spring Practice are allowed to play a spring game/scrimmage with another school, or a jamboree with three teams playing a half against the other two teams, in place of their last (10th) practice of the spring (Note: Restrictions under by-law 2.62 (f-2) & (f-3) will apply). Schools may use an OTA format in lieu of a scrimmage/jamboree if they so choose. This format may utilize up to 4 schools but must have the same time restraints as a traditional scrimmage/jamboree.
4. A football coach on the payroll of one school district, but under contract to another school district for the following year, may help with spring football at the new school, if the arrangement is satisfactory with both systems.
5. Students enrolled in grade 8 in a middle school or junior high school that is a feeder school to the high school may participate in Spring Practice at that high school.
6. No student (eighth grade or above) may participate in more than ten (10) days of Spring Practice and may participate for no more than one (1) school.
- B. In case of a game being terminated in the first half (suspended game), By-Law 2.93-c must be followed. NOTE: All varsity football games must be played to completion. Any interrupted game must be replayed from the point of interruption. The school that is behind in the score may choose not to continue the game and the score will be recorded as it was at the point of interruption. NOTE: Teams will not be allowed to play two football games in the same week, except when making up a suspended game with the permission of the Executive Director.
- C. During warmups before the game and at halftime there shall be a division of the field, and neither team shall enter the other team's portion of the field. That division shall be as follows:
1. Before the game: each team shall occupy the space from their own 45-yard line to the endline of their goal line. Neither team shall occupy the area between the 45-yard lines. EXCEPTION: When kicking, each team shall have the area between the opponent's 45-yard line and kicking team's end zone in the side zone area on the same side of the field as their bench. Kickers shall kick toward their end zone.



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2. Re-entering the field before the game and at halftime: each team shall have the portion of the field between their bench and the near edge of each goal post - i.e., field divided lengthwise.
- B. Overtime is mandated for all games between schools due to the implementation of the Post Season Ranking System.
1. See procedures below:
 2. Overtime games are exempt from the 11:30 p.m. GHSAA curfew.
- B. When there is a competitive imbalance between teams, the coach of a team trailing by 30 points or more at halftime may choose to play the second half with a running clock. Quarters will remain at 12 minutes.
1. If the coach does not exercise the option of the running clock, the third quarter will be played with regulation timing.
 2. If the point differential reaches, or remains, 30 or more points during the third quarter, the clock will still run according to rule for the remainder of the third quarter, but the fourth quarter will have a running clock mandated.
 3. A running clock means the clock will be stopped only:
 - a. after a touchdown and until the ball is kicked off.
 - b. during deliberations for penalty administration.
 - c. during charged timeouts or official's timeouts
 4. A game that is reduced in time by use of a running clock shall constitute a "completed" game to meet other by-law considerations.

GHSAA OVERTIME PROCEDURE

1. There will be a 3-minute intermission between the end of regulation play and the coin toss to start the overtime procedure.
2. The captains will meet for the coin toss, and the winner may choose one of the following:
 - a. Be on offense first
 - b. Be on defense first
 - c. Choose the end of the field on which to play
3. The ball is placed on the 15-yard line and the offense keeps the ball until:
 - a. The ball is turned over on downs (NOTE: The team on offense can gain a first down.)
 - b. The defense gains possession of the ball (ball is dead immediately)
 - c. The offense scores a touchdown or field goal
 - d. The offense misses a field goal



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2. After the first offensive team completes its possession, the opposing team gets its opportunity from the 15-yard line.
3. If the game remains tied after each team has had an offensive possession, there will be a 2-minute intermission and the team that lost the first coin toss has the first option for the second possession.
4. For each additional overtime period (i.e., an offensive possession by each team) the original coin toss options are alternated.
5. Beginning with the second overtime period, a team must attempt a 2-point try after a touchdown.
6. Subsequent to the first two series from the 15-yard line, if the game remains tied, the ball will be placed on the three-yard line and teams will alternate two-point conversions until the tie is broken.
7. Each team is allowed one timeout per overtime period. Timeouts may NOT be carried over from regulation play.

REGION PROCEDURES:

- A. To qualify for championship consideration in a region or sub-region, a school must play a minimum number of games with schools in its region as determined by the region and the GHSAA Reclassification Committee.
 1. In any region or sub-region in which there are six (6) or less schools, if each school plays two (2) games, both games will count as region games. In any other case where two (2) schools have played more than once during the regular season, only the first game scheduled shall count in the region standings.
 2. Any school playing a non-region or non-sub-region schedule (i.e., not in consideration for a region championship) will not have its games count for or against any opponent.
- B. The GHSAA Executive Director, upon presentation of evidence to show that a school cannot secure the required number of games in a region or sub-region, may authorize each school to substitute any number of games in any classification or region to qualify for championship consideration. NOTE: A request for substitution of game(s) must be submitted prior to September 1.
- C. *In All Classes, Regions will determine their respective Region Champion who will automatically qualify for the post season and host a first round playoff game.*
 1. *Each region will formulate a tie-breaker procedure to determine the Region Champion.*
 2. In case there is a tie between teams and the region does not have a different written tie-breaker plan, the following procedures will be used (NOTE: The use of mini-games to break ties is no longer allowed):
 - a. If two teams tie, and one of the teams has defeated the other in a regular schedule region game, the winner shall have the higher placement. Three or more tied teams shall first be considered in sets of two-way ties. NOTE: If three or more teams are tied, use head-to-head record among the tied teams to break ties for



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- seeding. Only utilize points to break ties among teams when the ties are a perfect triangle, with each team having the same record among the tied teams.
- b. If two teams tie and the tied teams split or have not played each other in a region game (no round robin), the team with the greater sum of winning margin using the following Point System, shall have the higher placement.
 - c. If more than two teams remain tied after applying "a" above, the following Point System shall be used to eliminate all but two teams. Tabulate the sum of the winning margins of each team's region games as indicated in the following:
POINT SYSTEM:
 1. If the margin of victory is more than 13 points, only 13 points shall count.
 2. Losses shall be tallied as 0 (zero) points.
 3. Forfeited games: Offended teams shall receive 13 points when tabulating the sum of the winning margins for breaking region ties.
 - d. After tabulating the sum of the winning margins, all teams except the two (2) with the greater sums shall be eliminated, and the selection process shall begin again with paragraph "a" above.
 - e. If teams remain tied after the above procedures are applied, the playoff representatives shall be determined by a coin toss. The coin toss, supervised by the REGION OFFICERS, shall be used to eliminate all but two (2) teams, and then the process shall begin again with paragraph "a" above.
 - f. In the event the region is eligible for more than one playoff representative, each subsequent playoff representative shall be chosen by reapplying the procedure above.
 - g. All regions will use the adopted procedures for breaking ties that occur in the order of standings when round robin schedules are completed.

D. In All Classes the remaining Playoff Qualifiers (non-Region Champions) will be determined by the GHSAA Post Season Ranking Formula (PSRF). Refer to Appendix "PSR".

STATE PLAYOFFS:

- A. All rounds of games after the end of the regular season are considered part of the state playoff structure.
 1. *In ALL Rounds except the Finals, the higher-seeded team according to PSR will host. (Note: In the first round, all Region Champions will automatically host a first-round playoff game).*
 2. In ALL Rounds except the Finals, game date and time will be set by mutual agreement. If that agreement is not possible, the GHSAA Executive Director will finalize the arrangements. If an administrator does not attend the meeting at which the playoff contract is negotiated, the coach shall be authorized by the principal to negotiate and sign a binding contract.
 3. In ALL Rounds except the Finals, one half of all permanent and temporary seats shall be offered to the visiting team, and it is the responsibility of the home team to regulate the seating so as to guarantee designated seating to the visiting team's supporters.



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4. In ALL Rounds except the Finals, there should be adequate parking space with a recommendation of one (1) space for every four (4) spectators.
5. In ALL Rounds except the Finals, security shall be provided at the site in the ratio of at least one officer per 500 spectators.
6. In ALL Rounds except the Finals, facilities for officials to dress, shower, and/or hold meetings shall be made available at the site or nearby.
7. It is mandatory to have emergency medical personnel at the site of all football playoff games.
8. Playoff ticket prices are as follows (NOTE: Only babies in arms do not need a ticket):
 - First Round: TBD*
 - Second Round: TBD*
 - Quarterfinals: TBD*
 - Semifinals: TBD*
 - Championships: TBD*
 - a. Through the semifinal round, high school level students of the participating schools may purchase presale tickets at a discount of \$2 off regular price. Students may purchase one (1) ticket each from their schools at this discounted price.
 - b. Certified staff members who work at the participating schools ONLY will be allowed free admission through the semifinal round with proper identification.

B. In order to host a Semifinal Round playoff game, a school must meet the following site requirements:

1. Permanent seating requirements:

- a. One seat equals 24 inches in width. Exception: each theatre style seat (with back and arm rests) will count as one seat regardless of the width of the seat.
- b. All seats must be at least 15 feet from the playing field.
- c. Total seating capacity for each class is as follows:
 - Class A ,2A, Private.....2,000 seats*
 - Class 3A2,500 seats*
 - Class 4A & 5A.....3,000 seats*
 - Class 6A.....3,500 seats*
 - Class 7A.....4,000 Seats*
- d. Each principal of a school in the playoffs shall certify that the school stadium meets or does not meet football playoff requirements. If a principal certifies such information falsely, then \$2,000.00 of such school's share of the gate receipts of the contest held in the non-complying stadium shall be paid to the opposing team.
- e. The GHSFA will mediate with both teams involved when there are concerns about the safety of a venue in regard to seating limitations.
- f. The higher-seeded team in the Semifinal Round will be the host team. If they do not have a stadium that meets GHSFA minimum standards, they may secure a suitable site.
- g. The higher-seeded team may use portable seating to bring its home stadium seating capacity up to the GHSFA minimum in order to host the game as long as



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(NOTE: Any portable seating brought in for games in earlier rounds also must meet these specifications):

1. The seating meets the standards of the industry and is installed by professional installers.
2. All seats provide clear sight lines to the field of play.
3. No costs for the temporary seating are taken out of game receipts.
4. Seating requirements for a semifinal game may be waived upon written agreement of the principals of the competing schools that the host's stadium will be adequate and with the approval of the GHSA Executive Director.

h. *In ALL Classes the higher seeded team according to PSR will host.*

1. *The higher seeded team will have the opportunity to bring its stadium up to specifications as outlined in item "g" above, or to secure a suitable stadium (if their stadium doesn't meet GHSA specifications.)*
2. *The higher seeded team will have until 4:00 p.m., on the Monday before the game to commit to bringing their stadium up to specifications or to secure a suitable site.*
3. *If the higher seeded team cannot secure a suitable site, or bring theirs up to specifications, the opponent will then be awarded the home game, assuming their stadium meets requirements.*
4. *If neither school meets or exceeds GHSA standards, and the higher seeded team can't find a suitable stadium or bring its stadium up to the specifications, the Executive Director will designate a neutral site.*
5. *Above seating requirements apply to all Classifications for semifinal games.*

i. The GHSA will provide a supervisor at all semifinal games.

2. The stadium shall have adequate working space in the press box as follows (NOTE: the first priority for access to the press box after the clock operator and the PA announcer is the working media):

Classes A, 2A, 3A, Private: 30 linear feet

Classes 4A, 5A: 40 linear feet

Classes 6A, 7A: 50 linear feet

B. All Championship Round games will be played *December 15 &16 (*tentative dates) at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. These games will be known as the "GHSA/Tommy Guillebeau Football Championships."

1. The expense and revenue shares by classification will be as follows:
7A - 17.5%, 6A - 15%, 5A - 15%, 4A - 13.5%, 3A - 12%, 2A- 9%, 1A- 9%, Private- 9%
2. A "Video Review" system will be used in all championship games, the procedure for which will be published on the GHSA web site.
3. The exact schedule for the championship games will be published on the GHSA website.

B. Financial Procedures:



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1. Total game receipts will include all revenue from ticket sales plus any payments for radio or television broadcasting and will not include money from the sale of programs and concessions.
 2. All band chaperones and other support personnel must have tickets.
 3. The division of game receipts will be handled as follows:
 - a. From the gross receipts:
 1. Twelve percent (12%) will be sent to the GHSA Office along with a financial report. Each Football Financial Report Form shall include the number of spectators admitted with a GHSA pass, along with a copy of the sign-in sheets listing the names and numbers of the passes used.
 2. The visiting team shall receive reimbursement for travel expenses in the amount of \$5.00 per mile (one way) taken from the game receipts and guaranteed by the host school. NOTE: If the game is played at a neutral site, both teams will be reimbursed for mileage.
 3. FOR ALL ROUNDS OF THE PLAYOFFS: The game officials will invoice GHSA and GHSA will pay the officials.
 4. The HOST school shall receive a fee of 7% of the gross gate receipts.
 - b. After items in Section "a" have been paid, the remainder shall be divided equally between the two teams.
 - c. Local service charges, stadium charges, lights, cost of operating personnel, etc., are not to be deducted prior to the division of funds and are considered a part of the expenses of the host school.
 4. Broadcasting procedures are handled as follows:
 - a. The GHSA office will process radio contracts in all rounds of the playoffs. The fee schedule and regulations for radio broadcasts may be found in the Broadcast section 2.80.
 - b. Outlets wishing to televise or webcast football games must contact the GHSA office for contract terms.
- B. Game officials will be assigned by the GHSA Office in all playoff rounds. Officiating crews shall include seven (7) field officials, clock operators, and three (3) chain crew members.



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Post Season Ranking Formula (2026-2028 Reclassification Cycle)

Public and Non-Public Schools in Classes 1A-7A will play in their assigned regions during the regular season, but private member schools will compete in a combined championship bracket of private member schools only. Public schools in 2A, 3A and 4A will participate in a separate championship bracket by assigned classification. The following format will be used for playoff seeding sports in all classifications.

All State Playoff Qualification including Private School Bracket

To qualify for the State Playoffs, schools are required to play a Region schedule and the minimum number of contests per sport listed below. All the Region Champions (1-16, host 1st Round game) are guaranteed a home contest and will be seeded by the school's post season ranking formula total and all the remaining schools will be seeded strictly by the school's post season ranking formula (after all the Region Champions are seeded).

GHSAA Post Season Ranking Formula will contain:

Winning Percentage (WP) is calculated by taking a team's weighted wins divided by the number of actual contests played.

Home win equals 1, Away win equals 1, neutral site and non GHSAA win equals 0.9. NOTE: GHSAA member schools may not win more than 20% of their scheduled contests against non-GHSAA schools. All contests will count toward the minimum number of contests and any win beyond the 20% maximum will be counted as no contest.

For sanctioned tournaments and play dates, a home win equals 1 and an away win equals 1. All other contests, not involving the host, would be considered a neutral site and a win equals 1.

All Region tournament contests will be considered a neutral site and a win equals 1.

Opponents' Winning Percentage (OWP) – is calculated by taking the average of each of the WP's for each of the team's GHSAA opponents with the requirement that all contests against the team in question are removed from the equation.

Opponents' Opponents' Winning Percentage (OOWP) – is calculated by taking the average of each GHSAA Opponent's OWP. Note that the team in question is part of the team's OOWP.

The MIS system will calculate the ranking using the evaluation formula for all classification teams by sport.

GHSAA Post Season Ranking Formula will be published on the GHSAA website for public viewing.

Calculations will be carried out to the fifth decimal place.

GHSAA Tiebreakers for equal ranking.

Head-to-Head Result

Highest PSR WP

Highest PSR OWP

Highest PSR OOWP

Coin Toss

GHSAA Post Season Ranking Formula: (All Classifications)



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$$\text{PSRF} = (\text{WP} \times 0.35) + (\text{OWP} \times 0.35) + (\text{OOWP} \times 0.30)$$

WP – Winning Percentage

OWP – Opponents' Winning Percentage against all opponents

OOWP – Opponents' Opponents' Winning Percentage against all opponents

WP – is calculated by taking a team's weighted wins divided by the number of actual contests it has played. Home win equals 1, Away win equals 1, neutral site and non GHSAA opponents win is 0.9.

OWP – is calculated by taking the average of the WP's for each of the team's opponents with the requirement that all contests against the team in question are removed from the equation.

OOWP – is calculated by taking the average of each Opponent's OWP. Note that the team in question is part of the team's OOWP.

Example - Bracket - 5 schools win the region and are guaranteed a home game or bye. The remaining seeds will be seeded strictly by the school's post season ranking formula.

All Classification Brackets

- #1 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #1)
- #2 Seed – PSR #2
- #3 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #3)
- #4 Seed - PSR #4
- #5 Seed - PSR #5
- #6 Seed - PSR #6
- #7 Seed - PSR #7
- #8 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #8)
- #9 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #9)
- #10 Seed - PSR #10
- #11 Seed - PSR #11
- #12 Seed - PSR #12
- #13 Seed - PSR #13
- #14 Seed - PSR #14
- #15 Seed - PSR #15
- #16 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #18)

- #17 Seed - PSR #16
- #18 Seed - PSR #17
- #19 Seed - PSR #19
- #20 Seed - PSR #20
- #21 Seed - PSR #21
- #22 Seed - PSR #22
- #23 Seed - PSR #23
- #24 Seed - PSR #24
- #25 Seed - PSR #25
- #26 Seed - PSR #26
- #27 Seed - PSR #27



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- #28 Seed - PSR #28
- #29 Seed - PSR #29
- #30 Seed - PSR #30
- #31 Seed - PSR #31
- #32 Seed - PSR #32

Example - Bracket - 6 schools win the region and are guaranteed a home game and will be seeded by the school's post-season ranking formula total. The remaining seeds will be seeded strictly by the school's post season ranking formula.

All Classification Brackets

- #1 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #1)
- #2 Seed - PSR #2
- #3 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #3)
- #4 Seed - PSR #4
- #5 Seed - PSR #5
- #6 Seed - PSR #6
- #7 Seed - PSR #7
- #8 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #8)
- #9 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #9)
- #10 Seed - PSR #10
- #11 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #13)
- #12 Seed - PSR #12
- #13 Seed - PSR #13
- #14 Seed - PSR #14
- #15 Seed - PSR #15
- #16 Seed - Region Champion (PSR #21)

- #17 Seed - PSR #16
- #18 Seed - PSR #17
- #19 Seed - PSR #18
- #20 Seed - PSR #19
- #21 Seed - PSR #20
- #22 Seed - PSR #22
- #23 Seed - PSR #23
- #24 Seed - PSR #24
- #25 Seed - PSR #25
- #26 Seed - PSR #26
- #27 Seed - PSR #27
- #28 Seed - PSR #28
- #29 Seed - PSR #29
- #30 Seed - PSR #30
- #31 Seed - PSR #31
- #32 Seed - PSR #32



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The GHSAA Office has built a platform in the MIS system that implements the following requirements:

Every Class 1A - 7A, each school enters their schedule in the MIS system (Schedule will be locked before 1st game).

Each school enters their teams schedule on the MIS platform for all contests; Contests against non GHSAA member schools will be calculated using winning percentage only.

All postponed contests should be rescheduled.

Canceled contests will need approval from the GHSAA office to reschedule a replacement opponent. Forfeited contests count in a school's formula and the appropriate points should be applied (If a school chooses to accept the forfeited contest points, any additional scheduled game played will not be calculated into the school's formula).

However, if a school chooses to not accept the forfeited contest points, the additional "makeup" contest will be calculated into the school's formula. The school must choose which option to accept before the makeup contest is played.

All contests against GHSAA member schools will be used to calculate the school's PSRF regardless of classification. Schools will not earn additional points for playing schools in higher classifications. All member schools must enter their scores in the MIS system for the schedule entered in the system (scores will be locked after being submitted).

2.67 Practice Policy for Heat and Humidity:

- (a) Schools must follow the statewide policy for conducting practices and voluntary conditioning workouts (this policy is year-round, including during the summer) in all sports during times of extremely high heat and/or humidity that will be signed by each head coach at the beginning of each season and distributed to all players and their parents or guardians. The policy shall follow modified guidelines of the American

College of Sports Medicine in regard to:

- (1) The scheduling of practices at various heat/humidity levels.
- (2) The ratio of workout time to time allotted for rest and hydration at various heat/humidity levels.
- (3) The heat/humidity levels that will result in practice being terminated.

- (b) Football Only: Acclimatization and Re-Acclimatization (prior to October 1st)

(1) Acclimatization

a. Football practice may begin five consecutive weekdays prior to the start date for football.

1. In the first five days of practice for any student, the practice may not last longer than two (2) hours, and the student may wear no other protective football equipment except helmet and mouthpieces. NOTE:

(a) The time for a session shall be measured from the time the players report to the practice or workout area until they leave that area.

(b) During acclimatization practices, teams may hold a walk-through as long as there is at least a three-hour break between the two activities.

- (2) Re-Acclimatization – Required for any athlete who misses five (5) consecutive days of practice for any reason.

a. Day 1 (Only COVID related quarantine can begin on last day of quarantine): 1.5 hours conditioning - helmets only

b. Day 2: 2 hours practice - helmets only



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- c. Day 3: 2.5 hours practice with helmets and shoulder pads
- d. Day 4: 2.5 hours practice with full pads
- e. Day 5: 2.5 hours practice with full pads or play a game

- (c) A scientifically-approved instrument that measures the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature must be utilized at each practice (prior to October 1) to ensure that the written policy is being followed properly. WBGT readings should be taken at a minimum of every 30 minutes, beginning 30 minutes prior to the start of practice. All WBGT monitors shall be calibrated, at a minimum, every two (2) years or earlier if recommended by the manufacturer.



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WBGT ACTIVITY GUIDELINES AND REST BREAK GUIDELINES

- Under 82.0** Normal Activities - Provide at least three separate rest breaks each hour with a minimum duration of 3 minutes each during the workout.
- 82.0 - 86.9** Use discretion for intense or prolonged exercise; watch at-risk players carefully. Provide at least three separate rest breaks each hour with a minimum duration of 4 minutes each.
- 87.0 - 89.9** Maximum practice time is 2 hours. For Football: players are restricted to helmet, shoulder pads, and shorts during practice, and all protective equipment must be removed during conditioning activities. If the WBGT rises to this level during practice, players may continue to work out wearing football pants without changing to shorts. For All Sports: Provide at least four separate rest breaks each hour with a minimum duration of 4 minutes each.
- 90.0 - 92.0** Maximum practice time is 1 hour. For Football: no protective equipment may be worn during practice, and there may be no conditioning activities. For All Sports: There must be 20 minutes of rest breaks distributed throughout the hour of practice.
- Over 92.0** No outdoor workouts. Delay practice until a cooler WBGT level is reached



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- (d) Practices are defined as: the period of time that a participant engages in a coach-supervised, school approved sport or conditioning- related activity. Practices are timed from the time the players report to the practice or workout area until players leave that area. If a practice is interrupted for a weather-related reason, the “clock” on that practice will stop and will begin again when the practice resumes.
- (e) Conditioning activities include such things as weight training, wind-sprints, timed runs for distance, etc., and may be a part of the practice time or included in “voluntary workouts.” Conditioning activities are not permitted to be used as punishment.
- (f) A walk-through is not a part of the practice time regulation, and may last no longer than one hour. This activity may not include conditioning activities or contact drills. No protective equipment may be worn during a walk-through, and no full-speed drills may be held.
- (g) Rest breaks may not be combined with any other type of activity and players must be given unlimited access to hydration. These breaks must be held in a “cool zone” where players are out of direct sunlight.
- (h) When the WBGT reading is over 86, ice towels and spray bottles filled with ice water should be available at the “cool zone” to aid the cooling process AND cold immersion tubs must be available for the benefit of any player showing early signs of heat illness. In the event of a serious EHI, the principle of “Cool First, Transport Second” should be utilized and implemented by the first medical provider onsite until cooling is completed (core temperature of 103 or less).



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GHSAA Concussion Policy and SB 60, Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act

(a) **GHSAA Concussion Policy:** In accordance with Georgia law and national playing rules published by the NFHS, any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion shall be immediately removed from the practice or contest and shall not return to play until an appropriate health care professional has determined that no concussion has occurred. (NOTE: An appropriate health care professional may include: licensed physician (MD/DO) or another licensed individual under the supervision of a licensed physician, such as a nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, or certified athletic trainer who has received training in concussion evaluation and management).

(1) No athlete is allowed to return to a game or practice on the same day that a concussion (1) has been diagnosed OR (2) cannot be ruled out.

(2) Any athlete diagnosed with a concussion shall be cleared medically by an appropriate health care professional prior to resuming participation in any future practice or contest. The formulation of a gradual return to play protocol shall be a part of the medical clearance.

(3) It is mandatory that every coach in each GHSAA sport (including Community Coaches, Student Teachers, and Interns) participate in a free, online course on concussion management prepared by the NFHS and available at www.nfhslearn.com at least every two years.

(4) Each school will be responsible for monitoring the participation of its coaches in the concussion management course, and shall keep a record of those who participate.

(5) Each school must distribute to every athlete and his/her parent/guardian an information sheet that includes: the dangers of concussion injuries, the signs/symptoms of concussion, and the concussion management protocol outlined in this by-law. This sheet must be signed by the parent/guardian of each athlete and a copy kept on file at the school.

(b) **SB 60, Jeremy Nelson and Nick Blakely Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act:** In accordance with Georgia law:

(1) *Each school must distribute to every athlete and his/her parent/guardian an information sheet that includes: the Early Warning Signs, How to Recognize Sudden Cardiac Arrest, and Learn Hands-Only CPR outlined in this by-law. This sheet must be signed by the parent/guardian of each athlete, each athlete and a copy kept on file at the school.*

(2) *Each school must hold an informational meeting twice per year regarding the symptoms and warning signs of sudden cardiac arrest. At such informational meetings, an information sheet on sudden cardiac arrest symptoms and warning signs shall be provided to each student's parent or guardian. In addition to students, parents or guardians, coaches, and other school officials, such informational meetings may include physicians, pediatric cardiologists, and athletic trainers.*



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Please make sure that the following statement is read as a public address announcement prior to the start of every

GHSAA sanctioned contest:

GHSAA SPORTSMANSHIP STATEMENT

“The GHSAA and its member schools have made a commitment to promote good sportsmanship by student/athletes, coaches, and spectators at all GHSAA sanctioned events. Profanity, degrading remarks, and intimidating actions directed at officials, competitors, or other spectators will not be tolerated, and are grounds for removal from the event site. Spectators are not allowed to enter the competition area prior to, during, or after the conclusion of the contest. Violators are subject to removal from the venue. Thank you for your cooperation in the promotion of good sportsmanship at today’s event.”



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General GHSFA Constitution and By Laws

It is your responsibility to read and have a working knowledge of the information presented in the GHSFA Constitution and By-Laws linked below and can be found at:

<https://www.ghsa.net/sites/default/files/documents/Constitution/Constitution21-22completecx1.pdf>

BY-LAW SECTION 1.00

STUDENT

- By-Law 1.10 - Certification of Eligibility
- By-Law 1.20 - Enrollment and Team Membership
- By-Law 1.30 - Age
- By-Law 1.40 - Limits of Participation
- By-Law 1.50 - Scholastic Standing / Scholarship
- By-Law 1.60 - School Service Areas / Transfer / Migrant Student
- By-Law 1.70 - Recruiting / Undue Influence
- By-Law 1.80 - Financial Aid
- By-Law 1.90 - Amateur Status / Awards

BY-LAW SECTION 2.00

SCHOOL

- By-Law 2.10 - School Membership to GHSFA
- By-Law 2.20 - Administrative Responsibilities
- By-Law 2.30 - Eligibility Reports Filed By The School
- By-Law 2.40 - Student Retention for Athletic Activities
- By-Law 2.50 - Qualifications to Coach
- By-Law 2.60 - Interscholastic Contests and Practices (Heat and Concussion policies)
- By-Law 2.70 - Sportsmanship
- By-Law 2.80 - Media and Filming Regulations
- By-Law 2.90 - Regulations of Competitions

BY-LAW SECTION 3.00

REGION

- By-Law 3.10 - Region Authority
- By-Law 3.20 - Region Responsibilities to State Association
- By-Law 3.30 - Region Financial Obligations to State Association

BY-LAW SECTION 4.00

STATE

- By-Law 4.10 - GHSFA Administrative Responsibilities to Member Schools
- By-Law 4.20 - Reclassification
- By-Law 4.30 - State Association Contest / Event Responsibilities
- By-Law 4.40 - State Passes to GHSFA Events
- By-Law 4.50 - Certification of Athletic Officials
- By-Law 4.60 - Special GHSFA Policies



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2026 NFHS Football Rules Changes

(For comments on the 2026 rules changes, see page 95)

1-5-3c (9) — The committee has approved the wearing of play cards on both the forearm/wrist and belt areas of the body.

9-4-7 — The committee approved new rules language that no player may use the hand(s) to slap the opponent's head.

Rules Reminders:

1-5-1d (5)a - 4, 5 — The committee clarified and restricted attachments on tooth and mouth protectors, effective with the 2026 season.

1-5-2d, 1-5-3c (6) — New arm sleeve specifications developed to guide manufacturers, players and coaches effective with the 2027 season.

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1-1-8; 1-3-5b; 1-5-1d (5)a - 4, 5; 1-5-3a (2); 2-15-1; 2-32-6; 3-5-7g; 4-1-3; 5-3-1;

5-3-2; 8-2-2; 8-2-3; 8-2-4; 8-2-5; 9-4-3p; 9-8 PENALTY; 10-4-2; 10-4-2b; 10

4-4a; 10-5-3; FOOTBALL FUNDAMENTALS – PENALTY MEASUREMENT (4);

RESOLVING TIED GAMES – (3-1); SIX-PLAYER RULES DIFFERENCES; NFHS

OFFICIAL FOOTBALL SIGNALS – (21).

Each state high school association adopting these rules is the sole and exclusive source of binding rules interpretations for contests involving its member schools. Any person having questions about the interpretation of NFHS rules should contact the rules interpreter designated by the respective state high school association.

The NFHS is the sole and exclusive source of model interpretations of NFHS rules.

State rules interpreters may contact the NFHS for model rules interpretations. No other model rules interpretations should be considered.



2026 GHSAA Football



2026 Points of Emphasis

Flagrant and Unsportsmanlike Fouls

In high school football, flagrant fouls and unsportsmanlike fouls are serious rule violations that threaten player safety and the integrity of the game. The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) places a strong emphasis on sportsmanship and risk minimization because players are still developing physically and emotionally. Game officials play a critical role in identifying and penalizing these fouls to ensure the game is played fairly, safely, and with respect for all participants. Flagrant fouls are the most severe type of personal foul in high school football. These actions involve intentional, reckless or excessively violent behavior that shows a clear disregard for the safety of others. Flagrant fouls are fouls so severe or extreme that they place an opponent in danger of serious injury. They may also involve violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive. Examples include fighting, maliciously targeting the head or neck area, striking an opponent, or delivering a violent illegal blindside block or late hit. When a flagrant foul occurs, the penalty is 15 yards and automatic disqualification of the offending player. Removing players who commit flagrant fouls helps prevent serious injuries and stops situations from escalating into further violence.

In high school football (NFHS rules), unsportsmanlike fouls are non-contact fouls that violate standards of fair play, respect and sportsmanship, while personal fouls are fouls that involve illegal personal contact. Unsportsmanlike fouls are penalized even if they don't directly affect the play, and while they may not be physically violent, they harm the tone of the game. Common examples include:

- taunting,
- threatening gestures or posturing,
- racist comments,
- trash talking,
- excessive or choreographed celebrations,
- aggressively spiking, spinning or throwing the ball high into the air,
- using profanity,
- spitting,
- arguing with game officials, or
- throwing equipment.

Unsportsmanlike fouls can be committed by players, coaches or other team personnel. Each unsportsmanlike foul results in a 15-yard penalty, and a player who commits two such fouls in one game is disqualified. Game officials must consistently penalize both flagrant and unsportsmanlike fouls to maintain control of the game. When these actions go unpunished, players may feel emboldened to act more aggressively or disrespectfully,

increasing the risk of fights and injuries. Proper enforcement sends a clear message that dangerous or



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unsportsmanlike behavior will not be tolerated, helping to keep emotions in check and the game orderly. Penalizing flagrant and unsportsmanlike fouls is important because high school football is about more than winning; it is about teaching values such as respect, discipline, and responsibility. By enforcing these rules, game officials protect players, promote good sportsmanship, and set a positive example for young athletes. Consistent enforcement helps ensure that high school football remains a safe, competitive and educational experience for everyone involved.

Helping/Aiding the Runner

Collegiate and professional football rules allow offensive players to pile in behind and directly push the runner. The “tush push” is an example of such a play often used at those levels. Although illegal under NFHS rules, these plays are becoming more common in the high school game. As guardians of the game, it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to remove “illegally helping the runner” from our high school game. Administrators, coaches and football game officials all have a responsibility to know, respect and teach/enforce the NFHS rules of high school football. Football is a vigorous, physical contact game and, for this reason, much attention is given to minimizing risk of injury to all players. Each respective rules code (NFL, NCAA and NFHS) has rules that coincide with the physical development of competing athletes and their goals for the game.

The NFHS Football Rules Committee focuses on minimizing risk and supporting a balance between offensive and defensive rules. Illegally helping the runner to assist forward progress presents a risk of injury to the runner and others. The additional momentum to a particular offensive player, as opposed to the pile, swings the balance toward the offense in a manner not intended by the rules. Football game officials should be aware of ruling plays dead when a runner’s forward progress is clearly stopped, and they should penalize actions by offensive teammates who directly contact the runner and push, pull or lift the runner forward in a clear and obvious attempt to keep the runner’s progress moving forward. Of course, not all contact with the runner is illegal.

Game officials should observe and judge an offensive teammate’s actions and the runner’s progress to determine whether a foul for illegally helping the runner is warranted. Although a foul can occur on any play, game officials should especially be alert for this type of action on short-yardage plays near the goal line and line to gain. Remember, pushing the pile is legal; direct contact while pushing, pulling, lifting of the runner to assist forward progress is not. The NFHS Coaches Code of Ethics states: “Coaches shall master the contest rules and shall teach the rules to their team members. Coaches shall not seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules. Coaches have a tremendous influence, for good or ill, on the education of the student, and thus shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest

ideals of character.” If school administrators/athletic directors truly believe that activities are an extension of

the classroom, they must be actively involved with programs they supervise and redirect coaches when they



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them teaching prohibited tactics. Removing “illegally helping the runner” from high school football will, at

times, be met with resistance, especially considering the visibility of this type of play at other levels of the game.

School administrative support of football game officials, re-focus of coaches and education of players will lead to

a smooth transition. All stakeholders must remain committed to trying to minimize risk to all players and

maintain the balance between offensive and defensive play.

Sideline Management and Control

Sideline management has become a recurring “point of emphasis” because it improves game safety by keeping

game officials, players, coaching staff and other team personnel clear of the active game play areas. It promotes

good sportsmanship and professionalism across all levels of play and also prevents unnecessary delays and

confrontations that can impact game flow and fairness. The sideline includes the team area and any restricted

zones around the field where players and coaches stand during the game. Game officials expect this area

to be organized and kept clear of unnecessary personnel. Coaches must remain in the designated team area

when interacting with game officials, especially for rule discussions. Leaving that area to step onto the field or

challenge calls results in an automatic unsportsmanlike conduct foul. Coaches are generally only allowed

to step toward the sideline (into the working area, often a marked 2-yard border) to call offensive or defensive

signals after play has stopped. Game officials are instructed to strictly enforce NFHS Football Rules when the

following behaviors are observed:



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- Coaches or team personnel entering the field of play to dispute rulings or address game officials outside the coaching area.
- Prolonged or excessive celebrations or demonstrations that carry onto the field.
- Failing to maintain professional behavior. Coaches and team personnel are expected to set a standard for sportsmanship.
- Game officials shall call fouls for violations of sideline control when they are observed.
- Infractions such as approaching game officials with devices (e.g., to view or review video).

The following is a summary checklist for coaches/teams to follow during a game:

- Remain inside your team area for game official discussions.
- Only move toward the sideline after play is dead, and for signal/play calling.
- Keep non-essential personnel and spectators off the field level.
- Avoid approaching game officials during play or with electronic/video devices.
- Set a professional, sportsmanlike example for the entirety of the contest.

To minimize the risk of all involved, non-players (including substitutes, athletic trainers and coaches) must

remain in their team box and out of any restricted areas, especially while the ball is live. Non-players may never

be on the field while the ball is live and may only be on the field when the ball is dead in very limited situations. In the excitement of the game, it is not uncommon for substitutes and other non-players to move

closer to the sideline beyond their team box area. This inevitably causes coaches to move up into restricted

areas and closer to the field - often impeding game officials in their essential duties. Crowding at the sideline

puts players, non-players, coaches and game officials in danger of severe injury. Game officials and coaches

must be aware of this problem and take the necessary steps to prevent and correct these occurrences. Coaches,

substitutes, athletic trainers and others affiliated with the team may be in their team's area, which is



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out-of-bounds and between the 25-yard lines (unless otherwise approved to be adjusted by state association

adopted policy). Their movements and positions are limited by this designated area. The coaches' area extends

at least a 2-yard depth out-of-bounds from the sideline. A maximum of three coaches – and only coaches – may

be in this area when the ball is dead between plays. However, all coaches must leave this area when the ball is

about to become live, such as when the snapper is approaching the ball, and no one may be in this area while

the ball is live. The team box area is outside the field, beyond the restricted area and between the 25-yard lines.

All coaches and non-players associated with the team may be in this area. A nonplayer may not be outside of

this area unless to become a player or return as a replaced player.

When non-players are outside of the team box area, or anyone is in the restricted area while the ball is live,

game officials will give a sideline warning to the team involved. A second offense results in a 5-yard penalty. All

subsequent offenses result in 15-yard penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct fouls, which are charged to the

head coach. If a game official unintentionally contacts a coach or other nonplayer in the restricted area while

the ball is live, the team is assessed a 15-yard penalty for a nonplayer, illegal personal contact foul. As a

nonplayer foul, the penalty is enforced from the succeeding spot. A second such offense would result in the

head coach's disqualification. Unlike a foul for sideline interference (non-contact, Rule 9-8-1k or 9-8-3), no warning or 5-yard penalty is required in this situation.



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Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls

The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competition for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the

NFHS Authenticating Mark. The use of conforming equipment is essential to the integrity of contests played

under the NFHS rules. This mark helps to promote a level playing field by ensuring consistency in the equipment

being used. The mark allows for the development of more sophisticated standards in balls and clearly communicates to administrators, coaches, and game officials that these standards are being met.

Non-compliance with these requirements will be reported to the state associations for potential penalties,

following the contest. Administrators and coaches play a pivotal role in making sure all inflated and non-inflated

balls meet these specifications. They must instill the importance of proper equipment use through consistent reinforcement during the pre-competition certification meeting and throughout the season. Game

officials must also remain vigilant and report any non-compliant balls to the state association office.

GHSAA Points of Emphasis:

GAME MANAGEMENT

Each school community must take pride in hosting an athletic contest or event. Proper advance planning is key to an orderly, secure, safe and enjoyable activity. Planning begins with clearly defined tasks for game administration and event personnel. Beginning with the arrival of players, game officials and spectators, each school must have a purposeful plan to address any and all expected issues, as well as the unforeseen.

Preparation begins with clear and concise communication between the host and the competing school regarding the logistics of arrival and departure. Meeting and greeting the visiting team is certainly the beginning of good sportsmanship. Clearly communicated information, such as parking information, location of ticket booths and entry gates, when given to the visitors is another step in assuring a great experience for all participants.

Game officials should be afforded the same communication considerations given the visiting school community. Host administration must provide accurate information for the officiating crew so as to



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ease any pre-game apprehension or uncertainty. Clear, concise communication is of utmost importance. Having assigned personnel to greet game officials and address all their pre- game and post-game needs is a bare minimum for the host school. Security of game officials must be an absolute priority. Make sure the locker room is properly supervised and access is limited to proper personnel only.

During the game, security of game personnel begins with ensuring that the sideline is properly secured and the playing field is restricted to essential game personnel. For safety and security reasons, essential game personnel would include game participants, reporters, photographers and game administration. All other, non-essential personnel should be located in the bleachers. All non-participants on the event level should be credentialed and restricted to being no closer than 2 yards from the sideline. Game officials are responsible for securing the team boxes and coaches' area. Sideline management begins with the consistent enforcement of game rules pertaining to the restricted area and the team box. The restricted area is designated to make the sidelines safe for all participants and to give game officials ample space to work. Game administration should be alert to requests of game officials in addressing problems beyond the team box and coach's area.

Expectations for the behavior of spectators and other attendees should be clearly, and repeatedly, communicated to all attendees. The reading of a sportsmanship script before the game is one method of communicating expectations. Good sportsmanship must become part of the culture of any school community. Behavior not acceptable in the school's hallways should not be acceptable on the courts or playing fields.

Appropriate conduct of the public-address announcer is vital to the game atmosphere. The public-address announcer must be the first line of sportsmanship and must exemplify expected and acceptable conduct. The goal of the public-address announcer is to inform and not entertain. Giving play-by-play of game action and/or critiquing game officials is unacceptable. The public-address announcer must be positive and respectful to all involved in the game. The conduct of non-participants is the domain of game and school administration.



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MINIMAL GAME ADMINISTRATION EXPECTATIONS

- Clearly communicated event itinerary
- Required field markings and game equipment
- Clock operator(s)
- Line-to-gain crew
- Game Official accommodations
- Visiting team accommodations
- Support personnel
- Medical personnel
- Security personnel
- Hospitality for game personnel and administration, inclusive of game officials

KNEE PADS

There will be emphasis placed on proper wearing of knee pads on the knees this season. It is understood that certain manufacturing details may permit this usage, however it is the responsibility of each team to ensure kids are being properly uniformed and equipped. Football pants are to be worn as designed. Those who do not adhere to the rules and regulations set forth will be assessed a fine, to be determined by the GHSAA office.

Verifying Officials:

Coaches and Athletic Directors: Please verify and re-verify with the official's association who handles your games each week to make sure they know who, when and where you are playing. The weekly varsity football schedule contains an average of 190 games. GHSAA attempts to track and confirm all games but needs assistance from its member schools. Invariably, there are a handful of "no show" games each season. Communication is the key. Check and re-check to make sure that your school has coverage. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.



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Sportsmanship:

Profanity of any kind, inappropriate language, Racial or Ethnic slurs, Sexist or Homophobic comments, directed at an official or opponent are not representative of the positive values of an education-based education. **Penalty will be DEADBALL UNS-15 yards, Cumulative for each player/coach. If they receive a second UNS for any reason, that coach or player will be ejected. (NFHS Rule 9-8)**

Sideline Etiquette:

Coaches must stay behind the restricted zone on the sidelines during the game unless during timeouts or dead ball periods, once the game begins until it has been completed. **If a coach repeatedly stands across the restricted zone on the sideline, the first violation will be a sideline warning. The 2nd violation will be a 5-yard penalty, and any further violations will result in a DEADBALL UNS-15 yards, cumulative for the HEAD COACH. (NFHS Rule 9-8)**

Game Administrators and Security for Officials:

When the Game Officials arrive at the game site, the host school: GHSA Constitution and By Laws, page 33, Section 2.71, C, 1-5:

- (c) It shall be the responsibility of the home or host school to take the following precautions at all interscholastic athletic events:
 - (1) Take proper steps and precautions to monitor crowd and spectator control, including having an administrator (or designee) from the host school to function as "Game Manager" at all GHSA sanctioned events. EXCEPTIONS: Golf and Tennis.
 - (2) Take steps to insure the comfort and security of all players, coaches, and officials.
 - (3) Have in place sufficient security personnel to handle any crowd-control problems that might reasonably be expected.
 - (4) Security escorts must be provided to game officials by the host school at all GHSA sanctioned contests, before, during and following the contest - including to their vehicles.
 - (5) Provide a safe and secure changing area for contest officials, free from traffic by school staff, students and spectators.



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OVERTIME PROCEDURE

1. There will be a 3-minute intermission between the end of regulation play and the coin toss to start the overtime procedure.
2. The captains will meet for the coin toss, and the winner may choose one of the following:
 - a. Be on offense first
 - b. Be on defense first
 - c. Choose the end of the field on which to play
3. The ball is placed on the 15-yard line and the offense keeps the ball until:
 - a. The ball is turned over on downs (NOTE: The team on offense can gain a first down)
 - b. The defense gains possession of the ball (ball is dead immediately)
 - c. The offense scores a touchdown or field goal
 - d. The offense misses a field goal
2. After the first offensive team completes its possession, the opposing team gets its opportunity from the 15-yard line.
3. If the game remains tied after each team has had an offensive possession, there will be a 2-minute intermission and the team that lost the first coin toss has the first option for the second possession.
4. For each additional overtime period (i.e., an offensive possession by each team) the original coin toss options are alternated.
5. Beginning with the second overtime period, a team must attempt a 2-point try after a touchdown.
6. *Subsequent to the first two series from the 15-yard line, if the game remains tied, the ball will be placed on the three-yard line and teams will alternate two-point conversions until the tie is broken.*

Each team is allowed one timeout per overtime period. Timeouts may NOT be carried over from regulation.



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GHSAA Penalty Enforcement in Overtime 2026

This document outlines how penalties are enforced in GHSAA Overtime. The driving desire behind this is for **all overtime possessions to begin at the 15-yard line if at all possible**. This policy overrides existing NFHS rules in remarkably rare situations which are outlined below.

Types of Fouls

In high school football there are three types of fouls:

1. Live ball fouls- those that occur while the ball is live
2. Dead ball fouls- those that occur prior to the ball becoming live during a down or those that occur after the down ends and prior to the ball again becoming live
3. Fouls that are always enforced as dead ball fouls (succeeding spot)- unsportsmanlike conduct, non- player fouls such as sideline interference

GHSAA Overtime

Whenever possible each overtime possession is to begin on the 15-yard line and in nearly all instances that will be the case. There are NFHS rules (8-2, 8-3 and 8-4) which outline carryover penalties on scoring plays of live and dead ball fouls and those fouls are always enforced as dead ball fouls (USL, non-player). **GHSAA policies of enforcement supersede these NFHS rules**. As such, it is possible for a head coach or team to experience a different enforcement choice or outcome in regulation play versus overtime even in the same game.

Going into Overtime

A game tying score with time expiring for the fourth quarter or a subsequently successful try of one or two points could send the game into overtime. We will begin our examples of overtime enforcement with live ball fouls.

- A. Team K kicks a game tying field goal. During the kick there is a live ball foul by the defense – most commonly a personal foul such as roughing the kicker, holder or snapper. In regulation play Team K could accept and have a replay of the down after a yardage penalty plus in some instances an automatic first down. Or they could accept with enforcement from the succeeding spot. In nearly all instances a kickoff. This comes under Rule 8-4-3. **In GHSAA overtime this would not be allowed**. Team K may only choose to replay the down after penalty enforcement or take the results of the play (points) by declining the penalty.
- B. Team A scores a touchdown tying the game as time expires for the fourth quarter. During the play there is a live ball defensive penalty such as pass interference. In regulation play Team A would be allowed to enforce this penalty on the try or carryover to the subsequent kickoff. Rule 8-2-2. The obvious problem is that there is no kickoff in overtime so the **only option is to enforce on the try**.
- C. Team A scores a touchdown as time expires for the fourth quarter leaving them behind by one or two points. A successful try for one or two points ties the game. During the try a live ball foul on Team B occurs. Rule 8-3-5 would allow acceptance with enforcement on a replay of the down or acceptance with enforcement from the succeeding spot. **In GHSAA overtime this would not be allowed. In accepting the points the penalty must be declined**.

Where Do Problems Arise? Non-player or unsportsmanlike fouls

These are always enforced from the succeeding spot. Going into or while in overtime that would not be an option under GHSAA policy in most instances. There are rare instances where they would. Below is an example.



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Coaches the burden of avoiding these types of fouls- especially sideline interference- falls on you and your staff. Let's look at a play.

- A. During a game tying field goal by Team K as time expires or while in overtime the head coach of Team B (defense) calls the Line Judge a profanity laced expletive. Even though this occurred during the live ball kick it is still enforced as a dead ball foul from the succeeding spot. This will be on the subsequent overtime possession. It cannot be declined. Here a team will face the consequences of an illegal act affecting the succeeding overtime possession.
- B. There are existing NFHS rules regarding the timing of USL fouls that are in regulation or while in overtime. An example is a USL prior to the ready to play for the try but after the score during the dead ball period. **Whether in GHSFA overtime or regulation this can only be enforced on the try.**

Dead Ball Fouls

In many respects the enforcement of these is easier to understand. They occur after a down is over. After a touchdown with regulation time expiring during the down, the dead ball foul must be enforced on the try. Even multiple dead ball fouls. After a successful or unsuccessful try or field goal and a dead ball foul occurs these may be enforced from the succeeding spot. This is another rare instance where the starting point of overtime may not be the 15-yard line.

- A. Team A scores a game tying touchdown with time for the fourth quarter expiring during the down. After the score a Team B player pushes a Team A player to the ground. This will be enforced on the try.
- B. Team A scores a game tying field goal. As time expires for the fourth quarter. As the teams head to the sideline a Team A player shoves a Team B player to the ground. This will be enforced in overtime and the next possession will not start at the 15-yard line.

Summary for Officials

- A. Going into overtime live ball fouls which would alter the subsequent possession from starting at the 15-yard line must be declined or enforced on a replay of the down
- B. Dead ball, unsportsmanlike or non-player fouls are from the succeeding spot and **may** change the 15-yard starting point. This is a very rare event.
- C. Dead ball fouls between a touchdown and a try-even multiple fouls- must be assessed on the try.
- D. Remember there is no PSK enforcement in overtime

Summary for Coaches

Officials will guide you as to which penalties must be declined unless a replay ensues. The list is short but includes all live ball fouls on scoring plays that tie the game and no other scoring attempt will be made such as a try. Dead ball, non-player or unsportsmanlike fouls between a touchdown and the try must be enforced on the try. Any dead ball foul after the down is over, unsportsmanlike or non-player foul that happens after a game tying score and no other scoring play will be attempted will be penalized in overtime and **may** affect the 15-yard starting point. These are avoidable penalties.



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Reminder:

Schools must enter team schedules & rosters on MaxPreps prior to season and be responsible for updates as needed. This information will support statewide media and event programs & broadcasts partners. Game results must be entered on MaxPreps Coaches app or [MaxPreps.com](https://www.maxpreps.com) following each game to maintain GHSA Region Standings. Teams are encouraged to maintain team / individual statistics on MaxPreps, who maintains compatibility with a wide range of partners.



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All of the below forms can be found at <https://www.ghsa.net/forms>

FOOTBALL FORMS

Contract - Football Games
Contract - Football Playoff
Games Football Playoff
Financial Report
Football Quarterfinal Financial
Report Football Semifinals
Financial Report Football
Schedule Form
Football Schedule Information
Instruction Sheet for Football
Playoffs Football Stadium Review
Form
Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness
Form Sudden Cardiac Arrest Meeting
Sign-In Form
Preparticipation Physical History and Evaluation Form
Preparticipation Physical History and Evaluation Form
(Spanish)
Preparticipation Physical History Supplement - Athletes with
Disabilities Unsatisfactory Officiating Report

ELIGIBILITY FORMS

(Note: Paper Form A and Form B submissions are no longer accepted - please submit online on the GHSFA MIS website) Form A (PDF) (Word)
Form B (PDF)
(Word) Form C
(PDF) (Word) Form
D (PDF) (Word)
Form MT (PDF)
(Word)
Hardship Application / Hardship Application from
Sending School Foreign Exchange Programs-
Approved List
Withdrawal List
Welcome Notice



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OFFICIAL GHSA FOOTBALLS

Football

WILSON

Model F1003, F1005, Omega, GST
Prime

[Wilson Website](#)





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GoFan Digital Ticket Sales

In preparing your financial reports for **GHSA State Playoffs in all sports**, this is a reminder to you that **GoFan Digital Ticket sales are part of your total gate**. The playoff forms for all sports have a separate line item for you to show the # of digital tickets sold and the resulting gate income. GoFan furnishes a report to GHSA for all playoff games at all member schools showing the # of digital tickets sold. Please make sure your financial report reflects that information.

If for any reason, the # of GoFan tickets are not shown on your playoff financial reports and included in the total gate revenue, GHSA will invoice you for the GHSA portion of the gate proceeds related to digital tickets and a notice to pay your visiting team their portion of the omitted gate proceeds as well. **It will be easier for all if you include your digital tickets on the original financial report sent to GHSA.**

Please do not hesitate to contact the GHSA office if you have questions concerning the digital ticket program.